

**Writing//painting; *l'écriture féminine* and difference
in the making**

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Abstract

This thesis critically interrogates the concept and practice of *l'écriture féminine* as proposed by Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva to challenge phallogocentric structures embedded in language and culture. It examines why abstraction has been so problematic for women and feminist artists and why, despite *l'écriture féminine* being utilised in art practice it came to a standstill in the mid-1990s, ceasing to provide possibilities for women's abstract painting. By using *l'écriture féminine* as a 'lens' with which to see abstract painting, I have distilled particular aspects of it and put forward my own concept and practice of *peinture féminine* to move on from these problematics.

I demonstrate that whilst the historicity of Modernist abstraction is embedded in abstract painting, it is not bound by rigid and fixed structures and conventions and these are not phallogocentric per se. *Peinture féminine* as defined here reconceptualises abstract painting as a spatiality comprising multiple, shifting and heterogeneous spaces. In doing so, it expands abstract painting internally and opens up these conventions non-oppositionally. By elaborating on the 'feminine' in relation to current thinking about subjectivity, I argue that the *unfolding* of abstract painting through its 'opening out', enables an *enfolding* of difference within this spatiality. *Peinture féminine* offers new ways of understanding how difference can manifest *through* material production, rather than a focus on *representing* difference through a 'feminine' aesthetic. I draw on my own art practice and the work of other artists, locating this study as 'art-practice-research' through a 'writing//painting' approach which underpins my research; considering the textual as not being transposed into the painterly but as intertwined within this relation. This approach is productive to non-oppositional thinking and elaborates on the theory/practice relation as entangled, providing possibilities for ways of thinking about Fine Art doctoral research.

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This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my mother Susanne who sadly passed away during my research in 2011; I am indebted to her for her continued inspiration and for encouraging me to strive to achieve what has neither been easy nor at times seemed possible at all.

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Introduction

'The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes' - Marcel Proust, *La Prisonnière*, 1923

This research project interrogates the discourse of *l'écriture féminine*, which literally translates to 'feminine writing'. It was developed in late 1960s France by Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva who analysed Western discourse as fundamentally phallogentric. Based on their analyses of philosophy and psychoanalysis, they argued that the 'masculine' and 'feminine' are locked in binary opposition in which the 'masculine' is the dominant term and the 'feminine' is placed in a subordinate position as the 'other'.¹ Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva argued that phallogentric structures are embedded within language and culture.² They critiqued Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic ideas, which defined the 'feminine' as repressed and understood in terms of 'lack' in relation to the Phallus as the 'transcendental signifier' of signification.³ Although Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva each envisaged different modes for problematising these structures, they each saw a 'feminine' writing practice as having the possibility to provide an alternative textual space to represent the 'feminine'. *L'écriture féminine* claimed to transform experience and articulate sexual difference in which writing was the very possibility of change.⁴ Their concept and practice of *l'écriture féminine* has challenged assumptions of hidden systems of privilege⁵ and been helpful in thinking about representing sexual difference as characterised differently to that fashioned by phallogentrism.

Feminist critiques of Western art have located painting as the dominant canon throughout art history, whereby 'marginalised' subjects have historically been overlooked by the mainstream. Such critiques have made visible the social construction of sexual difference and the role of cultural representation as hierarchical and based on 'masculine'

¹ Grosz, E. *Feminist Theory and the Politics of Art*, 1988, p138

² Irigaray, L. *Je, tu, nous: Towards a Culture of Difference*, 1993, p15

³ Ives, K. *Cixous, Irigaray, Kristeva: the Jouissance of French Feminism*, 2010, p42

⁴ Cixous, H. *The Laugh of the Medusa*, 1976, p879

⁵ Jones, A. *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader*, 2003, p33

dominance.⁶ Feminist art practice has proved useful in challenging patriarchal structures embedded within culture, language and art history, especially those within painting and Modernist abstraction.⁷ In response, the majority of feminist art practice incorporated mixed media, film, video, performance and body art⁸ which compared to painting had little history and was embraced at painting's expense. Abstract painting in particular was perceived as providing limited possibilities for feminist art practice by many women artists. Instead it was seen as bound with the conventions of Modernist abstraction such as the apparent autonomy and 'purity' of painting, which were defined culturally in relationship to the heroic male artist and perceived as 'masculinist' and 'patriarchal'. Feminist art practice also opposed the notion of 'non-representational' painting as being of little use for feminist politics of representation, instead focusing on the social production of art and subjectivity.

Elements of *l'écriture féminine* were utilised within women's abstract painting in the 1980s and 1990s. However as I argue, it was only partially successful and came to a standstill in the mid-1990s, ceasing to provide possibilities for both 'feminine' and feminist abstract painting. As a result, and in the light of more recent ideas surrounding subjectivity and the current shift to 'post-feminism',⁹ *l'écriture féminine* is now largely limited to its historical context as distinct from and of little value to women's contemporary abstract painting. Despite its many declared deaths, contemporary abstract painting has been embraced by both men and women painters today. In fact, it seems to be enjoying a rise in popularity since the Millennium.¹⁰ Despite this, the current context of abstract painting is still imbued with the legacy of Modernist abstraction and many abstract painters are still renegotiating or finding ways to challenge its history.¹¹ Feminist artists and critics thus continue to grapple with feminist and 'feminine' possibilities for abstract painting.

⁶ Pollock, G. *Vision and Difference: Feminism, Femininity and Histories of Art*, 1988, p9

⁷ Broude, N. and Garrard, M. (Eds), *The Power of Feminist Art: Emergence, Impact and Triumph of the American Art Movement*, 1994, p8

⁸ Deepwell, K. *Paint-Stripping: Feminist Possibilities in Painting After Modernism*, 1994, p3

⁹ 'Second-wave' feminism can loosely be defined as occurring between the 1960s and the late 1980s and focused on gender inequality in laws and culture. The term 'third-wave' feminism as following on from this has been disputed and argued by some as constituting 'post-feminism'. This movement began in the 1990s in response to second-wave feminism and used different strategies for a new expression of the feminist voice.

¹⁰ This can be seen in anthologies published after the Millennium such as *Vitamin P* and *Vitamin P2* in which there is a clear increase in contemporary abstract painters compared to the 1990s.

¹¹ This is demonstrated by recent exhibitions such as 'Subversive Abstraction' in 2010 at the Whitechapel Gallery, London.

Whilst it may not be deemed appropriate to challenge phallogentrism or patriarchy now in the same way as feminist art practice in the 1980s and 1990s, the impetus behind this research is instead to elaborate new ways of conceptualising abstract painting to open up spaces for 'feminine' subjectivities today. This research interrogates the historical discourse of *l'écriture féminine* and reframes it in relation to current thinking about the 'feminine' and subjectivity. It distills elements of *l'écriture féminine* as useful to reconceptualise abstract painting in its continuous renegotiation of Modernist abstraction as I demonstrate in my concept and practice of *peinture féminine*. Following on from Proust, rather than seeking new practices, it opens up new possibilities by seeing things with 'new eyes'.

1. Writing//painting

As denoted in the thesis title, the relations between writing and painting are central to my research. A single forward slash is a typographical convention used to signal a binary opposition where both terms rely on one another. It does not just signal a dialectical relation but also signifies a division in which one term is privileged over the other. The use of the double forward slash in 'writing//painting' troubles this convention. It asserts a re-thinking of this relation where the meaning of the single slash is blurred and reframed through the possibility of an alternative spatiality amidst the in-betweenness of the binary relation. In utilising the textual practice of *l'écriture féminine* as 'lens' to envisage abstract painting, the term writing//painting allows for writing and painting to inform one another dialogically. As well as expanding their relation with one another, both writing and painting are also considered as 'expanded' fields as intertwined within this relation, where their expansion within fields of practice could be understood as hybrid. This is fundamental to my concept and practice of *peinture féminine* and also seeks to elaborate theory/practice and masculine/feminine binary relations as non-oppositional and as productive to my research aims. In addition to the double forward slash the title also includes a semi-colon, which further challenges normative typographical structures. A colon is normally used in a title to

signify the second clause as explaining the first clause. The use of a semi-colon instead of a colon however, joins both clauses together so they are interdependent and non-hierarchical.

2. Research aims

The aims of this research are threefold:

1. To critically analyse *l'écriture féminine*; establishing it as a framework to consider 'women's' contemporary abstract painting and to explore the possibility of an alternative textual and material 'space' for representation by 'feminine' subjectivities.
2. To consider the extent to which sexual differentiation can be made to manifest or emerge through processes of production within the expanded field of abstract painting that problematises structures and conventions historically identified as 'masculine' within painting.
3. To develop a hybrid writing//painting methodology that can potentially destabilise the masculine/feminine dualistic relation as identified within *l'écriture féminine* and feminist critiques of Modernist art practice.

3. Thesis structure

The first chapter offers a critical review of *l'écriture féminine* and abstract painting. The first part of the chapter focuses on *l'écriture féminine* and the individual strategies used by Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva to challenge Freud and Lacan's psychoanalytical ideas. It is followed by a discussion of the textual 'qualities' that I argue manifest in the practice of *l'écriture féminine*. I then discuss what we can gain from *l'écriture féminine* and briefly focus on its relation to feminist art practice with an emphasis on painting. The second part of the chapter draws out the key problematics central to my research. It firstly examines why Modernist abstraction is so problematic for women's art practice and the conventions and structures that contribute to these problematics. Secondly, I argue that *l'écriture féminine* seems to have come to a stasis and examine why it has ceased to provide possibilities for women's abstract painting practice. In Chapter 2, I set out the methodological approach of

my research. The methodology is discussed at this point in the thesis to provide a rationale for the final two chapters and in doing so frames the relation between my art practice and theoretical ideas. I propose my own writing//painting methodology based on the 'writing//painting' relation, in which I argue that the interrelation between writing and painting as productive to *l'écriture féminine* opens up possibilities for abstract painting.

In Chapter 3, I propose a theory and practice of *peinture féminine*. Rather than simply being a translation of *l'écriture féminine* into abstract painting, which as I discuss in Chapter 1 is problematic, I identify particular elements distilled from *l'écriture féminine* and discuss how they can be useful for abstract painting. I firstly propose that abstract painting can be reconceptualised as made up of 'more complex and multiple spaces'. I argue that this allows for abstract painting to be 'opened up' from the inside and that the interplay of particular elements that I have distilled allows for 'difference' to be enfolded within abstract painting. Whilst I look at other painters (Fabian Marcaccio, Angela de la Cruz, Laura Godfrey-Isaacs, Katharina Grosse), in the final chapter I focus on the work of Cy Twombly, Rosa Lee and Neal Rock. I claim that each draws on a particular interplay of elements that I argue here successfully constitutes *peinture féminine*. The work of Twombly and Rock also provides examples of such work, which is not limited to women. I then discuss my own art practice in relation to the methodology set out in Chapter 2 and *peinture féminine* as conceptualised in Chapter 3.

4. Terminology and translations

This research draws on ideas rooted in psychoanalysis, linguistics and philosophy. Many of these ideas require the reader to have some understanding of these embedded concepts. Key terms central to the research can be found in the glossary. Whilst it is assumed that the reader has some knowledge of these areas and specific concepts, the glossary provides a fuller contextualisation of these key terms. When such terms are used in the thesis, the reader is directed to refer to the glossary if they require further contextualisation.

Much of the literature built on is taken from French philosophy and so all relating quotations are translations from the original French texts. Some terms such as *jouissance* do not have an exact English equivalent. Words such as *féminité* (femininity) and *écriture* (writing) have different and sometimes polysemic meanings in French and do not translate directly into English even though they are commonplace words. Such words have been acknowledged in the glossary as proper to their French etymological roots rather than the meanings developed by some Anglo-American thought, which on occasion has altered the original meaning in its original context.

L'écriture féminine is a complex and multifaceted concept and practice that has shifted and evolved over time. The individual oeuvres of Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva are also vast and themselves extremely complex. In addition, *l'écriture féminine* has been used in numerous ways and with varying degrees of success in feminist art practice. It is neither the aim nor within the scope of my research to map out and discuss a complete and extensive history and context of *l'écriture féminine* and its relation to feminist art practice. Instead, I will focus on the key textual themes in Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva's work that constitute *l'écriture féminine* and specifically in relation to abstract painting. Where appropriate, additional contextual information is elaborated on in the footnotes.

5. Research contributions

This research provides new contributions to knowledge foremost in abstract painting and the discourse surrounding *l'écriture féminine*. It offers a critical analysis of *l'écriture féminine* as proper to its French roots as a concept and practice made up of textual qualities grounded in the individual strategies and thinking of Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva. This research repositions *l'écriture féminine* in relation to contemporary thinking surrounding the 'feminine' and distills elements that can be of use today, moving on from it as limited to a historical concept and practice. It offers a reconceptualisation of abstract painting, which does not reject nor is oppositional to the embedded historical conventions of Modernist abstraction. Instead, it offers a way of 'troubling' and yet embracing such conventions and

acknowledges that they are not rigid nor explicitly phallogentric. This is demonstrated through my concept and practice of *peinture féminine* which offers an 'expanded' view of abstract painting through a 'writing//painting' relation.

My research also contributes on a broader level to multiple discourses such as feminism, painting, subjectivity and representation. It offers a rethinking of what feminism may mean today and elaborates on the feminist/'feminine' disjuncture. Additionally, my research contributes to debates surrounding the nature of Fine Art practice doctoral research. My own art practice offers knowledge and a form of research; it sheds light on the nature of art-practice-research and material epistemologies. This research will be useful to artists, theorists, writers, researchers and practitioners in a variety of fields with an interest in the aforementioned areas. It is not limited to women but is useful to all who have an investment in renegotiating or elaborating new ways to challenge phallogentric or dominant ways of thinking and binary logic.

CHAPTER 1

A critical exploration of *l'écriture féminine* and abstract painting

In this chapter, I critically explore the concept and practice of *l'écriture féminine*. In the first part of this chapter I firstly briefly discuss the psychoanalytical work of Freud and Lacan and critiques of their work as phallogentric. This provides a context against which I discuss the key concepts and strategies used by Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva to challenge phallogentrism and articulate sexual difference through *l'écriture féminine*. I then argue that whilst Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva each propose individual concepts and strategies, what I have termed textual 'qualities' have manifest in the practice of *l'écriture féminine*, which overlap with one another. I then briefly discuss what we can gain from *l'écriture féminine* and how women's art practice has engaged with it. In the second part of this chapter, I examine why Modernist abstraction was so problematic for women's and feminist art practice. I then argue that *l'écriture féminine* came to a theoretical and practical stasis in the late 1990s and has since been seen as providing limited possibilities for women's abstract painting. This provides a foundation to consider how particular elements of *l'écriture féminine* can be distilled to develop a new concept and practice of *peinture féminine*, which I propose in Chapter 3 to move on from these problems.

1. A selected context of *l'écriture féminine*

The term *l'écriture féminine* was first used in Cixous' text *The Laugh of the Medusa*.¹² However, both Irigaray and Kristeva do not explicitly use the term in their work. As Margaret Whitford asserts, Irigaray does not use the term *l'écriture féminine* at all; rather it is a label that has been attached to her by others.¹³ Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva do not define what *l'écriture féminine* specifically is. This resistance to categorisation means that its initial concept and practice has evolved as different interpretations have been established across

¹² *The Laugh of the Medusa* (1976) has been described by Ann Rosalind Jones as Cixous' "manifesto for *l'écriture féminine*" as discussed in her article *Writing the Body: Toward an Understanding of L'Écriture Feminine*, 1981, p251. This view has widely been adopted by other Anglo-American theorists drawing on Cixous' work.

¹³ Whitford, M. Luce Irigaray: Philosophy in the Feminine, 1991, p38

various discourses. As a result, *l'écriture féminine* has evolved beyond French discourse and through analysis by Anglo-American feminists in particular, has been reduced collectively to a group¹⁴ often labelled generically under the banner of 'French Feminism'.¹⁵ However this reduction risks obscuring the significance of Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva's individual thinking. The lack of specificity of *l'écriture féminine* is a key characteristic of what Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva's 'feminine' writing practice entails. I will embrace the ambiguous, mobile and unstable elements of *l'écriture féminine* as a heterogeneous and shifting concept and will use the term '*l'écriture féminine*' to reflect this, in doing so keeping with how it was envisaged by Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva. This will allow me to celebrate the difference in their work and yet provide an exploration of the wider concept and practice of *l'écriture féminine* true to its French etymological roots.

The word 'femininity' as found in English translations of Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva's texts, derives from the French word *féminité*. However, depending on its context it can be taken to mean 'feminine', 'female', 'woman', 'women' or 'femaleness'.¹⁶ In English translations, these terms are often used interchangeably and can thus be misinterpreted. Throughout this chapter I have used the terms 'man' and 'woman' whilst discussing *l'écriture féminine* in keeping with translations of original French texts. However, as I later discuss, these terms are not limited biologically to being male or female and such categorisation has been criticised by Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva themselves.

In their exploration of *l'écriture féminine*, Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva all problematise Freudian and Lacanian theories of sexuality as phallogcentrically biased, albeit taking different positions in their critiques. Rather than providing a thorough critique of Freud and Lacan's psychoanalytic ideas, I will focus specifically on the psychosexual development of the individual and in addition, Lacan's ideas surrounding the subject's relation to language to provide a contextual framework surrounding *l'écriture féminine*.

¹⁴ Holmes, D. French Women's Writing 1848-1994, 1996, p216

¹⁵ Moi, T. The Kristeva Reader, 1986, p207; please see glossary for further explanation

¹⁶ Moi, T. From Feminism to Finitude: Freud, Lacan, and Feminism, Again, 2004, p855

1.1 Freud and psychosexual development

Freud argued that the psychosexual development of the individual occurs in early childhood where the development and functioning of the libido in particular affects the psychology and personality of the subject in later life.¹⁷ For Freud, this development depends on the complex interaction between the child's biological development and their social context, which he divided into three stages: oral, anal and phallic.¹⁸ For Freud, the sexual identity of an individual and the constructs of 'masculinity' and 'femininity' arise through these stages. Up until the 'phallic' stage, he maintained that:

Both sexes seem to pass through the early phases of libidinal development in the same manner ... with their entry into the phallic stage the differences between the sexes are completely eclipsed by their agreements. We are now obliged to recognize that the little girl is a little man¹⁹

Unlike the 'oral' and 'anal' stages where similarities between both sexes are predominant, according to Freud in the phallic stage sexual differences start to take importance and the formation of sexual identity begins.

For Freud, it is in the phallic stage where the child enters the Oedipal complex,²⁰ which is experienced differently by boys and girls. The little boy develops castration anxiety through fear of losing his own penis. The little girl also experiences castration anxiety, however the threat of castration is manifested through 'penis envy' whereby in her clitoris she thought she had a significant phallic organ, but instead realises that she lacks this. For Freud, unlike the little boy, the little girl does not satisfactorily resolve her Oedipal complex, remaining in it for longer, if renouncing it at all. According to Freud, whereas successful resolution results in the development of 'normative' sexuality,²¹ unsuccessful resolution may lead to neurosis, paedophilia and homosexuality.

¹⁷ Stevens, R. Freud and Psychoanalysis: An Exposition and Appraisal, 1992, p39

¹⁸ Please see glossary for further explanation

¹⁹ Freud, S. The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, 1965, p146

²⁰ Please see glossary for further explanation

²¹ 'Normative' according to Freud can be defined here as heterosexual sexuality. This is seen in the individual as conforming to expectations of gender relations that determine conventional familial and social roles (such as the recognition of social taboos such as incest)

1.2 Lacan: the Mirror Stage, the Symbolic and the Phallus

Lacan expanded on Freud's 'pre-Oedipal' stage by developing the Mirror Stage,²² which he argued occurs around six to eighteen months in the early development of the child. He asserted that whilst the child identifies itself in the mirror, it also identifies with something which it is separated from and experiences the concept of itself as an 'other'.²³ Therefore, the foundation of identity involves the splitting of the subject whereby the child's identity is always that in which "the image *is* oneself and simultaneously *not* oneself".²⁴ Lacan's subject is not divided, but one that can only conceptualise itself when it is mirrored back to itself from the position of another's desire.²⁵

The beginning of the consciousness of the self that begins in the Mirror Stage allows the subject to submit to the process of symbolisation through their admission into the order of language. The individual's subsequent formation as a 'speaking subject' enables them to have access to the Symbolic realm²⁶ where meaning comes into being through signifiers as opposed to abstract concepts that dominate the Imaginary. When the speaking subject acquires language after the Mirror Stage, it is constituted as a split subject where language is partly repressed in the unconscious. For Lacan, the human psyche is made up of the asymmetrical co-presence of the conscious and the unconscious²⁷ that are governed by linguistic experience. As Wright notes:

The unconscious is what the subject represses, and by definition is not consciously expressible by the Subject; however it constantly manifests itself, quite without the Subject's intentions, in dreams, unsuccessful/self-defeating acts, slips of the tongue²⁸

He argued that the signifiers uttered by a subject often refer to something not consciously intended. For Lacan, the signifiers repressed into the unconscious continue to exist because they emerge through the subject 'speaking' in relation to the 'Other'.²⁹ This 'Other' discourse

²² Please see glossary for further explanation

²³ Please see glossary for further explanation

²⁴ Bailly, L. Lacan, 2009, p31

²⁵ Mitchell, J. Introduction I to *Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the École Freudienne*, 1982, p5

²⁶ Please see glossary for further explanation

²⁷ Wright, E. *Psychoanalytic Criticism: Theory in Practice*, 2003, p107

²⁸ *Ibid*, p42

²⁹ Lacan, J. *The Signification of the Phallus*, 1958, p285; please see glossary for further explanation

is not one intended by the subject, but one that it cannot help produce as it is omnipresent and unconsciously imposed through the unintended emergence of repressed signifiers.³⁰

Lacan asserted that it is the subject's unconscious that reveals a fragmented subject of shifting and uncertain sexual identity; the subject is split but an ideological world conceals this from the conscious subject who is supposed to feel whole and certain of their sexual identity.³¹

Lacan's account of sexuality is centred on the desire of the Phallus.³² He identifies the castration complex and the meaning of the Phallus as the locus of sexuality as the child's desire in the Oedipus complex is formed around the Phallus. He differentiates between the Phallus in the Imaginary realm and the Phallus in the Symbolic realm. Through the process of castration, the child no longer identifies with the Imaginary Phallus, subsequently abandoning it and instead accepting the 'Name of the Father'³³ as the representative possessor of the Phallus.³⁴ Lacan places the Phallus in the Symbolic Order and argues that it can only be understood as a signifier.³⁵ It is the child's submission to the 'Name of the Father' and the law of language that is the precondition of the child fitting in with the socio-symbolic order as a speaking subject. The subject instead identifies at this point with the Symbolic Phallus where sexual difference comes to manifest, making it a powerful signifier of sexual difference that establishes the process of signification itself. For Lacan, men and women assume their sexual identity through their relationship to the Symbolic Phallus; that is, of either possessing or lacking it. However unlike Freud, he argues that the relation of the subject to the Phallus is set up regardless of the anatomical difference between the sexes. For Lacan, the Phallus is not an object or an organ then, but a signifier of the mark where

³⁰ Bailly, L. Lacan, 2009, p66

³¹ Mitchell, J. Introduction I to *Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the École Freudienne*, 1982, p26

³² Lacan, J. *The Meaning of the Phallus*, 1958, p83

³³ Please see glossary for further explanation

³⁴ Bailly, L. *Op cit.*, 2009, p79

³⁵ Mitchell, J. and Rose, J. *Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the École Freudienne*, 1982, p65

'logos' is attached to desire.³⁶ It is therefore an entirely imaginary object that is invested with an entirely imagined and undefined power.³⁷

1.3 *L'écriture féminine* and phallogentrism

Elements of Lacan's ideas relating to subjectivity and language are significant to feminism and to Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva's work. His distinction between the Phallus as a signifier and the penis as an organ also enables Freud's biologicistic account of psychosexual development and 'woman' to be considered in linguistic and symbolic terms. Nevertheless, Freud and Lacan have both been accused of producing phallogentric theories. As Elizabeth Grosz notes:

While providing arguably the most sophisticated and convincing account of subjectivity, psychoanalysis itself is nevertheless phallogentric in its perspectives, methods and assumptions³⁸

Phallogentrism privileges the Phallus in the way meaning is made and how the subject is defined through its relation to it. Whilst no-one actually *has* or *is* the phallus, it is the register through which sexual difference is experienced; through castration and lack, it signifies difference at the level of the Imaginary and is a privileged term in the Symbolic order.³⁹ Moreover, because Lacan sees men as possessing the Phallus as the norm and women as lacking it, to a large extent anatomical sex has been perceived to predict one's position within the Symbolic order and determine the subject's relationship to the phallic signifier.⁴⁰

The Phallus has been criticised as designating power relations embedded in societal norms and language. As a result, the 'feminine' has been located as marginalised within the patriarchal Symbolic order, whereby women can only position themselves as 'speaking subjects' fashioned by phallogentrism. Although Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva have different strategies and thinking underpinning *l'écriture féminine*, they all challenge phallogentrism as a basis for their analysis of patriarchy, sexual difference and language. They critique

³⁶ Lacan, J. The Meaning of the Phallus, 1958, p82

³⁷ Bailly, L. Lacan, 2009, p75

³⁸ *Ibid*, p3

³⁹ Adams, P. The Emptiness of the Image, 1996, p49

⁴⁰ Moi, T. From Feminism to Finitude: Freud, Lacan, and Feminism, Again, 2004, p885

phallogocentric structures that govern dominant discourses and cultures⁴¹ through the 'Name-of-the-Father' and the masculine/feminine binary as ordering language. Together, they see *l'écriture féminine* as problematising Lacan's ideas as positioning the 'feminine' in the Imaginary and not expressible in Symbolic language.

1.4 Cixous and the man/woman opposition

For Cixous, Western culture is governed by dualist and hierarchical binary oppositions she terms 'couples' that she analyses from cultural representations derived from literature, philosophy and psychoanalysis.⁴² For Cixous, these dualist structures of unequal power dominate the formation of subjectivity and sexual difference,⁴³ whereby meaning is only constituted when one term of the 'couple' is undermined in favour of the other.⁴⁴ Sexual difference is thus locked into a structure of power where both terms are dependent on the other and difference is only tolerated when repressed. Cixous does not argue against the dialectical relation of each couple per se, but the dependence of power and exclusion that result in the two terms in violent conflict.⁴⁵

For Cixous, the man/woman 'couple' is the dialectical opposition that regulates the binary system, where man's opposition to 'woman' orders all other oppositions in Western culture.⁴⁶ Indeed, she asserts:

man

woman

Always the same metaphor: we follow it, it carries us, beneath all its figures, wherever discourse is organized ... thought has always worked in opposition⁴⁷

All aspects of culture and society are thus ordered around hierarchical oppositions that can only be sustained by a means of difference.⁴⁸ For her, the man/woman 'couple' needs to be deconstructed and rethought so that the 'feminine' as the repressed 'other' is problematised.

⁴¹ Grosz, E. Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction, 1991, p170

⁴² Cixous, H. *Sorties*, 1975, p64

⁴³ *Ibid*, p7

⁴⁴ Cixous, H. *Castration or Decapitation?*, 1981, p45

⁴⁵ Shiach, M. *Hélène Cixous: A Politics of Writing*, 1991, p6

⁴⁶ Cixous, H. *Op cit.*, 1981, p44

⁴⁷ Cixous, H. *Op cit.*, 1975, p63

⁴⁸ Cixous, H. *Op cit.*, 1981, p4

Cixous locates language as a hierarchical and phallogocentric construct that governs these binary oppositions as it has historically been run by a libidinal and cultural economy that is typically 'masculine'.⁴⁹ For her, language has maintained sexual oppositions and 'woman's' repression, because as soon as we exist we are bound by language. Indeed, she notes that at the moment of uttering a sentence we are "seized by a certain kind of masculine desire, the desire that mobilizes philosophical discourse."⁵⁰ For Cixous, historically 'woman' has not been able to be articulated as a subject through occupying a subordinate position to the 'masculine' in order to maintain the man/woman binary opposition; either 'woman' is passive or she does not exist.⁵¹ She asserts that because 'woman's' relation to the Phallus is through one of lack, she is outside the Symbolic and outside language, and thus unable to articulate her pleasure.

Cixous locates herself as comprising multiple identities and desires because of being situated between languages and cultures,⁵² stating that she has no legitimate place or history from which to write.⁵³ She notes:

Everything in me joined forces to forbid me to write: History,⁵⁴ my story, my origin, my sex. Everything that constructed my social and cultural self. To begin with the necessary, which I lacked, the material that writing is formed of and extracted from: language.⁵⁵

It is Cixous' own cultural and linguistic displacement as well as being a 'woman' that leads her to examine the origins of patriarchy and alternative sites of representation for subjectivities repressed by the dominant social order. For Cixous, historically women have been afraid to write.⁵⁶ However, it is because they have 'lost everything' that fixed signs and thoughts can be resisted⁵⁷ and it is indeed time for them to speak, proclaiming "let the priests tremble, we're going to show them our sexts!"⁵⁸ She asserts that 'woman' must break free

⁴⁹ Cixous, H. *The Laugh of the Medusa*, 1976, p879

⁵⁰ Cixous, H. *Castration or Decapitation?*, 1981, p45

⁵¹ Cixous, H. *Sorties*, 1975, p68

⁵² Cixous grew up speaking French and German and also heard Spanish and Arabic, experiencing multiple languages. In *Sorties*, she describes her own biography as placed 'on the edge' between different diasporas, 1975, p70

⁵³ Cixous, H. "Coming to Writing" and Other Essays, 1991, p15

⁵⁴ Cixous uses capital letters at the beginning of words as a strategy to emphasize and highlight terminology that she argues are fundamentally phallogocentric and to reflect the dominant authority of patriarchal logic.

⁵⁵ Cixous, H. *Op cit.*, 1991, p12

⁵⁶ Cixous, H. *Op cit.*, 1976, p876

⁵⁷ Cixous, H. *Op cit.*, 1991, p38

⁵⁸ Cixous, H. *Op cit.*, 1976, p885

from the restraints of phallogentrism and create change; inventing a new history for themselves.⁵⁹ She writes that if 'woman' has always functioned "within" man's discourse "it is time for her to displace this "within", explode it, overturn it, grab it, make it hers."⁶⁰

The key concepts underlying Cixous' thinking are twofold: to challenge the origins of patriarchy through unearthing and working beneath the myths that sustain it and to create an alternative 'feminine' writing practice to do so. For Cixous, it is through *l'écriture féminine*, that 'woman' can create alternative sites of representation for sexual difference that can rethink the masculine/feminine binary opposition and challenge the fixed structures of patriarchy. She argues that:

[feminine] writing is precisely *the very possibility of change*, the space that can serve as a springboard for subversive thought, the precursory movement of a transformation of social and cultural structures⁶¹

For Cixous, *l'écriture féminine* exceeds binary logic and creates transformative frameworks that can challenge phallogentric structures and create political and social change.⁶² It refuses to eradicate the other's difference to become dominant and maintain oppositional thinking. Instead, *l'écriture féminine* provides an alternative form of expression that can allow marginalised subjectivities to be articulated and reformulate existing structures through the inclusion of 'other' experiences. Cixous believes that 'feminine writing' is revolutionary; it can be the site of alternative economies that do not simply reproduce the system.⁶³ She asserts that whereas the dialectical nature of a 'masculine' textual economy implies the negation of one term and the enhancement of the other, 'feminine' ways of giving instead alter the conditions of language to create new practices⁶⁴ as they are based on *exchange*.

Cixous challenges Freud and Lacan's assertion that the libido is 'masculine' and only articulated through active masculinity before femininity is discovered in the Oedipal

⁵⁹ Cixous, H. *Sorties*, 1975, p95

⁶⁰ *Ibid*; Cixous re-uses sections of her writing in different texts and alters them slightly. This quotation was also published in *The Laugh of the Medusa*, 1976, p887 and edited slightly as the following: "If woman had always functioned "within" the discourse of man ... it is time for her to dislocate this "within", explode it, overturn it, grab it, make it hers, containing it, taking it in her own mouth, biting that tongue with her very own teeth to invent for herself a language to get inside of".

⁶¹ Cixous, H. *Op cit.*, 1976, p879

⁶² Sellers, S. *The Hélène Cixous Reader*, 1994, pxxix

⁶³ Shiach, M. *Hélène Cixous: A Politics of Writing*, 1991, p16

⁶⁴ Conley, V. A. *Hélène Cixous*, 1992, p39

complex.⁶⁵ She explores how ‘feminine’ libidinal pleasure based on the pre-linguistic drives of the Imaginary can be articulated and inscribed textually to form a subversive writing practice. Cixous locates sexual difference at the level of *jouissance* and the physical drives of the body to challenge the existing patriarchal Symbolic order which removes the identification of sexual identity with anatomical difference. She notes:

Sexual difference is not simply determined by the fantasized relation to anatomy... The difference, in my opinion, becomes most clearly perceived on the level of *jouissance*, inasmuch as a woman’s instinctual economy cannot be identified by a man or referred to the masculine economy⁶⁶

Indeed, she notes that to categorise the author of a text as a ‘woman’ does not make it ‘feminine’ and a text written by a man doesn’t exclude ‘femininity’, although this is rare.⁶⁷ She cites particular writers such as Clarice Lispector, Marguerite Duras, James Joyce and Jean Genêt as examples of ‘feminine’ writing regardless of gender.

For Cixous, ‘woman’ can invent new languages by ‘writing their bodies’ and *jouissance*, inscribing the unconscious as the formation of what is repressed in the splitting of the subject as it enters the Symbolic. Indeed she notes, “by censoring the body, breath and speech are censored at the same time”.⁶⁸ Instead she asserts one must write the self, “... only then will the immense resources of the unconscious spring forth”.⁶⁹ She continues:

There is a bond between woman’s libidinal economy – her *jouissance*, the feminine Imaginary – and her way of self-constituting a subjectivity that splits apart without regret⁷⁰

Cixous rejects Lacan’s notion that the Imaginary is beyond language and signification and that ‘woman’ cannot therefore express themselves in ordinary language within the Symbolic⁷¹ but only as passive and inferior in a structure which privileges the Phallus. Her *l’écriture féminine* is situated within the closure of the Lacanian Imaginary where ‘feminine’

⁶⁵ Cixous, H. *Sorties*, 1975, p81

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, p82

⁶⁷ Cixous, H. *Castration or Decapitation?*, 1981, p52

⁶⁸ Cixous, H. *Op cit.*, 1975, p97

⁶⁹ Cixous, H. *The Laugh of the Medusa*, 1976, p880

⁷⁰ Cixous, H. *Op cit.*, 1975, p90

⁷¹ Moi, T. *From Feminism to Finitude: Freud, Lacan, and Feminism, Again*, 2004, p864

jouissance is located outside Symbolic structures. Thus for her, it is in the Imaginary that through writing 'woman' can enjoy freedom in the space of pre-linguistic structures.⁷²

1.5 Irigaray's *parler femme* and mimesis

Irigaray situates her work surrounding *l'écriture féminine* within the discourse of philosophy, which she examines from a psychoanalytical perspective.⁷³ Unlike Cixous, Irigaray does not wholly reject psychoanalysis. She indeed critiques Freudian and Lacanian ideas as phallogcentrically biased and leaving no room for women, but develops an internal critique of Lacan versed in details of his work and his own technique.⁷⁴ As Whitford notes:

Although Irigaray clearly does have some debt to Lacan, she also demarcates herself sharply from his conceptualizations, and redefines the imaginary for her own purposes⁷⁵

Irigaray analyses the historical origins of patriarchy, primarily focusing on the history of philosophical discourse, arguing that it must be questioned and disturbed as it is a master discourse of power that dominates all other discourses.⁷⁶ She notes that we have to challenge and disrupt philosophical discourse as it "sets forth the law for all others, inasmuch as it constitutes the discourse on discourse."⁷⁷

Irigaray critiques Western culture as fundamentally patriarchal because of relations between the sexes.⁷⁸ For her, its dominance stems from its power to reduce all 'others' to the economy of the 'Same' in which difference is eradicated in systems of self-representation which privilege the 'masculine'.⁷⁹ Indeed, she writes:

Whereas the female body engenders with respect for difference, the patriarchal social body constructs itself hierarchically, excluding difference⁸⁰

Irigaray's logic of the 'Same' can be traced back to Freud's account of the development of sexual difference where the 'feminine' is defined by castration and the little girl is defined as

⁷² Shiach, M. Hélène Cixous: A Politics of Writing, 1985, p117

⁷³ Whitford, M. Luce Irigaray: Philosophy in the Feminine, 1991, p2

⁷⁴ Grosz, E. Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction, 1991, p144

⁷⁵ Whitford, M. Op cit., 1991, p54

⁷⁶ Moi, T. Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory, 1985, p129

⁷⁷ Irigaray, L. The Power of Discourse and the Subordination of the Feminine, 1985, p74

⁷⁸ Irigaray, L. Je, tu, nous: Towards a Culture of Difference, 1993, p19

⁷⁹ Irigaray, L. Op cit., 1985, p74

⁸⁰ Irigaray, L. Op cit., 1993, p45

lacking a penis. Indeed, she asserts that the 'feminine' is always described in terms of deficiency or atrophy; the 'other' of the male sex which holds a monopoly on value."⁸¹

Like Cixous, Irigaray criticises psychoanalysis as conceptualising the Imaginary and Symbolic from the viewpoint of the 'masculine' but not in terms of the 'feminine'. Indeed, in *Speculum*, she writes:

Any theory of the subject has always been appropriated by the "masculine". When she submits (to such) a theory, woman fails to realize that she is renouncing the specificity of her own relationship to the imaginary⁸²

Like Cixous, Irigaray asserts that women have functioned in a world fashioned by phallogentrism and have been prevented from expressing themselves. She theorises the unrepresentableness of the 'feminine' subject through what she calls 'specularisation'; the self-reflecting organisation of the subject that maintains the subordination of the 'feminine'. Irigaray asserts that 'woman' is caught up in the specular logic of patriarchy and can only return as man's specularised other in patriarchal culture, as it is her only acceptable form.⁸³

She can either choose to:

Remain silent, producing incomprehensible babble (any utterance that falls outside the logic of the same will by definition be incomprehensible to the male master discourse) or to enact the specular representation of herself as a lesser male⁸⁴

Functioning within the Symbolic, Irigaray asserts that 'woman' has no language of her own, but can only imitate male discourse. She writes that 'woman' is:

A (scarcely) living mirror, she/it is frozen, mute. More lifelike. The ebb and flow of our lives spent in the exhausting labour of copying, miming. Dedicated to reproducing – that sameness in which we have remained for centuries, as the other⁸⁵

She asserts that if language does not give both sexes equivalent, albeit different opportunities to speak, it will continue to function so that one sex will dominate the other.

⁸¹ Irigaray, L. The Power of Discourse and the Subordination of the Feminine, 1985, p69

⁸² Irigaray, L. *Speculum of the Other Woman*, 1985, p133

⁸³ Moi, T. *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory*, 1985, p134

⁸⁴ *Ibid*, p135

⁸⁵ Irigaray, L. *When Our Lips Speak Together*, 1985, p207

Although Irigaray locates women's oppression in sexual difference, she argues that it is precisely through new topologies of sexual difference that women can be liberated. Like Cixous, Irigaray focuses on non-oppositional difference to redefine the man/woman relation without submission to open up an alternative space for women, not defined in relation to men but in their own terms.⁸⁶ She argues for sexual difference based on a re-writing of each sex as different and yet respected whereby women can gain recognition for their difference *and* affirm themselves as valid subjects. For her, it is through language that 'woman' can articulate their sexuality through inventing new languages and establish sites of difference to deconstruct phallogentrism.⁸⁷ Irigaray conceptualises an 'alternative syntax' to enable their representation within the Symbolic by seeing the Imaginary as a place from which to write. She argues for a specific 'feminine' language, which she calls *parler femme* or 'womanspeak' that can represent the specificity of the 'feminine' and disrupt conventional (and Symbolic) syntax.

Irigaray challenges the specular and phallogentric logic of Lacan's mirror of self-representation as the dominant mode of representation, which positions 'woman' in the position of man's specular ego.⁸⁸ For Irigaray, the flat Lacanian mirror can only reflect 'woman's' sexual organs as a whole and not the sexual organs and sexual specificity of 'woman' as multiple, where the reflected body is instead either a male body or a castrated body.⁸⁹ Instead, she reconceptualises the specular logic of representation through the 'speculum'. She argues that:

The speculum is not necessarily a mirror. It may, quite simply, be an instrument to *dilate* the lips, the orifices, the walls, so that the eye can penetrate the *interior*. So that the eye can enter, to see, notably with speculative intent. Woman, having been misinterpreted, forgotten, variously frozen in show-cases, rolled up in metaphors ... would now become the "object" to be investigated, to be explicitly granted consideration, and thereby, by this deed of title, included in the theory⁹⁰

⁸⁶ Grosz, E. Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction, 1991, p172

⁸⁷ Jones, A. R. Writing the Body: Toward an Understanding of L'écriture Feminine, 1981, p248

⁸⁸ Grosz, E. Op cit., 1991, p173

⁸⁹ Whitford, M. Luce Irigaray: Philosophy in the Feminine, 1991, p65

⁹⁰ Irigaray, L. Speculum of the Other Woman, 1985, p144

The curved surface of the speculum disrupts the singular and dominant specularizing gaze presented through the Lacanian mirror and deconstructs any fixed notion of 'woman' as defined by phallogentrism. Instead, it opens up a rounded reality, whereby 'woman' is in becoming and a diffuse, fluid and multiple identity can emerge.⁹¹ As Grosz notes, it represents the specificity of the 'other' woman as different from man's 'other'.⁹²

The reconceptualisation of representation through the speculum is put into play through mimesis. Irigaray differentiates between mimesis caught up in a process of imitation, reproduction and specularisation, and mimesis as *production*.⁹³ For her, whereas non-productive mimesis refers to the 'feminine' as constructed by patriarchy and maintains 'woman' as the 'other' of man, productive mimesis enables 'woman' to regain her subjectivity.⁹⁴ Whilst Cixous proposes non-oppositional difference that does not reproduce the system, Irigaray does so deliberately. She asserts that women must assume the role of the 'feminine' allocated to them through specularisation to transform their subordination, by resubmitting herself to masculine logic through the playful repetition of the 'feminine' in language.⁹⁵ Indeed, she says:

Don't restrict yourself to describing, reproducing and repeating what exists, but know how to invent or imagine what hasn't yet taken place⁹⁶

As Grosz notes, mimesis is not a passive reproduction but an active process of reinscribing and recontextualising the mimicked 'object'.⁹⁷ For Irigaray then, it is miming the miming imposed on women that can create forms of resistance. As Moi points out, Irigaray's strategy is fundamentally paradoxical; woman's surrender becomes the moment of her liberation.⁹⁸

Irigaray locates productive mimesis in *l'écriture féminine* or what she specifically terms *parler femme*. For her, *parler femme* enables 'woman' to express herself by returning

⁹¹ Battersby, C. Just Jamming: Irigaray, Painting and Psychoanalysis, 1996, p132

⁹² Grosz, E. Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction, 1991, p173

⁹³ Robinson, H. Reading Art, Reading Irigaray: The Politics of Art by Women, 2006, p26

⁹⁴ *Ibid*, p27

⁹⁵ Irigaray, L. The Power of Discourse and the Subordination of the Feminine, 1985, p76

⁹⁶ Irigaray, L. Je, tu, nous: Towards a Culture of Difference, 1993, p49

⁹⁷ Grosz, E. What is Feminist Theory?, 1986, p143

⁹⁸ Moi, T. Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory, 1985, p140

to the same form with minor variations and no longer amounting to the logic of the Same.⁹⁹ Her *parler femme* poses an anarchic force that can disrupt the Symbolic order.¹⁰⁰ Irigaray critiques the present syntax in the Symbolic as a function of the Phallic Imaginary and instead argues for a 'double syntax' structured through difference;¹⁰¹ a syntax where the repressed 'feminine' can come into play and can represent 'feminine' specificity and difference in relation to language in *addition* to Symbolic syntax.

1.6 Kristeva's semiotic and the *chora*

Compared to Cixous and Irigaray, Kristeva embraces and builds on Lacan's ideas to develop her own theory surrounding the signifying process.¹⁰² Indeed as Grosz notes, key Lacanian concepts and principles form the framework Kristeva relies on to destabilise signifying conventions.¹⁰³ However, she is also highly critical of many of Lacan's ideas and partially re-works his psychoanalytic framework through adjustments and modifications. Kristeva sees psychoanalysis as a dominant socio-historical tradition that governs linguistic structuration, in turn governing societal codes. As Moi notes:

Kristeva sees the ideological and philosophical basis for modern linguistics as fundamentally authoritarian and oppressive¹⁰⁴

She follows on from Lacan in that the speaking subject exists within Symbolic language. However, she questions the position of the 'feminine' as constituted through the repression of the primary libidinal drives in the Symbolic order, through an analysis of its repression and oppression.

Kristeva problematises Freud and Lacan's focus on castration and the Phallus as the major referent in the operation of separation, as constituting the Symbolic field and all subjects inscribed therein.¹⁰⁵ For Kristeva, Lacan's Symbolic is the paternal law that

⁹⁹ Irigaray, L. *Speculum of the Other Woman*, 1985, p143

¹⁰⁰ Battersby, C. *Just Jamming: Irigaray, Painting and Psychoanalysis*, 1996, p131

¹⁰¹ Robinson, H. *Reading Art, Reading Irigaray: The Politics of Art by Women*, 2006, p53

¹⁰² Kristeva initially worked solely in linguistics and then later also became a practicing psychoanalyst allowing the two discourses to overlap. As a result, her linguistic theory is heavily influenced by psychoanalysis.

¹⁰³ Grosz, E. *Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction*, 1991, p156

¹⁰⁴ Moi, T. *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory*, 1985, p152

¹⁰⁵ Kristeva, J. *Revolution in Poetic Language*, 1993, p198

structures all linguistic significations (seen in the 'Name-of-the-father'), becoming a universal organising principle of culture.¹⁰⁶ Therefore for her, 'woman' has been left out of the socio-symbolic contract of language.¹⁰⁷ Kristeva's suspicion of identity leads her to reject any notion of 'woman' or the 'feminine' as a rigid construct and any possibility of *l'écriture féminine* as inherently female. Moi argues that if 'femininity' does have a definition in Kristevan terms, it is that which is marginalised by the patriarchal Symbolic order.¹⁰⁸ Rather than reformulating a new discourse that constructs the individual as Cixous sought to do, like Irigaray she asserts that women should persist in challenging the discourses that stand and it is their marginalised position that has a liberatory potential.¹⁰⁹

Rather than focusing purely on representation, Kristeva focused on new understandings of the subject and writing as a means of *production* through language and the signifying process. She examined how language comes into meaning and resists intelligibility and signification¹¹⁰ through developing theories of marginality and subversion to reclaim the subject and language. Kristeva conceptualised the subversive potential of language through what she termed the 'semiotic'¹¹¹ by building on Freud's distinction between pre-Oedipal and Oedipal sexual drives and Lacan's further distinction between the Imaginary and the Symbolic realms into a distinction between the semiotic and the Symbolic. Her semiotic refers to the instinctual infantile drives that move through the body of the subject and polymorphous erotogenic zones in the pre-Oedipal primary processes prior to the subject's entrance into the Symbolic and how they affect language. It facilitates their structural disposition and the processes that displace and condense these energies and their inscription.¹¹² The endless flow and circulation of these drives are gathered up in what Kristeva terms the *chora*.¹¹³ As Kelly Ives describes, the *chora* is "a realm of uncertainty,

¹⁰⁶ Butler, J. *The Body Politics of Julia Kristeva*, 1993, p164

¹⁰⁷ Kristeva, J. *Women's Time*, 1986, p199

¹⁰⁸ Moi, T. *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory*, 1985, p166

¹⁰⁹ Jones, A. R. *Writing the Body: Toward an Understanding of L'Écriture Feminine*, 1981, p249

¹¹⁰ Kristeva, J. *Op cit.*, 1986, p90

¹¹¹ Please see glossary for further explanation

¹¹² Kristeva, J. *Op cit.*, 1986, p93

¹¹³ Please see glossary for further explanation

undetermined articulation, ambiguity."¹¹⁴ It is the *chora* that orders the drives and implies a distinctiveness that allows us to connect it to a precise modality in the signifying process.¹¹⁵

For Kristeva, the 'masculine' signifies representational discourse whereby the semiotic is repressed and regulated to function within ordered and rule-governed signification. However, she asserts that the speaking subject is always infinitely split between the conscious and the unconscious; the paternal Symbolic and the maternal semiotic.¹¹⁶ Whereas Freud and Lacan assert that a 'normative' subject must repress the pre-Oedipal or Imaginary drives, for Kristeva the re-emergence of these drives in the semiotic have the potential to disrupt the patriarchal Symbolic and are bound up in the body as *jouissance*. Kristeva sees the semiotic and Symbolic as two interrelated modes whose relation constitutes the signifying process and the subject. In Lacanian terms, the Symbolic is an order superimposed on the semiotic, leading to a stable speaking subject and the regulation of libidinal drives as required by social order.¹¹⁷ However, for Kristeva the semiotic cannot be circumscribed by the Symbolic order but it is a constant threat of disruption never being fully eliminated.

For Kristeva, the repressed and unrepresentable 'feminine' as bound up with the semiotic can be inscribed into the Symbolic through the practice of 'feminine' writing. Once the subject enters into Symbolic language and the *chora* is repressed, these bodily drives continue into the subject's later life through the unconscious. The *chora* is normally perceived as 'pulsional pressure' on the symbolically regulated structures of language, manifesting as 'contradictions', 'absences' and 'silences'.¹¹⁸ Rather than a 'new language', the *chora* constitutes the heterogeneous dimension of language that can never be caught up in the closure of traditional linguistic theory.¹¹⁹ For Kristeva, the semiotic drives can be released into the Symbolic textually through what she calls 'negativity'.¹²⁰ Poetic language is

¹¹⁴ Ives, K. Cixous, Irigaray, Kristeva: the Jouissance of French Feminism, 2010, p108

¹¹⁵ Kristeva, J. Women's Time, 1986, p93

¹¹⁶ Grosz, E. Feminist Thought and Politics of Art, 1988, p148

¹¹⁷ Grosz, E. Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction, 1991, p152

¹¹⁸ Jones, A. R. Writing the Body: Toward an Understanding of L'écriture Feminine, 1981, p248

¹¹⁹ Moi, T. Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory, 1985, p162

¹²⁰ *Ibid*, p170

a vehicle for the manifestation of negativity.¹²¹ It does not *represent* the drives, but rather reactivates them through the practice of ‘feminine’ writing.¹²² Thus, the articulation and mobilisation of the semiotic and the *chora* provide the subversive potential of signification through a “disturbance of language and/or the order of the signifier”.¹²³

As the semiotic precedes language, it precedes the establishment of the sign in the constituted subject. Thus, it is prior to the emergence of the division between signifier and signified.¹²⁴ Linguistically, the Symbolic obeys the rules of communication and refers to the establishment of fixed structures through “sign and syntax, paternal function, grammatical and social constraints, symbolic law”.¹²⁵ Poetic language however, relates to the transfer of drive energies that organise the space of the subject before it is a split unity.¹²⁶ For Kristeva, only certain avant-garde and poetic texts create semiotic negativity that can articulate the infinite subject-in-process and provide the subversive potential of the semiotic.¹²⁷ Through this writing, the *chora* connects to a ‘precise modality’ in the signifying process, resulting in a ‘revolution in language’ through the transgression and renewal of the Symbolic.¹²⁸ As Kelly Oliver notes:

Poetic language is explicitly involved in the de-structuring and structuring of language at the “outer boundaries” of the Symbolic. Because the authority of the Symbolic requires unity and autonomy, the semiotic disposition in poetry destabilises the Symbolic even while recreating, and in order to create a new Symbolic. For Kristeva, this is the nature of all *signifiance*. Poetry reveals the nature of all *signifiance* through its practice.¹²⁹

Poetic language is revolutionary as it generates a new instance of the subject through the operations of *signifiance*¹³⁰ through the interplay of the semiotic and Symbolic, revealing the subject-in-process.¹³¹ Rather than demanding equality or rejecting the Symbolic in favour of a new dominant system, Kristeva brings out the importance of the semiotic without denying

¹²¹ Guerlec, S. *Transgression in Theory: Genius and the Subject of La Révolution du langage poétique*, 1993, p239

¹²² Oliver, K. *Ethics, Politics and Difference in Julia Kristeva’s Writing*, 1993, p2

¹²³ Kristeva, J. *Revolution in Poetic Language*, 1986, p104

¹²⁴ Lechte, J. *Julia Kristeva*, 1991, p133

¹²⁵ Roudiez, L. S. Introduction in: *Kristeva’s Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, 1992, p7

¹²⁶ Kristeva, J. *Op cit.*, 1986, p121

¹²⁷ *Ibid*, p122

¹²⁸ Schippers, B. *Julia Kristeva and Feminist Thought*, 2011, p27

¹²⁹ Oliver, K. *Op cit.*, 1993, p3

¹³⁰ Guerlec, S. *Op cit.*, 1993, p239; please see glossary for further explanation

¹³¹ Butler, J. *The Body Politics of Julia Kristeva*, 1993, p164

the Symbolic through a maternal *and* paternal signifying space.¹³² The double articulation of language through the semiotic and Symbolic emphasises how subjectivity is constantly renewed and involves both conscious and unconscious processes.¹³³

2. The textual 'qualities' of *l'écriture féminine*

Whilst Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva identify different strategies and thinking underlying *l'écriture féminine*, their analysis of how it manifests textually, overlap and interweave with one another. *L'écriture féminine* is not made up of prescribed rigid and definable elements but rather what I have termed textual 'qualities' that denote distinctive textual features which emerge through an intertextual reading of Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva's work. These qualities are themselves shifting and ambiguous, avoiding categorisation where themes and qualities appear in different contexts. Indeed, Kristeva herself notes that a problem of semiotics is replacing a rhetoric of genres "with a *typology of texts*; that is, to define the specificity of different textual arrangements by placing them within a general text".¹³⁴ I will draw out and elucidate what I argue are the key textual qualities of *l'écriture féminine* through a semi-structured thematic analysis that enables a fluid and intertextual reading of Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva's work, interlinking them where appropriate. This will allow for the discussion to remain in keeping with the non-linearity and complexity of *l'écriture féminine* and in doing so enabling their articulation.

Cixous does not explicitly state what 'feminine' writing *is*. Instead, she discusses what 'feminine' writing *will do* and allows various qualities to manifest textually in her own practice of *l'écriture féminine*. In fact, the lack of fixity, specificity and the prescription of what it entails is a quality of 'feminine' writing itself. Cixous asserts that a 'feminine' text is continuous and has no limits; it starts on "all sides at once, starts twenty times over, thirty times over".¹³⁵ She notes that this writing never ends and circulates within itself.¹³⁶ For

¹³² Lechte, J. Julia Kristeva, 1991, p130

¹³³ Barrett, E. Reframing Kristeva, 2011, p3

¹³⁴ Kristeva, J. Desire in Language, 1992, p36

¹³⁵ Cixous, H. Castration or Decapitation?, 1981, p53

¹³⁶ Cixous, H. Coming to Writing, 1991, p4

Cixous, these qualities of continuousness and multiplicity reflect the history of 'woman' as made up of millions of singular histories;¹³⁷ they are capable of creating a new history by occurring simultaneously through "a process of becoming in which several histories intersect with one another".¹³⁸ She asserts that 'feminine' language is the language of the 'other' and is several; the language of a thousand tongues that does not know closure¹³⁹ but which has the possibility to un-think the unifying and regulating homogenous authority of History.¹⁴⁰ Many of Cixous' ideas are repeated and reworked in several texts, where writing is "presented as a continuum that encourages non-linear forms of reading".¹⁴¹ Her practice of *l'écriture féminine* encompasses non-linearity and is in a continual process of becoming, with no clear beginning or end and where any points of fixity are undone through multiplicity.

Irigaray too, refers to the quality of multiplicity through focusing on the multiplicity of sexual desire or a specifically 'feminine' *jouissance* in which to consider language. For her, the 'feminine' is plural and multiple as women experience sexuality as a multiplicity of 'feminine' libidinal desires; therefore her *jouissance* is multiple, non-unified and endless.¹⁴² She writes:

Her sexuality, always at least double, goes even further: it is plural ... Woman has sex organs more or less everywhere. She finds pleasure almost anywhere. Even if we refrain from invoking hystericization of her entire body, the geography of her pleasure is far more diversified, more multiple in its differences, far more complex, more subtle, than is commonly imagined¹⁴³

For Irigaray, it is the articulation of this multiplicity relating to the polymorphous drives and a plural *jouissance* that can be inscribed in 'feminine' language, in doing so disrupting the linearity of phallogocentric discourse and 'man's' single pleasure to transform existing power structures. Thus, like Cixous, 'feminine' writing manifests as encompassing qualities of unfixity, multiplicity and becoming.

¹³⁷ Cixous, H. *Coming to Writing*, 1991, p27

¹³⁸ Cixous, H. *The Laugh of the Medusa*, 1976, p882

¹³⁹ Cixous, H. *Sorties*, 1975, p88; *The Laugh of the Medusa*, 1976, p889

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p882

¹⁴¹ Moi, T. *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory*, 1985, p102

¹⁴² *Ibid*, p143

¹⁴³ Irigaray, L. *This Sex Which Is Not One*, 1985, p28

Irigaray argues that women possess an 'autoeroticism' that men do not as her genitals are formed of two lips in continuous contact that caress one another.¹⁴⁴ Activity cannot be distinguished from passivity as 'woman' is not one but two (or more). Rather than one term privileging the other, the plurality of the 'feminine' and its mobility and continuous becoming fractures and disturbs binary logic. For Irigaray, these motifs of ceaseless and multiple self-touching create utterances that appropriate the 'feminine' to discourse.¹⁴⁵ She writes:

Between our lips, yours and mine, several voices, several ways of speaking resound endlessly, back and forth. One is never separable from the other. You/I: we are always several at once. And how could one dominate the other?¹⁴⁶

Irigaray's notion of autoeroticism also refers to the qualities of continuousness, and limits or borders. Indeed, she asserts that woman derives pleasure from entering into a ceaseless exchange of her-self with the 'other', without the possibility of identifying either.¹⁴⁷ For her, although 'woman' remains several, she is kept from dispersion because the 'other' is autoerotically familiar.¹⁴⁸ There is thus a tension between overflowing the limits of her self through excess and being contained so that this rupturing is kept from happening. In

Elemental Passions, she writes:

For me, nothing is ever finite/ What does not pass through our skin, between our skins, mingles in our bodies fluids. Ours. Or at least mine. And as mine are continuous with yours, there is no fixed boundary to impose a definite separation¹⁴⁹

For Irigaray, this 'other' is always in flux and never congeals or solidifies; instead flowing without fixed boundaries.¹⁵⁰ 'Feminine' language cannot be described in a linear manner; rather it is always in the process of weaving itself. It sets off in all directions because of 'woman's' autoeroticism, which when she returns sets off from 'elsewhere'.¹⁵¹ Like Cixous, Irigaray focuses on qualities of multiplicity, mobility, flux, excess and unfixity. Rather than

¹⁴⁴ Irigaray, L. *This Sex Which Is Not One*, 1985, p24

¹⁴⁵ Irigaray, L. *The Power of Discourse and the Subordination of the Feminine*, 1985, p79

¹⁴⁶ Irigaray, L. *When Our Lips Speak Together*, 1985, p209

¹⁴⁷ Irigaray, L. *Op cit.*, 1985, p31

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid*, p30

¹⁴⁹ Irigaray, L. *Elemental Passions*, 1992, p16

¹⁵⁰ Irigaray, L. *Op cit.*, 1985, p215

¹⁵¹ Irigaray, L. *Op cit.*, 1985, p29

describing or prescribing what 'feminine' writing entails, she asserts that the 'feminine' can be defined in these terms through the inscription of the repressed 'feminine' Imaginary.

Unlike Cixous and Irigaray, Kristeva does not practice *l'écriture féminine* herself but analyses it in the work of others. Her term 'intertextuality'¹⁵² refers to one or more systems of signs transposed into one another and how a text's meaning is mediated by other texts. Rather than referring to the relationships *between* different texts, it refers to the production of meaning *within* texts and how the components of a textual system allow for its structuration to come into being. For her, this 'transposition' is exchanging and permutating, it abandons sign-systems to articulate a new *representability*.¹⁵³ It has the potential to disrupt the Symbolic structuration of language and articulate a politics of a non-representational understanding of writing.¹⁵⁴ Kristeva's 'intertextuality' produces a plural history of different kinds of writing. It posits that every signifying practice is a field of transpositions where its place of enunciation is never single or complete, but instead plural and shattered.¹⁵⁵ Like Cixous and Irigaray's practice of 'feminine' writing, intertextuality incorporates the qualities of multiplicity and continuousness through the semiotic occurring through *signifiance*; it is a practice that is in flux and always in process with no beginning and no end.

Cixous uses multiple narratives that interweave, overlap and collide with one another to rupture conventional narrative structures. As Morag Shiach notes, her fictional and theoretical texts have a dialogical structure that involve multiple subjectivities, becoming intertexts.¹⁵⁶ In *Stigmata* for example, she weaves an abundance of poetic narratives that cultivate a new type of writing.¹⁵⁷ Like Kristeva's intertextuality, she refers to *interchanges* in which writing constitutes a weaving that put elements into relations to form subtle networks that in turn create new pathways.¹⁵⁸ They are infinitely mobile and like Irigaray's notion of autoeroticism are also self-touching. No one fragment of her texts carries the totality of her

¹⁵² Please see glossary for further explanation

¹⁵³ Kristeva, J. *Revolution in Poetic Language*, 1986, p112

¹⁵⁴ Moi, T. *The Kristeva Reader*, 1986, p5

¹⁵⁵ Kristeva, J. *Op cit.*, 1986, p111

¹⁵⁶ Shiach, M. *Hélène Cixous: A Politics of Writing*, 1991, p78

¹⁵⁷ Derrida, J. *Forw ord to Cixous, H. Stigmata: Escaping Texts*, 2005, piii

¹⁵⁸ Calle-Gruber, M. *Rootprints: Memory and Life Writing*, 1997, p23

message; instead, Cixous sees 'feminine' writing as continuous. It has no beginning or end and embodies a "to-be-in-the-process of writing."¹⁵⁹ Ways of reading and writing appear as a continuum where they are constantly changing, problematising dominant phallogentric structures in language. This experimental and intertextual writing undoes the unified 'masculine' subject and Symbolic discourses through a perpetual metamorphosis, where the subject is no longer fixed but shifts between the self and other.¹⁶⁰

Like Irigaray, Cixous also refers to the quality of flux. Indeed, Ives asserts that the sense of flux is one of the most prominent elements of her texts; "they do not keep still, her metaphors often concern fluidity, burning metamorphosis ... the process of creation and transformation."¹⁶¹ For her, it is an excess of multiple subjectivities that can undo thought:

A woman-text ... takes the metaphorical form of wandering, excess, risk of the unreckonable: no reckoning, a feminine text can't be predicted, isn't predictable, isn't knowable and is therefore very disturbing¹⁶²

The notion of excess relates to an economy of transformation that challenges the limits of language to move beyond the fixity of phallogentrism; 'woman' is everywhere in a continuous state of becoming and is constantly changing, she 'comes-in-between' without fear of reaching a limit.¹⁶³ This performative 'becoming' and overabundance relates to 'feminine' *jouissance* and forms the foundation for the development of an alternative 'feminine' textual economy.

Rather than creating a 'feminine' writing practice that maintains binary thinking, Cixous explores an alternative space "(in) the between."¹⁶⁴ As Shiach notes, her *l'écriture féminine* happens in a "space which is uncertain, dangerous in its refusal to ally itself with one side of an opposition".¹⁶⁵ Her use of multiple narratives blurs boundaries on a textual level between different genres of writing. She moves between critical discourse, fiction,

¹⁵⁹ Cixous, H. *Stigmata: Escaping Texts*, 2005, p25

¹⁶⁰ Conley, V. A. *Hélène Cixous*, 1992, p10

¹⁶¹ Ives, K. *Cixous, Irigaray, Kristeva: the Jouissance of French Feminism*, 2010, p69

¹⁶² Cixous, H. *Castration or Decapitation?*, 1981, p53

¹⁶³ Cixous, H. *The Laugh of the Medusa*, 1976, p893

¹⁶⁴ Cixous, H. *Sorties*, 1975, p 86

¹⁶⁵ Shiach, M. *Hélène Cixous: A Politics of Writing*, 1991, p22

philosophy and poetry to create a textual opera of plural narratives,¹⁶⁶ existing in indeterminate areas in-between genres.¹⁶⁷ Cixous asserts that ‘woman’ must write ‘in between’ to challenge the logical developments of discourse.¹⁶⁸ In order to conceptualise this ‘in-between’ space, she suggests a form of writing that embodies a non-hierarchical *other bisexuality* which is beyond oppositions that “crosses limits ... neither outside nor in.”¹⁶⁹ Rather than a total composed of two halves, her *other bisexuality* locates the subject as simultaneously being able to move *between* the ‘masculine’ and the ‘feminine’. It is multiple, variable and ever-changing and is based on the non-exclusion of difference or of one sex; it includes the multiplication of the effects of the inscription of desire.¹⁷⁰

Irigaray works in the between of different genres of writing, often blurring boundaries between poetic, fictional, semi-theoretical and traditionally theoretical texts. Like Cixous, her ‘feminine’ writing encompasses the quality of continuousness where narrative structures are blurred and unfixed, continuously alluding structure. She deliberately omits references and footnotes, blurring distinctions between her own text and the text she is ‘citing’, allowing for associative connections.¹⁷¹ Irigaray argues that to create a new textual strategy, linear reading needs to be challenged to undo oppositions and disturb structures.¹⁷² Indeed, in *Speculum*, she disrupts the chronology of the ideas she critiques, starting with Freud and ending with Plato and weaving in her own ideas; thus disrupting the phallographic order from the outside rather than simply toppling and replacing it.¹⁷³ In doing so, like Cixous she refers to the quality of excess. Irigaray sees the female Imaginary as a repressed entity, where its rejection means ‘woman’ can only experience herself fragmentarily, in the little-structured margins of a dominant ideology, as waste or excess.¹⁷⁴ She asserts that the ‘feminine’ as defined by phallogentrism should be repeated through mimetic strategies as disruptive

¹⁶⁶ Conley, V. A. Hélène Cixous, 1992, p23

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid*, pxvi

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid*, p64

¹⁶⁹ Cixous, H. Castration or Decapitation?, 1981, p54

¹⁷⁰ Moi, T. Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory, 1985, p109

¹⁷¹ Whitford, M. Luce Irigaray: Philosophy in the Feminine, 1991, p37

¹⁷² Irigaray, L. The Power of Discourse and the Subordination of the Feminine, 1985, p80

¹⁷³ *Ibid*, p68

¹⁷⁴ Irigaray, L. This Sex Which Is Not One, 1985, p 30

excess¹⁷⁵ to overflow 'masculine' logic. For her, this excess refers to the materiality of writing where this style does not privilege sight, but emphasises the *tactile*; it simultaneously comes back in touch with itself, where its properties are never fixed in one form or another but always fluid.¹⁷⁶

Cixous experiments and plays with language, which is most often employed through incorporating the quality of poeticality. Indeed, Ives describes her writing as 'exuberant', 'abundant' and 'wild', a "hyper-lyrical poetry. A new Song of Songs."¹⁷⁷ She frequently incorporates allusion, metaphorisation, cumulation, rhythm, puns, sounds and signifiers that are normally exploited in poetry.¹⁷⁸ For example, in *Neutre*, she plays with alliteration and rhythm to evoke a sense of musicality and rhythm:

Délire ou délier ou délitér la cendre
(Delirium or unbind or split the ash(f))¹⁷⁹

Cixous also plays with the gendered nature of the French language, replacing masculine and feminine words with an abundance of plural and neutral words to alter and displace meaning and disrupt linguistic structure, shattering the notion of a unified self. Cixous also hybridises gendered words. *Illes*, for example being a combination of *ils(m)* and *elles(f)*. Such words jumble the order of space, disorientating, breaking up and dislocating values and structures, being able to make a 'feminine' text subversive and 'volcanic'.¹⁸⁰ For Cixous, poetic language is a material form, where sounds and signifiers create meanings that exceed the descriptive.¹⁸¹ She writes:

There's *tactility* in the feminine text, there's touch ... writing in the feminine is passing on what is cut out by the Symbolic, the voice of the mother, passing on what is most archaic¹⁸²

¹⁷⁵ Irigaray, L. The Power of Discourse and the Subordination of the Feminine, 1985, p78

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid*, p79

¹⁷⁷ Ives, K. Cixous, Irigaray, Kristeva: the Jouissance of French Feminism, 2010, p68

¹⁷⁸ These qualities are clearer in French and not always possible to fully comprehend when her texts are translated into English. Indeed as Sellers notes, differences of gender through masculine, feminine, neutral and plural are lost when translating texts into English where gender is attributed biologically to the sex of a person (The Hélène Cixous Reader, 1994, p3)

¹⁷⁹ Cixous, H. *Neutre*, 1994, p9, English translation on p8

¹⁸⁰ Cixous, H. *The Laugh of the Medusa*, 1976, p887

¹⁸¹ Shiach, M. Hélène Cixous: A Politics of Writing, 1991, p69

¹⁸² Cixous, H. *Castration or Decapitation?*, 1981, p54

By exploring the materiality of the signifier, she utilises techniques of transformation that undo meaning and syntax.¹⁸³ Cixous also posits that the material texture of language is related to writing being produced in relation to the body and *jouissance*.

Irigaray also incorporates the quality of poeticity to articulate the 'feminine', in particular interspersing poetic writing with more conventional texts. She too plays with the gendered nature of French words, where for example, in *Speculum* she "plays on the synonymy and homonymy of French words and their syntactic and semantic ambiguities."¹⁸⁴ She argues that in French language, the masculine is the dominant syntax; seemingly neutral words like *they* (ils) are masculine and erase the feminine. Like Cixous, Irigaray hybridises words to disturb phallogentric syntactical framing to create language free from rules that appropriate the 'feminine' to the 'masculine.' For example, instead of '*they*' she uses the word *I-She* (je-elle(s)), and *hom(m)osexualité* to play on 'homo' as meaning *same* and 'homme' as meaning *man*; being a pun on the male desire for the same.¹⁸⁵

It is perhaps Irigaray's use of analogy and metaphor that most strongly embody poetic qualities. For example, she refers to the curves of the speculum in terms of movement as thus:

Everything, then, has to be rethought in terms of curve(s), helix(es), diagonal(s), spiral(s), roll(s), twirl(s), revolution(s), pirouette(s). Speculation whirls around faster and faster as it pierces, bores, drills into a volume that is supposed to be *solid* still. Covered with a hard shell that must be fractured, trepanned, split open ... whipped along, spinning, twirling faster and faster until matter shatters into pieces, crumbles into dust¹⁸⁶

Irigaray uses an abundance of adjectives and an excess of punctuation to play with plurality and rhythm in order to create a lyrical musicality. She often uses analogy to define 'feminine' writing in terms of fluidity and the sense of touch.¹⁸⁷ For example, in *The Mechanics of Fluids*, she refers to the 'feminine' as fluids and the 'masculine' as solids; arguing that phallogentric science is unable to account for the movement of fluids just as it is unable to

¹⁸³ Conley, V. A. Hélène Cixous, 1992, p12

¹⁸⁴ Irigaray, L. *Je, tu, nous: Tow ards a Culture of Difference*, 1993, p58

¹⁸⁵ Moi, T. *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory*, 1985, p135

¹⁸⁶ Irigaray, L. *Volume-Fluidity*, 1985, p238

¹⁸⁷ Moi, T. *Op cit.*, 1985, p145

account for 'feminine' language.¹⁸⁸ Irigaray utilises the quality of fluidity to refer to qualities of excess, continuousness and mobility. Indeed, she asserts that an economy of fluids can resist the properties of solids through internal frictions, pressures and movements. For her, fluidity resists adequate symbolisation and includes the characteristics of the repressed.¹⁸⁹ It is able to describe pleasure to articulate *jouissance* and disconcert the structure of the signifying chain.

Kristeva's semiotic *chora* closely relates to qualities of fluidity and flux. For Kristeva, the *chora* is a mobile and extremely provisional concept that is ambiguous, amorphous and unstable.¹⁹⁰ She describes the *chora* as:

A non-expressive totality formed by the drives and their stases in a motility that is full of movement as it is regulated¹⁹¹

The *chora* is constantly shifting; as Ives notes, it is "all is flux and incoherence, provisional, inchoate, occasional".¹⁹² For Kristeva, once the subject has entered into the Symbolic order the *chora* is more or less repressed and manifests as rhythmic pulsional pressure and disruptions. Thus, 'feminine' or poetic writing 'reactivates' the instability of semiotic motility and the space of the *chora*, allowing its heterogeneity, mobility and fluidity to manifest. It relates to the semiotic's ambivalent relation to identity that challenges fixed and stable identity situated in the Symbolic and is able to disturb the homogenous and fixed monolithic structures of Symbolic language.

For Kristeva, it is through poetic language that other qualities Cixous and Irigaray elucidate come into being. Indeed, she asserts that heterogeneity and mobility form the disruptive dimension of poetic language, which can transform and subvert the Symbolic on a linguistic level. Through being continuously modified by the semiotic, it creates a "never finished, undefined production of a new space of significance" drawing attention to the subject-in-process.¹⁹³ Kristeva asserts that poetic language is bound up with the materiality

¹⁸⁸ Moi, T. *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory*, 1985, p142

¹⁸⁹ Irigaray, L. *The "Mechanics" of Fluids*, 1985, p107

¹⁹⁰ Ives, K. Cixous, Irigaray, Kristeva: the *Jouissance* of French Feminism, 2010, p109

¹⁹¹ Kristeva, K. *Revolution in Poetic Language*, 1986, p93

¹⁹² Ives, K. *Op cit.*, 2010, p112

¹⁹³ Kristeva, J. *Desire in Language*, 1993, p135

of writing; rhythm, sounds and tonality which evoke the quality of musicality. For Kristeva, such language manifests as movements, gesture, prosody and word-play.¹⁹⁴ Indeed, she notes that Mallarméan poetry ‘musicalises’ language through the use of displacements, condensations, transpositions and repetitions; distorting if not destroying syntax and grammar.¹⁹⁵ She writes:

Mallarmé calls attention to the semiotic rhythm within language ... (which is) indifferent to language, enigmatic and feminine, this space underlying the written is rhythmic, unfettered, irreducible to its intelligible verbal translation; it is musical, anterior to judgment, but restrained by a single guarantee: syntax¹⁹⁶

She asserts that the ‘music’ of Mallarméan texts evoke maternal *jouissance* which exceed the limits of the Imaginary and shatter the unity of social homogeneity.¹⁹⁷ She notes that the Modernist and Symbolist poem is a kind of writing in which the rhythms of the body and the unconscious have broken through the strict rational defenses of conventional social meaning, taking the form of abrupt shifts, ellipses, breaks and an apparent lack of logical construction.¹⁹⁸ Kristeva highlights qualities of excess through referring to the rhythm of poetic language as irrupting into the Symbolic, in which the semiotic operates in excess of signification to produce ‘musical’ effects that destroy syntax.¹⁹⁹ Indeed, Ives notes that when unleashed, the *chora* is ‘pulverising’ and ‘exploding’.²⁰⁰

3. What can we gain from *l’écriture féminine*?

If considered in relation to its social, political and cultural context as politically urgent,²⁰¹ *l’écriture féminine* has provided positive strategies to challenge phallogentrism. Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva have together rethought the space of the Imaginary to offer

¹⁹⁴ Kristeva, J. *Desire in Language*, 1993, p129

¹⁹⁵ Lechte, J. *Julia Kristeva*, 1991, p142

¹⁹⁶ Kristeva, K. *Revolution in Poetic Language*, 1986, p97

¹⁹⁷ Lechte, J. *Op cit.*, 1991, p152

¹⁹⁸ Moi, T. *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory*, 1985, p11

¹⁹⁹ Kristeva, J. *From One Identity to Another*, 1986, p133

²⁰⁰ Ives, K. Cixous, Irigaray, *Kristeva: the Jouissance of French Feminism*, 2010, p104

²⁰¹ The feminist movement in France and subsequent development of *l’écriture féminine* were triggered by political uprisings in 1968. The uprisings began from a series of protests that eventually overthrew the government. Police action further resulted in rioting and mass general strikes by two thirds of the working population, bringing the country to a standstill. The *Mouvement de libération des femmes* (the Women’s Liberation Movement or MLF) was developed after the uprisings and was given the name by the press with reference to the US Women’s Liberation Movement and fought for women’s rights. Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva refused to be associated with the MLF and were not aligned with feminism as it was seen in the Anglophone world, however the development of what has been since labelled ‘French Feminist theory’ as encompassing their work grew after this.

ways of reconceptualising the 'masculine' and the 'feminine' as non-oppositional that are equal and yet respected and celebrated in their difference. Foremost, they have provided an analysis of the 'feminine' as embedded in power structures in relation to language and representation. In doing so, *l'écriture féminine* has been instrumental in providing textual strategies that open up sites of expression for and the self-representation of the 'feminine' as not fashioned by phallogentrism. As Janet Wolff notes, as a writing practice grounded in women's experience of the body and sexuality, *l'écriture féminine* has been found by many as a liberating practice not compromised and contained by patriarchal discourse.²⁰²

L'écriture féminine has also provided a means in the context of the 1970s to 1990s to think of 'woman' as 'becoming', being wary of any fixed definition. When considered in a current context and new thinking about these ideas, there are inevitably criticisms of *l'écriture féminine*. However, as Jones points out, as a partial strategy, *l'écriture féminine* has been vital in challenging patriarchy and thinking about representing the 'feminine'.²⁰³

3.1 *L'écriture féminine* and feminist art practice

Although Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva explicitly disassociated themselves with the feminist movement, they nevertheless have provided an array of strategies of use for feminist practices and politics. As a result, the intersection of French and Anglo-American feminist thought heavily influenced the development of feminist art practice and theory whereby "the concept of *l'écriture féminine* ... has indeed been widely taken up by women's art practices".²⁰⁴ As well drawing on particular ideas such as 'feminine' *jouissance*, mimesis, specularisation and the semiotic, the textual qualities of *l'écriture féminine* have been interpreted as a way to disrupt phallogentrism and think about the 'feminine' in art practice. It has been transposed into Anglo-American feminist art practice and its associated politics as a challenge to patriarchy and dominant canons.

²⁰² Wolff, J. Reinstating Corporeality: Feminism and Body Politics, 1990, p132

²⁰³ Jones, A. R. Writing the Body: Toward an Understanding of *L'Écriture Feminine*, 1981, p258

²⁰⁴ Betterton, R. Bodies in the Work: The Aesthetics and Politics of Women's Non-Representational Painting, 1996, p92

As Katy Deepwell notes, the engagement with psychoanalysis in particular has been one of the most powerful influences on feminist art practice in the late 1980s.²⁰⁵ Feminist artists following on from Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva sought to examine ways in which 'woman' could be represented in relation to Symbolic structures; seeking to dismantle them but not reject them altogether. In addition to critiquing existing representational regimes *l'écriture féminine* allowed feminists to explore new symbologies of the female body²⁰⁶ and consider alternative visual languages and syntax appropriate to 'woman'. *L'écriture féminine* also provided ways to explore representations of the female and 'feminine' body as omitted from Western art history. As Betterton argues, the work of Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva offered "a way of exploring how the feminine body exceeds its discursive limits."²⁰⁷ It provided a means to question Western systems of representation and dominant systems of 'looking' as being phallogocentric.²⁰⁸ In particular, Irigaray's notion of specularisation has been argued to provide "the most powerful critique of the primacy of vision as a model for comprehending the female body".²⁰⁹ It challenged historical ideas of the female body where women were situated as objects of the male gaze and the projection of male desires.²¹⁰

Women's and feminist art practice interpreted *l'écriture féminine* foremost through 'newer' art practices such as body art, performance, film, scripto-visual work and installation.²¹¹ There was also later a focus on 'material strategies' which took the form of 'mixed-media', craft and installation work based on sculpture and materialities that evoked female morphology.²¹² This work resulted in positive and celebratory images of women that aimed to make visible the female body in culture as a political and radical form of empowerment. Images of the female body in particular, were utilised in representational art

²⁰⁵ Deepwell, K. *New Feminist Art Criticism: Critical Strategies*, 1995, p4

²⁰⁶ Robinson, H. *Feminism-Art-Theory: An Anthology 1968-2000*, 2001, p540

²⁰⁷ Betterton, R. *An Intimate Distance: Women, Artists and the Body*, 1996, p13

²⁰⁸ The term *phallogocentrism* combines *ocularcentrism* which refers to the privileging of sight over the other senses and *phallogocentrism* and has been explored by Irigaray, Derrida, Martin Jay and Hilary Robinson.

²⁰⁹ Betterton, R. *Op cit.*, 1996, p13

²¹⁰ Wolff, J. *Reinstating Corporeality: Feminism and Body Politics*, 2003, p418

²¹¹ This includes work by Yoko Ono, Marina Abramovich, Carolee Schneeman, Hannah Wilke, Judy Chicago and Mary Kelly. Chicago's 'The Dinner Party' for example (see plate 2) has been described as the most important feminist artwork.

²¹² Key artists included Louise Bourgeois, Mona Hatoum and Kiki Smith.

practices and instrumental in explicitly challenging historical strategies of exclusion and privilege.

3.2 *L'écriture féminine* and women's painting practice

Although feminist art practice at this time engaged with *l'écriture féminine*, offering multiple strategies to disrupt patriarchy, it seems that women's painting was marginalised by feminist art practice in which "painting as a medium was rejected in favour of photo-text, performance and scripto-visual media".²¹³ Many feminist artists dismissed painting altogether in reaction to "the patriarchal reign of masterpiece ... [as the] traditional medium of heroic self-expression".²¹⁴ For example, work like Mary Kelly's *Post Partum Document* (1973-79) (see plate 1) could be seen as a parodic rejection of painting itself.²¹⁵ Unlike painting, other media was not bound up with its tradition as a privileged medium and thus perceived as more suitable for feminist art practice. As Rosa Lee argues, there has been a somewhat "problematic relationship between feminism and the practice of painting in the current postmodern debate".²¹⁶

Women and feminist painters have not been entirely absent from discourse and there have been and still are notable women painters with feminist subject matter. However, women's and feminist painting practice has largely been figurative or focused on partial representations of the female body.²¹⁷ The reintroduction of representation and figuration in particular marked a move away from the hegemony of Modernism and towards postmodernism.²¹⁸ Women painters dealing with the figurative could critique Modernist abstraction, yet remain removed from it and avoid re-inscribing the ideas and conventions it privileged. As John Roberts notes, the defence of the figurative tradition as a basis for

²¹³ Betterton, R. *An Intimate Distance: Women, Artists and the Body*, 1996, p10

²¹⁴ Nochlin, L. *Women Artists Then and Now*, 2007, p49

²¹⁵ Work by Yves Klein and Keith Boadwee can also be seen as examples.

²¹⁶ Lee, R. *Resisting Amnesia*, 1987, p5

²¹⁷ Examples of such artists include Nancy Spero, Frieda Kahlo, Paula Rego, Cecily Brown and Jenny Saville.

²¹⁸ Deepwell, K. *Paint-Stripping: Feminist Possibilities in Painting After Modernism*, 1994, p14

feminist narrative challenged the 'totalising and heroic march towards purity, abstraction and the autonomy of art'.²¹⁹

Women figurative painters have critiqued phallogentrism and communicated feminist ideas such as the representation of women's bodies through numerous strategies. For example, Jenny Saville's paintings (see plate 3) have called into question the normative and objectified body by painting voluptuous and sometimes transgendered nude figures, troubling the universal ideal of 'woman'. Such work can be seen as incorporating Irigaray's notion of mimesis where the traditional nude has been mimicked, but through references such as to non-normative gender, has been subverted. It seems that figurative and representational painting was most successful for feminist artists whose work oscillated between representation and non-representation.²²⁰ This work was seen as on the 'edges' of representation and the body and as a result could disrupt representational structures and its conventions. Such painting has also been interpreted as the interplay between the semiotic/Imaginary and the Symbolic. For example, Alison Rowley's paintings present the viewer with a familiar image such as a figure, but dark masses of colour disrupt its representation through a sense of ambiguity where only some bodily elements are recognisable.²²¹ According to Barrett, the work reveals the interplay between the Symbolic and the heterogeneous disruptive dimension of the semiotic.²²² In doing so, the unconscious heterogeneous articulations of the semiotic disposition of visual language subvert existing systems and conventional representational codes.

Despite feminist artists drawing widely on *l'écriture féminine*, women's non-representational or abstract painting was perceived as providing limited possibilities for feminist art practice. Indeed, as Betterton notes:

²¹⁹ Roberts, J. *Painting and Sexual Difference*, 1990, p166

²²⁰ There are numerous examples of such work, of which there are too many to mention here. Parveen Adams discusses Francis Bacon's 'accidents' (*The Emptiness of the Image*, 1996). Estelle Barrett also discusses how Edward Munch's brushstrokes evoke the semiotic and exceed their representational functions in his painting *The Scream* (*Kristeva Reframed*, 2011). Even Cixous herself has argued that Monet's paintings have a transgressive potential because their representational function is disrupted.

²²⁰ Betterton, R. *Bodies in the Work: The Aesthetics and Politics of Women's Non-Representational Painting*, 1996, p103

²²¹ Barrett, E. *Kristeva Reframed*, 2011, p50

²²² *Ibid*, p47

'abstract' or 'non-representational' painting has been one of the most ignored areas of feminist intervention ... (it) was decisively dismissed by a generation in the 1970s and has largely been dismissed within feminist art practice ever since²²³

In fact, Marjorie Kramer goes so far as to disregard any possibility of an abstract feminist painting practice at all:

The most controversial conclusion I came to seems to be whether a feminist painting can be abstract or not. I feel that abstract can communicate, but only abstract ideas such as power, violence, a sense of flux (Gorky), or a moving sense of colour ... Feminism is not a quality like that. I think the images in a feminist painting have to be socially legible, that is, recognisable. Figurative.²²⁴

Abstract painting has been perceived to remain within the structures of Modernist art and as such oppositional to feminist art practice. It has largely been dismissed by the intervention of feminist art practice as masculinist, patriarchal, phallogocentric and canonical and as providing limited possibilities for women's and feminist representation and expression.

4. The problematic status of abstraction for women's painting

Modernist abstraction is defined by the coexistence of independent and yet often overlapping and contradictory approaches to painting.²²⁵ I will refer in my argument specifically to American Modernist abstraction, focusing on Abstract Expressionism (including 'Action Painting') and 'Post-painterly Abstraction'. This is because American abstraction dominated abstract painting from the late 1940s to the early 1960s and asserted itself as the most superior, in particular to European abstract painting. These movements were also masculinised via narratives by art critics and their championing of creative genius of select male artists by American culture²²⁶ and are thus most problematic for a feminist politics of abstract painting.

Like language, painting is heavily coded and conventionalised, subject to selective canons that are the result of choices determined by and reinvested in social, political and

²²³ Betterton, R. *Bodies in the Work: The Aesthetics and Politics of Women's Non-Representational Painting*, 1996, p79

²²⁴ Kramer, M. *Some Thoughts on Feminist Art*, 1971, p293

²²⁵ Modernist abstraction most notably developed in Europe and America and includes but is not exclusively made up of movements such as Constructivism, Suprematism, Orphism, De Stijl, Geometric Abstraction, Tachisme, Abstract Expressionism, Action Painting and Post-painterly Abstraction.

²²⁶ The male artists that made up these movements were heralded firstly because there was a need for America to be seen as the only option for Britain in terms of political alliances and alignments after the Second World War. Secondly, in order to do this, these artists needed to co-opt European Modernism - which had largely fled to New York because of the war - as they needed to support those who could make work that looked brand new and exciting and sold as part of the 'American Dream'.

economic values.²²⁷ Even before the dominance of abstraction, painting has been regarded as the most privileged medium amongst all art practice²²⁸ and the dominant discourse of the Western art-historical canon.²²⁹ Historically, this canon of painting has reaffirmed, with only occasional exceptions, white male supremacy in visual high culture and has provided a 'monocentric hegemony' that has been adhered to.²³⁰ As Griselda Pollock notes:

Art history is not just indifferent to women; it is a masculinist discourse, partly due to the social construction of sexual difference²³¹

The dominant representational structures of painting have been linked to the 'male gaze' and critiqued by feminist theorists and artists as phallogocentric by privileging 'man' as the active artist and subject, and marginalising 'woman' as the passive model and object.²³² In addition, the canon has marginalised women artists as creative subjects by excluding them from the mainstream and art historical narratives. As a voice for absolute difference, the canon can thus be recognised as gendered and engendering discourse.²³³

4.1 The hegemonic status of Modernist abstraction

Although artists and critics saw Modernism as avant-garde and breaking away from the historical canon of representational reality, Modernist abstraction emerged itself as a canon. It has since been argued to be the dominant paradigm of 19th and 20th century art history.²³⁴ Whilst critics such as Harold Rosenberg and Michael Fried were also prominent, this was in part due to the role of Clement Greenberg who as Harris points out has been argued to be the most important and influential.²³⁵ For Greenberg, American abstract painting was superior to representational painting and sculpture because it possessed a 'major' quality that constituted it as 'high art'²³⁶ and should thus 'monopolise' all art forms.²³⁷

²²⁷ Deepwell, K. *Paint-Stripping: Feminist Possibilities in Painting After Modernism*, 1994, p14

²²⁸ Pollock, G. *Painting, Feminism, History*, 1992, p159

²²⁹ Reilly, M. *Towards Transnational Feminisms*, 2007, p 15

²³⁰ Buchloch, B. *Theories of Art After Minimalism and Pop*, 1987, p66

²³¹ Pollock, G. *Vision and Difference: Feminism, Femininity and Histories of Art*, 1988, p9

²³² Key, J. *Models of Painting Practice: too much body?*, 1996, p154

²³³ Pollock, G. *Differencing the Canon: Feminist Desire and the Writing of Art's Histories*, 1999, 26

²³⁴ Pollock, G. *Op cit.*, 1988, p2; as Harrison and Wood note, this is particularly true of the New York School artists who made up Abstract Expressionism (*Modernity and Modernism Reconsidered*, 1993, p236)

²³⁵ Harris, J. *Modernism and Culture in the USA, 1930-1960*, 1993, p53

²³⁶ Greenberg, C. *Abstract, Representational, and so forth*, 1954, p135

²³⁷ Greenberg, C. *American-Type Painting*, 1955, p208

In his promotion of American abstraction, Greenberg acted as *the* autocratic voice of abstraction that determined what was important in art.²³⁸ In doing so, he positioned it as a dominant and hierarchical practice where as Elger notes, his presentation of ‘new American painting’ appeared like a claim to artistic hegemony.²³⁹

Modernist abstract painting was a male-centred activity, which was critiqued by feminist artists as overtly patriarchal as the canon historically valued white heterosexual ‘masculine’ subjects as the norm and marginalised women.²⁴⁰ Indeed, as Deepwell asserts:

Modernism constructs a model of art history that produces the marginalisation of most women practitioners because it privileges and is centred upon male only examples²⁴¹

Women have always produced art and there have indeed been women painters in art history²⁴² even if they have been small in number. However, the canon presented the work of women artists as derivative of the achievements of ‘major’ male artists.²⁴³ The way that art history has been recorded and written has thus been argued to ensure the hegemony of men in cultural practice.²⁴⁴ The history of Modernist abstraction has been predominantly marked by strategies of exclusion and refusal²⁴⁵ because of power structures embedded within gender hierarchy. As Shirley Kaneda notes, this inflexibility has been described as “the most resistant and decisive discourse within Modernism”.²⁴⁶

4.2 Greenberg’s claims for the ‘pure essence’ of abstract painting

Greenberg argued that an artistic practice’s competence rested on the uniqueness of the nature of its medium or what he termed ‘medium specificity’. He asserted that the ‘pure essence’ of an art practice guaranteed its standards of quality.²⁴⁷ For Greenberg, this could

²³⁸ Rosler, M. *Subverting the Myths of Everyday Life*, 2006, p99

²³⁹ Elger, D. *Abstract Art*, 2012, p19

²⁴⁰ Betterton, R. *Bodies in the Work: The Aesthetics and Politics of Women’s Non-Representational Painting*, 1996, p86

²⁴¹ Deepwell, K. *Women Artists and Modernism*, 1998, p3

²⁴² There were a small number of women painters prior to Modernism such as Mary Cassatt and Berthe Morisot. Women painters during Modernism included Helen Frankenthaler, Lee Krasner, Georgia O’Keeffe, Nancy Spero and Paula Rego. However, they did not receive the same status as men and were regarded as ‘anomalies’ or token female painters. The recuperative strategies of feminism helped to make these artists visible and dismantle such a canon.

²⁴³ Deepwell, K. *New Feminist Art Criticism: Critical Strategies*, 1995, p7

²⁴⁴ Lee, R. *Resisting Amnesia: Feminism, Painting and Postmodernism*, 1987, p10

²⁴⁵ Harrison, C and Wood, P. *Modernity and Modernism Reconsidered*, 1993, p251

²⁴⁶ Kaneda, S. *Painting and Its Others: In the Realm of the Feminine*, 1991, p58

²⁴⁷ Greenberg, C. *Modernist Painting*, 1965, p755

be found in abstract painting's flatness, where its two-dimensionality was a condition unique and exclusive to non-representational painting.²⁴⁸ The amplification of ground and flatness over any sort of narrative or representational function (set up as the figure/ground binary) privileged pure visuality and non-tactile experience. It emphasised formal elements such as the identification of colour with the surface of the canvas as purely optical and disembodied.²⁴⁹ For Greenberg, when removed from its representational function, abstract painting gained an independence and autonomy by being "relieved of its denotive function".²⁵⁰ It did not refer to known reality, but functioned autonomously where its painterly elements stood for themselves.²⁵¹ Reduced to its formal qualities and essence, abstract painting could be based solely on aesthetic values. Rather than the colour blue, for example, representing or being analogous for something (such as the sea or the sky), it was instead perceived of in purely painterly terms; its innate 'blueness'.

4.3 The 'pure' and 'unmediated' expression of the self

For Greenberg, the autonomy of abstract painting also revealed the supposed spiritual dimension of the work, resulting in the expression of pure emotion that communicated the artist's 'inner self'. Forms and colours were no longer perceived as abstractions of reality that did not refer to anything formally, but derived from 'within' the artist.²⁵² The spontaneous techniques and gestural application of paint explored in Abstract Expressionism in particular were claimed to have resulted from the immediate expression of the artist's psyche through a struggle between self-expression and the chaos of the unconscious. Greenberg argued that this was a universal 'truth' of art; the ineffable and self-sufficient measure of experience only found in abstract painting, contributing to the condition of 'quality' that made it 'high art'.²⁵³

²⁴⁸ Greenberg, C. *Modernist Painting*, 1965, p756

²⁴⁹ Harrison, C and Wood, P. *Modernity and Modernism Reconsidered*, 1993, p173

²⁵⁰ Greenberg, C. *After Abstract Expressionism*, 1962, p768

²⁵¹ Elger, D. *Abstract Art*, 2012, p7

²⁵² *Ibid*, p13

²⁵³ Harrison, C and Wood, P. *Op cit.*, 1993, p180

Despite the claims for the pure unmediated expression of the artist as arising from abstract painting as autonomous and disembodied, the rejection of embodiment did not result in a corresponding loss of gendered identity. By being associated with a universal subjectivity, the artist could be seen as disembodied and heroically masculine at once.²⁵⁴ Indeed, Kaneda notes that:

Theoretically, the paradigms of modernist abstract painting are ones that anyone could partake of: individualism, self-consciousness, empiricism, rationality, self-reflection, a utopian or idealised notion of progress. The only problem was that these universalised ideals veiled the masculinist particularity of the conventions and institutions within which these ideas were posited as the norm²⁵⁵

The transformation of experience into aesthetic truth was shown through the indexical registering of traces created in the process of painting.²⁵⁶ Through affirming the artistic subject, Abstract Expressionism celebrated the expressivity of the self in which the gesture could also be seen as a sign of subjectivity. There was thus a unity between the subject and the mark, despite being apparently 'autonomous'.

The focus on bodily movement in 'Action Painting,' enabled the work to reveal itself as the trace of the gesture as embodied in the physical act of making the work. Jackson Pollock's 'drip paintings' are a clear example of this, largely due to the iconic Hans Namuth images of Pollock in the act of painting (see figure 1.1). The photographs emphasised the



Figure 1.1 Photograph of Jackson Pollock by Hans Namuth (1950)

²⁵⁴ Brennan, M. *Modernism's Masculine Subjects: Matisse, the New York School, and Post-Painterly Abstraction*, 2004, p118

²⁵⁵ Kaneda, S. *Painting and Its Others: In the Realm of the Feminine*, 1992, p58

²⁵⁶ Anfan, D. *Abstract Expressionism*, 1990, p108

relation between the body of the painter and the traces of inhabiting that body as signified by its physical manifestations on canvas. In one sense, Pollock's 'drips' could be seen as a direct expression of his movement where his 'abstract rhythms' manifested as expressions of his inner self.²⁵⁷ However, although the drips were connected to Pollock's body, they could be seen at the same time as disembodied and autonomous.

The Namuth photographs enabled Pollock to demonstrate the special 'genius' put forth by Greenberg as attributed to his individuality. Pollock's work has been problematised by feminist criticism as typical of the rhetorical processes through which artistic subjectivity became invested into abstract painting, where the drip paintings were produced through the masculine corporeal presence of Pollock's body.²⁵⁸ They point to a series of alignments between the body of the painter and the construction of heterosexual masculine subjectivity embedded in the work.²⁵⁹ In this sense, Abstract Expressionism is centred on a paradox. It promoted and established itself as disembodied and autonomous without reference to the body and yet simultaneously promoted idealised gendered subjectivity of embodied masculine creativity and gendered artistic presence. Indeed, the Namuth photographs highlight what Amelia Jones calls the 'Pollockian Performative'; paradoxically we are left with the quintessential 'genius' and coherent Modernist subject, *and* the fragmented, decentred and intersubjective performative Pollock of postmodernism.²⁶⁰

4.4 The creative subject and painterly gesture as masculinised

Abstract Expressionism has been problematised by feminist critics as an essentially male and patriarchal pursuit.²⁶¹ The embedded gender hierarchy was further promoted by Greenberg's championing of select individuals²⁶² who were repeatedly characterised as

²⁵⁷ Anfan, D. Abstract Expressionism, 1990, p16

²⁵⁸ Brennan, M. Modernism's Masculine Subjects: Matisse, the New York School, and Post-Painterly Abstraction, 2004, p108

²⁵⁹ There was also a practical and theoretical paradox in Pollock's work in that his apparent 'masculine' autonomy stood in relation to the intersubjective merging of the 'feminine' other: his wife Lee Krasner who frequently appeared in some of the images of Pollock creating his drip paintings. When Krasner no longer played a supporting role in facilitating Pollock's creativity and instead became the centre of attention, readings of his paintings as 'masculine' were compromised. The vocabulary of the body in Pollock's work as well as others, was thus developed in which the artwork acted as a mediation between independence and intersubjectivity.

²⁶⁰ Brennan, M. Op cit., 2004, p108

²⁶¹ Princenthal, N. Elizabeth Murray: Fractious Formalist, 2007, p83

²⁶² These individuals made up the 'New York School' and included artists such as Jackson Pollock, Barnett Newman and Clyfford Still and later evolved into Abstract Expressionism

'heroic' and 'genius' representations of creative identity. The Modernist myth of genius was a dominant trope of art history.²⁶³ It provided a criterion of greatness as male defined that consisted entirely of hetero-normative white men and actively excluded those²⁶⁴ who did not conform to this stereotype.²⁶⁵ The criterion of genius has been theorised by feminist critics as based on gendered power relations implicit in the artwork as a universal standard of absolute artistic value in which masculinity has been constructed by marginalising women and the 'feminine' as the 'other'. Indeed, Pollock notes that Modernist abstraction distinctly lacked significant women abstract painters because they did not possess the Phallus; the innate "nugget of genius" aligned with greatness.²⁶⁶ By linking the lack of women artists in the canon with gendered power structures centred on qualities of artistic greatness and genius as defined in relation to the Phallus, Modernist abstraction has been labelled as 'patriarchal' and 'phallogocentric'.

The gestural actions of the male Abstract Expressionists have been described as 'masterly'.²⁶⁷ The work of Modernist abstraction has also been consistently described in terms traditionally associated with masculinity: strong, vigorous and assertive.²⁶⁸ As Marcia Brennan suggests of Pollock's 'drip' paintings:

Characterisations of Pollock's art as "volcanic" and "violent" expressions of a "ravaging, aggressive virility" helped to sustain a fantasy of masculine subjectivity as aggressively constituted and virtually impenetrable.²⁶⁹

Theorisations of Modernist male abstract painters incorporating this language have privileged macho and aggressive stereotypes, constructing a heroic individualism of the macho self, displaying phallic dominance on canvas.²⁷⁰ As Betterton notes:

Feminist critics have frequently argued that the figure of the masculine artist who expresses phallic mastery in the act of painting is one of the founding metaphors which informs modern Western art²⁷¹

²⁶³ Deepwell, K. *Claims for a Feminist Politics in Painting*, 2010, p152

²⁶⁴ For example, even though Robert Motherwell was a heterosexual man with a family, he was treated with suspicion as he was perceived as effeminate. This is noted by Christopher Reed in *Art and Homosexuality: A History of Ideas*, 2011, p106

²⁶⁵ Brennan, M. *Modernism's Masculine Subjects: Matisse, the New York School, and Post-Painterly Abstraction*, 2004, p77

²⁶⁶ Pollock, G. *Vision and Difference: Feminism, Femininity and Histories of Art*, 1988, p2

²⁶⁷ Phelan, P. *Art and Feminism*, 2012, p84

²⁶⁸ Robinson, H. *Feminism-Art-Theory: An Anthology 1968-2000*, 2001, p162

²⁶⁹ Brennan, M. *Op cit.*, 2004, p92

²⁷⁰ Nochlin, L. *Women Artists Then and Now*, 2007, p49

²⁷¹ Betterton, R. *Bodies in the Work: The Aesthetics and Politics of Women's Non-Representational Painting*, 1996, p80

The gesture was linked to the expression of masculinity whereby the male artist came to be seen as expressing his sexuality and phallic mastery through the act of painting and through the medium of paint itself. However, whilst the marks of male painters were characterised as masculinist (and simultaneously autonomous) in positive terms, the work of the few women painters at the time were not considered painterly in the same way as men. They were instead 'feminised' as fluid²⁷² and negatively aligned with terms such as soft, pretty, pastel and passive which were disapproved.²⁷³ The abstract paintings of Helen Frankenthaler (see plate 4) for example, were classed as inherently feminine and as free, lyrical and flowing where her 'unbounded forms' and 'flowing stains' referring to the female body as fluid.²⁷⁴ As a woman she was unable to occupy a subject position that could be seen as disembodied or unmarked by gender, as such a privilege was exclusively reserved for her male counterparts.²⁷⁵

4.5 Feminist reactions to Modernist abstraction

Whilst Greenberg and others celebrated abstract painting as an autonomous sphere of activity separated from the material world, it proved problematic for any possibility of feminist politics as the work's aesthetic quality had priority in the function of the work over any social or political meaning. As Deepwell notes:

Feminism has had a vested interest in challenging modernism, especially for its masculinist biases but also for its separation of art from politics²⁷⁶

Claims for abstract painting as autonomous and apolitical meant women artists were unable to communicate any feminist politics of representation, as the image would instead exist as having an unmediated and transparent relationship to the real.²⁷⁷ As a result, an analysis of sexual difference through historico-socio structures or the political potential for feminist art practice as an embodiment of shared cultural value was rendered impossible by 'pure'

²⁷² Smith, T. In *Visible Touch: Modernism and Modernity*, 2006, p13

²⁷³ Robinson, H. *Feminism-Art-Theory: An Anthology 1968-2000*, 2001, p162

²⁷⁴ Drucker, J. *Visual Pleasure: A Feminist Perspective*, 2000, p16

²⁷⁵ Brennan, M. *Modernism's Masculine Subjects: Matisse, the New York School, and Post-Painterly Abstraction*, 2004, p13

²⁷⁶ Deepwell, K. *Claims for a Feminist Politics in Painting*, 2010, p144

²⁷⁷ Jones, A. *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader*, 2003, p33

abstraction. This conflicted with feminist artists seeking to examine the social production of art and the political potential of painting which was a condition essential for a feminist art practice. As Betterton notes, the debates about how women can be represented through feminist cultural politics have primarily focused on signification.²⁷⁸

The claims for the 'pure' expression of the artist provided no space for the subject as socially constructed. As a result, feminist and other postmodern notions of the subject saw Abstract Expressionism as a utopian and idealist fantasy. Indeed, many anti-painting arguments were constructed against the signification of the gesture as a mark of the painter's presence and psychic expression.²⁷⁹ As a result, the traditional usage of the term 'gesture' in art criticism in Abstract Expressionism is redolent of patriarchy, Modernism and genius.²⁸⁰ Moreover, following on from *l'écriture féminine*, if the 'pure' expression of the self did recognise the subject as socially constructed, in psychoanalytic terms, 'woman' is a marginalised position only legible within the Symbolic order. The issue of authorship therefore still remains contentious from the point of view of 'woman' as a speaking subject when considering how the self as subject and artist is to be represented.²⁸¹

It is therefore perhaps understandable, in the cultural and political context of the 1970s and 1980s where there was an urgent need for feminist politics to be communicated, that representational painting and work in other media were perceived as more appropriate than abstract painting which was heavily loaded with the tropes of Modernist abstraction. As Martha Rosler asserts:

It was feminism, which burst like a bomb in my mind. That stopped me from doing abstract painting, because it was then that I realised that I really had a great deal to say and that in fact abstract painting was mute and self-mutilating²⁸²

In reference to Marjorie Kramer's seemingly radical assertion that there cannot be a feminist abstract painting practice as images must be socially legible,²⁸³ it is perhaps unsurprising

²⁷⁸ Betterton, R. *Bodies in the Work: The Aesthetics and Politics of Women's Non-Representational Painting*, 1996, p79

²⁷⁹ Deepwell, K. *Paint-Stripping: Feminist Possibilities in Painting After Modernism*, 1994, p16

²⁸⁰ Robinson, H. *Reading Art, Reading Irigaray: The Politics of Art by Women*, 2006, p131

²⁸¹ Betterton, R. *Identities, Memories, Desires*, 1996, p161

²⁸² Rosler, M. Interview with Frascina, F in 1991, as cited in Frascina, F. *The Politics of Representation*, 1993, p160

²⁸³ Kramer, M. *Some Thoughts on Feminist Art*, 1971, p293; see section 3.2 of this chapter, p40

that, in the early stages of feminist art practice which embraced radical and active political statements, abstract painting was so vehemently rejected.

In his essay *Painting and Sexual Difference*, John Roberts identifies three dominant and polarised feminist approaches to painting and sexual difference: firstly, the 'anti-painting argument' - to reject painting altogether; secondly, the 'anti-functionalist argument' - to embrace painting as linking bodily experience with a female aesthetic and thirdly, the 'female-centred approach' - defending the figurative tradition as a basis for feminist narrative.²⁸⁴ These three positions conceptualise the nature of women's subordination in relation to painting in culture and according to Deepwell are still dominant in feminist painting. However, she suggests that a focus on figuration is most productive, offering figurative approaches that provide feminist strategies in painting but none in abstract painting.²⁸⁵ Whilst there have been, and still are, female artists working through abstraction, it is apparent that its legacy is long-lasting, affecting feminist artists working in any medium, but particularly those with an investment in abstract painting. Indeed, the demise of its authority does not mean that its problems are solved or irrelevant.²⁸⁶ It is thus clear that Modernist abstraction, taking into consideration its complexity and historicity needs to be considered in a current context and that it is still in need of urgent re-examination if we are to develop strategies for 'feminine' or 'non-phallogentric' abstract painting.

5. *L'écriture féminine* at a theoretical and practical stasis

As discussed, there is much to be gained from *l'écriture féminine* and its ideas have positively influenced feminist art practice. Despite this and its popularity amongst women abstract painters to challenge the aforementioned problematics, *l'écriture féminine* seems to have come to a theoretical and practical stasis. Although it has continued to be investigated in the fields of theatre, literature and writing, from the late 1990s onwards there has been little engagement with it in the visual arts and abstract painting in particular. This raises

²⁸⁴ Roberts, J. *Painting and Sexual Difference*, 1990, p166

²⁸⁵ Deepwell, K. *Claims for a Feminist Politics in Painting*, 2010, p157

²⁸⁶ Harrison, C and Wood, P. *Modernity and Modernism Reconsidered*, 1993, p254

questions about *l'écriture féminine*, such as what is it that no longer appeals to those in the visual arts, both theoretically and practically? Is it still relevant in the current context of abstract painting and feminism? And, to what extent can it still be used?

5.1 The changing contexts surrounding *l'écriture féminine*

It seems that *l'écriture féminine* is a historical concept and practice specific to its political, cultural and artistic contexts. Art practice and culture in addition to ideas surrounding painting, feminism and 'feminine' sexuality, have inevitably evolved and continue to do so. Indeed, Bracha Ettinger's 'Matrixial theory of trans-subjectivity' and the discourse of Queer Theory have subsequently emerged, offering new conceptions of subjectivity. Whilst *l'écriture féminine* was important in its initial context in challenging phallogentrism, more recent thinking has provided more complex and sophisticated ways of thinking about 'difference'.

Although *l'écriture féminine* recognised subjectivity as socially constructed and that the sign 'woman' risked categorisation and universalism, it nevertheless used the sign of 'woman' which has been interpreted in terms of gender.²⁸⁷ Following on from Butler and Sedgwick, the sign 'woman' has been used universally in reference to gender and sexuality, in particular by feminists. Butler problematises any universal and fixed definition of 'woman' through socially constructed accounts of a shared femininity; asserting that feminists unwittingly defined the term 'woman' in a way that implies that there is a correct way to be gendered as a 'woman'.²⁸⁸ Acknowledging the complexity of 'woman' as not prescribing unspoken normative requirements like having a 'feminine' personality to conform to,²⁸⁹ can open up the term and who may articulate it as extending beyond hetero-normative sexuality. The sign 'woman' can be rethought as open-ended and *in process* rather than being a rigid

²⁸⁷ This has been in part through English interpretations of the French term *féminite*, which is further elucidated in the glossary.

²⁸⁸ Butler, J. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, 1999, p5

²⁸⁹ *Ibid*, p9

ontology as the foundation of feminist politics, whereby an examination of power structures can move beyond the sex and gender distinction.²⁹⁰

5.2 The feminist/'feminine' disjuncture

The interest in *l'écriture féminine* in challenging the phallic Symbolic to renegotiate the masculinist legacy of Modernism from contemporary women painters highlights "that *women* aren't prepared to accept the psychic-social closure offered by Lacan's formulation of the Symbolic"²⁹¹ (my emphasis). However, it is not only *women* who are invested in opening up spaces for the 'feminine' and challenging phallocentrism. Indeed, both Cixous and Kristeva locate *l'écriture féminine* in the pre-linguistic Imaginary/semiotic as a non-gendered space *before* sexual identity, that has no special relation to women and cite male writers and painters in their work. For Irigaray however, the Imaginary bears the marks of the female sexual body.²⁹² Her *parler-femme* is located specifically in relation to female morphology and libidinal desires, although she does make it clear that to claim that the 'feminine' can be expressed as a concept allows oneself to be "caught up in a system of 'masculine' representations, in which women are trapped in a system of meaning."²⁹³

There has been reluctance for 'feminine' and feminist art practice to extend beyond normative gendered notions of 'woman' and the issue divides artists and theorists. On one hand, artists such as Shirley Kaneda argue for 'feminine' painting as independent from the gender of the producer.²⁹⁴ Rather, for the re-inscription of those values that have been suppressed in art which do not rely on any connection between femininity and a specifically embodied subject.²⁹⁵ However others, such as Mira Schor have been critical of the 'feminine' as an apolitical position 'beyond' gender, arguing it rejects the specificity of political/personal experience, making it potentially universalist,²⁹⁶ supporting female experience as the basis of

²⁹⁰ Butler argues that gender identity is performative and constituted through a 'stylised repetition of acts' (Performative Acts and Gender Construction, 2003, p392). These acts are interpreted as expressive of identity or a 'gender core' and seen as conforming with expected gender identity.

²⁹¹ Deepwell, K. Paint-Stripping: Feminist Possibilities in Painting After Modernism, 1994, p16

²⁹² Betterton, R. Bodies in the Work: The Aesthetics and Politics of Women's Non-Representational Painting, 1996, p93

²⁹³ Irigaray, I. Questions, 1985, p122

²⁹⁴ Kaneda, S. Painting and Its Others: In the Realm of the Feminine, 1991, p58

²⁹⁵ Betterton, R. Op cit., 1996, p85

²⁹⁶ Schor, M. Wet: On Painting, Feminism and Art Culture, 1997, p169

'feminine' language. In this sense, *l'écriture féminine* is at a stasis as there seems to be a disjuncture between 'feminine' as a psychoanalytical and linguistic term not necessarily linked to female morphology, and feminist as limited to sex and gender. Conceptualisations of the sign 'woman' in its traditional usage, and the term 'feminine' thus need to be redefined if elements of *l'écriture féminine* can be taken forward.

5.3 Misappropriations of *l'écriture féminine*

It seems that *l'écriture féminine* was and still is misinterpreted as a generic and homogenous term given to the overall concept and practice of 'feminine' writing. It has often been reductively interpreted as 'writing from the body', and an unconscious overflowing of a 'feminine' libidinal economy to express female experience, most notably from American feminists. Indeed, Jones describes *l'écriture féminine* as a "spontaneous outpouring from the body."²⁹⁷ It has subsequently evolved as generalised and simplified, whereby the complexity and multilayered nature of what Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva offer us in their individual thinking are lost. Most notably, Cixous and Irigaray's thinking based on the Imaginary and Kristeva's semiotic have been used interchangeably, rejecting the specificity of Kristeva's notion of the *chora* as based on *signifiance*. Furthermore, the Imaginary and semiotic have been interpreted as 'female' constructs, ignoring Cixous' conceptualisation of the Imaginary and Kristeva's semiotic *chora* as not related to women as embodied subjects. These generalisations have resulted in criticisms of *l'écriture féminine* as essentialist. Resultingly, it has gained a 'bad reputation'; being perceived as idealised, passé and cliché, offering nothing new and thus not appealing to artists today. After the 1990s, current strategies have also tended to focus on the individual approaches of Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva, with little interest in *l'écriture féminine* as a heterogeneous concept and practice, again moving away from any real sense of *l'écriture féminine*.

²⁹⁷ Jones, A. R. Writing the Body: Toward an Understanding of L'écriture Feminine, 1981, p259

5.4 Differences of engaging with *l'écriture féminine* theoretically and practically

The misappropriations of *l'écriture féminine* point to distinctions between how theorists and artists have engaged with it. Central to *l'écriture féminine* is that it is foremost a *practice*, an alternative textual economy that in its very production creates sites of change. Indeed as Irigaray states: “it is a matter of trying to *practice* the difference”²⁹⁸ (my emphasis). With few exceptions, it seems that theorists engage with *l'écriture féminine* on a theoretical basis and artists engage with it on a practical basis, with one not necessarily informing the other. Indeed, Robinson, Betterton and Deepwell provide useful critical analyses of women’s painting practices that engage with *l'écriture féminine*. They are accurately theoretically grounded and acknowledge its complexity and roots in psychoanalysis. However, they offer a feminist/‘feminine’ interpretation of others’ work, often not considering the experience and process of material production of the work, instead focusing on the artwork as an end artefact.

As Barrett notes, interpretation brought to the work by someone *other* than the artist is also the point at which the work may be despecified in terms of the body and the experience that produced it.²⁹⁹ The theorisation that gives meaning to artworks and creates feminist readings is only one strategy of engaging with *l'écriture féminine* and by itself offers limited possibilities for painting as a *practice* to articulate the ‘feminine’. The knowledge gained in the ‘heat of making’³⁰⁰ and the articulation of the subject as engaged in practice by submerging *in it* and emerging *from* it through the pre-linguistic drives to produce situated knowledge³⁰¹ needs to be taken into account.

However on the other hand, artistic investigations into *l'écriture féminine* have demonstrated limited theoretical understanding. Nancy Spero’s engagement with *l'écriture féminine* is a key example of its simplification and misinterpretation in feminist art practice.

²⁹⁸ Irigaray, I. Questions, 1985, p159

²⁹⁹ Barrett, E. Kristeva Reframed, 2011, p46

³⁰⁰ Bolt, B. Art Beyond Representation: The Performative Power of the Image, 2004, p5

³⁰¹ Barrett, E. Op cit., p21

Spero termed her work *la peinture féminine*,³⁰² which she claimed to be an exploration of ‘the *jouissance* of the female body’. However, rather than elaborating on *jouissance* as the bodily and psychic pleasures that generate in the pre-linguistic functioning of language,³⁰³ she simply elaborated on it as ‘joy’ to recapture the sense of one’s own body and control over it.³⁰⁴ Moreover, she asserted that *jouissance* celebrates the ‘joy’ of women as active subjects and not passive objects.³⁰⁵ Whilst non-oppositional thinking is a key feature of *l’écriture féminine*, she reverses the power structures embedded in the man/woman binary by locating women as ‘active’ subjects in opposition to men. As Lisa Tickner notes, her *la peinture féminine* is fundamentally paradoxical as it both asserts and undermines sexual difference.³⁰⁶

Spero’s claims for *la peinture féminine* as the painterly equivalent of *l’écriture féminine* imply a structural consideration of how it may manifest in all its complexity and multiplicity. It also requires a consideration of how exactly the textual as a system of signification may be considered in visual and material terms as a ‘painterly equivalent’.



Figure 1.2 Nancy Spero, *Let the Priests Tremble*, (1984), handprinting and collage on paper

³⁰² Whilst Spero mentions *la peinture féminine*, stating “the French feminists are talking “L’écriture féminine” and I am trying a “la peinture féminine”” (Defying the Death Machine; interview with Jolicoeur N., 1985, p42), she at no point elaborates on *la peinture féminine*, rather theoretical interpretations have been applied to it by others. Although these are more accurately aligned with *l’écriture féminine*, they too are still basic. Lisa Tickner and Jon Bird for example, have applied theoretical references of *l’écriture féminine* to her work. Tickner’s essay *Nancy Spero: Images of women and ‘la peinture feminine’* (1987) is the only essay that explicitly discusses her *la peinture féminine*. It elucidates it in relation to *l’écriture féminine* and provides more in depth discussion in relation to Cixous’ ideas than Spero herself.

³⁰³ Barrett, E. Kristeva Reframed, 2011, p15

³⁰⁴ Spero, N. Op cit., 1985, p13

³⁰⁵ Spero, N. Woman as protagonist; interview with Jeanne Siegel, 1987, p98

³⁰⁶ Tickner, L. Nancy Spero: Images of Women and 'la peinture feminine', 1987, p12



Figure 1.3 Nancy Spero, *The Goddess Nut II*, (1990), handprinting and collage on paper

Spero provides a formal exploration of *l'écriture féminine* through juxtaposing and layering together text and fragmented images of women³⁰⁷ (see figures 1.2 and 1.3). Her work contains textual qualities such as multiplicity and heterogeneity, which she uses to disrupt and subvert the patriarchal gaze and represent women as 'multiple'. As Bird notes, her work can be read as the inscription of the 'feminine' between the lines of patriarchal discourse.³⁰⁸ It can instead be seen as representing *l'écriture féminine* and difference, rather than transposing it into *la peinture féminine*, not offering us anything new for creating difference in painting.

5.5 Reinforcing the 'feminine' as oppositional to Modernist abstraction

The textual qualities of *l'écriture féminine* have been theorised as manifesting in some women's abstract painting as 'feminine' characteristics. Irigaray's conceptualisation of the Imaginary for example, has been characterised in terms of fluidity, multiplicity and non-linearity.³⁰⁹ For example, Eve Muske's paintings (see plate 5) have been described as 'alluding to the feminine' because they comprise a multiplicity of canvases of different sizes,

³⁰⁷ Posner, E. Nancy Spero: Radical History Painter, 2007, p60

³⁰⁸ Bird, J. Nancy Spero: Inscribing Woman – Between the Lines, 1987, p25

³⁰⁹ Betterton, R. Bodies in the Work: The Aesthetics and Politics of Women's Non-Representational Painting, 1996, p93

shapes, images and textures.³¹⁰ According to Christine Battersby, Kay Sage's paintings (see plate 6) incorporate 'fragile' elements such as swirls, which refer to the 'feminine' and are scattered amongst harsh lines and angles that are 'masculine'³¹¹ undoing masculinist representations because they are at the same time 'feminised'. Kaneda describes such 'feminine' painting, which she explores in her own (see plate 7) and other's practice, as contrary, eccentric, structurally unprincipled and sensuous, whereby 'intuitive' works are able to 'liquidate' the painting plane and Modernism's 'masculine panoptics'.³¹² Such works and their descriptions³¹³ have simplistically translated the textual qualities and thinking of *l'écriture féminine* into paint and painting, using them as a metaphor for the 'feminine'.

Artists seem to have mistakenly associated the physical manifestations of these qualities as constituting a practical engagement with *l'écriture féminine* where attempts to visualise the 'feminine' reduce it to a 'feminine' painterly visual language or aesthetic, but do not offer a structural rethinking of sexual difference. Instead of questioning phallogentrism, this has set up 'feminine' painting practice in opposition to the 'aggression' and 'virility' perceived as 'masculine' characteristics associated with the Modernist male artist and Modernist abstraction. Furthermore, the categorisation of formal qualities in relation to the 'masculine' and 'feminine' by attributing them to subjectivity further strengthens this opposition and risks essentialising the 'feminine' in visual terms.

5.6 The inscription and embodiment of the 'feminine'

Since Modernist abstraction, women abstract painters have explored ways of inscribing the 'feminine'; attempting to visualise what has been marginalised, suppressed or

³¹⁰ Betterton, R. *Bodies in the Work: The Aesthetics and Politics of Women's Non-Representational Painting*, 1996, p96

³¹¹ Battersby, C. *Just Jamming: Irigaray, Painting and Psychoanalysis*, 1995, p133

³¹² Kaneda, S. *Painting and Its Others: In the Realm of the Feminine*, 1991, p62-3

³¹³ There are endless examples of the 'feminine' being described in these terms by both the artists and by critics who are feminist and otherwise. Lucy Lippard lists recurring motifs that she believed suggested a 'female sensibility' which included the apparent 'abstract sexuality' inherent in circles, domes, eggs, spheres and biomorphic shapes and an overall non-linear approach in women as different to men (Heartney E. et al, *After the Revolution: Women Who Transformed Contemporary Art*, 2007, p14). Kaneda also goes into more detail about how 'masculine' painting can be defined as geometric, objective, uniform and controlled (*Painting and Its Others: In the Realm of the Feminine*, 1991, p63). This trend was not limited to the 1990s and as recently as 2010, Ring Peterson has argued that the current generation of women painters challenge the canon of 'great' painting by using "a palette of pastels, a girlish pictorial language, or other visual effects and signs that are readily associated with femininity" (*Contemporary Painting in Context*, p17).

excluded.³¹⁴ The construction of sexuality and its underpinning of sexual difference is implied in looking where visual representation has traditionally privileged sight.³¹⁵ Irigaray challenges phallogocentrism³¹⁶ as the dominant visual economy based on the visual sign of the Phallus as signifying difference. For her, 'woman' finds more pleasure from touching rather than looking,³¹⁷ which is similar to Kristeva in her assertion that the semiotic is organised by synaesthetic qualities such as touch.³¹⁸ Cixous too argues for touch and the quality of the tactile in writing. Indeed as Shiach notes, whereas the painter wants to deal with surfaces, "Cixous wants to explore the inside, the underneath, the taste and the texture."³¹⁹ Practically, the inscription of the 'feminine' through such qualities of tactility, in addition to excess, multiplicity and unfixity have been explored literally and metaphorically in abstract painting to articulate the 'feminine'.

Mira Schor's paintings (see plate 8) for example, literalise the physicality of the 'masculine' ideal of presence; they strip away the surface of the painting, defacing the completeness of the 'masculine' by wounding it and giving the wound a positive value.³²⁰ As Betterton suggests:

The inscription of the feminine has frequently been conceived in formalist terms of the fluid, tactile and sensuous properties of paint³²¹

However, as Deepwell notes, women painters who have explored abstract painting and ambiguously reclaimed it as feminist/'feminine', have mistakenly associated texture and the tactile as a textual strategy for 'writing the body'.³²² It seems that such artworks simply attempt to represent the 'feminine' and sexual difference through the inscription of *l'écriture féminine's* textual qualities, however they do not structurally problematise phallogocentrism on a deeper level. As Robinson notes in relation to Irigaray, there is a danger that art and aesthetic practices simply attempt to illustrate her ideas, without attempting to resolve sexual

³¹⁴ Kaneda, S. *Painting and Its Others: In the Realm of the Feminine*, 1991, p59

³¹⁵ Pollock, G. *Vision and Difference: Feminism, Femininity and Histories of Art*, 1988, p13

³¹⁶ Robinson, H. *Reading Art, Reading Irigaray: The Politics of Art by Women*, 2006, p160

³¹⁷ Betterton, R. *Bodies in the Work: The Aesthetics and Politics of Women's Non-Representational Painting*, 1996, p94

³¹⁸ Grosz, E. *Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction*, 1991, p157

³¹⁹ Shiach, M. *Hélène Cixous: A Politics of Writing*, 1991, p36

³²⁰ Kaneda, S. *Op cit.*, 1991, p63; this can also be seen in the work of Joyce Pensato and the early work of Rebecca Fortnum

³²¹ Betterton, R. *Op cit.*, 1996, p92

³²² Deepwell, K. *Paint-Stripping: Feminist Possibilities in Painting After Modernism*, 1994, p16

difference.³²³ Moreover, in their problematising of Modernist abstract painting through 'feminine' painting, qualities such as tactility have been positioned in opposition to the non-tactility privileged in Modernist abstraction, simply reversing the hierarchy imposed by Modernist abstraction and maintaining binary oppositions.

In addition to the textual quality of fluidity as explored by Cixous, Irigaray conceptualises fluidity not as inherently 'feminine', but through productive mimesis as creating resistances to phallogentric culture and language, which "freezes fluidity into fixity".³²⁴ Kristeva's semiotic *chora* is also fluid and cannot be contained, disrupting the Symbolic through *signifiance*. The material properties of paint have been used to represent the quality of fluidity in 'feminine' abstract painting to articulate bodily experience. It has been argued to provide a reading of 'feminine' difference potentially constructed against the Symbolic.³²⁵ Embodiment had also sought to articulate the unconscious outpouring of the body and the irruption of repressed bodily experience in the semiotic as a way to articulate the 'feminine'. The notion that 'woman' must transgress Symbolic logic has been shown literally in artworks through the overflowing of materials. This has taken the form of containment and breaking through boundaries.³²⁶

Laura Godfrey-Isaacs' abstract paintings of the 1990s consciously consider embodiment as a strategy. They explore the metaphorical and literal equivalencies between the 'feminine' body and the surface and textures of oil paint.³²⁷ The surfaces of some of her works refer to fleshy skin and often incorporate pinkish colours. As Betterton writes:

Pinkness, softness, malleability and disorder are the signs of the feminine body within a Symbolic order and evoke a multiplicity of cultural associations³²⁸

As Robinson notes they have been read as exploring the material qualities of their media as "metaphors for viscera and bodily fluids."³²⁹ Other works appear as 'sexualised surfaces';

³²³ Robinson, H. *Beauty, the universal, the divine: Irigaray's re-valuings*, 1998, p163

³²⁴ Battersby, C. *Just Jamming: Irigaray, Painting and Psychoanalysis*, 1995, p182

³²⁵ Deepwell, K. *Paint-Stripping: Feminist Possibilities in Painting After Modernism*, 1994, p16

³²⁶ Betterton, R. *Identities, Memories, Desires*, 1996, p176

³²⁷ Betterton, R. *Bodies in the Work: The Aesthetics and Politics of Women's Non-Representational Painting*, 1996, p96

³²⁸ *Ibid*

³²⁹ Robinson, H. *Reading Art, Reading Irigaray: The Politics of Art by Women*, 2006, p112

nipple-like nodules or vulva-like openings.³³⁰ Her work pushes the properties of oil paint to its limits and plays around with the formal concerns of Modernist abstraction and challenges the so-called disembodiment of the male painter.

The emphasis on touch shifts her work from a purely visual to tactile experience.³³¹ Lavishly applied thick and gooey pigment trickles and seeps over the framing edges of some of her works.³³² The 'painterly' materials she uses such as polyurethane foam appear in a state of fluidity as seen in *Monstrous*, (1994) (see figure 1.4). The focus on qualities of touch, fluidity and excess through the overflowing of materials have located Godfrey-Isaacs' work



Figure 1.4 Laura Godfrey-Isaacs, *Monstrous*, (1994), polyurethane foam and acrylic

as signifying the pre-linguistic maternal space of the semiotic which refers to the body as not yet mapped according to erogenous zones and Kristeva's notion of abjection. Her materials appear to be once contained within the recognisable limits of painting and yet to have

³³⁰ Robinson, H. *Border Crossings: Womanliness, Body, Representation*, 1995, p143

³³¹ Betterton, R. *Body Horror? Food (and Sex and Death) in Women's Art*, 1996, p154

³³² Hilton, T. *One lump or two o?: Laura Godfrey-Isaacs*, in *The Independent newspaper*, April 1994

emptied outwards, symbolic of the fluid mobility of the semiotic in its constant transgressing of the Symbolic.

If considered in terms of Kristeva's semiotic before identity, Godfrey-Isaacs work can avoid connotations with the gendered corporeal body. However, her work runs the risk of maintaining traditional views of the 'feminine' body and appearing as fetishistic in evoking the pleasure of paint through thick, oozing pigment that embodies 'feminine' sexuality and libidinal pleasure. In being interpreted as a representation of the *chora*, rather than as coming-into-being through *signifiance* as put forward by Kristeva, the work can simply be seen as a translation of the Semiotic *chora* to painting which still assumes a 'feminine' aesthetic, characterised as fluid, abject and tactile. Although a connection between 'feminine' subjectivity and female embodiment is important, this need not be a literal illustration of female morphology or a formalist association of the painting process with the female body.³³³

5.7 Problems of translating *l'écriture féminine* to abstract painting

L'écriture féminine aims to provide an alternative syntax or language for the 'feminine'. One of the problems of utilising *l'écriture féminine* in a 'non-representational' painting practice is of translating it from the textual to the painterly. Attempts at translating *l'écriture féminine* ignore that visual language requires a different signifying system than spoken/written language and the textual. It seems that whilst metaphorical and literal translations may indeed represent the 'feminine' formally and aesthetically, they do not create any real structural challenge to phallogentrism. As Betterton notes, there is a problem with transposing ideas too literally into art practice because of the differences between verbal and visual representations.³³⁴ Thus, utilising *l'écriture féminine* to provide possibilities for 'feminine' abstract painting must be thought through differently and be made legible in terms of the structure of signification in abstract painting.

³³³ Betterton, R. *Bodies in the Work: The Aesthetics and Politics of Women's Non-Representational Painting*, 1996, p94

³³⁴ *Ibid*, p93-4

As Rebecca Fortnum argues, depicting female subjectivity is both imperative and extremely problematic.³³⁵ Indeed, how can one *depict* subjectivity, particularly through abstract or non-representational means? If the structures and conventions of Modernist abstraction are to be disrupted, the inscription of the 'feminine' needs to be legible. Instead of seeking meaning primarily through the theorisation of the artwork, 'looking' and representation, one must also consider the making of the work. The matter of material existence and the materiality of the artefact, as a process and a pleasure for itself, rather than the artwork as a means subordinated to an end and to its very materiality, textuality and specificity can start to open up new possibilities.³³⁶

6. Conclusions

Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva all challenge phallogentrism and the 'feminine' as defined by psychoanalysis in relation to the Phallus as 'lack'. They all envisage some form of 'feminine' writing practice based on non-oppositional thinking to transform the man/woman binary relation without one term being privileged and the other as subordinated, using different strategies, such as Cixous' *other bisexuality*, Irigaray's notions of mimesis and specularisation and Kristeva's semiotic to do so. I have brought together the key ideas of Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva as relating to their individual thinking, acknowledging the diversity and multiplicity of *l'écriture féminine*. This has enabled me to put forward *l'écriture féminine* as a historical practice true to its French etymological roots. I have argued that in addition to the strategies used, the textual practice of *l'écriture féminine* encompasses various 'qualities'. These qualities refer to 'distinctive textual features' such as unfixity, heterogeneity, continuousness and multiplicity and are themselves ambiguous and fluid, qualities also aligned with *l'écriture féminine*. They show how *l'écriture féminine* as a practice seeks to disturb phallogentric logic embedded in Symbolic linguistic conventions as tied in with Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva's individual strategies. This has allowed me to critically

³³⁵ Fortnum, R. *Seeing and Feeling*, 2004, p140

³³⁶ Grosz, E. *Feminist Theory and the Politics of Art*, 1998, p152

explore *l'écriture féminine* as an overall practice and provides a way of conceptualising how these qualities have been interpreted by women and feminist abstract painters.

In addition to Modernist abstraction being problematic for feminist art practice, the work of women artists in their use of *l'écriture féminine* in abstract painting has also been problematic. It is clear that if we are to distill and reframe elements of *l'écriture féminine*, it cannot be used as it was in the 1970s to 1990s but needs to be reconsidered in relation to contemporary contexts. In addition, a reframing of *l'écriture féminine* needs to be juxtaposed with a reframing of abstraction, sexual difference and feminism in order to provide possibilities for 'feminine' abstract painting. One must consider how one can create work that represents or originates in experience whilst attempting to be responsible for an audience's engagement with it, in terms of how it may communicate and to whom.³³⁷ The strategies used therefore need to be multi-layered and multi-threaded.³³⁸

The Modernist canon of painting as male-dominated and the omission of women artists within it have meant that historically, painting has indeed been marked by exclusion and privilege. However, it seems that there is a very real problem in reducing abstraction to phallocentrism. The retrospective problematising of abstraction by feminist artists and critics has masculinised abstract painting, leaving a legacy of it that appears fundamentally phallocentric and rigidly bound by 'patriarchal' conventions. In moving forward, firstly it is imperative to differentiate between 'feminine' and 'feminist' as well as the contexts of French *féminité* and Anglo-American feminism. In addition, any problematisation of abstraction must differentiate between what is meant by 'phallocentrism' as a term located in psychoanalysis and 'patriarchal'. Failure to do so for any of these terms conflates a psychoanalytically grounded analysis of 'masculine' and 'feminine' with a fight for equality for men and women based on gender. Secondly, it seems that in a current context we are no longer challenging phallocentrism per se but elaborating new ways of articulation and making in relation to subjectivity that can open up possibilities, which needs to be considered.

³³⁷ Fortnum, R. *Seeing and Feeling*, 2004, p139

³³⁸ Robinson, H. *Reading Art, Reading Irigaray: The Politics of Art by Women*, 2006, p61

CHAPTER 2

Writing//painting: re-imagining methodology

In Chapter 1, I provided a critical exploration of *l'écriture féminine* and what we can gain from it. I then interrogated why Modernist abstraction has been so problematic for women's abstract painting and why *l'écriture féminine* came to a standstill in providing feminist and 'feminine' possibilities for abstract painting. In order to distill useful elements of *l'écriture féminine* and move forward from these problematics, it is important to consider how to think through and transpose the textual into the painterly in order to create difference and elaborate on the 'feminine' in abstract painting. I will now present the methodological approach I have used in the final two chapters of my thesis in which I will propose what I have termed a 'writing//painting' methodology. This has provided an appropriate framework for thinking through the concept and practice of *l'écriture féminine* into abstract painting and my new conceptualisation of *peinture féminine*, which I propose in Chapter 3. It will also position my own art practice as encompassing writing//painting within my research, as productive to my development of *peinture féminine*. Drawing on my writing//painting methodology, I will then discuss the particular strategies of mapping, using a research diary and 'art-writing' that I have developed. In particular, I will identify how these strategies draw on and facilitate my third research aim which is: "to develop a hybrid writing//painting methodology that can potentially destabilise the masculine/feminine dualistic relation as identified within *l'écriture féminine* and feminist critiques of Modernist art practice". This research aim will be considered throughout Chapters 3 and 4 and more fully elucidated in the conclusion.

I have presented my methodology at this particular point in the thesis as the writing//painting approach presented here feeds through into and accounts for the shift in the way that I have approached the last two chapters. Whereas the first chapter presents a largely straightforward and linear argument in its positioning of ideas, Chapters 3 and 4 offer

a more richly intertextual approach. In these chapters, multiple ideas and textual, material and visual elements are interwoven together to allow a layered and polyvocal discussion in dialogue with artistic production in a way very much aligned with *l'écriture féminine* and productive to my research aims. Furthermore, there are subtle shifts in the genres of writing and narratives presented through the incorporation of research diary extracts and 'art-writing'. This chapter provides a rationale at this particular point to frame and situate this approach.

1. A self-reflexive bricolage

I have used a mixture of strategies that overlap, intersect and interweave with one another. This approach draws on the notion of the artist-researcher as a 'bricoleur' who adopts a multi-method or polyvalent approach to art practice research.³³⁹ Bricolage allows the artist-researcher to juxtapose elements that would otherwise be independent³⁴⁰ and enables a set of practices to be knitted together. Indeed, as Robyn Stewart notes:

The bricoleur appropriates available methods, strategies and empirical materials or invents or pieces together new tools as necessary³⁴¹

Bricolage is dependent on research questions and contexts; its construction changes and takes new forms as different methods are added or as the research itself changes. This suggests that methodology is partly derived from and responds to practice³⁴² and that it is complex, open to change and fundamentally reflexive. I have utilised bricolage as a metaphorical tool to draw on ideas and strategies from multiple areas. It also points to the interweaving of my practice with the critical analysis of others' work to bring them together and accounts for the shifts in the last part of the thesis.

The bricoleur works *between* and *within* competing and overlapping perspectives and paradigms³⁴³ and thus travels *across* disciplines. As Iain Biggs notes, a text's ability to

³³⁹ Biggs, I. *Hybrid Texts and Academic Authority: the Wager in Creative Practice Research*, 2006, p194

³⁴⁰ Vaughan, K. *Mariposa: The Story of New Work of Research/Creation, Taking Shape, Taking Flight*, 2009, p173

³⁴¹ Stewart, R. *Creating New Stories for Praxis: Navigations, Narrations, Neonarratives*, 2007, p12

³⁴² Gray, C. and Malins, J. *Visualising Research: A Guide to the Research Process in Art & Design*, 2004, p74

³⁴³ Denzin, N. and Lincoln, Y. *The Landscape of Qualitative Research, Theories and Issues*, 1994, p2

occupy a space 'between' the self-reflexive bricolage of events, voices, histories, practical exploration and knowledges to its topic can unveil meaning that has not yet been objectified.³⁴⁴ Bricolage has allowed for different perspectives and positions to emerge as my inquiry has twisted and turned towards various sources.³⁴⁵ It has enabled me to bring together ideas from opposing discourses through the logic of my writing//painting methodology and define new ideas by opening up spaces amidst different areas of enquiry. In reference to Proust's quote in the introduction, it has enabled me to see things with 'new eyes'.

*Working crossdisciplinarily seems to be a thinking into dichotomies. It is a working at the edges and the margins of disciplines and between them to create an intertextual way of working; interlinking disciplines, fusing and overlapping ideas to solve 'old' problems.*³⁴⁶

2. A feminist/'non-phallogentric' approach

Bricolage is aligned with the notion of 'crossdisciplines' and discourses such as feminism and deconstruction that take place across a number of spaces, as opposed to the concept of interdisciplinarity which is supported by existing boundaries.³⁴⁷ It has allowed a multilayered approach to my research, drawing on multiple narratives and ideas which preclude any singular or dominant discourse or perspective. In this sense, it is aligned with Judith Halberstam's 'scavenger methodology' that scavenges different methods to collect and produce information on subjects who have been excluded from traditional studies.³⁴⁸ Phallogentrism has been argued to be resistant to analysis precisely because its reproduction maintains a system of authority, privilege and entitlement in which unequal power structures are heavily invested. Feminist approaches to methodology privilege a borrowing and hybrid interweaving of strategies and have the potential to subvert dominant structures and create resistances. Indeed as Pollock notes, by moving across canons,

³⁴⁴ Biggs, I. *Hybrid Texts and Academic Authority: the Wager in Creative Practice Research*, 2006, p199

³⁴⁵ Sullivan, G. *Making Space: The Purpose and Place of Practice-led Research*, 2009, p49

³⁴⁶ Research diary extract 09.05.2009

³⁴⁷ Elam, D. *Feminism and Deconstruction: Ms en Abyme*, 1994, p11

³⁴⁸ Halberstam, J. *Female Masculinity*, 1998, p13

disciplines and concepts, meaning is produced in the spaces 'between' to enable new understandings that can challenge dominant formations of sexuality and power.³⁴⁹

My first two research aims seek to open up 'spaces' to articulate the 'feminine' and for 'difference' to emerge through material production in abstract painting. One of my central methodological concerns is therefore to employ 'non-phallogentric' strategies and ways of thinking and to examine the extent to which methodologies themselves can challenge phallogentric thinking. Bricolage and working across disciplines can be seen to be aligned with 'non-phallogentrism' and my research aims. It underpins my writing//painting methodology and is helpful in problematising the 'monocentric hegemony' of Modernist abstraction and oppositional thinking as problematic for women's abstract painting. In this sense, bricolage also relates closely to *l'écriture féminine* as it is aligned with non-oppositional thinking and qualities such as intertextuality.

3. A writing//painting methodology

'Methodology' can be defined as a system of methods that comprises specific procedures and components. Rather than being rigidly systematic or made up of a specific formation of constituents, my writing//painting methodology does not prescribe a fixed set of methods. Indeed, Graeme Sullivan argues that one must be cautious about describing and prescribing an analytical framework as "any systematic structure has the potential to usher in a new orthodoxy as preferred interests and methods function to normalize practices".³⁵⁰ My writing//painting methodology instead forms a framework to approach the multi-layered concerns of my research through the 'lens' of *l'écriture féminine*. Like art practice, my methodology itself has been emergent. Indeed, Barrett notes that research is a reflexive process and therefore:

Methodologies in artistic research are necessarily emergent and subject to repeated adjustment, rather than remaining fixed throughout the process of enquiry³⁵¹

³⁴⁹ Pollock, G. *Differencing the Canon: Feminist Desire and the Writing of Art's Histories*, 1999, p26

³⁵⁰ Sullivan, G. *Art Practice as Research: Enquiry in the Visual Arts*, 2005, p94

³⁵¹ Barrett, E. *Practice as Research: Approaches to Creative Arts Enquiry*, 2007, p6

Although my writing//painting methodology has shifted and moved over time, it has allowed for reflexivity *within* its framework. Possibilities have been opened up by the interplay of numerous elements including the interplay of the textual and the painterly, and its construction and interior has changed as new things have been added or as ideas have shifted. In doing so, this approach has allowed for my practice in its various forms to reflexively emerge and come into being. The spaces opened up by the interaction of multiple elements are both responsive to and driven by the requirements of my practice and the creative dynamics of the artworks.³⁵² The possibilities within my writing//painting methodology cannot be planned and predicted; rather through the focus on conversational engagement between theory and practice and the textual and painterly, unexpected and transforming possibilities have emerged.³⁵³

The term 'writing//painting' reflects this approach. The troubling of binary modes of thinking as signified by the double forward slashes presupposes not just a singular space between writing and painting but opens up *spaces* amidst them, where following Yve Lomax, "between two folds we can always find a thousand folds".³⁵⁴ Drawing on the idea of a fold rather than a gap or singular space 'in-between' allows for the complexity of the writing//painting interrelation and for the two to reflexively overlap and interact in ways productive to my research aims. Rather than asserting a hybridisation of writing and painting per se, it accounts for hybrid moments and slippages to unfold and be enfolded amidst the two, which is a fundamental element of my art practice.

4. Art-practice-research

The relationship between theory and practice has historically been seen as oppositional, in which "theory, criticism and historical investigation have been heavily prioritised over arts practice".³⁵⁵ The use of the terms 'practice-based' research and 'practice-led' research have indeed highlighted practice as being as important as

³⁵² Gray, C. and Malins, J. *Visualising Research: A Guide to the Research Process in Art & Design*, 2004, p72

³⁵³ Davey, N. *Art and Theoria*, 2006, p21

³⁵⁴ Lomax, Y. *Writing the Image: An Adventure with Art and Theory*, 2000, pxii

³⁵⁵ Dean, R. T. and Smith, H. *Practice-led Research, Research-led Practice in the Creative Arts*, 2009, p2

theoretically-based methods in generating knowledge.³⁵⁶ They have acknowledged the practice of making artwork and reflecting on it as a central part of the research process.³⁵⁷ However, it seems that the term ‘practice-based’ research as defined by creative work as a *basis* of research³⁵⁸ ignores the complexity and interrelated nature of theory and practice through the generalness and broadness of its definition. Indeed, as Timothy Emlyn Jones argues, “practice-based research is too loose a term to be useful”.³⁵⁹ Moreover, the term ‘practice-led’ research implies that creative practice *leads* to research insights, privileging practice and the insights it can produce.³⁶⁰ This term both simplifies the relation by asserting that one leads the other and runs the risk of reversing the historical theory/practice opposition and maintaining oppositional thinking.

My writing//painting methodology facilitates ‘theory’ and ‘practice’ as interrelated and non-oppositional concepts. They form a complementary relationship in which they “mutually participate in each other’s endeavours”.³⁶¹ Rather than using the terms ‘practice-led’ and ‘practice-based’, I have instead used the term ‘art-practice-research’ to elaborate a non-oppositional and non-hierarchical interrelation that acknowledges the complexity and dialogic writing//painting relation central to my research. My art-practice-research focuses on enquiry through my own art practice as a key element of my research. In utilising the textual practice of *l’écriture féminine* as a ‘lens’ to consider abstract painting practice, the writing//painting framework has provided a space for one to inform the other. It has elaborated ways in which the textual and the painterly are in dialogue with one another where they overlap and are intertwined.

5. My art practice

Throughout the research process, I have continuously engaged with the material production of artworks. My art practice has included the practice of writing, as manifest in my

³⁵⁶ Dean, R. T. and Smith, H. Practice-led Research, Research-led Practice in the Creative Arts, 2009, p2

³⁵⁷ Gray, C. and Malins, J. Visualising Research: A Guide to the Research Process in Art & Design, 2004, p3

³⁵⁸ Candy, L. Practice Based Research: A Guide, 2006, p3

³⁵⁹ Emlyn Jones, T. A Method of Search for Reality: Research and Research Degrees in Art and Design, 2006, p228

³⁶⁰ Dean, R. T. and Smith, H. Op cit., 2009, p9

³⁶¹ Davey, N. Art and Theoria, 2006, p20

research diary and 'art-writing' as I will later discuss. Writing has also formed an integral part of my painting practice where writing and painting have been intertwined with one another both practically, materially and conceptually in the spaces amidst the writing//painting relation. This is evident in the performative writing that formed my textstallations and the diagrammatic use of writing as part of my book-paintings and painting-poems as I will discuss in Chapter 4. This intertwining has allowed the practices of writing and painting to form a constant multilayered and reflexive dialogue productive to my research aims.

My art practice has been made up of heterogeneous elements that have continually shifted and resulted in the simultaneous production of visually, materially and textually quite different work, which have overlapped and been interwoven with one another. For example, the ongoing experimentation of book-paintings and larger scale painterly experimentations into mark-making and colour in my studio space, alongside writing/painting/making in my research diary collided to inform my 'painting-poems'. In turn, the painting-poems were shaped by their overlap with reading about *l'écriture féminine* and mapping together the first part of the thesis.

As my research has utilised the concept and practice of *l'écriture féminine* as a 'lens' with which to see abstract painting and inform the material and painterly aspects of *peinture féminine*, it has been vital that these two 'systems' have been in dialogue and have had a reflexive relationship. The overlaps, slippages and hybrid moments that have occurred within the writing//painting interrelation are central to my research. They are both fundamental to the development of a new approach to *peinture féminine* and also in the process of making as thinking through ideas. Therefore, a key function of the writing//painting methodology has been to facilitate a space in which these collisions, slippages and overlaps can occur. This has acknowledged the movement between different types of engagement with materials and concepts and the drive to and away from resolution within the self-imposed parameters of

practice.³⁶² This has also involved embracing theory and practice and the intertextual and the intermaterial³⁶³ as interrelated and entangled together.

6. Material thinking

Rather than focusing on artworks as an object or end outcome, my second research aim focuses on practice as a *process* and knowledge as emerging *through* making to examine the potential of 'difference in the making'. As this has been central to the development of my concept and practice of *peinture féminine*, it has been integral that my writing//painting methodology enables knowledge, in its various forms to arise from the process of making and to articulate this knowledge. Kim Vincs argues that:

Art practice is able to produce knowledge in a unique material and specific way. It is not a generic kind of knowledge that can be mapped onto other fields or works of art³⁶⁴

This focus on the process of making involves a sense of unknowing and of making sense of what happens in what Barbara Bolt calls the 'heat' of making when the artist is not necessarily aware of what is happening but when a certain type of thinking and knowledge arises out of the handling of materials.³⁶⁵ As Sullivan points out, art practice is not necessarily captive to existing frameworks of knowledge but a focus on reflexive action that is open-ended and exploratory, and encourages a working from the unknown to the known where "serendipity and intuition ... direct attention to unanticipated possibilities".³⁶⁶

The 'unique and specific' knowledge that Vincs refers to relates to 'practical knowledge' as arising from the artists' handling of materials and processes, and what Bolt terms 'material thinking'.³⁶⁷ According to Bolt, 'material thinking' can offer a way of considering that which takes place within the very process of making. She elucidates:

³⁶² Fortnum, R. and Smith, C. *The Problem of Documenting Fine Art Practices and Processes*, 2007, p169

³⁶³ I have developed the term 'intermaterial' as part of *peinture féminine* as the material potential of Kristeva's concept of intertextuality in which meaning can be made through connecting networks of prior and concurrent discourse and material processes within a 'painting'. This is further elucidated in Chapter 3.

³⁶⁴ Vincs, K. *Rhizome/MyZone: A Case Study in Studio-Based Dance Research*, 2007, p112

³⁶⁵ Bolt, B. *The Magic is in Handling*, 2007, p30

³⁶⁶ Sullivan, G. *Making Space: The Purpose and Place of Practice-led Research*, 2009, p48

³⁶⁷ Bolt, B. *Op cit.*, 2007, p30

A very specific sort of knowing, a knowing that arises through handling materials in practice. This form of tacit knowledge provides a very specific way of understanding the world, one that is grounded in material practice ... or “material thinking”³⁶⁸

We cannot consciously seek the new in this logic, since by definition it cannot be known in advance; rather it arrives through the tools and materials of production and in our handling of ideas.³⁶⁹ This thinking enables a shift from ‘knowledge-in-reflection’ and thinking *about* art to ‘knowledge-in-action’ and thinking *through* art and thus allows practice to be seen to produce knowledge. The making of art as unfolding in unexpected ways also generates knowledges that are tacit, intuitive and implicit in the artwork through unknowing and a getting lost in the process of making. Indeed, as Lomax states, art practice can be seen as ‘slippery’ and can be grasped precisely by letting it slip through one’s fingers.³⁷⁰ Material thinking accounts for knowledge as embedded within practice³⁷¹ and intuitive knowledge closely related to the ‘logic of practice’ where strategies are not predetermined but emerge and operate according to the demands of action and movement in time.³⁷²

In the reciprocal relation of my writing//painting methodology, research can be seen to happen *through* practice and material thinking, where at the same time practice can also be seen as that of theorisation and also of writing. There is a double articulation to my notion of art-practice-research; that theory emerges from a reflexive practice at the same time that practice is informed by theory.³⁷³ This implies that theory and practice, as well as research are not separate activities but instead entangled. Theory asserts itself as a practice through the fact that theorisation happens by doing, thus “theorizing is not oppositional to but inseparable from practicing”, where theoretical ideas are always already entangled in and conditioned by a set of formats, conventions, materialities, conventions and histories.³⁷⁴ As Katy Macleod and Lin Holdridge assert, the practices of art are not separate from theory, but “art is thought and practice is theory”.³⁷⁵

³⁶⁸ Bolt, B. *The Magic is in Handling*, 2007, p29

³⁶⁹ *Ibid*, p31

³⁷⁰ Lomax, Y. *Sounding the Event: Escapades in Dialogue and Matters of Art, Nature and Time*, 2005, p3

³⁷¹ Sullivan, G. *Art Practice as Research: Enquiry in the Visual Arts*, 2005, p87

³⁷² Barrett, E. *Practice as Research: Approaches to Creative Arts Enquiry*, 2007, p4

³⁷³ Bolt, B. *Op cit.*, 2007, p29

³⁷⁴ Cassar, I. *Towards a Criticality in the Now*, 2009, p230

³⁷⁵ Holdridge, L. and Macleod, K. *Related Objects of Thought: art and thought, theory and practice*, 2005, p143

In addition to my own art practice, I have also focused in depth on the work of Cy Twombly, Rosa Lee and Neal Rock which I will claim under the auspices of my concept and practice of *peinture féminine* in Chapter 4. Betterton notes that:

Talking with artists enables a different kind of understanding of practice than one that is gained solely from looking at artworks or reading about them³⁷⁶

Indeed, such discussion gives access to the processes through which the work is made and the material thinking not always conscious in the 'heat' of making but realised retrospectively. I undertook an in depth semi-structured interview with Rock (see Appendix A) which has formed the basis of my analysis of his work in which he discussed the 'material thinking' involved in the making of the work. Whilst Twombly is an internationally renowned artist and gaining an interview may have proven difficult, I intended to interview Lee to discuss the making of her work. As she unfortunately died in 2009 after I had started my research, I have instead accessed information through archival information and commentary about her work. Unlike Twombly and Rock, Lee published several essays that reflect on the making processes in her art practice. I have used these essays to examine the material processes and thinking involved in her art practice in relation to key ideas in my research.

7. An entangled interrelation

Dean and Smith assert that conceptualising theory and practice in dialogue with one another allows for a multidimensional, reciprocal and iterative relationship.³⁷⁷ Their model of the 'Iterative Cyclic Web' (see figure 2.1) proposes a framework for articulating this dialogic interrelation inherent in creative arts research and processes. It combines cycles of alterations between practice and research, which form a web made up of numerous points of entry, exit, cross-referencing and cross-transit within the cycles. It also includes iteration made up of sub-cycles where creative practice or research processes are repeated with variation and interweave to create new and shifting paradigms.³⁷⁸ They assert that research

³⁷⁶ Betterton, R. *Unframing Women's Painting*, 2004, p3

³⁷⁷ Dean, R. T. and Smith, H. *Practice-led Research, Research-led Practice in the Creative Arts*, 2009, p10

³⁷⁸ *Ibid*, pp8-9

is made up of 'practice-led research' and 'research-led practice' which are not separate but "interconnected in ways which are very complex".³⁷⁹ Their model moves on from a singular bi-directional relation of practice leading research and offers a non-hierarchical mutual relation in dialogue. However, the acknowledgment of 'research-led practice' *in addition to* 'practice-led research' simply proposes a double bi-directional relation. This still asserts a

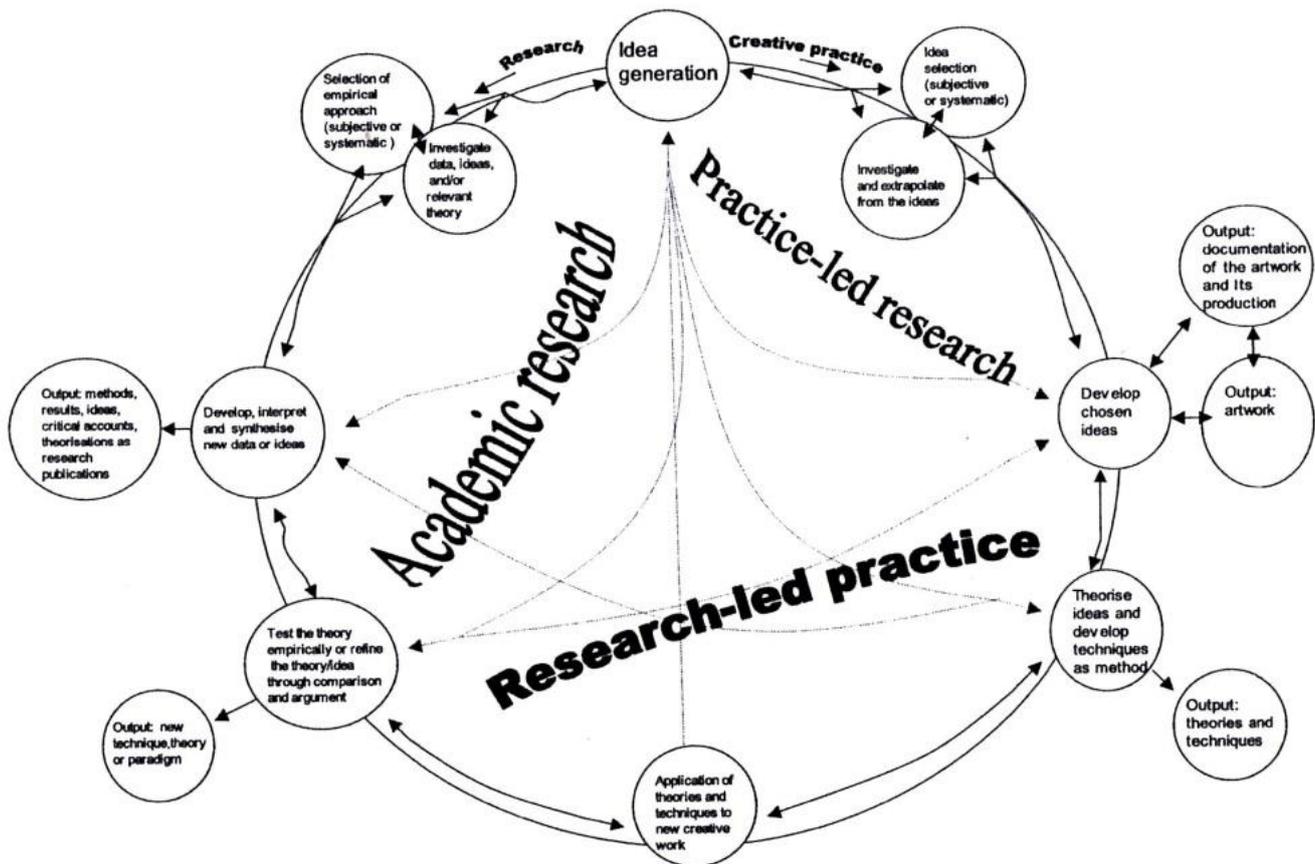


Figure 2.1 Hazel Smith and Roger Dean's 'Iterative Cyclic Web' of practice-led research and research-led practice

simplistic relation of research or practice as emerging from the other, whereby practice comes from research *and* research comes from practice in which the artist-researcher oscillates between the two. Although these two concepts are circular, the Iterative Cyclic Web does not seem to account for any interrelation *within* the concepts of 'research-led practice' or 'practice-led research' or *between* the two. It also does not account for the fact that research *is* a form of practice and that art practice *is* a form of research. In doing so, it

³⁷⁹ Dean, R. T. and Smith, H. Practice-led Research, Research-led Practice in the Creative Arts, 2009, p8

does not allow for an experimental and crossdisciplinary focus of process as fundamental to my research aims where theory, practice and research are complexly entangled and overlap and interweave on multiple levels in a reflexive and often unpredictable way. Although Dean and Smith argue that this model allows for ‘hybrid intermedia outputs’³⁸⁰ it also does not facilitate the hybrid moments of becoming that occur in my art-practice-research or the stutters and slippages that may occur within the writing//painting interrelation.

My writing//painting methodology is more closely aligned with Sullivan’s conceptualisation of practice and theory as encompassing a ‘braided relationship’ (see figure 2.2). Here, theory and practice, writing and painting and the textual and painterly can be

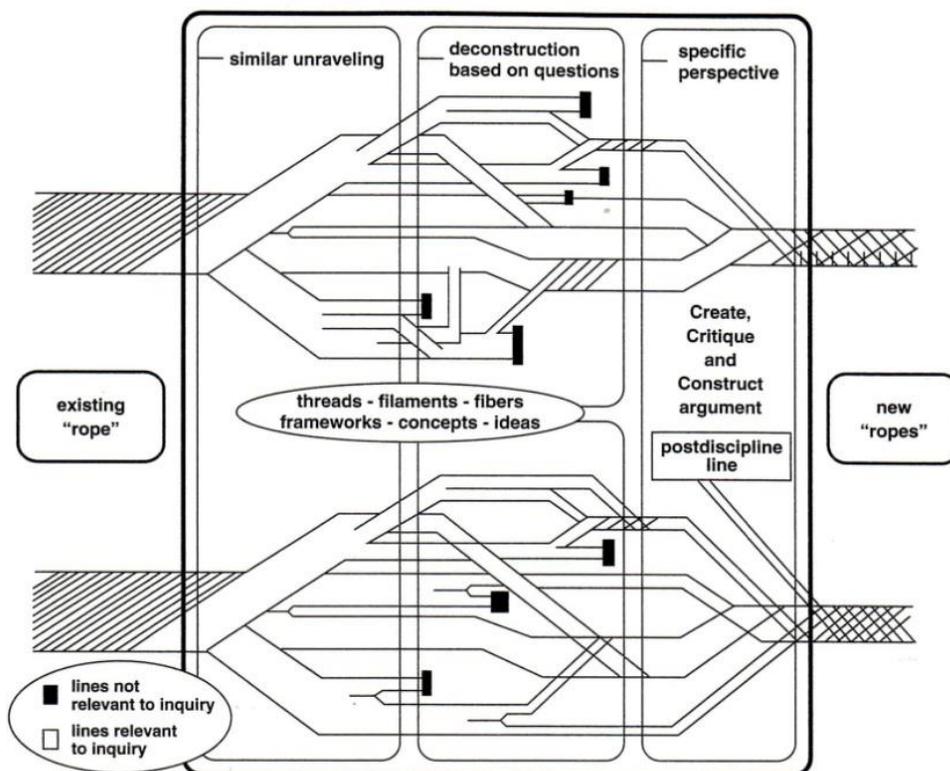


Figure 2.2 Graeme Sullivan’s ‘braided relationship’ model

viewed as interconnected areas of enquiry that are bound together as a braided set of connected strands, or teased apart as separate threads. Sullivan’s ‘braided relationship’ sees visual arts practice as a complex interactive system like strands of unraveling rope where meaning and the work intertwine or disconnect so that the same image can have

³⁸⁰ Dean, R. T. and Smith, H. Practice-led Research, Research-led Practice in the Creative Arts, 2009, p23

different meanings.³⁸¹ It thus allows for the way that visual arts practitioners move across boundaries in which different perspectives and practices emerge as enquiry twists into new positions and turns towards different sources.³⁸²

The boundaries in the model act as bridges and rather than borders or boundaries, the edges more resemble folds. This relates to the notion of unfolding and enfolding as central to my concept and practice of *peinture féminine*, which considers how difference can be enfolded into the multiple, heterogeneous and shifting spatiality of abstract painting that I have put forward. Conceptual borders are therefore not rigid but are permeable and allow ideas to flow back and forth.³⁸³ This allows for a flexible framework that can be adapted to suit different purposes where practice and theory can inform one another. This model is more closely aligned with my writing//painting methodology and the mobility of different elements within it. It accommodates the textual//painterly and intertextual//intermaterial dialogues central to my research and allows for accidents, collisions and hybridisations.

8. Interrelated objects of thought

Rather than applying theory to practice, the knowledge generated through artistic production such as praxical knowledge must become generalised and made communicable to a wider audience through writing to allow for theorisation to emerge out of practice.³⁸⁴ Historically, the conservative separation of theory and practice³⁸⁵ has manifested as writing in the thesis as theorising *what artists do*³⁸⁶ or where the artwork/visual data is simply illustrative of theory.³⁸⁷ However, as Sullivan notes, an explanatory thesis can be seen as redundant as it fails to acknowledge that art can be research by maintaining a distinction between research and visual arts practice.³⁸⁸ The task of the thesis is not just simply to explain practice but to mobilise this theorisation through writing and reveal the knowledge it

³⁸¹ Sullivan, G. *Art Practice as Research: Enquiry in the Visual Arts*, 2005, p104

³⁸² *Ibid.*, p94

³⁸³ *Ibid.*

³⁸⁴ Dean, R. T. and Smith, H. *Practice-led Research, Research-led Practice in the Creative Arts*, 2009, p6

³⁸⁵ Emlyn Jones, T. *A Method of Search for Reality: Research and Research Degrees in Art and Design*, 2006, p233

³⁸⁶ Bolt, B. *The Magic is in Handling*, 2007, p34

³⁸⁷ Emmison, M. and Smith, P. *Researching the Visual: Images, Objects, Contexts and Interactions in Social and Cultural Inquiry* 2000, p21

³⁸⁸ Sullivan, G. *Op cit.*, 2005, p92

may embody by providing a framework in which it can be articulated. As Davey notes: “the question is not how art theory and practice relate to each other but how each relate differently to a shared subject matter”.³⁸⁹

The emphasis on process in my research requires a focus on the making sense of material handling and the material logic embedded in the work in order for them to be communicable. The braided relationship of the writing//painting relation is articulated in my thesis not through explaining my art practice, but in articulating its logic as important and bound up with my ideas of *peinture féminine*. Although the thesis and viva exhibition can be seen as separate yet co-dependent submissions, the thesis itself can be seen as made up of partial submissions; the writing and artworks are ‘related objects of thinking’ where art *is* thought, practice *is* theory.³⁹⁰ The thesis can thus provide a vehicle through which the artwork, mapping, research diaries and ‘art-writing’ can find a discursive form,³⁹¹ one which “can be redefined in relation to the practice it seeks to elucidate”.³⁹²

The writing//painting methodology embraces writing and painting as having a dialogic relationship where the thesis reveals the work of art and is vital in articulating the outcomes of material practices. Rather than theory and practice as largely being recognised as dual outputs,³⁹³ the writing//painting approach has allowed for one to be integrated with the other as a mutual inter-dependence that allows a correspondence to occur *between* practices and the thesis as a series of interactive dialogues.³⁹⁴ Rather than writing demonstrating my art practice, it functions as an exploration of it, articulating the understandings that arise in my dealings with ideas, tools and materials of practice. The thesis also enables ‘particular’ situated and emergent knowledge that is potentially only meaningful to my experience of making to be made communicable. The writing//painting dialogue has provided a framework in which making and writing have functioned on the same epistemological level rather than

³⁸⁹ Davey, N. *Art and Theoria*, 2006, p21

³⁹⁰ Holdridge, L. and Macleod, K. *Thinking Through Art: Reflections on Art as Research*, 2006, p144

³⁹¹ Bolt, B. *The Magic is in Handling*, 2007, p33

³⁹² Goddard, S. *A Correspondence Between Practices*, 2007, p113

³⁹³ Emlyn Jones, T. *A Method of Search for Reality: Research and Research Degrees in Art and Design*, 2006, p233

³⁹⁴ Goddard, S. *Op cit.*, 2007, p118

translating or representing the other.³⁹⁵ It has enabled me to discuss and articulate my practice and the work of others and to make sense of the shifting reflexivity that is fundamental to my practice, hybrid moments and productive to *peinture féminine*. This has been done through the strategies of mapping, using a research diary and ‘art-writing’ I have developed as part of my writing//painting methodology, which I will now discuss.

9. Mapping

‘Information mapping’ is typically concerned with organising large amounts of data within the field of sociology and the humanities. ‘Mind-mapping’ is also frequently used in research to encourage a brain-storming approach. It provides a diagrammatical and graphical method of taking notes and representing words, ideas and concepts by visualising and linking ideas together to organise information. ‘Concept mapping’ was developed as a pedagogical tool by Joseph Novak (1984). It is largely used in the sciences as a graphic tool for organising and representing knowledge. It is used to communicate complex ideas by

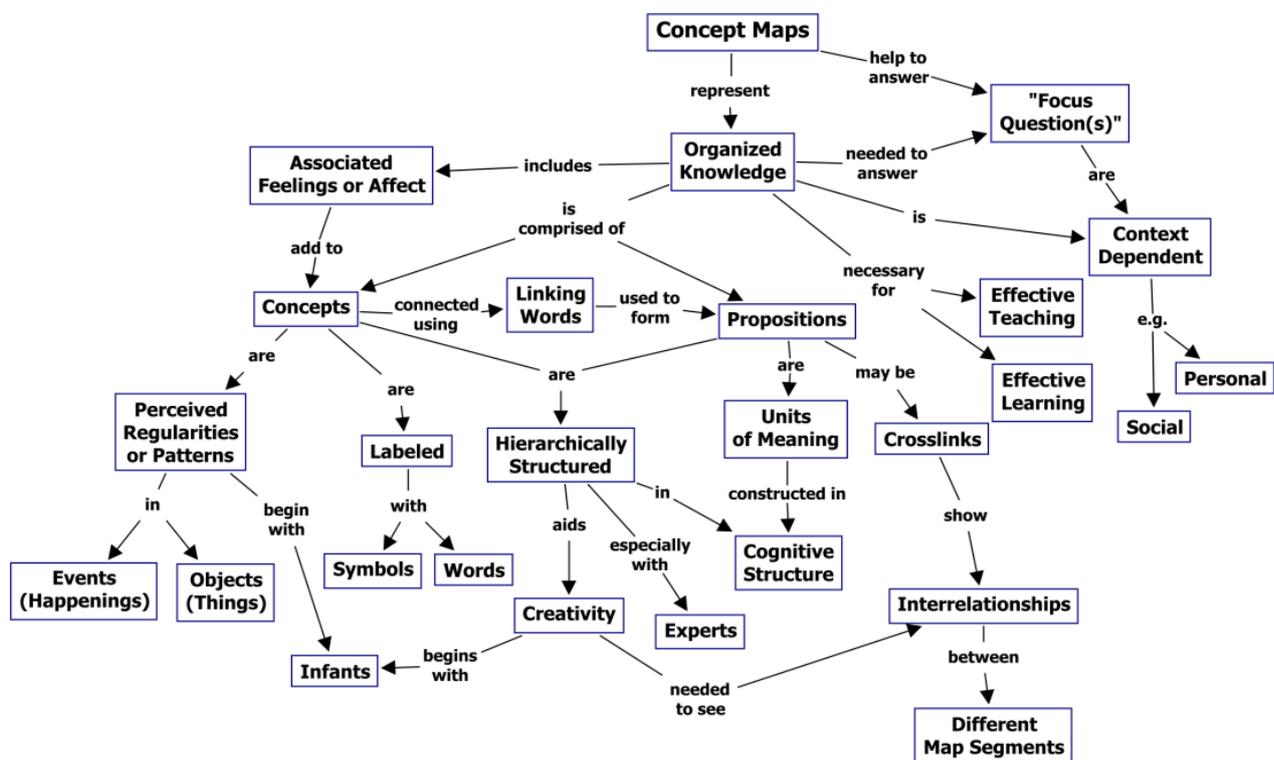


Figure 2.3 Example of ‘concept mapping’ after Novak

³⁹⁵ Vincs, K. Rhizome/MyZone: A Case Study in Studio-Based Dance Research, 2007, p111

linking existing knowledge and showing the relationships between concepts. In research, concept mapping is conventionally used as a methodological tool to map ideas from different sources. Concepts are represented as boxes or circles and connected by arrows in a downward-branching linear structure (see figure 2.3). They are organised hierarchically with general and inclusive concepts at the top with “progressively more specific, less inclusive concepts arranged below them”.³⁹⁶

In the context of Art and Design however, mapping has only basically been used in this way as a methodological tool. It has largely been limited to the field of Design to develop a concept to a finished product in a linear fashion to aid the design process. In the visual arts, rather than being used as a methodological tool, mapping has instead primarily been used by contemporary artists as part of and informing their art practice. Here, artists’ work often *includes* maps or is *about* the subject of maps.³⁹⁷ It also extends to questioning “the underlying socio-political structures and cultural hierarchies that inform mapmaking”.³⁹⁸ In this sense, mapping and cartography are visually, aesthetically and conceptually part of art

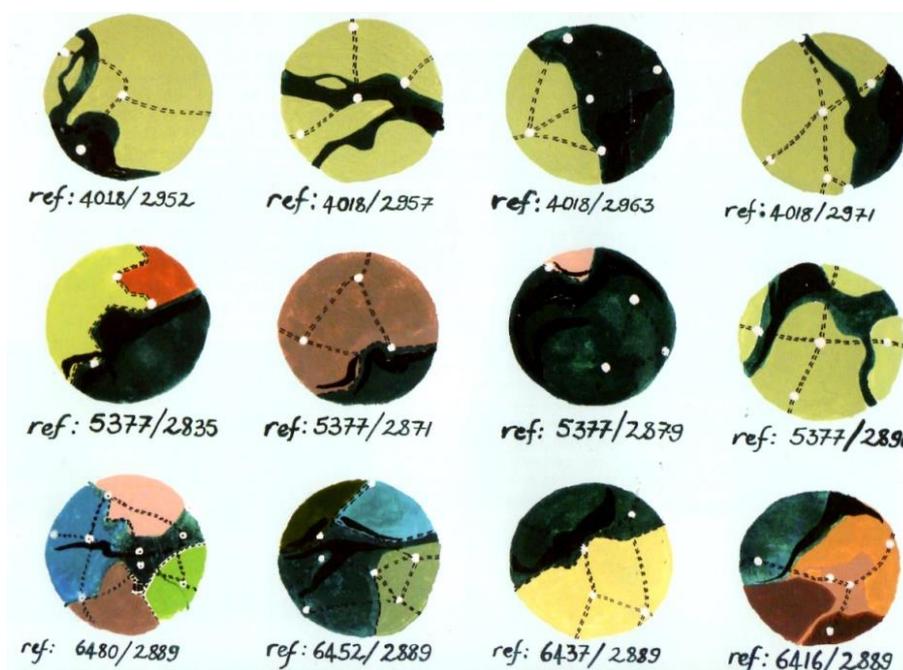


Figure 2.4 Otobong Nkanga, detail of *Delta Stories: Blast 111*, (2005-6), acrylic on paper

³⁹⁶ Novak, J. D. *Learning How to Learn*, 1984, p15

³⁹⁷ Wood, D. *Not the World We'd Mapped*, 2010, p4

³⁹⁸ Cisneros, T. and Takengny, C. *Whose Map is it? New Mapping by Artists*, 2010, p3

practice. For example, the exhibition and subsequent conference *Whose Map is it? New Mapping by Artists* at the Institute for International Visual Arts in London (2010) included work by artists such as Otobong Nkanga (see figure 2.4) who explores mapping by transposing cartography as an accurate geographical representation into the painterly. In the visual arts, mapping has also been used in collaborative social projects such as walking practices and those exploring mobile technologies. For example, the walking project *Mapchester* (2006) (see plate 9) mapped individual's wanderings across the city with GPS and Kathrin Böhm's *Yourwhere* project in (2009) (see plate 10) created a large-scale interactive map with the public to show how visitors move across and between spaces.

Conceptually, mapping also refers to what Irit Rogoff calls 'counter-cartography'.³⁹⁹ Whereas cartography looks at the making of maps through the *affect* of geography, counter-cartography seeks to unframe and unpin cartographic logic through a transdisciplinary and performative focus of *un-mapping* which rethinks the boundaries and divides of geographical constructs. Rogoff asserts that when considered in relation to semiotics, cartography is powerful in masking difference and in producing unity and homogeneity.⁴⁰⁰ For her, mapping as counter-cartographic is instead an activity 'from the margins' which repositions language and signifying systems through sexual difference and subverts the dominant language of cartography.⁴⁰¹ It can create spaces for the articulation of ignored experiences where the need to navigate is transcended by experience and not by representation, and is therefore in this way very much aligned with *l'écriture féminine*.

Although the notion of counter-cartography has been built on in visual art practice, it has not been used methodologically. Rather than the linear and hierarchical models of mapping used in the sciences such as information mapping and concept mapping, I have taken the notion of mapping forward as a counter-cartographic practice. This has allowed me to treat the 'map' as a surface with unlimited boundaries, allowing ideas to emerge and

³⁹⁹ Rogoff, I. *Terra Infirma: Geography's Visual Culture*, 2000, p73

⁴⁰⁰ *Ibid*, p75

⁴⁰¹ *Ibid*, p74

evolve organically to offer a more complex interrelationality and spatialising of ideas. My notion of mapping follows on from counter-cartography's refusal of any clear distinction between the inside and the outside. This reflects the artist-researcher as a bricoleur as bringing together potentially disparate information from multiple sources where fragments of marginal discourses can be connected together and re-examined. It also refers to my research as being crossdisciplinary and referring to the 'inbetween' of concepts rather than rigid academic disciplines, where moving across and between boundaries in this way can create new meaning not centered around hierarchical or oppositional thinking. This feeds through into my concept and practice of *peinture féminine* in its exploration of the 'within' or 'amidst' of binary relations as building on the non-oppositional thinking of *l'écriture féminine*.

Mapping implies a practice; what Cixous terms a 'to-be-in-the-process' of.⁴⁰² In my research, rather than being directional and getting from one fixed point to another, I have developed mapping as an explorational wandering or getting lost. It is aligned with Kristeva's notion of intertextuality and Cixous' notion of interchanges in which the relation of elements form networks that in turn create new pathways.⁴⁰³ Vincs talks about her art practice as that of producing a map, where the map is not the representation of a prior unifying idea, but something that *connects* elements.⁴⁰⁴ She argues that constructing a map is not the construction of a set of directions, because:

In a map, everything is laid out on the same plane, on the page. The map is not time-dependent. It doesn't tell you what to read first, or in what order to put things together⁴⁰⁵

Mapping in this sense can be likened to the Deleuzian notion of the rhizome, which asserts growth in all directions at once, not necessarily in an orderly manner but an assemblage with an increase in dimensions and with multiplicity that changes nature as it expands its connections.⁴⁰⁶ The simultaneous engagement with a multiplicity of elements allows mobility amongst concepts where everything is continuously in movement. I have utilised the concept

⁴⁰² Cixous, H. *Stigmata: Escaping Texts*, 2005, p25

⁴⁰³ Calle-Gruber, M. *Rootprints: Memory and Life Writing*, 1997, p23

⁴⁰⁴ Vincs, K. *Rhizome/MyZone: A Case Study in Studio-Based Dance Research*, 2007, p105

⁴⁰⁵ *Ibid*, p104

⁴⁰⁶ Deleuze, G. and Guattari, F. *A Thousand Plateaus*, 1987, p8

of mapping as a performative process, allowing for ideas and multiple voices to emerge relationally and reflexively within the research process; creating detours and opening up spaces. Indeed, Simon Harvey asserts that a natural mapping impulse is performative as we map out spaces as we go.⁴⁰⁷ This spatial production cannot be understood as a linear process but as a multiplicity of socio-spatial aspects that evolve over time and include different levels of randomness and intentionality.⁴⁰⁸ This practice of mapping is productive to my writing//painting methodology where the spatialisation of ideas enables 'old' concepts to be seen through 'new eyes'.

The process of mapping has happened at numerous points and in different forms throughout my research. Large-scale mapping (see figures 2.5 and 2.6) has brought together different and often disparate and broad ideas and has been of particular use at the beginning of my research. Smaller maps in A3 sketchbooks have allowed more specific ideas to expand and evolve. I have also used mapping at various points in my research diaries on a more basic level to gather together and map out ideas in a more speculative and exploratory way (see figure 2.7). The mapping has manifested much differently in the research diaries; crossing over into the margins of the page where the written entries expanded diagrammatically and transcended the structures of the lines and margins on the book pages. Although the mapping in the research diaries essentially appeared much simpler when seen as a single entry on an isolated page, they possessed a complexity in that they consist of smaller multiple and interrelated pages layered together within the overall space of the books. This allowed different movements across and between ideas compared to the larger map where all of the information was on the same plane.

I've been looking at the research diary as a piece of mapping itself as it has started to evolve and become more three-dimensional with the fold-out pieces of text and images. When I started it, I assumed that it would be a book of writing and that the writing could also extend to mapping out ideas within the research diary itself, but I didn't consider that it could evolve

⁴⁰⁷ Harvey, S. *The Force of Mapping*, 2010, p6

⁴⁰⁸ Böhm, K. *Who is Building What: Relational Art Practice and Spatial Production*, 2009, p13

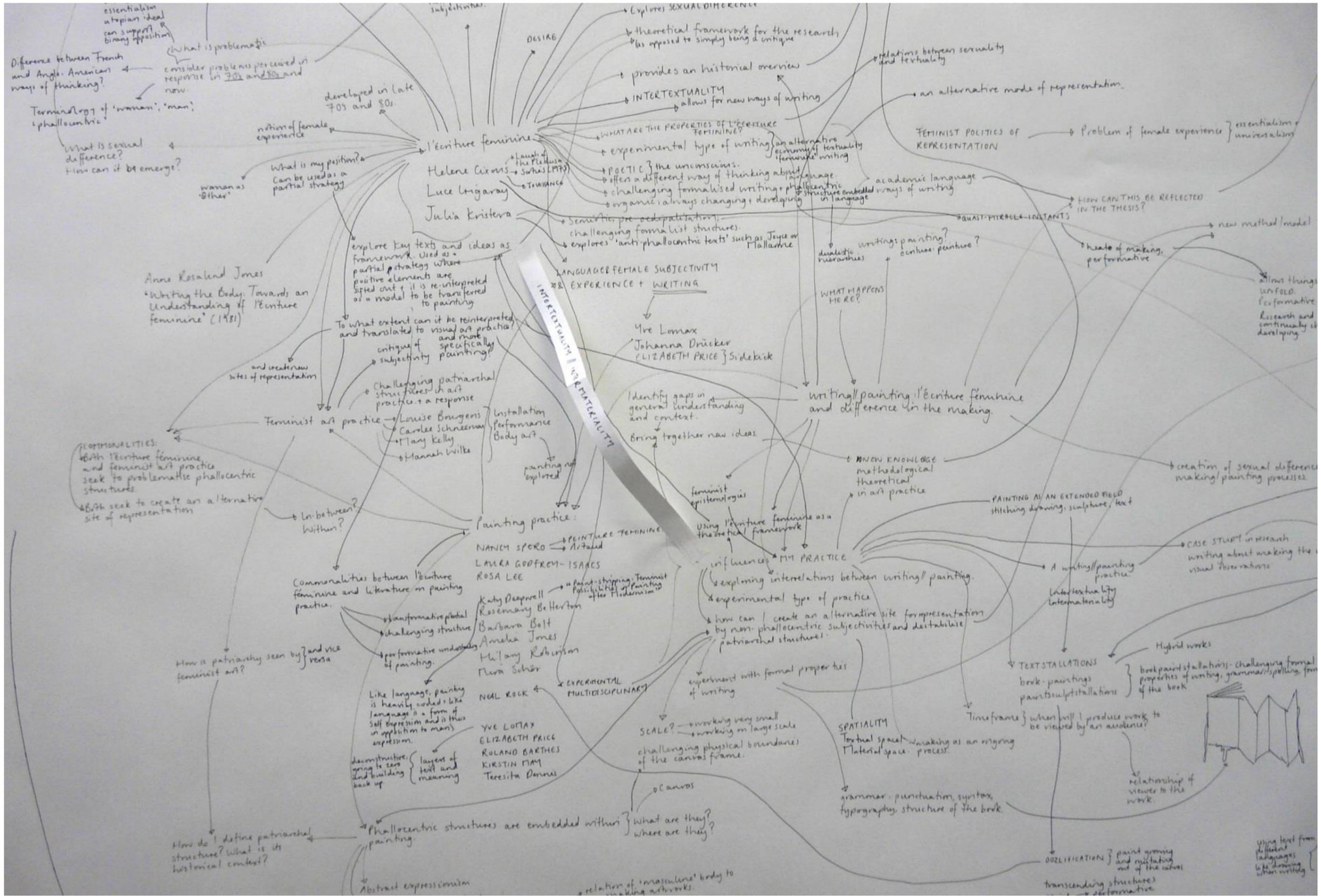


Figure 2.5 Image of mapping on studio wall, (2010), 6 x 8ft

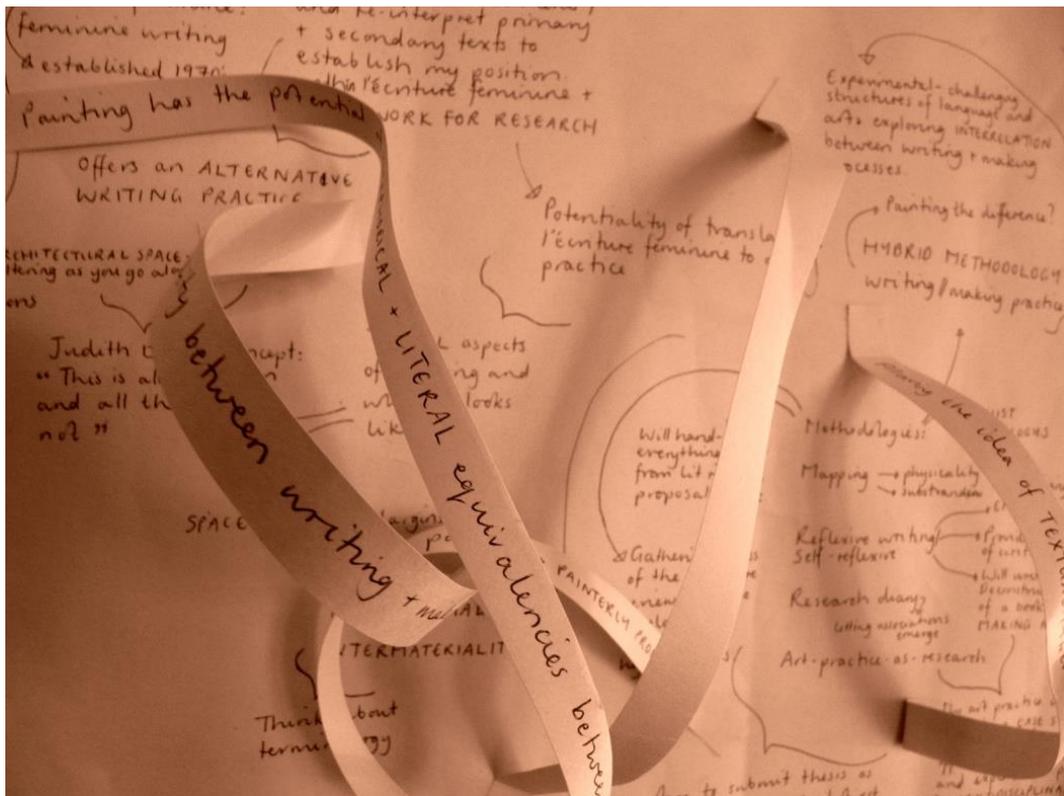


Figure 2.6 Detail of mapping in studio, (2009), 2 x 3ft

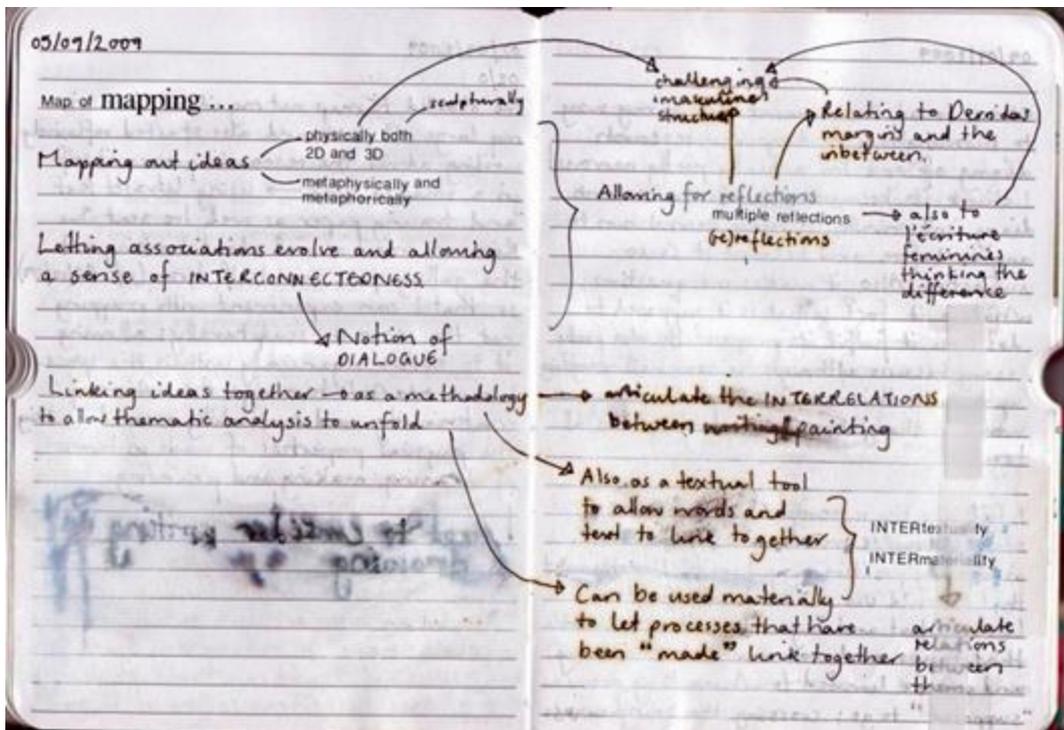


Figure 2.7 Map of mapping in research diary, (2009)

*both visually and physically as mapping ideas together as well.*⁴⁰⁹

Moments of mapping both on large-scale paper and in the research diaries evolved sculpturally; extending beyond the limits and edges of the paper and also the flatness of the text and the pictorial plane. The sculptural element that emerged through mapping linked both to the non-oppositional thinking of *l'écriture féminine* and textual qualities such as 'excess' and 'tactility'. The mapping resulted in the development of what I have called 'textstallations'.⁴¹⁰ In the two textstallations I made, *Encounter with the text* (2009), (see figure 2.8) and *Blisses of materiality* (2011), (see figure 2.9), I mapped out the ideas central to my research at the time allowing it to evolve into an installation throughout the gallery space. My reconceptualisation of abstract painting as a spatiality comprising multiple heterogeneous spaces which forms the logic of my new concept and practice of *peinture féminine*, emerged through the construction of the textstallations through the expanded sculptural process of mapping. My use of mapping as forming part of my writing//painting

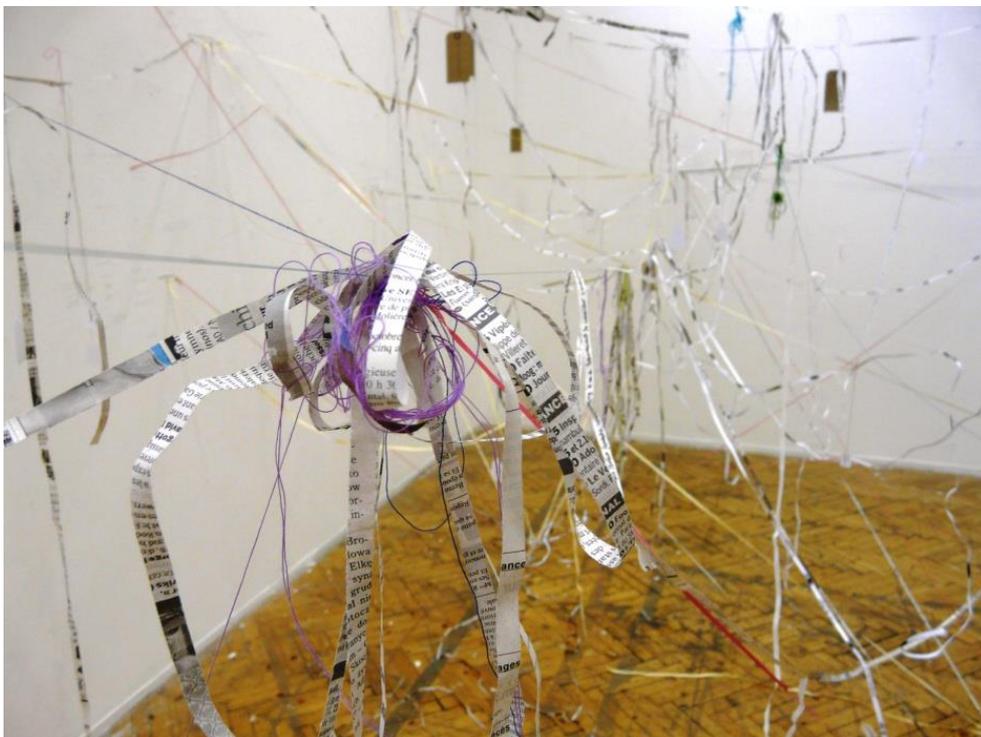


Figure 2.8 *Encounter with the text*, (2009)

⁴⁰⁹ Research diary extract 27.09.2009

⁴¹⁰ The textstallations are further elaborated in relation to *peinture féminine* in Chapter 4.

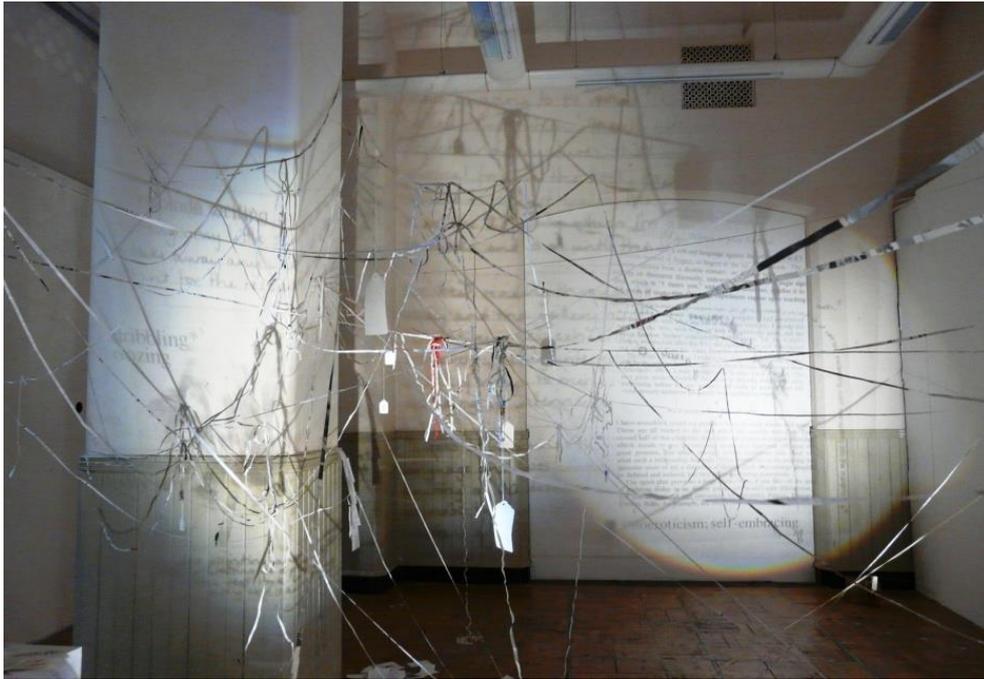


Figure 2.9 *Blisses of materiality*, (2011)

approach thus originated and functioned methodologically, allowing key ideas to emerge through interconnecting them together spatially. However, it also functioned as an artwork in which further meaning came into being through material handling and praxical knowledge.

By being able to map into the space sculpturally, I was able to articulate interconnections between writing and making. New ideas emerged during the process of mapping that I had not yet considered; I actually wrote some of my 9r [registration document] on the strips as I was putting it together.⁴¹¹ I ended up interconnecting elements of it almost instinctively as I went along. The forms evolved from a non-preconceived way through working dialogically with the materials to negotiate how to move forward. In this way, it was both a piece of research and an artwork.⁴¹² The actual process of ‘making’ it involved was not just the process of artmaking in terms of working with materials but also included writing.⁴¹³

10. Research Diary

Throughout my research I have kept a research diary, culminating in four volumes.

Initially, the purpose of the research diary was as a tool to reflectively record and document

⁴¹¹ Research diary extract 28.10.2009

⁴¹² Research diary extract 30.10.2009

⁴¹³ Research diary extract 16.11.2009

my subjective responses to my art practice and to provide an insight into the making process, thus aiding me in analysing my artwork. Throughout my research however, the status of the research diary has shifted; reflexively informing and responding to the emergence of key ideas in my practice and the research as a whole. It also seems to have responded to *l'écriture féminine* as a 'lens' to approach my research by unexpectedly embodying some of its qualities. It has developed as a fundamental element of the writing//painting approach reflecting the concept and practice of *peinture féminine* by being multilayered and consisting of conventions as layered into the research diaries to 'expand' them. As a result, the research diary has evolved into a much more complex and multifaceted 'artefact', both conceptually and in its physical and textual manifestation. It can be seen as another layer of creative research activity necessary to the production of artworks⁴¹⁴ and as a peripheral narrative.⁴¹⁵ As Emlyn Jones notes, it functions as a meta-enquiry in which the process of research itself has become a means of learning about research.⁴¹⁶ As my writing//painting methodology is performative, dialogic, reflexive and emergent, the reflection of the research process itself has become fundamental in enabling it to be more fully articulated.

I have acknowledged the research diaries in this thesis as being a fundamental component of my research, complementary to and productive of different elements of my research and its articulation. They can be seen as related objects of thinking with the other elements of the research.⁴¹⁷ I have drawn on the wealth of ideas, 'moments' and information collected in the research diaries by including small extracts in this chapter and the final two chapters. The inclusion of these extracts draw on Cixous' text *Rootprints: Memory and Life Writing* (1997), (see figure 2.10) in which boxes appear in the main text at various points

⁴¹⁴ Fortnum, R. and Smith, C. *The Problem of Documenting Fine Art Practices and Processes*, 2007, p172

⁴¹⁵ Suleiman, S. *Subjectivity in Flux*, 2006, p48

⁴¹⁶ Emlyn Jones, T. *A Method of Search for Reality: Research and Research Degrees in Art and Design*, 2006, p234

⁴¹⁷ As Macleod and Holdridge point out, the doctoral thesis does not reside in the written text alone; the submission is determined by the 'relation of parts' and is made up of 'multi-parts' which reflect experience itself and how consciousness can be articulated: "drawings; diaries; travelogues; academic written texts; interviews; poetic texts, all these are part of a panoply of possible modes of delivering thought ... this is the vital stuff of art practice" (*Related Objects of Thought: art and thought, theory and practice*, 2005, p144)

haps. And I suppose that this is what makes it *my* affair too: that endlessly restaged *otherness*; the fact that I am incessantly thwarted (in my habits) by the other. What every reader tends to repress because it is more comfortable being in an illusion of sameness. Such that I (reader) find my bearings where I have no bearings; I find my bearings where I become lost. There is a sort of irremediable, never finished cutting into pieces of I-me. This is what holds me back at first; it is what I would say about your books:

<i>I know that it's by being unknown to myself, that I live.</i>	they recount /-prey-to-the-other. / in a bout of otherness – as one would say a bout of fever. This is
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Figure 2.10 Extract from H el ene Cixous' text *Rootprints: Memory and Life Writing* (1997) showing windows into her notebooks

as windows into her notebooks. They do not simply serve to elucidate her ideas but form another layer of her writing. In my thesis, the extracts from my research diaries have created an intertextual interchange, weaving the meta-narrative of the diaries with the rest of the thesis. Rather than being referenced through formal quotations, the extracts have been signified through *the text shifting to another typeface* to maintain the flow of the text. The research diary extracts also include 'art-writing' which have taken place at particular moments and in different forms throughout the research diaries.⁴¹⁸

The sketchbook is conventionally used to record processes and ideas in Art and Design in a range of media. It is also largely experimental and a space for material thinking before or during making an artwork. The journal or diary however, is a literary convention typically used for writing. Although it is a conventional means of recording information in research, it is not a means immediately obvious in Art and Design.⁴¹⁹ In art practice, a research journal or diary can be a complementary method of capturing the dynamism in practice, which is flexible, responsive, improvisational and reflexive.⁴²⁰ As Darren Newbury notes, it can be a stimulus for reflective thinking that brings together images and words.⁴²¹ A sketchbook can be seen as a collection of visual ideas, notes and contextual thinking that contain the development of ideas over time and subsequent reflection and analysis in an

⁴¹⁸ Because the research diary entries are written in situ in a quick and 'free-flowing' manner, slippages have frequently occurred in the text. These include spelling errors, repeated words, omitted words and colloquial language. Although these slippages form a fundamental element of the diaries, the extracts presented in the thesis have been edited to ensure they are more readable for the viewer rather than being exact quotations of the text.

⁴¹⁹ Emlyn Jones, T. A Method of Search for Reality: Research and Research Degrees in Art and Design, 2006, p234

⁴²⁰ Gray, C. and Malins, J. Visualising Research: A Guide to the Research Process in Art & Design, 2004, p59

⁴²¹ Newbury, D. Diaries and Fieldnotes in the Research Process, 2001

often unordered and unsequenced way. According to Carol Gray and Julian Malins, a reflective journal goes beyond the sketchbook in that it is a much more structured and deliberate research method which enables much more effective conversations.⁴²² They argue that the research diary is used for both research and practice by documenting works in progress by recording experiments with materials and processes and that even in the context of Art and Design, it needs to have 'factual and precisely detailed records' and may include photographs, material samples, diagrams and charts.⁴²³ Within the context of my research, my research diaries combine these approaches in an experimental way as framed by my writing//painting approach.

The research diary has provided a space; one of thought, one of gathering and one of interaction and interchanges. It has not just documented ideas *for* the research, but functioned *as part of* the research. Rather than containing precise factual data or material samples as suggested by Gray and Malins, the research diaries can be seen as similar to the artist's sketchbook or writer's notebook. They are journalistic but not limited to text, extending at particular moments into the painterly mark or poetic textual experiments such as one might find in the provisional spaces of the sketchbook or notebook. Yet, they are structured through the chronology of entries and framed by the conventions of the book and its pages as structured by lines and margins.

All of the entries in the research diaries have been handwritten, collating ideas and reflections reflectively through the physical act of writing. As my research developed, there were multiple moments within the research diaries where writing slid into making and parts of the pages included collage, stitching, drawing and painting (see figures 2.11-2.14).

The research diary has started to evolve in an unexpected and interesting way. I initially thought that I would use the diary for writing and a separate sketchbook for experimenting with Letraset text and other materials, layering them together. I suppose that it was inevitable

⁴²² Gray, C. and Malins, J. *Visualising Research: A Guide to the Research Process in Art & Design*, 2004, p113

⁴²³ *Ibid*, p60

that they would crossover into the diary and not be limited to where they are “supposed” to go; crossing boundaries with one another and manifesting in hybrid moments or slippages.⁴²⁴

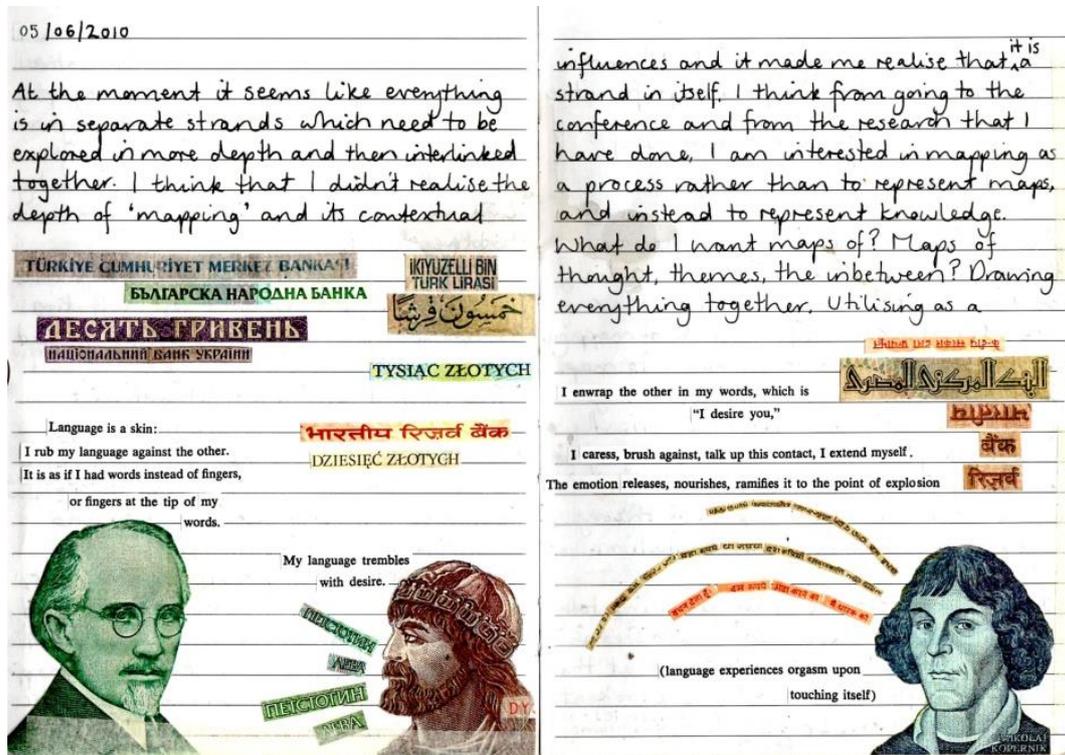


Figure 2.11 Example of research diary extending to collage, (2010)

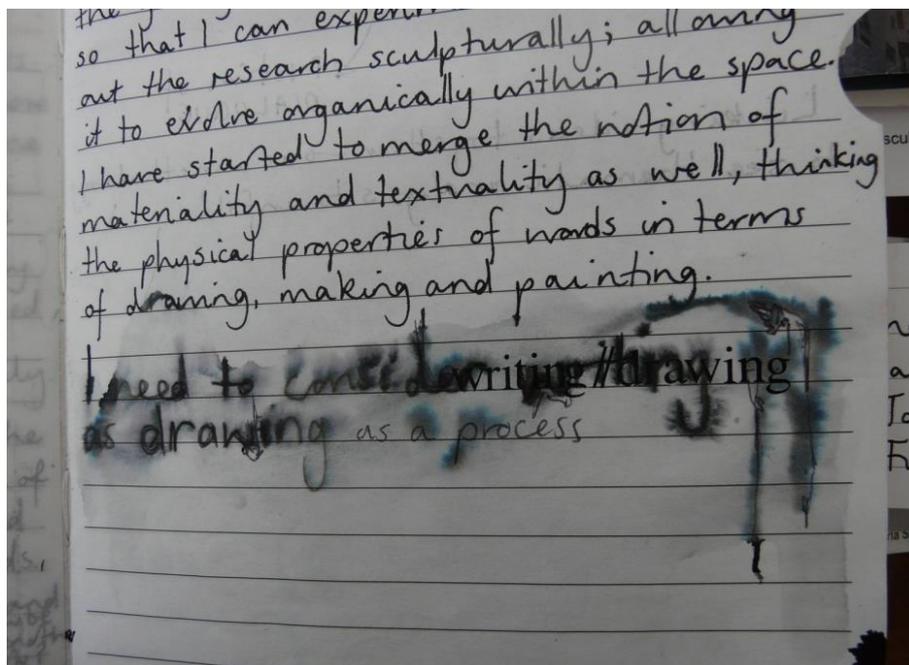


Figure 2.12 Example of research diary where handwriting slides into drawing, (2010)

⁴²⁴ Research diary extract 09.09.2009

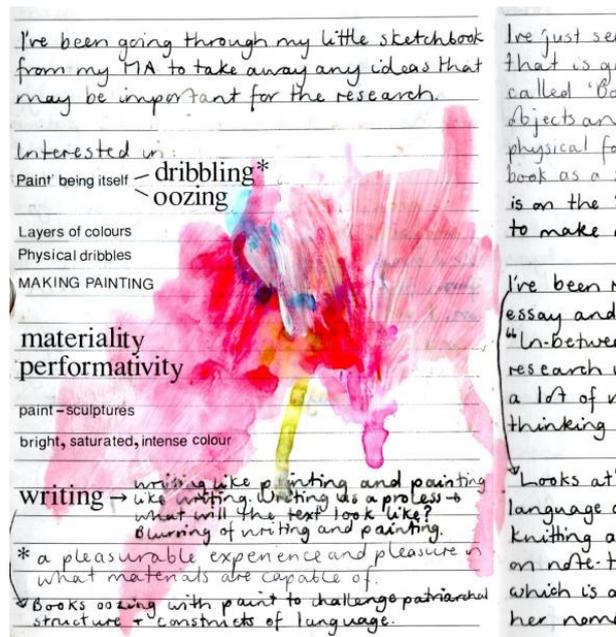


Figure 2.13 Example of research diary incorporating painting, (2010)

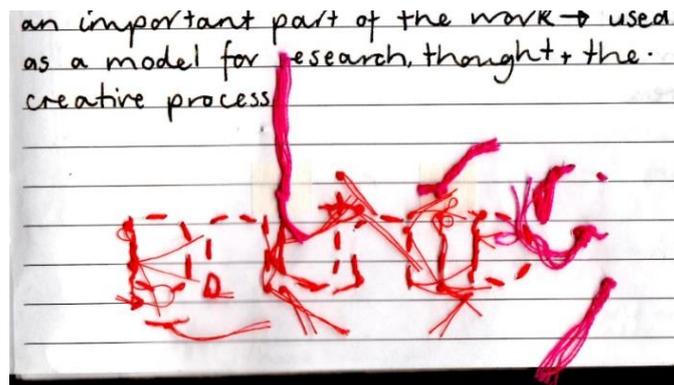


Figure 2.14 Detail of research diary incorporating stitching, (2010)

The process of handwriting can be seen to be diagrammatical in nature and similar to drawing. Indeed, as Kelly Chorpening notes, writing and drawing share an etymological root; they are graphic arts.⁴²⁵ Although writing and making may appear as discrete disciplines that employ different sets of rules for comprehension, for the maker there is a similarity of process. From a phenomenological perspective “writing retains the potential to slide into drawing; drawn lines can easily become letters”.⁴²⁶ This also refers to the French notion of *écriture*⁴²⁷ which is not limited to writing as defined in the English sense.

⁴²⁵ Chorpening, K. Drawing-Inside-Writing, 2012, p2

⁴²⁶ Ibid

⁴²⁷ See glossary for further explanation

The blurring of writing and making through the unpredictable interaction and colliding of each in the space of the diary, has enabled it to be seen as encompassing hybrid moments amidst the writing//painting interrelation in which one is indistinguishable from the other.⁴²⁸ It refers to the importance of the writing//painting approach as utilising the textual practice of *l'écriture féminine* as a 'lens' to approach painting as a material practice. It has enabled me to think through my work both textually and materially and through their hybridisation. Through this, the pages of the diaries have also become artworks in themselves through their textual, visual and material dialogues and collisions, acting as a layer of my art practice. Moreover, the portable nature of the research diary means it is always at hand *within* the studio during material production and handling, where writing, reading and research occur in the same space. In this sense, the research diary can be seen to exist amidst my writing//painting practice and as a parallel dimension of the work. The research diary has also evolved to become a sculptural object with layers of text and images physically overflowing the conventional boundaries of the book and exceeding themselves (see figures 2.15 and 2.16).

*I've decided to photograph my research diary as an object in itself: rather than merely as a "book" or something that simply contains writing. I like the fact that the images show the diary as transformed from what is considered a normative book to something quite tactile and interactive where images and text need to be discovered and physically unfolded to interpret them. There is also a lot of layering and the 'book' itself is multi-faceted, revealing layers as I read.*⁴²⁹

The research diary is also a space of thought and provisional ideas about what it is I am doing and how the work may become (see figure 2.17). The ideas gathered are not finite conclusions or consolidated ideas, but a space of doing and being. It has enabled me to 'think painting' by reflecting on the causes of making. It is also a space of material thinking

⁴²⁸ There is also an intertextual and intermaterial dialogic interrelation in the research diaries. This has informed my art practice and particular artworks such as 'book-paintings' and 'painting-poems' which I discuss in Chapter 4.

⁴²⁹ Research diary extract 27.09.2009

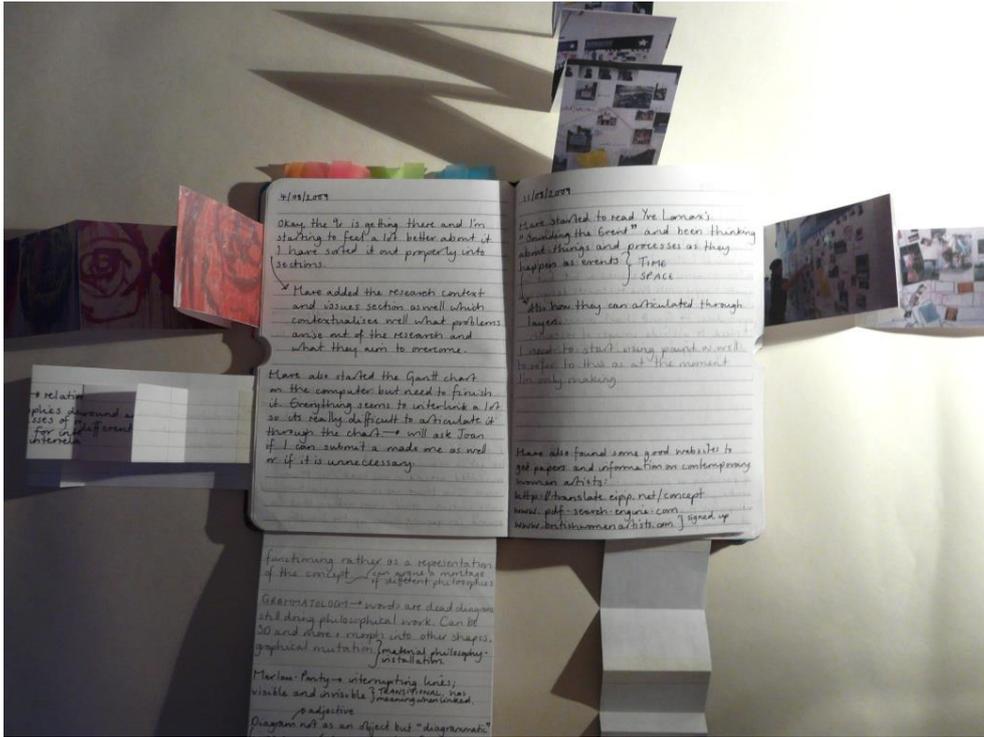


Figure 2.15 Example of research diary as sculptural

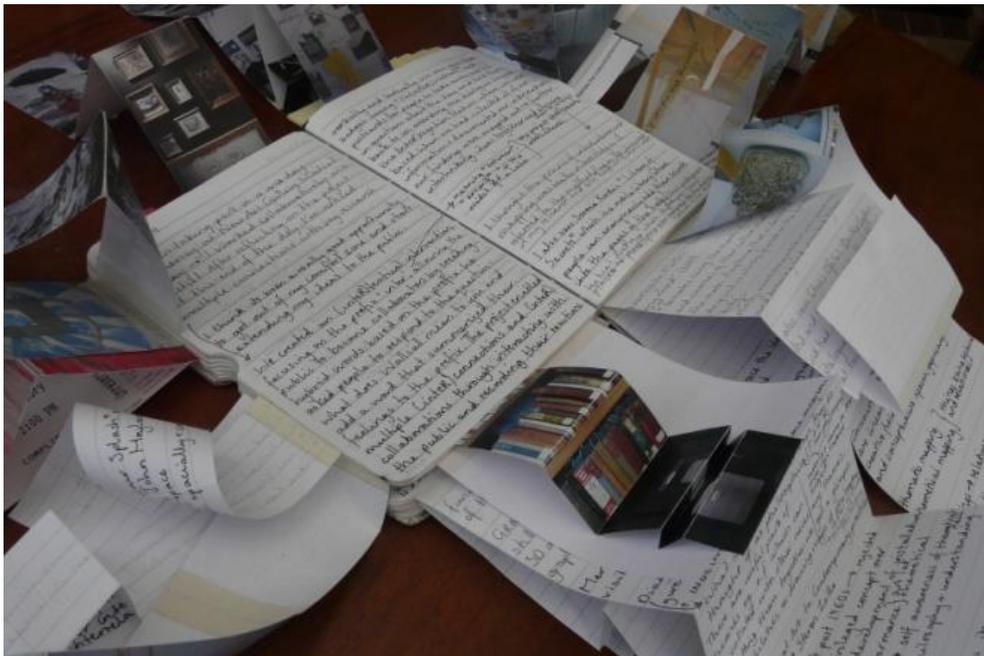


Figure 2.16 Example of research diary as sculptural

that has enabled me to make sense of material handling and the unknowing of practice and also to think through the *doing* of the rest of the research. Writing in the research diary makes sense of things through 'writing-thinking', as building on the artist Flore Gardner's work which incorporates 'drawing=thinking', in which drawing or doodling is a form of

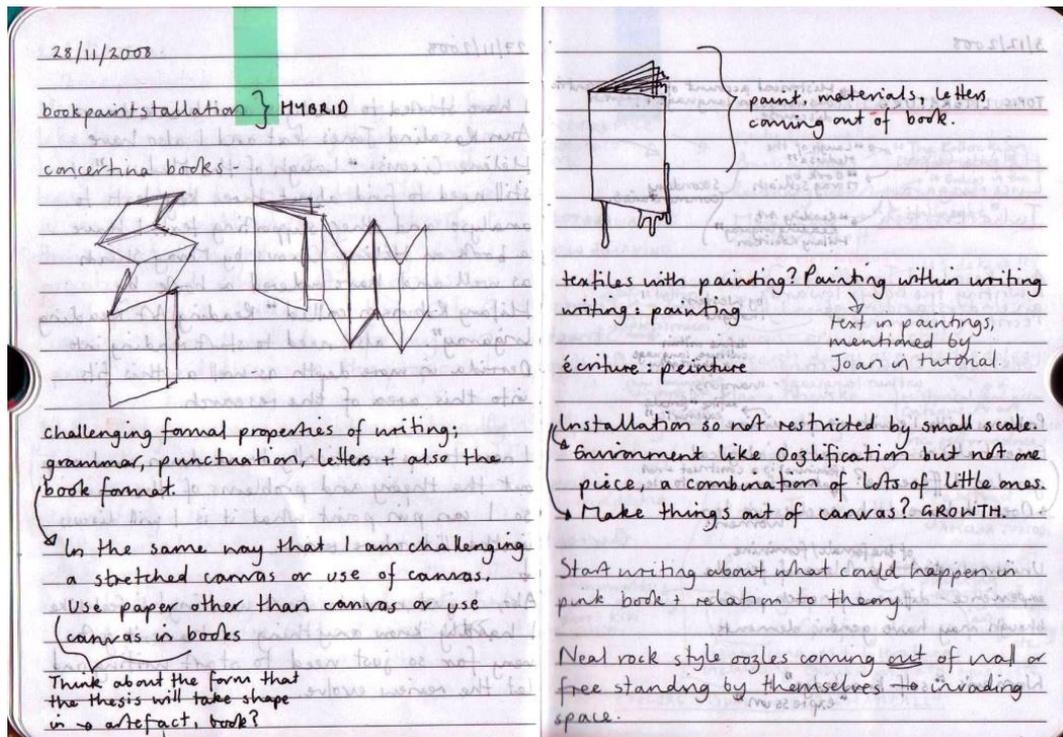


Figure 2.17 Example of thinking about how ideas may 'become' in research diary

thinking and note-taking and allows the mind to wander.⁴³⁰ In relation to my research aims of how things can come into being through making and the unknowing of practice, writing-thinking in my research diary has proven essential in thinking through the process of making as the artist does not necessarily come to understand what and how they do what they do as well as what it is they have done immediately, but only over time.⁴³¹

My research diary also includes the interaction of different types of writing. It includes an analysis of artworks and the process of making by retrospectively writing about my experiences of painting and recalling and reflecting on what has happened. This type of writing has taken the form of reflections usually recorded at the end of the day or on the day after the event and subsequent re-reflections. It facilitates connections between different ideas and a dialogue with the work as well as contextual ideas and the articulation of particular themes. This writing is complemented by writing manifest in different forms, which has taken place *during* the act of making. Whilst it is not possible for one to physically write and paint as two different and separate and yet interconnected activities, I have written in the

⁴³⁰ Gardner, F. 'In-between-ness': Embroidering on History, 2010, p30

⁴³¹ Fortnum, R. On Not Knowing; how artists think, 2009, p1

pauses or moments within or amidst the making process normally used for reflection such as sitting back and looking at the work to consider what I have done, what I will do next and why/how this may or may not work.

11. Art-writing

I have termed this second type of writing 'art-writing', which draws on Katy Macleod's notion of 'art/writing' as an entity that is a theoretical synthesis of art and writing; "that is, art as writing and writing as art".⁴³² Rather than just thinking about ideas during the dialogue of making, I have written performatively, descriptively and reflexively about the process of making as a form of 'writing-thinking'. This writing can be seen to come from being submerged *within* the making process and rather like making, writing in this way has enabled ideas to emerge *through* its practice. Rather than being edited and reworked over time, it is shaped at the point of utterance and captures ideas immediately.

Macleod's art/writing considers how theory can arise *in* and *through* art and be mobilised by writing. It explores how the artist's use of writing can bring us closer to the language needed to more fully understand the theorising of encounters with art and can enable an understanding of the complexities of language in relation to the actuality of experience and its incompleteness.⁴³³ Macleod cites Elizabeth Price's doctoral submission *sidekick* (2000) as an entity of art/writing, which she describes as a 'live address' or 'research soliloquy'⁴³⁴ to her artwork *Boulder* (1998) (see plate 11), forming an evolving theorisation in 'live time', without completion.⁴³⁵ My notion of art-writing also draws on Lomax's notion of 'Art Writing' which explores writing as a form of art-making that experiments with the non-division between practice and theory. She seeks to examine what writing can do and what it can develop and envelop as well as exploring writing as constituting visual art practice.⁴³⁶

⁴³² Macleod, K. A Singular Encounter with Art Theorisation: A Speculation Concerning Art/Writing in the Context of Doctoral Research, 2007, p1

⁴³³ *Ibid*, p16

⁴³⁴ *Ibid*, p4

⁴³⁵ *Ibid*, p7

⁴³⁶ Lomax, Y. Writing the Image: An Adventure with Art and Theory, 2000, pxii

Building on these ideas, my art-writing is productive to using *l'écriture féminine* as a 'lens' in which to consider abstract painting. It builds on *l'écriture féminine* as being foremost a *practice* of writing which is "the very possibility of change".⁴³⁷ Vincs discusses her practice as not directed at reaching somewhere as meaning, signifying or producing an outcome and asserts that the ultimate destination of writing in relation to her practice isn't as important as the territory it weaves through.⁴³⁸ In a similar way, my art-writing has formed a reflexive and performative textual wandering which is shaped at the point of utterance. It builds on what Cixous calls the 'gesture of writing'.⁴³⁹ Following Cixous, the written utterance of the word has a different logic and resistance through the emphasis on the performative potential of syntactical framing where writing can be seen as a specific way of thinking, which is realised through and as gestures.⁴⁴⁰ This conceptualisation of writing draws on Cixous' metaphor of writing and language as a forest whereby:

The rooted forest is a complex and multidimensional place constituted through a subtle yet resilient balance of interdependencies, symbiotic and parasitic relationships and cross-fertilisations; a biotope in a dynamic process of change, of becoming, regeneration and decay. Its distinct cycle of vegetation is shaped by, adapts to and moulds the environment in which it is situated and with which it interacts⁴⁴¹

As Gaylene Perry notes about her own doctoral research in which her thesis was presented as a novel, the process of writing itself as a studio enquiry can lead to knowledge not necessarily discernible on the surface of the creative work, but as moments of clarity that appear in the writing process.⁴⁴² For Perry, the physical act of writing in her journal by writing descriptively as she travelled as part of her research became a creative work in itself which allowed her to 'strike something solid as she wrote'; thus the act of writing in her journal became part of the writing of her thesis, even though few of the words can be found in it.⁴⁴³

⁴³⁷ Cixous, H. *The Laugh of the Medusa*, 1976, p12

⁴³⁸ Vincs, K. *Rhizome/MyZone: A Case Study in Studio-Based Dance Research*, 2007, p108

⁴³⁹ Cixous, H. and Calle-Gruber, M. *Hélène Cixous: Rootprints: Memory and Life Writing*, 1997, p26

⁴⁴⁰ Mey, K. *The gesture of writing*, 2006, p206

⁴⁴¹ Cixous, H. and Calle-Gruber M. *Op cit.*, 1997, p84

⁴⁴² Perry, G. *History Documents, Art Reveals: Creative Writing as Research*, 2007, p35

⁴⁴³ *Ibid*, p37

Unlike Macleod's art/writing, which she theorises as happening in other's work, my art-writing is part of and articulates my own art practice. As part of my writing//painting approach, it also informs my art practice by extending to physically manifesting in parts of the work and being intertwined with painting. The exploration of sexual difference as manifesting through the handling of materials is key to my research aims. Art-writing has made sense of the tacit knowledge and unknowing produced through 'material thinking' that is involved in the making of my work in the studio and also in work that has been produced in the gallery space. As Fortnum asserts, "the studio allows the artist to live *with* and *in* the process, staving off resolution or closure"⁴⁴⁴ where there is a to-ing and fro-ing between knowing and not knowing in the creative process.⁴⁴⁵ Art-writing seeks to frame and articulate the material knowledge and moments of unknowing that arise out of my painting practice through revealing ideas and enabling theorisation through the practice of writing. As part of my writing//painting methodological approach, my art-writing thus facilitates a double articulation: knowledge or knowing can be seen to arise from writing as well as the material production of my art practice and secondly it also arises from the interaction between the two in the writing//painting relation. In following Proust's quotation at the beginning of this thesis, it has enabled me to see with 'new eyes'.

Macleod's art/writing proposes a singular multi-layered encounter with an artwork as a method of conceiving something in a new way.⁴⁴⁶ My art-writing can be seen as happening from *within* the moment of making in 'live time'. It functions as a 'live theorisation'⁴⁴⁷ in the visual present of my encounter with it, in which new things come to light. Writing from direct experience in this way has opened out the critical moment of the artwork's production and a description of its own purposes, which has created new understandings and theory.⁴⁴⁸ Writing *about* art practice positions writing in a hierarchical relation, privileged above practice in which it simply serves to elucidate and articulate the artwork, masking the productive

⁴⁴⁴ Fortnum, R. On Not Knowing; how artists think, 2009, p1

⁴⁴⁵ *Ibid*, p3

⁴⁴⁶ Macleod, K. A Singular Encounter with Art Theorisation: A Speculation Concerning Art/Writing in the Context of Doctoral Research, 2007, p1

⁴⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p2

⁴⁴⁸ *Ibid*, p16

elements of writing.⁴⁴⁹ Instead, art-writing as revealing the ‘unknown’ rather than documenting the work displaces a hierarchical structure where one precedes and the other explains, but positions writing as an action where new perspectives are achieved in the act of writing. It does not demonstrate practice, but *is* practice and mobilises the artwork. As Macleod notes in reference to Price’s *sidekick*, art/writing can thus be:

... conceived as a resistance to research conventions which hierarchizes the relationship between the written and the visual⁴⁵⁰

Price’s art-writing in *sidekick* provokes the reader to grapple with what might be seen as the sum of its related parts.⁴⁵¹ It is the particularity of art practice and experiencing of it that enables us to establish the importance of its ‘live-time’ descriptive criticality as not subordinated to narrative but as an equivalent to it in which the generalisable can become known through the practice of art/writing.⁴⁵² The art-writing I have engaged in does not serve to explain my practice but allows knowledge to be drawn out through writing as productive to mobilising ‘theory’ and theorisation. The act of the art-writing as performing rather than describing is thus directly played out in the thesis.⁴⁵³

12. Conclusions

My writing//painting methodology that I have put forward in this chapter is a new approach that I have developed specifically in relation to my research. It is central to the thinking that goes through into the final two chapters to explore my concept and practice of *peinture féminine* as providing possibilities for abstract painting and moving on from the problematics identified in Chapter 1. Employing a bricolage approach and working cross-disciplinarily has enabled me to bring together thinking from different areas such as *l’écriture féminine* and Modernist abstraction and to open up spaces to see things in new ways. The

⁴⁴⁹ Vincs, K. *Rhizome/MyZone: A Case Study in Studio-Based Dance Research*, 2007, p106

⁴⁵⁰ Macleod, K. *A Singular Encounter with Art Theorisation: A Speculation Concerning Art/Writing in the Context of Doctoral Research*, 2007, p6

⁴⁵¹ Macleod, K. and Holdridge, L. *Related Objects of Thought: art and thought, theory and practice*, 2005, p148

⁴⁵² Macleod, K. *Op cit.*, 2007, p9

⁴⁵³ This also draws closely on *l’écriture féminine*. In reference to Kristeva, Barrett notes that performativity in creative production involves an interaction between the subject as a material process as being, and the subject as a signifying process resulting in the renewal and alteration between both subject and language (Kristeva Reframed, 2011, p131). There is also a focus on practice and difference in the making.

writing//painting methodology can thus be seen to be aligned with a 'non-phallogentric' approach and challenging dominant thinking. In addition, new conceptualisations of mapping, using a research diary and 'art-writing' that I have put forward have also allowed me to make sense of my art practice and have formed a vital part of my writing//painting methodology. These strategies have been central to the development of the next two chapters of my thesis that focus on my art practice and material thinking.

My writing//painting approach offers a way of thinking about practice and theory, writing and painting, the textual and the material (as well as the intertextual and the intermaterial) in ways that are non-oppositional and non-hierarchical. Utilising *l'écriture féminine* as a 'lens' to see abstract painting as grounded in my writing//painting approach has allowed the intertwining of writing and painting to open up spaces within this interrelation in a way that is dialogical and reflexive. In doing so, rather than transposing *l'écriture féminine* into painting or translating its qualities, it has enabled elements of it to manifest in my art practice through material thinking which have then informed the development of my concept and practice of *peinture féminine*.

CHAPTER 3

Peinture féminine: quasacles, the poetic and the intermaterial

Despite the problematics I identified in Chapter 1, I will now argue that particular aspects that I have distilled from *l'écriture féminine* can provide possibilities for abstract painting which open up spaces for the 'feminine'. I have taken the term *la peinture féminine* from its initial context as used by Spero and will put forward in this chapter my own conceptualisation of *peinture féminine*; claiming and rethinking it by arguing for it as a new concept and practice in light of my research aims. My notion of *peinture féminine* moves on from it as a literal translation or painterly equivalent of *l'écriture féminine* as put forward by Spero and others, and attempts to represent the 'feminine' through paint or painting which as I discussed is problematic. *Peinture féminine* involves a reconsideration of *l'écriture féminine* in the context of contemporary abstract painting and its associated politics, moving on from it as a term rooted in 1960s and 1970s philosophy and the problematics identified in Chapter 1. Based on the logic of my writing//painting approach, *peinture féminine* demonstrates how *l'écriture féminine* can be thought *through* abstract painting and used as a 'lens' to see abstract painting with 'new eyes'.

I will firstly propose that *peinture féminine* can 'open up' abstract painting by reconceptualising it as a spatiality made up of 'more complex and multiple spaces'. I will then put forward three interrelating 'elements' of *peinture féminine* which I have drawn from *l'écriture féminine*: 'quasacles', the 'poetic' and the 'intermaterial' as providing possibilities for 'feminine' abstract painting. Building on *l'écriture féminine* as being foremost a practice that can enable transformational possibilities to occur through the process of writing, *peinture féminine* focuses on painting as a process rather than an object to enable 'difference' to emerge *through* making. It elaborates on what the notion of the 'feminine' is and raises questions about how difference can be deployed in this way and in what form it may take by considering difference as also extending but not moving to Derridean *différance*. *Peinture*

féminine does not prescribe a fixed strategy or aesthetic, or pluralism itself as an approach. Like *l'écriture féminine*, it can instead be seen as comprising multiple unfixed and mobile elements that are specific to the individual subject.

1. Rethinking the 'feminine'; thinking difference differently

Peinture féminine involves a rethinking of *l'écriture féminine*'s notion of the 'feminine'; situating it as a historical term originating from a particular socio-cultural and political context. That is, it is unrepresentable within Symbolic language due to its marginalised position to the Phallus as the transcendental signifier, as put forward by Lacan. *Peinture féminine* considers the 'feminine' as not limited to Lacanian definitions of the subject within the Symbolic. It does not reject the Imaginary or Kristeva's more sophisticated theorising of the semiotic. Rather, it acknowledges Bracha Ettinger's 'matrixial difference'⁴⁵⁴ as providing a supplementary perspective to the Symbolic. Ettinger offers a reconceptualisation of sexual difference through rethinking Freud's notion of the intrauterine space *before* Kristeva's semiotic. Here the 'feminine' is not viewed as lacking the Phallus, since it is not defined by castration.⁴⁵⁵ She notes that:

*The intrauterine or womb phantasy is not to be folded retroactively into the castration phantasy but must be considered as co-existing with it, contrary to other pre-Oedipal – postnatal – phantasies based on weaning or on separation from organs as part-objects.*⁴⁵⁶

Ettinger challenges any notion of fixed identity. Her intrauterine 'feminine' or 'matrixial' pre-natal encounter is instead a scene of "emergence at once traumatic, scattered, partial, multiple, non-unified and non-unifiable" which challenges "the very ontological designations "I am" and "you are" ".⁴⁵⁷ Ettinger rethinks the 'feminine' and subjectivity as moving on from the subject as defined by 'lack' to 'subjectivity-as-encounter' where "*partial subjects* composed of co-emerging *I*'s and *non-I*'s simultaneously inhabit a shared borderspace"⁴⁵⁸

⁴⁵⁴ Please see glossary for further explanation

⁴⁵⁵ Ettinger, B. *The Matrixial Borderspace*, 2006, p46

⁴⁵⁶ *Ibid*, p47

⁴⁵⁷ Butler, J. *Bracha's Eurydice*, 2006, px

⁴⁵⁸ Ettinger, B. *Metramorphic Borderlinks and Matrixial Borderspace*, 1996, p124

not signified by the Phallus. Instead the subject can be seen as becoming or co-emerging through transubjective and intersubjective relations of several becoming subjectivities.

Peinture féminine reconsiders what the 'feminine' and the sign 'woman' may mean. In doing so it 'troubles'⁴⁵⁹ the sexual specificity of abstract painting as proposed by feminist artists and critics in the 1980s and 1990s and moves on from Irigaray's *parler femme* as linked to female morphology. For example, Betterton has argued that embodiment has the potential to reclaim *female* authorship for non-representational painting⁴⁶⁰ where a feminist investment in painting lies in issues of gendered embodiment and spectatorship to articulate the complexity of being and looking as a woman.⁴⁶¹ Feminists, in their search for the equality of 'woman' with 'man' however, have maintained binary categories with gender as two. As Butler points out, this "implicitly retains the belief in a mimetic relation for gender to sex whereby gender mirrors sex".⁴⁶² 'Woman' here is seen as a universal 'other' to 'man' and implies a common identity. As Drucilla Cornell notes however, gender can no longer be used to legitimately name a social category.⁴⁶³

Peinture féminine asserts a move away from female morphology as suggested by Irigaray and feminist thought. It repositions ideas of *l'écriture féminine* by following on from Butler as considering gender as independent of sex where 'man' and 'masculine' may as easily signify a female body as a male one, and 'woman' and 'feminine' a male body as easily a female one.⁴⁶⁴ Butler's notion of gender as the delimitation of a coherent social identity for women is based on the repetition of imposed norms and a reiterated social performance⁴⁶⁵ that decides how our bodies are given meaning and gendered.⁴⁶⁶ Following

⁴⁵⁹ I have used the term 'troubles' in reference to Judith Butler's notion of troubling "gender categories that support gender hierarchy and compulsory heterosexuality" (*Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, 1999, pxxx). For Butler, 'trouble' does not have a negative connotation but implies a destabilisation that contests authority and power structures embedded in binary thinking.

⁴⁶⁰ Betterton, R. *Bodies in the Work: The Aesthetics and Politics of Women's Non-Representational Painting*, 1996, p79

⁴⁶¹ Betterton, R. *Unframing Women's Painting*, 2004, p 5

⁴⁶² Butler, J. *Op cit.*, 1999, p9

⁴⁶³ Cornell, D. *Gender in America*, 2004, p38

⁴⁶⁴ *Ibid*

⁴⁶⁵ For Butler, identity is enacted through acts and gestures that are performative in the sense that the identity they aim to express are fabrications manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs on the surface of the body. She asserts that "the gendered body is performative suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constructs its reality" (*Op cit.*, 1999, p185)

⁴⁶⁶ Cornell, D. *Op cit.*, 2004, p40

on from such thought then, 'woman' and identity can be thought of as not just in opposition to 'man' but aligned with more recent ideas of subjectivity that encompass a 'sheerness of difference'.⁴⁶⁷

Like Kristeva's semiotic which is maternal and 'feminine', but not necessarily in relation to women as embodied subjects, Ettinger's 'matrixial' space is also sexually indifferent and independent of sexual identity and gender. As Pollock notes:

Matrixial difference arises from the sexual specificity of the feminine that every subject, irrespective of later sexuality or gender identification, encounters in the process of becoming, and from artworking⁴⁶⁸

Ettinger's intrauterine space, like Kristeva's semiotic *chora*, does not consider the body at this point as gendered. *Peinture féminine* builds on these ideas to avoid sexual difference as a rigid ontology assigned to 'masculine' or 'feminine'.⁴⁶⁹ In addition to not being limited to Lacan's Phallic model, I have used the term 'feminine' as not limited to 'woman' as a rigid cultural category. It troubles any sort of rigid binary and acknowledges that subjectivity incorporates a spectrum of difference in an array of bodies that cannot be so clearly or normatively defined as 'masculine' or 'feminine' and not limited to gender.⁴⁷⁰ Indeed, in Chapter 4, I will argue that the work of Cy Twombly and Neal Rock is aligned with *peinture féminine*, regardless of their gender designation as male.

Although *peinture féminine* enables feminist possibilities, it is not limited to a feminist project for women, however multi-dimensionally the sign 'woman' may be made to signify. It seems that any rigid categorisation of *peinture féminine* as feminist would be problematic and provide limitations. As feminism's focus on the politics of representation and as seeking a political voice for women as equal with men is not the primary aim of this research, it is thus essential to distinguish between feminist and 'feminine'. Such a move allows feminist

⁴⁶⁷ Sedgwick, E. K. *Epistemology of the Closet*, 2008; these ideas have generally been understood and accepted in various discourses and include issues of intersection in terms of the trans versus biological body. For example, writing at such interstices by Judith Halberstam, Gayatri Spivak, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Ned Katz and bell hooks in addition to Butler has built on this. *Peinture féminine* is aligned with these conceptions of subjectivity and 'difference' rather than those identified solely with *l'écriture féminine* and put forward by feminist arguments for equality in the 1960s to 1990s.

⁴⁶⁸ Pollock, G. *Femininity: Aporia or Sexual Difference?*, 2006, p3

⁴⁶⁹ *Ibid*, p47

⁴⁷⁰ An example of this can be seen in Judith Halberstam's exploration into female masculinity as different to dominant heterosexual masculinity of white middle-class maleness whereby masculinity is not necessarily linked to biological maleness and extends beyond the male body, (*Female Masculinity*, 1998, p2). This is further explored in her recent book *Gaga Feminism: Sex, Gender and the end of Normal*, 2012

possibilities *and* a focus on opening up spaces for ‘feminine’ subjectivities to ‘come-into-being’ that are not just spaces for women. In this sense, *peinture féminine* also questions what ‘feminist’ practice may mean today, by repositioning it in line with more recent conceptualisations of subjectivity not defined or categorised by gender. Whilst feminist politics are still important in today’s context, it seems more beneficial to widen the definition of feminist and consider the intersection of feminist and ‘feminine’.

2. Renegotiating historicity

The development of *peinture féminine* not only involves a rethinking of *l’écriture féminine* in relation to more recent ideas of subjectivity, but also of abstract painting. Contemporary abstract painting does not exist as a static discourse removed from historical ideas of abstraction. Indeed, painters today are “conscious of their production as sharing in an array of practices and conventions with deep roots in history”.⁴⁷¹ As Michael Astbury notes, as a cultural activity, painting cannot rid itself entirely of its past as its past always returns to ‘haunt’ its present status.⁴⁷² Abstract painting is in a continual state of evolution and transformation in relation to previous forms and contexts where there is a simultaneous development from and in relation to previous ideas.⁴⁷³ Therefore, although contemporary abstract painting has evolved, it seems to me that the binary thinking and conventions inherent in Modernist abstraction lurk within and beneath its structures and still need to be renegotiated. Indeed, as Linda Besemer points out:

The idea of pure formalism is still alive and kicking – bolstered by those who still believe in the Modernist myth and by those who wish for its end⁴⁷⁴

Jim Mooney argues that the contemporary condition of painting appears to have an entangled, intimate and longstanding relation to death; one in endless ferment and which lends painting its continued life force and resistance to the writers of its many obituaries.⁴⁷⁵ For Mooney, painting’s survival is secured by a failure to mourn whereby the painter enters

⁴⁷¹ Schwabsky, B. *Everyday Painting*, 2011, p11

⁴⁷² Astbury, M. *Tracing Hybrid Strategies in Brazilian Modern Art*, 2003, p140

⁴⁷³ Harris, J. *Hybridity versus Tradition: Contemporary Art and Cultural Politics*, 2003, p240

⁴⁷⁴ Besemer, L. *Abstraction: Politics and Possibilities*, 2005

⁴⁷⁵ Mooney, J. *Painting: poignancy and ethics*, 2005, p133

into a continuous and extended dialogue with the 'dead body' of painting, inevitably evoking its long, distinguished and degraded history.⁴⁷⁶ Indeed, Jonathan Harris notes that "painting, perhaps, is *always* being revived and *always* being kicked in the teeth by someone".⁴⁷⁷ My concept and practice of *peinture féminine* does not reject abstraction nor its conventions altogether. Neither is it tempted "to be seduced by ... other, supposedly, more vital practices".⁴⁷⁸ It instead seeks to renegotiate abstract painting's history as embedded in Modernist abstraction and rethink it in relation to the current context of painting and social and cultural ideas as non-oppositional whereby this continual renegotiation creates its vitality. In reference to the opening quotation in the introduction by Proust, *peinture féminine* does not seek new landscapes 'beyond' or 'outside' abstraction. Instead, by having 'new eyes' it reconceptualises abstract painting by reconsidering the ways in which we think and come to understand the function of abstract painting and how its renegotiation revitalises our understanding of it.

3. Painting as an 'expanded field'

The notion of painting as an 'expanded field' is not new and unique to the current context of painting. It can instead be seen to be part of the continual revitalisation of painting, particularly since the dominance of Modernist abstraction. In fact, despite the hegemonic status it has attained through history, Modernist abstraction saw itself as rethinking and 'expanding' painting by challenging the tradition of painting as representational. *Peinture féminine* is considered in light of Rosalind Krauss's claims for the 'expanded field' or what she later termed the 'post-medium condition'. In her essay *Sculpture in the Expanded Field*, Krauss notes that:

The logic of space of a postmodernist practice is no longer organized around the definition of a given medium on the grounds of material ... It is organized instead through the universe of terms that are felt to be in opposition with a cultural position ... with any one of the positions generated by the given logical space, many different mediums might be employed⁴⁷⁹

⁴⁷⁶ Mooney, J. *Painting: poignancy and ethics*, 2005, p134

⁴⁷⁷ Harris, J. *Hybridity versus Tradition: Contemporary Art and Cultural Politics*, 2003, p236

⁴⁷⁸ Mooney, J. *Op cit.*, 2005, p134

⁴⁷⁹ Krauss, R. *Sculpture in the Expanded Field*, 1979, p43

Krauss's notion of the 'expanded field' offers a rethinking of the Greenbergian definition of 'medium' which he defined as stripped of its complexity and reduced to its essence; that is, its flatness. Instead of the medium as autonomous and nothing more than a physical object or plane surface, she builds on Maurice Denis's definition of medium as:

The layered, complex relationship that we would call a *recursive structure* – a structure that is, some of the elements of which will produce the rules that generate the structure itself⁴⁸⁰

Krauss' expanded field insists on the impossibility of the aesthetic medium as being nothing more than a physical support by highlighting the 'internal plurality' of a medium. Instead, she argues for the interrelation between the conventions layered *into* a medium to open up a space "to *improvise* the complex marriages between its voices".⁴⁸¹ She therefore rethinks the notion of 'medium' without rejecting or opposing it but as 'expanding' it internally.

Krauss specifically refers to the medium of film⁴⁸² to illustrate this. She asserts that the specificity of film can be found in its 'self-differing' nature in which it is "aggregative, a matter of interlocking supports and layered conventions".⁴⁸³ For Krauss, the specificity of film is not the medium or support, the celluloid strip of images, the camera, the projector, the light that relays motion to the screen, the screen itself or the audience's vision, but *all* of these together. Rather like Irigaray's notion of the 'other' as autoerotic or self-touching,⁴⁸⁴ the parts of the apparatus have an interdependence that "cannot touch *on* each other without themselves being touched".⁴⁸⁵ Krauss asserts that the 'post-medium condition' occupies:

A kind of discursive chaos, a heterogeneity of activities that could not be theorized as coherent or conceived of as having something like an essence or unifying core⁴⁸⁶

The self-differential specificity of film as an 'expanded field' or 'post-medium condition' as put forward by Krauss rethinks the traditional notion of 'medium' and Greenbergian definitions by considering the interrelation of conventions layered together that make up a medium to

⁴⁸⁰ Krauss, R. "A Voyage on the North Sea": Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition, 2000, p6

⁴⁸¹ *Ibid*

⁴⁸² By film, Krauss is referring to analogue film used in the 1960s and 1970s, not digital recording currently used to make films.

⁴⁸³ Krauss, R. *Op cit.*, 2000, p44

⁴⁸⁴ Irigaray, L. *The Power of Discourse and the Subordination of the Feminine*, 1985, p79

⁴⁸⁵ Krauss, R. *Op cit.*, 2000, p25

⁴⁸⁶ *Ibid*, p31

grasp their inner complexity. Moreover, its inner complexity as being heterogeneous disrupts the Greenbergian 'purity' of Modernist abstraction.

In addition to the internal interdependence of conventions *within* a medium, Krauss also discussed different mediums⁴⁸⁷ as interdependent with each other. For her, mixed-media installations were symptomatic of the 'post-medium condition' and signalled an "inter-media loss of specificity".⁴⁸⁸ Krauss avoids a polarisation between painting and lens-based media by challenging the Modernist notion of the exclusivity of a medium, instead considering various possibilities of interrelations that exist between various mediums in an expanded field.⁴⁸⁹ It allows us to think of different mediums as existing in relationships of a kind of inter-dependency. Different mediums therefore exist dialectically rather than oppositionally. Painting can thus be considered in terms of its actual or possible interrelationships with other forms such as sculpture, architecture, film and video.⁴⁹⁰ Rather than resisting 'traditional' media or re-investing in painting as distinct from other practices, such a move blurs the lines of any claim to medium-specificity which is aligned with reinstating or trying to maintain a Modernist perspective.⁴⁹¹

4. Hybridity as expanding abstraction

I would argue that painting as an 'expanded field' has been explored and interpreted by some contemporary abstract painters in terms of 'hybridity'. Like the expanded field, the term hybridity is not necessarily new but has "periodically been a necessary stage for the renewal of the modernist project."⁴⁹² However, abstract painting as 'hybrid' has gathered force in recent years. Indeed as Ring Peterson notes, interdisciplinary crossovers of the 'post-medium condition' have dissolved traditional art historical categories and Modernist

⁴⁸⁷ Krauss uses the term *mediums* rather than *media* to denote the plural of a medium to retain the notion of specificity and to avoid confusion with 'media' which she reserves for technologies of communication ("A Voyage on the North Sea": Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition, 2000, p57). Following on from this, I have also used the term mediums in keeping with the context of Krauss' discussion of medium specificity.

⁴⁸⁸ Krauss, R. Op cit., 2000, p15

⁴⁸⁹ Green, D. Painting as Asporia, 2003, p99

⁴⁹⁰ *Ibid*

⁴⁹¹ Deepwell, K, Claims for a Feminist Politics in Painting, 2010, p143

⁴⁹² Pollock, G. and Rowley, A. Painting in a 'Hybrid Moment', 2003, p42

specificity has been overtaken by 'new media' and the 'generation of new hybrids'⁴⁹³ where "generally speaking, the expansion of painting can be described as *hybridisation*".⁴⁹⁴ Harris notes that it is hybridity that has captured the constantly changing status of painting.⁴⁹⁵ In 'hybrid' work, 'traditional' media such as paint and canvas are fused or hybridised with other media or technologies or as a replacement for those methods and materials.⁴⁹⁶ Painting thus has a dialectical relation with other media and technologies and is no longer exclusive.⁴⁹⁷ This change has allowed for painting to be recognised as moving on from a well-defined discipline into an expanded field where painting can merge with photography, video, ready-mades, installation and performance as well as 'older' disciplines such as sculpture, architecture and drawing.⁴⁹⁸ As Harris points out, the definition of paint on a canvas that is attached to a stretcher and hung on a wall is extant, but it has expanded to include other materials and is also presented as freestanding or in installations.⁴⁹⁹

The term hybrid refers to something heterogeneous and of mixed character or composed of incongruous elements⁵⁰⁰ in which "forms become separated from existing practices and recombine with new forms in new practices".⁵⁰¹ The heterogeneity and plurality associated with 'hybrid' painting can be seen to displace the singularity, purity and autonomy of Modernist abstraction, directly challenging Greenbergian medium specificity. As David Green asserts, 'hybridity' as a postmodernist term clashes with 'painting' as a Modernist term, as the heterogeneity, intertextuality and contingency of hybridity compromises and potentially renders invalid the singularity, specificity and autonomy directly associated with Greenberg's Modernist painting.⁵⁰² The term hybrid:

... would seem to accept a loss of purity, a kind of mutation. At the positive end of the critical spectrum, hybridisation may be seen as a necessary and welcome cross-fertilisation⁵⁰³

⁴⁹³ Ring Peterson, A. *Painting Spaces*, 2010, p123

⁴⁹⁴ *Ibid*, p125

⁴⁹⁵ Harris, J. *Hybridity versus Tradition: Contemporary Art and Cultural Politics*, 2003, p236

⁴⁹⁶ Harris, J. *Hybridity, Hegemony, Historicism*, 2003, p17

⁴⁹⁷ Green, D. *Painting as Asporia*, 2003, p38

⁴⁹⁸ Ring Peterson, A. *Op cit.*, 2010, p124

⁴⁹⁹ Harris, J. *Op cit.*, 2003, p238

⁵⁰⁰ *Ibid*, p15

⁵⁰¹ Pieterse, J. N. *Globalisation as Hybridisation*, 1994, p165

⁵⁰² Green, D. *Op cit.*, 2003, p81

⁵⁰³ Pollock, G and Row ley, A. *Painting in a 'Hybrid Moment'*, 2003, p39

It can be seen as antagonistic to Greenbergian notions of purity and as painting referring to its own internal logic and practice⁵⁰⁴ where painting is no longer articulated within a specific set of terms⁵⁰⁵ and it is not just specific to itself. Contamination in relation to other forms renders this purity impossible.

It seems that the notion of hybridity in abstract painting has been embraced as being able to directly challenge the conventions of Modernist abstraction in formalist terms (for example, David Reed, Jessica Stockholder [see plates 12 and 13] and Fabian Marcaccio). Fabian Marcaccio's 'paintants', which are a hybridisation of the words 'painting' and 'mutant' (see figures 3.1 and 3.2) are a clear example of abstract painting as 'hybrid'. His paintants are constructed out of materials and erected in the gallery in ways normally associated with sculpture. They fuse plastic, metal, paint, canvas and print; meshing together heterogeneous elements *within* a single 'painting'.⁵⁰⁶ The painted elements of his works are hybridised with photographic images such as enlarged images of the weft of the canvas and liquid strokes of brushed paint. The painterly marks themselves are also hybrid, where the bottom of a thick



Figure 3.1 Fabian Marcaccio, example of *Structural Canvas Paintant*, (2011)

⁵⁰⁴ Astbury, M. *Tracing Hybrid Strategies in Brazilian Modern Art*, 2003, p139

⁵⁰⁵ Green, D. *Painting as Asporia*, 2003, p83

⁵⁰⁶ Harris, J. *Hybridity, Hegemony, Historicism*, 2003, p16



Figure 3.2 Fabian Marcaccio, example of *Analytical-Rage Paintant*, (2009)

impastoed brushmark often blurs into a leaking row of drips,⁵⁰⁷ confusing any differentiation between the two. His paintants have been argued to offer a coherent yet heterogeneous definition of painting as complex and as manifesting as a 'new materiality'⁵⁰⁸ through the polyphony of media registers. In more recent paintants such as in his *Analytical-Rage Paintants* (see figure 3.2), painterly marks are hybridised with recognisable elements such as parts of the human body to create hybrid mutant figures. As Friis-Hansen points out, his paintants "deconstructs, dissects, and otherwise bastardises the language of pure Modernist painting and then reassembles the parts in an amalgamation".⁵⁰⁹ They literally stretch paint to new configurations; there is a literal subversion of materials and conventions where abstraction is extraverted.

5. Moving towards a new model of *peinture féminine*

Abstract painting as 'hybrid' indeed 'extends' the definition of abstract painting both formally and materially. However, the 'contamination' by other supposedly more 'vital' practices to renew and extend painting's vitality, risks 'hybridity' being a 'cure-all rescue

⁵⁰⁷ Friis-Hansen, D. Fabian Marcaccio, 2002, p202

⁵⁰⁸ Amdur, M. Temporal Hybridity, 2003, p222

⁵⁰⁹ Friis-Hansen, D. Op cit., 2002, p202

remedy'.⁵¹⁰ *Peinture féminine* instead offers a reconceptualisation of abstract painting as comprising 'more complex and multiple spaces' that opens up abstract painting internally. This is demonstrated by the following series of diagrams that I have developed. The diagrams show the different strategies and thinking that I argue underpin the different ways that art practice has engaged with abstract painting and its relation to Modernist abstraction.⁵¹¹ They lead to my model of *peinture féminine* as moving on from this thinking.

Figure 3.3 represents art practices that have problematised Modernist abstraction by rejecting it altogether. In this model, the underlying logic is to reject Modernist abstraction as a strategy to challenge and move on from it. The blue entity represents Modernist abstraction. I have referenced this in all of my diagrams through 'Abstraction' with a capital 'A'. This differentiates between Modernist abstraction as a historical concept and practice⁵¹²

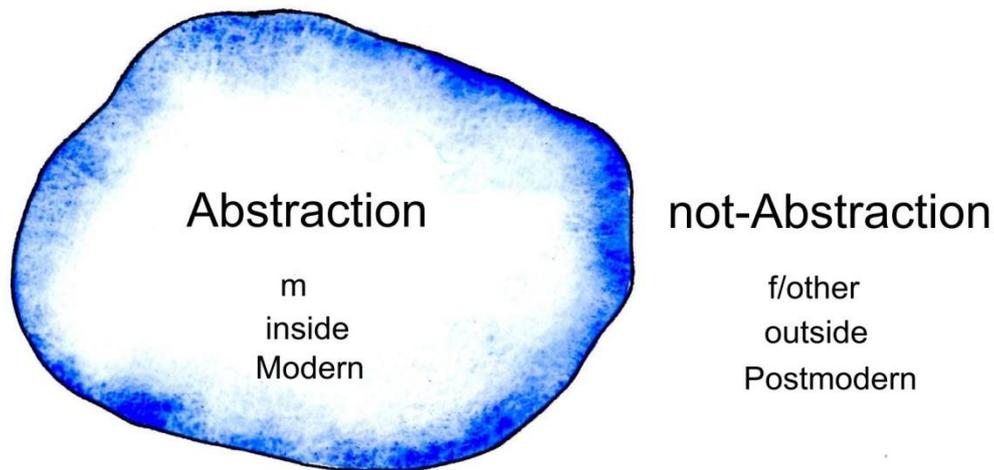


Figure 3.3 Diagram of art practice as rejecting abstraction

and abstract painting after this. In this model, there is a clearly defined border between Abstraction and what is not Abstraction (not-Abstraction) signalling a move to reject and completely disengage with it. I argue that this model is aligned with feminist attitudes to painting, in particular to abstract painting, where painting was rejected in favour of other media as discussed in Chapter 1. It also refers to attitudes in painting where abstract

⁵¹⁰ Mooney, J. *Painting: poignancy and ethics*, 2005, p134

⁵¹¹ These models are by no means a definite and fixed mapping out of the engagement with Modernist abstraction. As with anything, there are anomalies or 'in-between' models that exist in addition to work aligned with these models.

⁵¹² Defined here between the 1940s and 1960s as invested in the conventions and thinking outlined on Chapter 1.

painting was rejected in favour of representational painting, such as the figurative. This model is oppositional and sets up binaries such as Abstraction/not-Abstraction and inside/outside where these practices work ‘outside’ of Modernist abstraction. It also represents feminist critiques of Modernist abstraction where this oppositional relation has been attributed to masculine/feminine and patriarchal/feminist relations which is signalled in my diagram through ‘m’ and ‘f/other’, and also as Modern/Postmodern binaries.

Figure 3.4 shows my model of how painting practices have attempted to dismantle the project of Modernist abstraction through ‘rupturing’ it. This includes artists who have literally deconstructed abstract painting and formally rejected conventions inherent within it such as figure/ground and support/surface oppositions and the supposed flatness and autonomy of Modernist abstraction. An example of artists aligned with this model includes

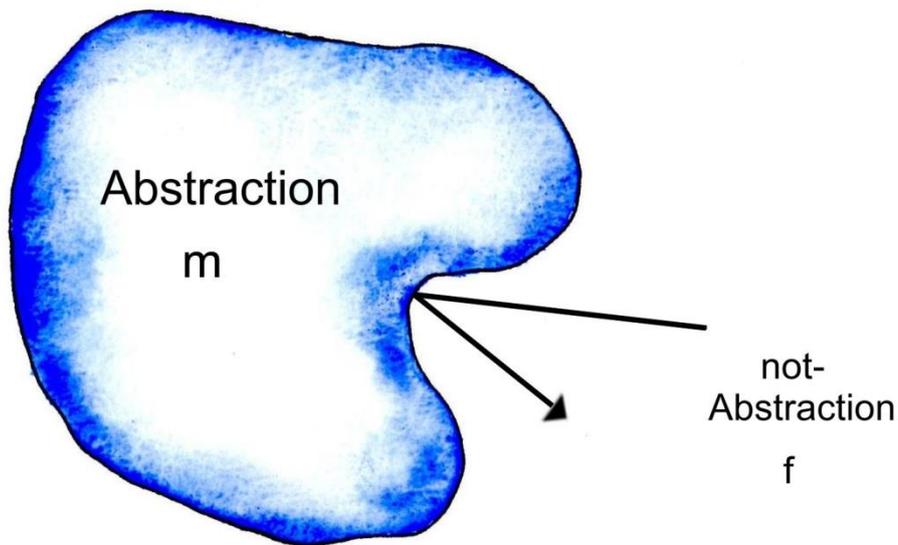


Figure 3.4 Diagram of abstract painting as rupturing abstraction

work by Angela de la Cruz (see figure 3.5) whereby instead of celebrating the medium of painting, she seems compelled “to resurrect it by killing it”.⁵¹³ Indeed, de la Cruz’s work has been argued to enable new possibilities and reinvent the medium of painting⁵¹⁴ by challenging the conventions, limits and methods of painting by ‘liberating’ it from its

⁵¹³ Friis-Hansen, D. Angela de la Cruz, 2002, p64

⁵¹⁴ Little, H. and Stout, K. Turner Prize catalogue, 2010, p12



Figure 3.5 Angela de la Cruz, *Super Clutter XXL (Pink and Brown)*, (2006), oil and acrylic on canvas

support.⁵¹⁵ Abstract painting aligned with this model literally ruptures Modernist abstraction as a whole and its conventions. The word rupture implies a break or a split. However, I would argue that this model only ‘ruptures’ paint and painting on a physical and literal level, but not embedded conventions conceptually or structurally on a deeper level. Rather than being signified through a split, this is shown in the diagram as an indentation on the blue entity of Abstraction as representing an inflection but no real lasting ‘rupture’. Like figure 3.3, this model is oppositional and based on the Abstraction/not-Abstraction binary. It can also be attributed to masculine/feminine, patriarchal/feminist and Modern/Postmodern binary oppositions and can be seen to work ‘outside’ of Modernism, maintaining inside/outside relations.

Figure 3.6 shows my model of abstract painting which incorporates artists working with an ‘alternative’ language of abstract painting to Modernist abstraction. Abstract painting aligned with this model seeks to problematise Modernist abstraction through developing an

⁵¹⁵ Little, H. and Stout, K. Turner Prize catalogue, 2010, p15

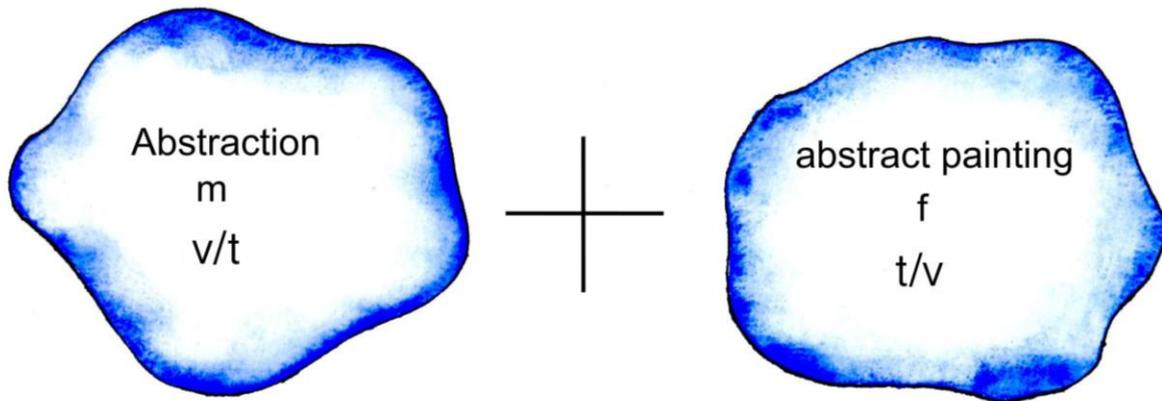


Figure 3.6 Diagram of 'alternative' practices of 'feminine' abstract painting

alternative 'feminine' abstract painting practice in *addition* to the perceived 'masculinist', 'masculine' and patriarchal' practice of Modernist abstraction. I would argue that this model is aligned with much abstract painting that engaged with *l'écriture féminine* as discussed in Chapter 1. In my diagram, the blue entity on the left represents Modernist abstraction and the blue entity on the right represents 'feminine' abstract painting. I argue that the development of 'feminine' abstract painting is 'other' of Abstraction, however it does not maintain the inside/outside binary by positing it as its own alternative 'feminine' entity. However, the development of an alternative 'feminine' aesthetic or language reverses oppositions and conventions through a focus on identifying 'feminine' characteristics of abstract painting in opposition to perceived 'masculine' characteristics embedded in Modernist abstraction. It therefore simply reinforces the status quo and does not create any real structural change. Binaries such as purely visual (non-tactile)/tactile, as signified in the diagram as 'v/t' are reversed in 'feminine' painting to 't/v' in an attempt to move on from Abstraction as highlighted in Chapter 1. Like my previous models, Modern/Postmodern, masculine/feminine and patriarchal/feminist binary relations are maintained.

Figure 3.7 shows abstract painting as 'hybrid'. This is signified by the blue entity of Abstraction hybridised with and both 'expanding' and 'extending' into other media which is shown in green. Here, Modernist abstraction and its embedded conventions (such as the essence or purity of painting) are 'contaminated' to become 'impure'. This is shown by the

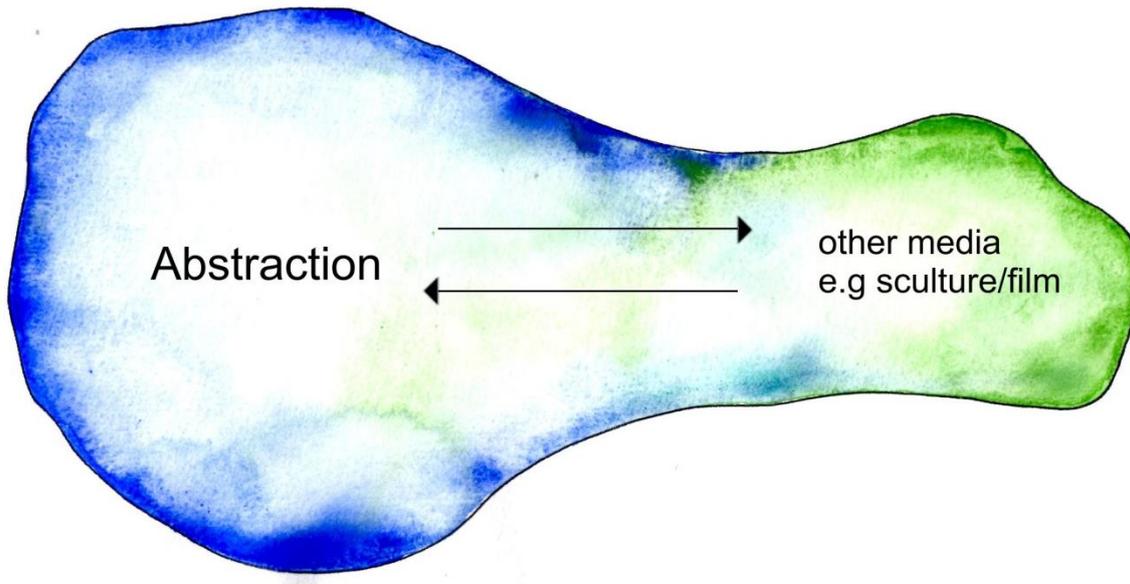


Figure 3.7 Diagram of abstract painting as 'hybrid'

two directional arrows in which Abstraction blurs with 'other media' and vice versa. In this model, 'hybrid' abstract painting is contained within the boundaries of the historical project of abstraction, however it becomes cross-fertilised into something 'new'. This model claims to be non-oppositional but can be seen as a 'new' practice of abstract painting in which the Postmodern is positioned in opposition to Modernist abstraction and contamination and heterogeneity is set up in opposition to purity and homogeneity.

6. Opening up abstract painting; more complex and multiple spaces

In *Contemporary Painting in Context* (2010), Ring Peterson argues that since the Millennium, painters have begun to explore the *spatiality* of painting.⁵¹⁶ She defines this as one of redefining space *in relation* to painting to expand it physically as well as conceptually.⁵¹⁷ Ring Peterson asserts that the spatiality of painting shifts from the artist painting a picture to creating or *painting spaces*. She argues that the rethinking of space *in* painting or of painting as space brings about changes such as the relationship of painting to the viewer, the exhibition space and other contexts.⁵¹⁸ Examples include paintings by Sun K

⁵¹⁶ Ring Peterson, A. *Painting Spaces*, 2010, p126

⁵¹⁷ *Ibid*

⁵¹⁸ *Ibid*



Figure 3.8 Sun K Kwak, *Untying Space*, 2010, mixed media installation



Figure 3.9 Katharina Grosse, *Untitled*, (2002), acrylic on wall

Kwak (see figure 3.8), whose large-scale installations use architectural space as the canvas to make the viewer feel enveloped within the space. The work of Katharina Grosse (see figure 3.9) can also be seen as an example. Grosse uses the exhibition space as a surface, which she describes as “the coming together of an architecturally built space and a painted space which is an illusionistic space”.⁵¹⁹ She ‘expands’ the boundaries of painting by

⁵¹⁹ Grosse, K. Katharina Grosse in conversation with Lynn Herbert, 2004, p3

expanding the 'space within painting'.⁵²⁰ Grosse describes her paintings as a three-dimensional surface that by linking together different surfaces such as the wall and floor, even if they are flat, create an illusionistic space. Both artists translate the painting plane to space and create space *in* painting to create an apparent 'spatiality'.

My notion of *peinture féminine* does not simply see abstract painting as a spatiality which is expanded by being 'combined with installation' to create space *in* paintings or installations *based on* paintings.⁵²¹ Instead, it reconceptualises abstract painting as made up of 'more complex and multiple spaces' in order to be expanded within itself and 'opened up' from the inside. This involves reconceptualising the logic of abstract painting, rather than just formally and physically. In my diagram of *peinture féminine* (see figure 3.10), rather than Abstraction being a singular entity it is here reconceptualised as comprising multiple 'spaces'. The dark blue shapes labelled with 'A' represent Modernist abstraction and its embedded conventions and logic. Rather than inflecting Abstraction as a whole or providing

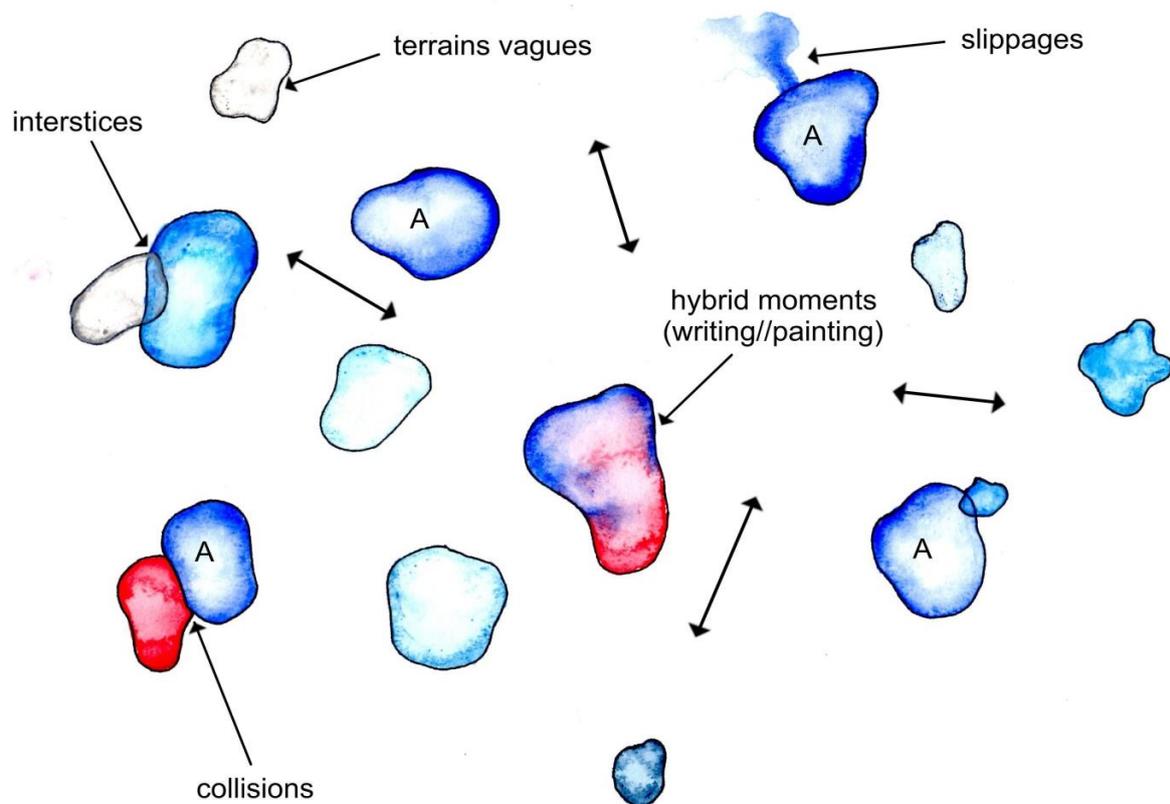


Figure 3.10 My diagram of *peinture féminine* as made up of 'more complex and multiple spaces'

⁵²⁰ Grosse, K. Katharina Grosse in conversation with Lynn Herbert, 2004, p2

⁵²¹ Ring Peterson, A. *Painting Spaces*, 2010, p137

an 'alternative' entity (see figures 3.4 and 3.6), it is instead seen as opened out and as a continuous multiplicity. Through its expansion, embedded binaries and conventions are disrupted and 'opened out', moving away from Abstraction as rigid and a 'monocentric hegemony'. The other blue shapes in my diagram represent the blurring of the opened out conventions and logic of Abstraction as a historical project within/amidst abstract painting or not-Abstraction. They are signified in my diagram through multiple shades of blue as different to the darker blue that represents Abstraction. They can be seen as different nuances of abstract painting to show the heterogeneousness of these spaces.

Peinture féminine follows on from *l'écriture féminine* in that it is non-oppositional. It builds on Cixous' notion of *l'écriture féminine* as moving from the masculine/feminine binary opposition to existing in-between the terms and refusing to ally itself with one side of the opposition.⁵²² However, my concept and practice of *peinture féminine* moves on from the idea of a singular 'in-between' or a third 'bisexual' space as proposed by Cixous to a heterogeneous spatiality amidst the masculine/feminine binary opposition made up of a multiplicity of spaces. This involves a shift from *the* 'in-between' as an entity to an '*in the* between' or '*within*' where there are a multiplicity of nuances of between-ness.

Although my diagram is two-dimensional, the spatiality of *peinture féminine* is multi-dimensional and prismatic.⁵²³ It builds on Irigaray's notion of fluidity and volume as a challenge to phallogentrism which is always moving, expanding, shifting and infinitely becoming.⁵²⁴ *Peinture féminine* is not a fixed state of being but of becoming; it is a continuum in which the multiplicity of spaces shift and move amidst binaries and conventions. In my diagram, this is shown by the double-ended arrows amidst the spatiality. They signify that the spaces that make up *peinture féminine* are not rigid but there is mobility amongst them. It is a continuous multiplicity where at any one point something may happen.

⁵²² Shiach, M. Hélène Cixous: A Politics of Writing, 1991, p22

⁵²³ My diagram represents *peinture féminine* two-dimensionally in order for it to be shown visually in this thesis. However, it seems to me that such a model cannot be realistically represented as it is not static. A more accurate representation would perhaps be through 3D digital imaging that takes such mobility and multi-dimensionality into consideration, however this is not in the scope of the research.

⁵²⁴ Irigaray, L. Volume-Fluidity, 1985, p238

Peinture féminine is not 'outside' Abstraction as shown in figures 3.3 and 3.4 or 'beyond' its structures and conventions if indeed this is possible. Rather than something external affecting the internal logic of Modernist abstraction, as shown in figures 3.4 and 3.7, my model is expanded within itself in which abstract painting is 'opened up' through an internal disturbance caused by the continuous becoming of its spatiality. It shifts from a movement inwards to, following Irigaray, a movement outwards 'in all directions at once'.⁵²⁵ In doing so, it pushes abstract painting to its physical, material and conceptual limits, revitalising our understanding of it. Rather than seeking new landscapes or alternative practices, *peinture féminine* therefore 'sees' abstract painting with 'new eyes'.

Peinture féminine is not about inbetweenness per se, but rather how the more complex and multiple spaces reshape the binary or elements within the binary. It troubles any opposition between the inside and the outside where the opening out into multiple spaces disconcerts any distinction between them.⁵²⁶ This disturbs any sense of what is Abstraction and what is not-Abstraction as the conventions and binaries are dispersed and multiple elements are broken up and layered together. *Peinture féminine* therefore cannot be seen to have an 'edge' or an absolute fixed boundary since this spatiality is a continuous multiplicity and an infinite space. Binaries are opened out and not just reversed through its internal altering and shifting. Pollock and Rowley assert that the postmodern shift away from the hegemony of painting, where painting is 'expanded and complex' implies a kind of rupture.⁵²⁷ Whereas the term rupture implies a disturbance based on a fracture, break or division, *peinture féminine* aims to trouble⁵²⁸ these structures, which instead implies a disturbance based on disorder or inflection. As Neal Rock has commented, rather than the severing or cutting implied by rupture, inflection instead implies to bend or distort.⁵²⁹ It can be

⁵²⁵ Irigaray, L. *This Sex Which Is Not One*, 1985, p29

⁵²⁶ *Peinture féminine* refers in this sense to Derrida's *parergon* which dismantles the notion that pure interiority is separate and uncontaminated by an exterior through the introjections of the outside as dissolved into the self-different. This is further elaborated in the glossary.

⁵²⁷ Pollock, G. and Rowley, A. *Painting in a 'Hybrid Moment'*, 2003, p35

⁵²⁸ Whilst terms such as rupture assert a disruption based on a break, fracture, crack, split, division, sever, fissure, the term 'trouble' implies a disruption centred on a sense of disturbance, disorder, agitation, perturbation, distress and upset.

⁵²⁹ Rock, N. *Interview with Neal Rock*, 2010, p33; see Appendix A

understood as deconstruction in the Derridean sense;⁵³⁰ seeking to expose and subvert binary oppositions that underpin dominant ways of thinking. Indeed, as Derrida notes, deconstruction can reveal dualistic tendencies and rather than establishing a new hierarchy it displaces and intervenes with oppositions.⁵³¹

Peinture féminine moves on from abstract painting being reconceptualised as hybrid per se as shown in figure 3.7. Rather, *within* its spatiality and the spaces opened up, the spaces include hybrid 'moments'. This is shown in my model of *peinture féminine* through the red and blue shape in the centre of the diagram. This has manifested in my own art practice as 'writing//painting' and is shown in my diagram through writing as shown in red, blurring and hybridising with abstract painting. Rather than moving 'beyond' the embedded conventions and thinking of Modernist abstraction as a whole, multiple writing//painting hybrid moments further trouble and disrupt them. I argue that the complex spaces also include *terrains vagues* which are shown in faint grey shapes in my diagram. *Terrains vagues* is a French term for the underdeveloped weedy lots at the edge of architectural constructs in a city. These spaces are vague and yet not vacant. As Schor notes, they are spaces of 'waves' and of 'liquidity' in which painting lives in such interstices, allowing entry at these points of imperfection and of neglect between figure/ground.⁵³² She asserts that in some instances:

Paintings are vague terrains on which paint filtered through the human eye, mind, and hand, flickers in and out of representation, as figure skims ground, transmitting thought⁵³³

For Schor, between the figure/ground relation there is imperfection, not the overdetermined structure of perspectival space or the rigid economy of positive and negative space.⁵³⁴

Building on the notion of *terrains vagues*, rather than considering the 'between' of the figure/ground relation, which implies a third space: figure - *terrains vagues* - ground, it can instead be seen in *peinture féminine* as a troubling of this relation. Rather, it encompasses a

⁵³⁰ Please see glossary for further explanation

⁵³¹ Derrida, J. *The Margins of Philosophy*, 1982, p195

⁵³² Schor, M. *Wet: On Painting, Feminism and Art Culture*, 1997, p155

⁵³³ *Ibid*

⁵³⁴ *Ibid*

multiplicity of *terrains vagues* and interstitial spaces amidst other complex spaces where the figure/ground relation is blurred and troubled.

Within the spatiality of *peinture féminine* there are also collisions between the different elements. This is shown in my diagram through the collision of the red space of writing and the dark blue space that signals an opened out element of Abstraction. This is through the mobility of the spatiality and the different elements in flux through its becoming. These collisions also refer to the 'self-touching' and autoerotic. Like Krauss's recursive structure as 'producing the rules that generate itself', the internal conventions layered within *peinture féminine* collide and rebound as part of its becoming. The movement also opens up spaces for 'slippages' and 'transgressions'; internal disturbances within and amidst these spaces such as the blue shape labelled 'slippages' in which it has overflowed its own border.

7. Abstract painting as 'unstable'

My model of *peinture féminine* acknowledges that abstract painting is not made up of rigid structures and cannot be reduced to a fixed identity, but that the conventions embedded in it are 'unstable'.⁵³⁵ As Lee states:

For the painter, the codes and languages of painting, like the paint itself, are, by their very nature, slippery and amorphous. As a form of communication, it is invariably a very imprecise tool, prone to ambiguity and subsequent misreadings, if not downright miscomprehension from viewers.⁵³⁶

The terms 'abstraction' and 'non-representational' are often used interchangeably, implying that abstraction (as a historical term) and abstract painting are non-representational and unable to represent. Peter Fischer argues that in practice, the term 'abstract' is only functional if it is applied in the narrower sense to art that is non-figurative and non-representational.⁵³⁷ However, the term 'abstract' cannot be clearly and easily defined, as a painted representation can simultaneously be seen as an abstraction of that model and as 'abstract'.⁵³⁸ Thus, even the most figurative painting can be argued to be abstract, since

⁵³⁵ Pollock, G and Rowley, A. *Painting in a Hybrid Moment*, 2003, p55

⁵³⁶ Lee, R. *Threads*, 2004, p116

⁵³⁷ Fischer, P. *Abstraction, Gesture, Ecriture: Paintings from the Daros Collection*, 1999, p13

⁵³⁸ Eger, D. *Abstraction*, 2012, p7

ultimately things existing in the real world are *de-picted* where painting refers to things through an analogy of form, colour, allusion and representational conventions such as perspective.⁵³⁹ In fact, Bolt goes as far as to assert that through attention to performativity, all painting is potentially non-representational as the material practice of painting exceeds its own representational structure and becomes “more than the medium that bears it”.⁵⁴⁰

Although all painting can be argued to be fundamentally abstract, it can also be simultaneously representational where references to objects in the real world, such as the figure, a landscape or a vase of flowers in a still life signify and are able to *represent*. A representation is created through the momentary stabilisation of a set of structures, allowing for an image to be recognised and for it to have an effect on the viewer.⁵⁴¹ In representational painting or painting with representational elements, a signifier represents the signified through physical resemblance. Here, the signifier and signified have a stable relationship. However, painting that has no reference to the ‘real world’ or that is typically referred to as ‘abstraction’ or ‘abstract painting’ involves a removal of recognisable signifiers. There is therefore a breakdown between the signifier and signified and they instead have an unstable relationship where the painting comes to present meaning in a different way. Like Bolt, John Lechte suggests that instead of a transcendental notion of abstraction, the form and formless are beyond experience and representation, irreducible to a material manifestation and simultaneously full and empty.⁵⁴²

The Modernist notion of autonomy has been dismissed by many as a myth, particularly those aligned with feminism (Deepwell, Betterton, Pollock, Besemer, Jones) and it has been deduced that even the most abstract painting can still have meaning. As Fischer notes, abstraction and in particular Abstract Expressionism, has little to do with the direct and immediate expression of the artist and attempts to erase any reference outside of the painting itself, but that the stylistic and technical aspects of abstract painting can convey or

⁵³⁹ Fischer, P. Abstraction, Gesture, Ecriture: Paintings from the Daros Collection, p13

⁵⁴⁰ Bolt, B. Painting is not a Representational Practice, 2004, p42

⁵⁴¹ Richards, M. Derrida, 2008, p134

⁵⁴² Lechte, J. Thinking the Reality of Abstraction, 1995, 26

signal meaning as well as artistic and cultural references.⁵⁴³ Each work of art is rooted in a specific cultural moment and is not indefinitely split from the political.⁵⁴⁴ Even in the most abstract of paintings, the physical events of paint being applied to a surface involve some form of narrativity, even if it is only the narrative of the process of the painting's production, the sequence of the maker's marks or the way a surface and its effects have been thought out.⁵⁴⁵ Artistic production can thus reference cultural specificity. As Besemer notes, paintings can be read within the history of abstraction *and* also of the artist's personal history through referents, albeit ones that are 'abstract', reflecting a particularity of culture, nationality and ethnicity.⁵⁴⁶ Indeed, some abstract painting incorporates the political whereby forms and histories cross over and intersect even if they are paradoxical. For example, Denyse Thomasos's paintings (see plate 14) can be read within the history of abstraction *and* the histories of African quilts and slavery and thus of her personal history.⁵⁴⁷

Abstract painting is therefore not necessarily purely non-representational *per se*. The way meaning is made in abstract painting is ambiguous. Indeed, the 'language' of abstract painting does not lend itself to the making of direct statements and can be argued to be an art of pure interpretation.⁵⁴⁸ There is also an issue of *affect* and the way abstraction works on the viewer. Over time, abstraction as a historical project has become a recognisable genre with a panoply of accompanying techniques (for example, the use of drips) and therefore encompasses a recognisable visual vocabulary. However, there is no rigid or definite universal 'language' of abstract painting as such and the way meaning is made is neither clear cut nor stable. Works can oscillate between being 'abstract' and not abstract, representational and non-representational or simultaneously both, or be 'abstract' and signify meaning through different means: through analogy and its referentials, embodiment, iconographical 'signs', materials and through what is and what is not visible. Abstract

⁵⁴³ Fischer, P. *Abstraction, Gesture, Ecriture: Paintings from the Daros Collection*, 1999, p14

⁵⁴⁴ Abstract painting movements such as Futurism, Russian Constructivism and European Expressionism were heavily invested in the social and the political. It was American abstraction that asserted it as apparently autonomous and apolitical.

⁵⁴⁵ Pollock, G. *Differencing the Canon: Feminist Desire and the Writing of Art's Histories*, 1999, p98

⁵⁴⁶ Besemer, L. *Abstraction: Politics and Possibilities*, 2005

⁵⁴⁷ *Ibid*

⁵⁴⁸ Lee, R. *Threads*, 2004, p116

painting, more so than 'representational' painting also refers to how things are 'read' in relation to representational structures (for example, the gaze and phallogocentric ways of looking) because there are fewer 'referentials' in the work and so it doesn't point to such an obvious narrative. As Barrett points out, the artist's subjective logic of practice involved in making work is lost once the work enters various discourses and some sort of meta-language of interpretation is needed to recuperate it.⁵⁴⁹

8. Unfolding and enfolding difference

Although the history of Modernist abstraction is still heavily invested in contemporary abstract painting, the claim that its conventions are not rigid and fixed asserts that within itself, abstract painting is changeable and its embedded structures and conventions have the potential to be disturbed. Acknowledging that they are not fixed nor rigidly phallogocentric, in addition to their expansion through the spatiality of *peinture féminine*, allows the embedded binaries and conventions within abstract painting to be seen as movable and ambiguous. This enables the spatiality of *peinture féminine* to be understood as a sphere of possibility which is 'infinitely malleable'⁵⁵⁰ as it constitutes itself through the existence of multiplicity which is always under construction.⁵⁵¹

In her essay *Bodies in the Work: the Practices and Politics of Women's Non-Representational Painting*, Betterton asserts that it is the question of "precisely how abstraction functions as a representation of *gender* difference", and the differently gendered body that Modernist criticism has failed to acknowledge.⁵⁵² In women's art practice, difference has primarily been examined in terms of a feminist politics of *representation*. This has indeed moved away from the direct expression of the artist's psyche as asserted by Modernist abstraction towards the analysis of the signifying field and the politics of representation. However, it seems that attempts to *represent* difference through abstract means are problematic as I have shown in Chapter 1.

⁵⁴⁹ Barrett, E. *Kristeva Reframed*, 2011, p45

⁵⁵⁰ Krauss, R. *Sculpture in the Expanded Field*, 1976, p30

⁵⁵¹ Böhm, K. *Who is Building What: Relational Art Practice and Spatial Production*, 2009, p30

⁵⁵² Betterton, R. *Bodies in the Work: The Aesthetics and Politics of Women's Non-Representational Painting*, 1996, p79

Rather than representing or 'expressing' the 'feminine', *peinture féminine* asserts that the subject can 'come-into-being' or *co-emerge* within the spaces opened up amidst its spatiality. It can be seen to incorporate what Lomax refers to as 'the baker's logic'.⁵⁵³ She argues that:

The logic of binary oppositions seeks to make clear cut divisions but the baker folds. Stretches and folds. Both the baker and the philosopher know that it isn't a matter of attempting to exclude or oppose the logic of binary oppositions – it is a matter of enfolding it within the dough⁵⁵⁴

Lomax's 'baker's logic' is a pliable or enfolding logic; as the baker kneads, the two of binary difference becomes one *and* the other *and* something else of infinite 'ands'.⁵⁵⁵ I argue that through abstract painting being *unfolded* through the opening up of multiple spaces, 'difference' can be *enfolded* within the spatiality of *peinture féminine*. Rather than establishing a 'feminine' abstract painting practice in opposition to abstraction as examined by feminist artists as discussed in Chapter 1, the multiplicity of 'ands' sets what Cixous argues for as 'multiple heterogenous difference' against binary schemes of thought.⁵⁵⁶ I will now argue that this enfolding occurs through the interplay of three 'elements' that I have drawn from *l'écriture féminine* and claimed as part of *peinture féminine*: quasacles, the poetic and the intermaterial. These elements are not distinct or separate entities, nor are they fixed nor can they be contained within well-defined 'edges'. Rather, they exist in relation with one other as part of the continuous multiplicity of *peinture féminine*'s spatiality and can themselves too be seen as multiple and continuous.

9. 'Quasacles'

Cixous discusses how elements of painting have the potential to challenge the cultural embeddedness of language.⁵⁵⁷ Although her discussion of painting is limited to 'representational' artworks such as those of post-Impressionism, she elucidates an element of *l'écriture féminine* that I have developed as a key aspect of *peinture féminine*; the

⁵⁵³ Lomax, Y. *Writing the Image: An Adventure with Art and Theory*, 2000, p147

⁵⁵⁴ *Ibid*

⁵⁵⁵ *Ibid*, p149

⁵⁵⁶ Moi, T. *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory*, 1985, p103

⁵⁵⁷ This is most notably in her essays *The Art of Innocence*, *The Last Painting or the Portrait of God* and *Bathsheba Bathing* where she discusses the work of Monet, Cezanne, Van Gogh and Rembrandt.

'quasacle'. In her essay *The Last Painting or Coming to God*, Cixous identifies the intensity of the instantaneous and the immediacy of visual and emotional impact as something the painter can paint but which the writer cannot capture textually. Cixous does not use the term 'quasacle' herself in her original French texts; it has been used instead by Shiach on one occasion to describe these ideas as 'quasi-miracle-instants' or 'quasacles'.⁵⁵⁸ I have taken the term 'quasacle' in relation to abstract painting and have claimed it as an element of my concept and practice of *peinture féminine*.

The intensity of the instantaneous is something Cixous strives to communicate and render in writing. Indeed, she writes:

I would like to write like a painter. I would like to write like painting ... In the happening of an instant. Just at the moment of an instant, in what unfurls it. I touch down and then let myself slip into the depth of the instant itself ... And what is a painter? A bird-catcher of instants⁵⁵⁹

Cixous refers to the immediacy and rapidity in which time and light are painted by certain post-Impressionist painters in which they 'follow the sun' and '*paint the difference*'.⁵⁶⁰ Indeed, she asserts that she "writes in the direction of painting *towards the light*" (my emphasis) and desires to "communicate the full force of the instant, the colours and the textures of the present moment".⁵⁶¹ She notes that the painter paints the movement of the sun, yet as she writes, the sun disappears, whereby she senses "the struggle, [and] sees the race of speed and with the light".⁵⁶² She asserts that textually the intensity of the instantaneous can be most closely seen in Joyce's 'epiphanies' or the writing of Clarice Lispector in what she interprets as their practice of *l'écriture féminine*.

I argue that the quasacle can be seen as an event. However, it is not an event that *has happened*, but following Cixous, a 'beforehand' and a 'to-be-in-the-process of'.⁵⁶³ Indeed, in her text *Stigmata* she writes:

⁵⁵⁸ Shiach, M. *Hélène Cixous: A Politics of Writing*, 1991, p34

⁵⁵⁹ Cixous, H. *The Last Painting or the Portrait of God*, 1991, p104

⁵⁶⁰ *Ibid*, p111

⁵⁶¹ Shiach, M. *Op cit.*, 1991, p34

⁵⁶² Cixous, H. *Op cit.*, 1991, p108

⁵⁶³ Cixous, H. *Stigmata: Escaping Texts*, 2005, p25

I have a feeling that I always write from the perspective of what passes away... I perceive writing also in a differential: I am not a painter, I am not a musician. For it seems to me that painters and musicians paint, write, amidst the deluge, that which does not pass away⁵⁶⁴

Cixous asserts that such painting is in 'a state of waiting' and captures that which 'escapes' us such as time and light.⁵⁶⁵ It captures what has happened but also what *will* happen, where these works are 'approaching' painting.⁵⁶⁶ For example, Cixous asserts that Lispector paints the voice that *causes* writing. Indeed she notes that:

One does not paint yesterday, one does not even paint today, one paints tomorrow, one paints what will be, one paints the "imminence of"⁵⁶⁷

Following on from Cixous, rather than simply being seen as an 'event', my notion of the quasacle can instead be seen as the *becoming* of an event. It refers to the 'event' as something that is indefinite as it happens before we can know of it and cannot be understood ahead of time; it is the existence of the 'not yet'.⁵⁶⁸

I would argue that the quasacle and Cixous' desire 'to-be-in-the-process-of writing' are comparable to the performative potential of painting; the indefinable moment where the painting takes on a life of its own and ceases to represent or illustrate subject matter but instead performs it.⁵⁶⁹ The quasacle is thus tied up with the *practice* of painting; an instantaneous becoming of an 'event' that occurs in the 'heat of making'.⁵⁷⁰ In *l'écriture féminine*, the 'feminine' or repressed pre-linguistic drives of the 'other' before entry into the Symbolic are mobilised through the *practice* of 'feminine' writing. As Irigaray notes, "it is a question of trying to *practice* the difference"⁵⁷¹ (my emphasis). As Pollock and Rowley point out, there is a distinction between object-making which focuses on painting as an object or a 'thing' (usually made out of paint and canvas) and painting as a practice which follows on from Kristeva as related to *signifiance*.⁵⁷² According to Kristeva, *signifiance* refers to:

⁵⁶⁴ Cixous, H. *Stigmata: Escaping Texts*, 2005, p55

⁵⁶⁵ *Ibid*, p16

⁵⁶⁶ Cixous, H. *The Last Painting or the Portrait of God*, 1991, p114

⁵⁶⁷ *Ibid*, p113

⁵⁶⁸ Lomax, Y. *Sounding the Event: Escapades in Dialogue and Matters of Art, Nature and Time*, 2005, p5

⁵⁶⁹ Bolt, B. *Painting is not a Representational Practice*, 2004, p42

⁵⁷⁰ *Ibid*

⁵⁷¹ Irigaray, L. *This Sex Which is Not One*, 1985

⁵⁷² Pollock, G and Rowley, A. *Painting in a Hybrid Moment*, 2003, p65

The work performed in language (through the heterogeneous articulation of the semiotic and symbolic dispositions) that enables a text to signify what representative communicative speech cannot say⁵⁷³

For her, it is through 'feminine' writing and certain practices of art that the subject can recover a former relation to the semiotic in order to reactivate traces of marginal experience that are otherwise inexpressible in our culture.⁵⁷⁴ It is thus a process that can articulate unstable and non-signifying structures and allow the 'feminine' or semiotic to come-into-being.⁵⁷⁵

Ettinger elaborates on the intersection of psychoanalysis and aesthetics through her Matrixial model. She sees painting as a way of thinking of subjectivity as between something outside of all knowledge and the beginnings of a means of imagining its archaic trace within us.⁵⁷⁶ Through *metramorphosis* Ettinger explores the artwork and the artmaking process as linking the artist, viewer and artwork through the transference of intersubjective relations between subject and objects through the Matrixial stratum.⁵⁷⁷ In her own paintings, (see figure 3.11) she works with images such as old photographs and then through a long



Figure 3.11 Bracha Ettinger, *Untitled no. 4*, (2002), mixed media on paper

⁵⁷³ Roudiez, L. S. Introduction to Kristeva's *Desire in Language*, 1992, p18

⁵⁷⁴ Kristeva, J. *Revolution in Poetic Language*, 1993, p103

⁵⁷⁵ *Ibid*, p121

⁵⁷⁶ Pollock, G. and Rowley, A. *Painting in a Hybrid Moment*, 2003, p66

⁵⁷⁷ Ettinger, B. *The Matrixial Borderspace*, 2006, p94

process of abstraction makes these images gradually disappear to form work that appears totally abstract, comprising only color, lines and light in which 'phantomic figuralities' emerge. Through this process, she asserts that the co-emerging 'feminine' is 'routed' and inscribed into the artwork and is therefore bound up with Matrixial difference or as she terms 'difference-in-co-emergence'.⁵⁷⁸ Rather than *representing* difference, I argue that it is through the quasacle that the 'feminine' subject as unstable, co-emerging and 'in-process' can emerge in the spaces opened up within *peinture féminine* where difference can manifest through processes of production. Moreover, when considered in relation to Ettinger's notion of the Matrixial, difference is not tied to a Phallic model but is instead tied up as Matrixial difference not defined by lack.

Cixous' notions of the 'intensity of the instantaneous' and 'immediacy of visual and emotional impact' are very precisely tied to a specific moment such as capturing time and light in painting. However, my notion of the quasacle is not a definable, concrete or tangible 'thing'. It does not exist *on* or *as part of* a painting at a particular definable moment. As quasacles are and exist as part of a continuous multiplicity, one cannot capture or record them. Rather, the quasacle as the becoming of an event is part of the process of painting in which the 'feminine' comes-into-being and it is the aftermath of the quasacle that manifests in space and time. This can be seen in my diagram of *peinture féminine* as incorporating quasacles (see figure 3.12). The different elements refer to my diagram of *peinture féminine* as shown in figure 3.10. However in addition, quasacles are represented by the areas in yellow. As quasacles are not definable or tangible, they do not have a clearly definable 'edge' or 'borderline' as shown in the diagram. Indeed, as they are temporal in nature and in *doing*, like a cloud or a mass of expanding dough, they change and morph through their becoming. Quasacles are thus by their very nature ungraspable. They cannot be fully grasped as they are tied up with practice, making them 'slippery' to understand.⁵⁷⁹ Rather than grasping the quasacle or gaining something, "on the contrary, something else happens:

⁵⁷⁸ Ettinger, B. *The Matrixial Gaze*, 2005, p24

⁵⁷⁹ Lomax, Y. *Sounding the Event: Escapades in Dialogue and Matters of Art, Nature and Time*, 2005, p3

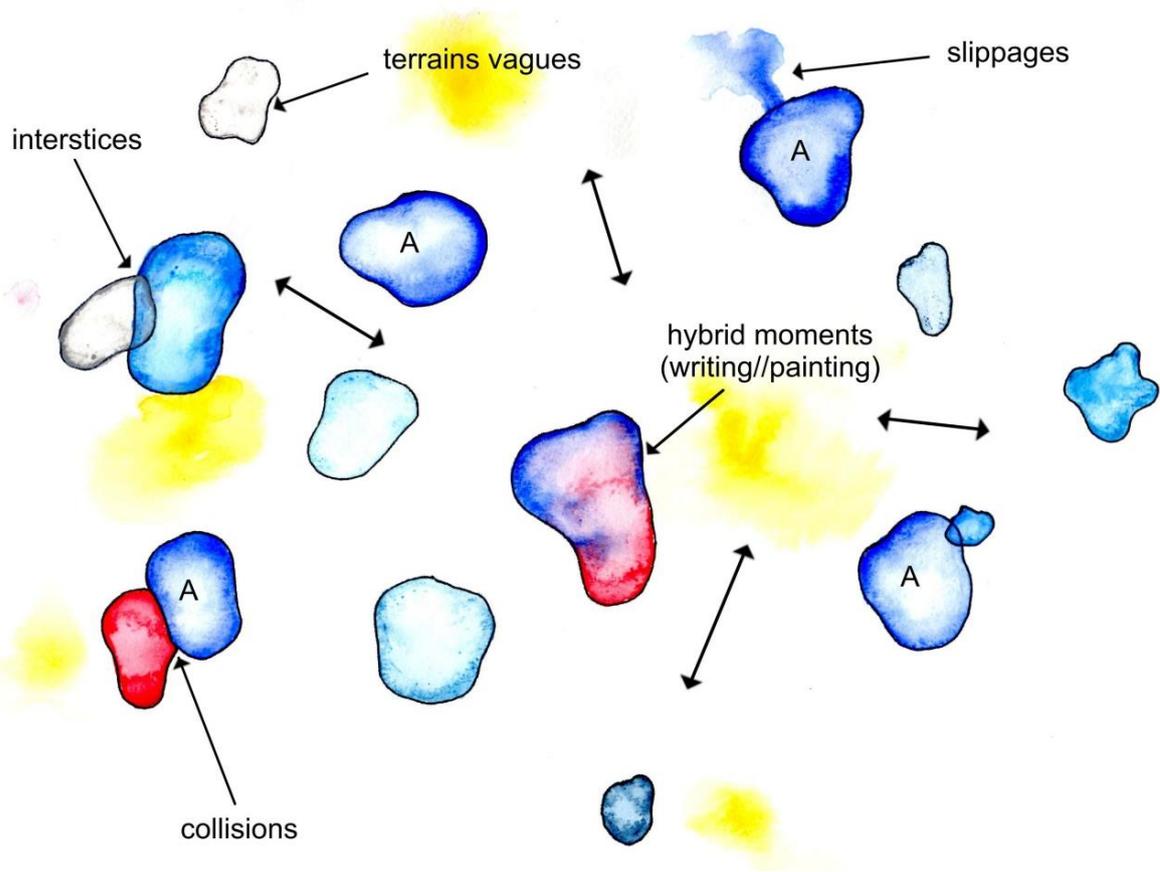


Figure 3.12 My diagram of *peinture féminine* incorporating quasacles

[we] come to exist differently".⁵⁸⁰ When discussing the immediacy of the instantaneous, Cixous makes an important differentiation between writing and painting: she asserts that the painter paints the surface of a painting, whereas she wants to touch the *inside* of what is being painted.⁵⁸¹ In the expansion of abstract painting through *peinture féminine* as unfolding, quasacles can be *enfolding* into abstract painting. They exist amidst the spaces opened up by *peinture féminine* and rather than being on the surface, they can be seen to be inside of it.

10. The poetic

I argue that quasacles are interrelated with what I have termed the 'poetic'. I have developed the poetic as an element of *peinture féminine* from the quality of poeticality and various qualities that Kristeva sees as tied up with poetic language. It refers to *l'écriture*

⁵⁸⁰ Lomax, Y. *Sounding the Event: Escapades in Dialogue and Matters of Art, Nature and Time*, 2005, p6

⁵⁸¹ Cixous, H. *The Last Painting or the Portrait of God*, 1991, p130

féminine's exploration of the subversive potential of poetic language⁵⁸² where the subject is not bound in language by pre-established signifiers.⁵⁸³ As Cixous warns of Symbolic language, "be aware, my friend, of the signifier that would take you back to the authority of the signified".⁵⁸⁴ Poetic language avoids the closure of Symbolic language and syntax: phonemes, lexemes and morphemes that govern the structuration of language. Instead, it is beyond signification as seen in breaks in structuration in which the 'sign' exceeds itself and the 'free play of the signifier'. Textually, poetic language manifests as 'silences', 'contradictions' and 'collisions' in a text where codes move and come into contact⁵⁸⁵ from the break between the signified and signifier. For Kristeva, the semiotic chora as unrepresentable in the Symbolic manifests in poetic language and constitutes the heterogeneous dimension of language that can never be caught up in Symbolic language.⁵⁸⁶ Language does not *represent* the drives but rather they can be reactivated through the practice of poetic writing and avant garde language.⁵⁸⁷

In abstract painting, whilst the signified and signifier are not 'broken' like Kristeva sees in poetic language, they have an unstable relationship and do not always cohere. I argue that the aftermath of the quasacle manifests as 'things' such as 'chance effects', 'accidents' and 'slippages' within and amidst the complex and multiple spaces of *peinture féminine*. They are bound up with the performative and material nature of painting rather than with any representational model as comparable to the 'free play of the signifier' in poetic language. The material utterances perform difference by creating a state of affairs by their state of being, in doing so shifting from a sign to a 'thing'. As Parveen Adams notes, it is the materiality of the image in which the otherness of the work becomes known. She describes this otherness as that which has remained outside the signifying chain, desired and only dimly seen by the artist and acceded to only with the help of 'accidents' or 'chance'

⁵⁸² Cixous and Kristeva do not refer to *all* poetry but locate poetic language in French Symbolist poetry such as by Mallarmé and Lautréamont in addition to writing by Joyce and Lispector.

⁵⁸³ Ettinger, B. *The Matrixial Borderspace*, 2006, p94

⁵⁸⁴ Cixous, H. *The Laugh of The Medusa*, 1976, p892

⁵⁸⁵ Barthes, R. *The Pleasure of the Text*, 1975, p6

⁵⁸⁶ Moi, T. *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory*, 1985, p162

⁵⁸⁷ Oliver, K. *Ethics, Politics and Difference in Julia Kristeva's Writing*, 1993, p2

interventions.⁵⁸⁸ In the material manifestation of the quasacle, following on from Bolt, “where materiality insists, the visual language begins to stutter, mumble and whisper”.⁵⁸⁹ The manifestations of the quasacle as tied to abstract painting are beyond signification and can be seen to be comparable with the ‘silences’, ‘contradictions’ and ‘collisions’ that occur from the breaks in structuration in poetic language. They are ambiguous and undecipherable and can be seen to refer to Derrida’s notion of the ‘undecidable’.⁵⁹⁰

Like the material and chance, I argue that in abstract painting, colour is also tied up with the poetic. It can be seen to be beyond signification; as Kristeva notes, it is impossible to define and describe and does not have an equivalent in linguistics.⁵⁹¹ In her essay, *Giotto’s Joy*, Kristeva asserts that ‘feminine’ *jouissance* comes from a movement towards the poetic and away from conventional Symbolic language and in art is related to colour. It is not a sign or induces meaning but ‘pure sensation’⁵⁹² which overwhelms the signifier. She asserts that colour is where the semiotic and Symbolic interact most directly and like “rhythm in language thus involves a shattering of meaning and its subject into a scale of difference”.⁵⁹³ For Kristeva, colour is the shattering of unity and codes and creates visual difference.⁵⁹⁴ Like the instability of abstract painting as proposed by *peinture féminine*, colour is the most unstable⁵⁹⁵ and is “representationally ambiguous”.⁵⁹⁶

The poetic cannot be clearly seen in a diagram because it is the *affect* of the quasacle which manifests temporally and spatially at the moment of its completion in an unstable and unpredictable manner. Rather, the poetic can be seen to encompass the spatiality of *peinture féminine* and through the interplay with other elements such as the quasacle, incorporates collisions, slippages, interstices, hybrid moments and *terrains vagues* amidst the multiplicity of spaces of *peinture féminine* (as seen in figure 3.12). As an element

⁵⁸⁸ Adams, P. *The Emptiness of the Image*, 1996, p113

⁵⁸⁹ Bolt, B. *Painting is Not a Representational Practice*, 2004, p47

⁵⁹⁰ Derrida’s ‘undecidables’ refer to something that cannot conform to either polarity of a dichotomy and attempts to trouble dualisms, or reveal how they are already troubled. For example, the figure of a ghost is an ‘undecidable’ as it seems to be neither present or absent or alternatively it is both present and absent at the same time.

⁵⁹¹ Kristeva, J. *Giotto’s Joy*, 1979, p216

⁵⁹² Barrett, E. *Kristeva Reframed*, 2011, p17

⁵⁹³ Kristeva, J. *Op cit.*, 1979, p221

⁵⁹⁴ *Ibid*

⁵⁹⁵ Pollock, G. and Rowley, A. *Painting in a Hybrid Moment*, 2003, p56

⁵⁹⁶ Barrett, E. *Op cit.*, 2011, p55

of *peinture féminine*, the poetic as interrelated with quasacles both opens up the embedded structures of Modernist abstraction through more complex and multiple spaces in which these structures are expanded and dispersed and at the same time enables 'difference' to manifest through making and its enfolding. In *peinture féminine*, it is the interplay of the poetic with the intermaterial and quasacles as part of its spatiality in which dualistic relations can be troubled and allow difference to 'come-into-being' in abstract painting.

11. The intermaterial

In her discussion of the spatiality of painting, Ring Peterson talks about exhibitions of paintings as installations, which use the 'techniques' of installation to emphasise the interrelation between the individual paintings in an exhibition.⁵⁹⁷ She continues that:

The installational display of paintings turns painting into something more complex, intertextual, contradictory and – last but not least – more spatial than we have been used to⁵⁹⁸

Whilst 'hybrid' or 'expanded' abstract painting has been argued to be intertextual,⁵⁹⁹ such arguments refer to the relationships *between* paintings or between paintings and other disciplines. However, this is a common misconception of the term intertextuality as coined by Kristeva. In Kristevan terms, intertextuality⁶⁰⁰ does not refer to the relationships between different textual 'systems', such as between texts or work by different authors influencing one another as the aforementioned hybrid work has built on. Rather, it involves the relationships *within* a text and the internal components of a textual system. Building on Kristeva's notion of intertextuality as a textual quality of *l'écriture féminine*, I have developed the term intermateriality as an element of my concept and practice of *peinture féminine*. Whereas Kristeva's intertextuality is rooted in language systems and semiotics, my notion of intermateriality explores its material potential as tied specifically with abstract painting and making processes.

⁵⁹⁷ Ring Peterson, A. *Painting Spaces*, 2010, p126

⁵⁹⁸ *Ibid*, p128

⁵⁹⁹ This is also discussed by both Green in *Painting as Asporia*, 2003 and Harris in *Hybridity versus Tradition: Contemporary Art and Cultural Politics*, 2003

⁶⁰⁰ Please see glossary for further explanation

Like the intertextual, the intermaterial refers to the production of meaning *within* a painting and how its structuration comes into being. It exploits the fact that in abstract painting, the relationship between the signifier and the signified is volatile and that in *peinture féminine*, the *affect* of the quasacle as tied up with the poetic exceeds the signifier. In this sense it is interrelated with quasacles and the poetic. Cixous discusses the ‘silences’ of poetic language as produced in the endless movement of giving and reading and the differences between traces and spaces.⁶⁰¹ The poetic text is a relation of relations containing its own internal form of communication such as repetitions, which modify all others. Following on from this, the intermaterial builds on Derrida’s concept of *différance*⁶⁰² in which there is an open ended play of differences based on the presence of the signifier and the absence of another through deferral, creating a never-ending chain of signifiers in a text. The intermaterial accounts for elements of the poetic that exceed signification and the ‘free play of the signifier’, and for the fact that in abstract painting, meaning is open-ended and there is no closure to interpreting the elements that make up the work.

The intermaterial does not just refer to the different elements of *peinture féminine* but their relations with one another and their *affects*. The multiple heterogeneous spaces opened out in *peinture féminine* are an infinite process of relations of the material put into play by its becoming and the shifting and mobility of its internal elements. Thus the intermaterial can open up the painted surface where elements do not just exist on the surface of a painting but allow meaning to be shaped by different material elements within the work. The intermaterial challenges hierarchical structures and binary thinking that may be seen as ‘masculine’ or ‘masculinist’ through their opening out into *peinture féminine* and the infinite deferral of meaning. Thus difference as enfolded also extends to incorporating *différance*.

⁶⁰¹ Conley, V. A. Hélène Cixous: Writing the Feminine, 1991, p8.

⁶⁰² Please see glossary for further explanation

12. Conclusions

My concept and practice of *peinture féminine* as put forward in this chapter, has distilled elements of *l'écriture féminine* to conceptualise a new way of thinking about abstract painting. I have built on the thinking of *l'écriture féminine* as being non-oppositional and Cixous' notion of 'in-betweenness' to reconceptualise abstract painting as a spatiality comprising a multiplicity of complex and heterogeneous shifting spaces in the between of and amidst oppositions. I have built on notions of the 'immediacy of the instantaneous', 'poeticity' and 'intertextuality' in relation to abstract painting to form 'quasacles', the 'poetic' and the 'intermaterial' as three interrelated and interdependent elements of *peinture féminine*. By using *l'écriture féminine* as a 'lens' with which to see abstract painting, textual qualities and elements have filtered through into my concept and practice of *peinture féminine*. This has moved on from problems of translating or applying these qualities to abstract painting which I have argued have contributed to *l'écriture féminine* coming to a standstill in providing possibilities for abstract painting. Instead, seeing *l'écriture féminine* as a 'lens' has allowed qualities such as 'volume', 'continuousness' and 'unfixity' to manifest in my art practice and through a reflexive dialogue as grounded in my writing//painting approach has permeated my thinking behind *peinture féminine*.

The spatiality of *peinture féminine* as encompassing 'more complex and multiple spaces' has provided a way to renegotiate the embedded structures and conventions of Modernist abstraction and its associated problematics. It has moved on from the four ways that I have argued artists have tried to negotiate abstract painting which focus on oppositional thinking or attempts to hybridise abstract painting to 'contaminate' it. The logic of *peinture féminine* disturbs and 'troubles' these conventions and binary thinking by 'opening up' and expanding them, acknowledging that they are not fixed and rigid. This opening out enables a shift from representing difference to difference as manifesting in practice and being enfolded into *peinture féminine* through the interplay of its elements. Difference can also be seen to extend to *différance* in which meaning is made through the

infinite deferral of elements as evoked by the intermaterial. In doing so, *peinture féminine* also moves on from the apparent 'direct expression' associated with Modernist abstraction and from an indexical to an intermaterial system of understanding abstract painting.

CHAPTER 4

Difference in the making

Underlying my research have been two key problematics: why abstraction has been so problematic for women and feminist painters and why *l'écriture féminine* ceased to provide possibilities for women's abstract painting. I have argued that my concept and practice of *peinture féminine* as incorporating the logic of writing//painting, has distilled aspects of *l'écriture féminine* to provide possibilities for abstract painting to move on from these problematics. This involved 'opening up' abstract painting to expand the perceived 'masculine' conventions of Modernist abstraction as embedded within it and reconceptualising abstract painting as not rigid but made up of multiple shifting and heterogeneous spaces. I discussed how this 'opening up' through abstract painting as a spatiality facilitated three elements: quasacles, the poetic and the intermaterial, allowing for difference to emerge through material production and be enfolded within this spatiality.

I will now discuss the work of Cy Twombly, Rosa Lee and Neal Rock which I claim as most closely embodying *peinture féminine* and the interplay of its elements. Whilst *peinture féminine* is not a fixed strategy or aesthetic made up of a specific formation of components, I will discuss how different elements operate in their work in relation to *peinture féminine*. I will then discuss my own art practice as constituting *peinture féminine*. Although my art practice has been ongoing throughout the research process, I will discuss five key bodies of work. As I have discussed in Chapter 2, my own work does not seek to demonstrate or illustrate my ideas surrounding *peinture féminine*. Rather, it can be seen as part of its exploration in which the concept and practice of *peinture féminine* has resulted from a symbiotic relation between theoretical and practical ideas resulting in praxical knowledge. The discussion of my artwork will draw out my writing//painting methodological approach as specific to my practice which will then be further considered in the conclusion.

1. *Peinture féminine* and the work of Cy Twombly, Rosa Lee and Neal Rock

1.1 Cy Twombly: graphisms and little *satoris*

Although Twombly's paintings are conventional in terms of canvas stretched on a support, I argue that they encompass a spatiality of more complex and multiple spaces and are aligned with *peinture féminine*. Barthes alludes to this spatiality when he describes Twombly's surfaces as possessing an 'absolute spaciousness' and an 'airiness'.⁶⁰³ His surfaces do not have illusionistic or visual space *on* them, but instead it seems to me that this 'spaciousness' is one *within* them. This shifts his surfaces from being limited to flatness

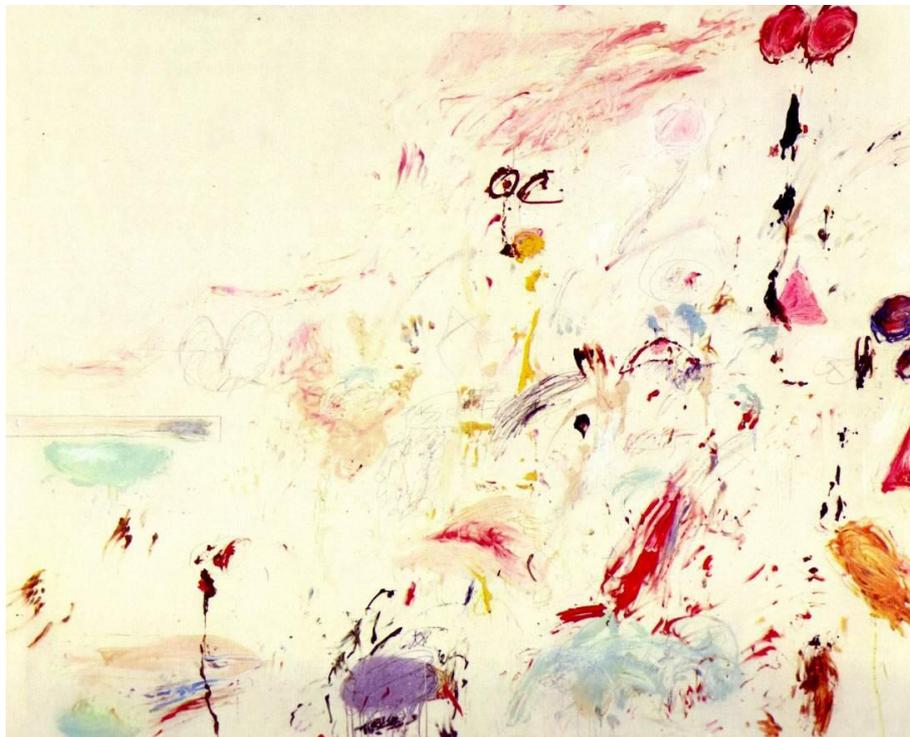


Figure 4.1, Cy Twombly, *Bay of Naples*, (1961), oil, crayon and pencil on canvas

to being opened up internally as 'multi-dimensional' or 'prismatic' like the spatiality of *peinture féminine*. Indeed, Barthes notes that Twombly's surfaces have gaps, interstices and sparse porous spaces within which we float and breathe and do not "*grasp anything at all*".⁶⁰⁴ Yve Alain Bois also later asserts that his surfaces do not cohere but float.⁶⁰⁵ Such a

⁶⁰³ Barthes, R. *The Wisdom of Art*, 1979, p105

⁶⁰⁴ *Ibid*

⁶⁰⁵ Bois, Y. A. "Der Liebe Gott Steckt im Detail": Reading Twombly, 1999, p 64

description of 'floating' implies a movement in all directions at once⁶⁰⁶ as seen in Irigaray's notion of volume and mobility *amidst* these spaces, rather than only *across* his surfaces. In doing so, rather than just dealing with surfaces, like Cixous he explores the inside and the underneath.⁶⁰⁷

Twombly's paintings also have a sense of being 'scattered'⁶⁰⁸ (see figure 4.1). The marks on his paintings appear dispersed, rather like my diagram of *peinture féminine* (see figure 3.10). This is further highlighted through the mismatch of the size of his paintings and its internal scale. There are heterogeneous marks including tiny details and faint smudges layered amongst larger marks including what Bois calls 'the blob', which appears as a "turd-like handful of paint applied to the canvas and unexpectedly remaining there".⁶⁰⁹ This discrepancy between its elements as heightened by scattered detail further unfolds his surfaces.

In addition, the heterogeneous and scattered effects *affect* modes of looking when encountering his work. In order to view his work, Bois notes that one becomes "entangled in a forest of unsynthesizable details".⁶¹⁰ In looking at Twombly's paintings, one must graze the surface rather than gaze, moving from one focal point to another. We must:

Continuously adjust [our] gaze, for due to the abrupt changes in scale from one atom to the next, the focus does not remain constant⁶¹¹

Paintings such as *Untitled (Say Goodbye Catallus, to the Shores of Asia Minor)*, (1994), (see figure 4.2) envelop the viewer because of their size. The work cannot be viewed in one glance as there are multiple points of entry both scattered across his surfaces and *within* them. As Bois continues, we miss too much if we look at a Twombly painting from afar, yet there is no position from which to securely fathom the picture.⁶¹²

⁶⁰⁶ Irigaray, L. *This Sex Which Is Not One*, 1985, p29

⁶⁰⁷ Schiach, M. *Hélène Cixous: A Politics of Writing*, 1991, p36

⁶⁰⁸ Barthes, R. *The Wisdom of Art*, 1979, p105

⁶⁰⁹ Bois, Y. *A Certain Infantile Thing*, 2002, p72

⁶¹⁰ Bois, Y. A. "Der Liebe Gott Steckt im Detail": Reading Twombly, 1999, p 64

⁶¹¹ *Ibid*

⁶¹² *Ibid*

The references to modes of looking evoked by the 'more complex and multiple spaces' within Twombly's surfaces disturb the 'gaze' as a dominant scopic regime and the privileged mode of visibility in Western painting, and also the 'pure' visibility' privileged in



Figure 4.2, Cy Twombly, *Untitled (Say Goodbye Catallus, to the Shores of Asia Minor)*, (1994), oil on canvas

Modernist abstraction.⁶¹³ Indeed, Martin Jay notes that “Modernity has been resolutely ocularcentric”⁶¹⁴ and is what Irigaray calls ‘phallogocentric’ in which the ocular has a fixed presence and is hierarchised over all other senses. The spaces in Twombly’s paintings built into and within his canvases do not simply create illusionistic depth through optical visibility. Rather, this ‘grazing’ requires haptic visibility which troubles modes of vision through the spatiality of his work and through the intermateriality of his palimpsest-like surfaces. In addition to ‘grazing’ his surfaces, I would argue that the experience of looking also encompasses ‘glancing’. This suggests not just mobility in looking at his surfaces but that this is broken up by moments when one glances at the different elements of his work more briefly than ‘gazing’. In work that employs the ‘glance’, there is no single distance to view the work to make it intelligible whereby:

⁶¹³ For an extended discussion on modes of vision and visibility, please refer to Hal Foster’s collection of essays *Vision and Visibility, Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth Century French Thought* by Martin Jay, *The Glance and the Gaze* by Norman Bryson and texts by Rosalind Krauss and Jonathan Crary.

⁶¹⁴ Jay, M. *Scopic Regimes of Modernity*, 1988, p3

Different parts of the painting are rendered with different levels of focus and are subject to differing treatments, some meticulously detailed.⁶¹⁵

Krauss talks about a 'beat' or 'pulse' as an oscillation or 'on/off' of visibility as a mode of disruption which acts against the stability of a visual space.⁶¹⁶ The shifting undecidability evoked by grazing and glancing in Twombly's work creates "the simultaneous separation and intactness of figure and ground"⁶¹⁷ as seen in the spatiality of his surfaces.

Twombly's surfaces appear as a palimpsest; there are multiple marks and 'events' layered within them, opening up 'complex' spaces. These include 'smears', 'smudges' and softly rubbed out traces of colour from wax crayons or oil paint. In some works, cream coloured areas of paint are indistinguishable from the cream coloured paint of the primer, only recognisable as slight 'surprises' or 'accidents' such as drips or splash marks. Barthes notes of Twombly's paintings that:

No surface, no matter what the distance from which one looks at it, is truly virginal. A surface is always and already asper, discontinuous, uneven and rhythmical by accidents: there's the grain of the paper, the smudging, the tracings, the interlace of tracings, the diagrams, the words⁶¹⁸

The palimpsest of marks as fluctuating between the visible and not fully visible further disturbs any single point of focus where the oscillation between primer and the independent surface of paint tests the very limits of visibility.⁶¹⁹ As Katharina Schmidt notes:

Twombly relies on the suggestive power of the painterly process. It remains legible in enigmatic signs and traces, in the allure of colour, in the movement of paint, which transforms visual perception into a haptic experience, and above all, the infinitely varied scale of scriptural articulations⁶²⁰

Marks are faintly visible under the layer which covers them.⁶²¹ Within the surface, what fades away and what we cannot make out also simultaneously comes into being, on the border of visibility and invisibility. His surfaces can be described, following on from Bois, as 'surface-spaces'.⁶²²

⁶¹⁵ Fortnum, R. *Seeing and Feeling*, 2004, p143

⁶¹⁶ Krauss, R. *The Im/Pulse to See*, 1988, p51

⁶¹⁷ *Ibid*, p63

⁶¹⁸ Barthes, R. *Non Multa Sed Multum*, 1976, p91

⁶¹⁹ Langenberg, R. *The Limits of Meaning and Visibility*, 2002, p53

⁶²⁰ Schmidt, K. *Hero and Leander*, 2002, p107

⁶²¹ Barthes, R. *The Wisdom of Art*, 1979, p103

⁶²² Bois, Y. A. "Der Liebe Gott Steckt im Detail": *Reading Twombly*, 1999, p64

I would argue that the palimpsest of marks in Twombly's surfaces evoke the poetic. His surfaces contain a multitude of 'events', many of which such as 'the smudge' or 'the smear' barely appear on the surface and are ambiguous and ungraspable through their lack of visibility. They create a paradoxical sense of sparseness and density which create what Barthes describes as 'enigmas' and 'silences' or "a very faint sizzling of the surface".⁶²³ These silences refer to those of the poetic and the 'breaks' and 'gaps' in structuration. The intermateriality of Twombly's paintings also incorporate the handwritten 'event' or what Barthes refers to as 'graphisms'⁶²⁴ (see figure 4.3). His letters are not concerned with the intelligibility of his signs; like his other 'events', the traces of his letters evoke the poetic in

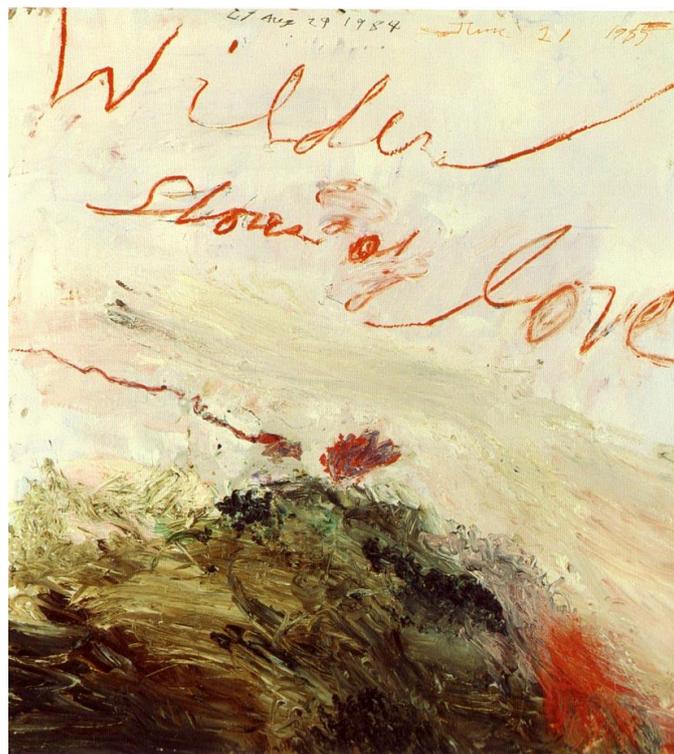


Figure 4.3, Cy Twombly, *Wilder Shores of Love*, (1985),
oil, crayon and pencil on plywood

that they are discontinuous and have an 'emptiness'. Indeed his use of words such as 'wilder shores of love' do not evoke 'shores' or 'wildness' in a literal or metaphoric sense. Rather, they appear as words that cannot be fully deciphered as there is a break between the

⁶²³ Barthes, R. *The Wisdom of Art*, 1979, p113

⁶²⁴ Barthes, R. *Non Multa Sed Multum*, 1976, p90

signified and the signifier.⁶²⁵ They can be seen as the ‘free play of the signifier’ not tied to any representational image. As Barthes notes, they can be partially deciphered but not interpreted; their function is nothing more than to render vagueness that prevents full deciphering, making them paradoxically alive.⁶²⁶ His letters in their unreadability and lack of communicability refer to the *terrains vagues of peinture féminine* that are vague and yet not vacant. They encompass what Barthes calls ‘illisible écriture’;⁶²⁷ like Mallarméan poetry, they allude to legible writing through ambiguity. Indeed as Berger notes, Twombly is the painter of verbal ‘silence’ who visualises the silent space that exists between and around words.⁶²⁸ Robert Pincus-Witten asserts that Mallarméan notions of white, emptiness, drifting and allusion are implicit to Twombly’s work.⁶²⁹ The ‘silences’ of his paintings and notions of poeticality refer to *l’écriture féminine* and of an opening up of *différences* in the interchanges of the text whereby these ‘silences’ are produced in the endless movement of giving and reading the difference between traces and spaces, where there is no true beginning as ‘writing is always already there’.⁶³⁰

Twombly’s graphisms can be referred to as *gauche*;⁶³¹ possessing a sense of clumsiness and awkwardness in their shakiness and can be seen as ‘accidents’ or ‘surprises’ rather than deliberate actions. Barthes calls these graphisms a ‘graphic itch’ as referring to when writing ‘feels itself constrained’ and explodes and pushes outwards.⁶³² Twombly’s lines appear as if they were created without any effort at all. Indeed as Barthes notes, his hands seem to enter a state of levitation as if “he writes his words *with his fingertips*”.⁶³³ The fragmentary letters appear to be woven into the picture plane to create an ‘airiness’⁶³⁴ and ‘shake at the peace of the work’s spaciousness’.⁶³⁵ This vagueness further

⁶²⁵ This can also be seen in the use of Twombly’s titles. For example, his painting *Bay of Naples* (see figure 4.1) does not depict the city of Naples nor can we see any known referent that may be interpreted in relation to Naples. Instead, his titles are poetic in that they do not represent, but are ambiguous and the reader must make sense of the disconnection between the signifier of the title and the signified.

⁶²⁶ Barthes, R. *Non Multa Sed Multum*, 1976, p89

⁶²⁷ Barthes, R. *The Wisdom of Art*, 1979, p107

⁶²⁸ Berger, J. *Post-Scriptum*, 2002, p45

⁶²⁹ Pincus-Witten, R. *Cy Twombly: Aurelian Souvenirs*, 2002, p19

⁶³⁰ Conley, V. A., *Hélène Cixous: Writing the feminine*, 1991, p8

⁶³¹ *Gauche* is the French word for clumsy or embarrassed.

⁶³² Barthes, R. *Op cit.*, 1976, p91

⁶³³ *Ibid*, p 89

⁶³⁴ Langenberg, R. *The Limits of meaning and Visibility*, 2002, p53

⁶³⁵ Barthes, R. *Op cit.*, 1979, p110

opens up his surfaces as liberated from vision and as made up of a continuous multiplicity of spaces becoming within and amidst the events, marks and gestures. These spaces live within Twombly's paintings and trouble the relation between the surface and structure and the flatness of the surface.

Twombly's 'surprises' also show his surfaces not as written but "*to be written*"⁶³⁶ (my emphasis). Barthes argues that Twombly's gestures and events 'garble' the causative chain of acts in the production of painting and make it rebound so he loses its meaning, which he calls *satoris*.⁶³⁷ He asserts that Twombly's paintings do not possess but "*are many little satoris*"⁶³⁸ (my emphasis). Like Cixous in her discussion of the immediacy of the instantaneous as 'approaching' writing,⁶³⁹ with Twombly:

Everything happens at that infinitesimal moment in which the wax of his crayon *approaches* the grain of the paper⁶⁴⁰ (my emphasis)

I would argue that the poetic element of his graphisms are closely related with the quasacle; they are '*to be written*' and in turn open up spaces within the work. His work can be seen to be tied up in production, and the activity of *smudging* or *smearing* rather than the trace of a smudge or a smear. *Tracing* enunciates the trace and *smudging* enunciates the smudge; they can thus be linked to time where the trace becomes through "the gesture that produces it *by allowing it to happen*".⁶⁴¹ His events are never truly present but instead *about to* become. They are the supplement to an act; rebounded and escaped in their traces, not what remains but what is thrown away in use.⁶⁴²

The 'surprises' or events do not just manifest in Twombly's graphisms, smears or smudges. In his later work, colour is directly spurted out of the tube onto the canvas.⁶⁴³ There are chance material *affects* which have the appearance of being thrown. These marks appear as accidents, existing in their plain materiality; as oozes, dribbles or 'blobs'. His

⁶³⁶ Barthes, R. *Non Multa Sed Multum*, 1976, p90

⁶³⁷ *Ibid*, p91; meaning ruptures in Japanese zen philosophy

⁶³⁸ *Ibid*, p90

⁶³⁹ Cixous, H. *The Last Painting or the Portrait of God*, 1991, p114

⁶⁴⁰ Barthes, R. *Op cit.*, 1976, p95

⁶⁴¹ *Ibid*, p91

⁶⁴² *Ibid*, p89

⁶⁴³ Bois, Y. A. "Der Liebe Gott Steckt im Detail": Reading Twombly, 1999, p78

materials are imposed on us; we see 'things' such as the drip of paint but they do not represent anything. As Barthes notes, they exist *alla prima*;⁶⁴⁴ a first attempt. The space-time moments interact with the materiality of the applied paint.⁶⁴⁵ His marks, non-marks, events and signs in their heterogeneous manifestations and various states of becomings are enfolded into the multiplicity of vague and shifting spaces within his works and exist as a complex intermaterially. His surfaces can be seen to have a mobile multiplicity which is infinitely permeable, always ready to accept new marks whilst conserving existing traces, a becoming producing something new.⁶⁴⁶ His marks are the moment of actualisation; not a sign, but the condition of possibility and the material instant.

1.2 Rosa Lee: a multiplicity of detail

Lee also examines the notion of 'detail' in her paintings. However, compared to Twombly, her paintings contain a mass of detail and the material presence of minutiae. Margaret Walters describes her surfaces as:

Patiently and minutely elaborated with wax-thickened oil, until the tiny repetitions (she calls them 'cell-like accretions') form a pattern, a tissue, of their own⁶⁴⁷

The repetitive layering of tiny brush marks evoke stitching and embroidery⁶⁴⁸ (see figures 4.4 and 4.5). Lee's process of painting has also been described as 'lace-making', where there is a lace-like quality in the intricately worked, decorated surfaces of her canvases.⁶⁴⁹ Walters notes that Lee's surfaces look as though they have been "slowly and patiently fabri-cated – woven, knotted, knitted, netted, embroidered".⁶⁵⁰ These marks do not have a literal excess of paint, but the sheer multiplicity of these marks creates an overabundance that makes them seem unending. Moreover, this knitting and knotting together refers to these marks as interlaced and tangled. They also imply a looping in on themselves and following on from

⁶⁴⁴ Barthes, R. *Non Multa Sed Multum*, 1976, p100

⁶⁴⁵ Langenberg, R. *The Limits of Meaning and Visibility*, 2002, p53

⁶⁴⁶ Lechte, J. *Thinking the Reality of Abstraction*, 1995, p 25

⁶⁴⁷ Walters, M. *Rosa Lee: Painting as Lace-making*, 1992, p71

⁶⁴⁸ Lee's paintings have been interpreted by some critics as being 'feminist' through their relation to domestic crafts traditionally used by women such as embroidery and lace-making, although this has not been elaborated on by Lee herself. For example, in the exhibition catalogue *Conceits, Vanités* (1994), Simms argues that Lee plays on the gendered nature of lacemaking and embroidery as being seen as 'women's work', conflating 'heroic' painting and the decorative arts.

⁶⁴⁹ Walters, M. *Rosa Lee: Painting as Lace-making*, 1992, p71

⁶⁵⁰ *Ibid*



Figure 4.4 Rosa Lee, *Comus (Revelry) No. 2*, (1992), oil on canvas



Figure 4.5 Rosa Lee, *Braid 2*, (2001), oil on linen

Irigaray, a self-touching. This internal complexity and abundance of marks opens up her surfaces as comprising a multiplicity of spaces.

As Lee's paintings do not refer to any known referents and can be interpreted as abstract, I would argue that the multiplicity of internal elements can be seen to function on an intermaterial rather than a representational level through the transposing of the material elements of the work into one another. This is highlighted when considering the experience of looking at her surfaces. Like Twombly, the multiplicity of detail creates a sense of deferral amongst the elements of the work and in order to look at her work, we must graze across the surface. They trouble any single point of focus where the interlacing of tiny marks that make up the overall composition appear in flux and set the gaze in motion (see figure 4.6). As Lee herself notes, looking at a larger vista prevents the possibility of seeing things in one glance,



Figure 4.6 Rosa Lee, *Untitled*, (2009), oil on canvas

which is further enhanced by the awareness of the minutiae with which the bigger picture is populated.⁶⁵¹ As Lorraine Simms notes:

The space is shallow yet the canvas seems to ebb and flow. Undulating bands of alternating colours press upon my retina, shifting back and forth, creating the illusion of continuous movement. These

⁶⁵¹ Lee, R. *Threads*, 2004, p122

paintings pulse with energy. They do not passively wait for my gaze to consume them, but rather, they consume my gaze.⁶⁵²

By evoking haptic visuality whereby one must graze, Lee troubles optical visuality and disrupts any singular gaze where we usually see things from enough distance to intelligibly perceive objects in deep space.⁶⁵³ Looking at her surfaces also involves a sense of peripheral vision whereby we must pay attention to what is discernible only at the edges of our sight.⁶⁵⁴ Evoking both haptic and peripheral vision disturbs the certainties induced by illusionistic space and pure visuality, revealing that the condition of any illusion is that there is something hidden *behind* space.⁶⁵⁵

Lee's examination of detail has led at the same time to a search for structure. Her paintings have been described as having a "sense of patterned order"⁶⁵⁶. As Lee notes, they explore:

A kind of attempt at order and the often paradoxical search for a language to articulate the possibility of fluidity and the shifting nature of meanings⁶⁵⁷

Her paintings are first marked out on graph paper and then transferred to canvas in pencil or sometimes patterns are sprayed through templates to provide a framework. Transparent washes of colour are then added to the canvas or linen substrate. At this point, the paintings 'break loose'; they are "elaborated on and 'embroidered' with the characteristic skeins of lush pigment".⁶⁵⁸ The underlying numerical systems she uses are dissolved within webs and repetitive rhythms of rich colour and tonal and textual variation.⁶⁵⁹ The process of painting for Lee is:

A lengthy and at times contradictory series of manoeuvres, from the first veil of thin colour washed onto the white canvas to the delineation and scrupulous in-filling of the last elements, with their sweaty, turbulent interweavings and stranded pigment. There are many intermediary glazes and adjustments as she superimposes layer after layer. The final superimpositions are the most emphatic. These too are repeated motifs, but twisted, reversed, inverted and displaced.⁶⁶⁰

⁶⁵² Simms, L. Rosa Lee: Conceits, Vanités, 1994

⁶⁵³ Lee, R. Threads, 2004, p124

⁶⁵⁴ *Ibid*, p 122

⁶⁵⁵ Adams, P. The Emptiness of the Image, 1996, p112

⁶⁵⁶ Simms, L. *Op cit*, 1994

⁶⁵⁷ Lee, R. *Op cit*, 2004, p120-21

⁶⁵⁸ Kent, S. Review of Rosa Lee's exhibition at Todd Gallery London in Time Out magazine, July 1990

⁶⁵⁹ Betterton, R. Bodies in the Work: The Aesthetics and Politics of Women's Non-Representational Painting, 1996, p101

⁶⁶⁰ Searle, A. Provisions and Follies, 1992, p2

Even though her paintings are organised, the multiple layers and material elements resist any rigid categorisation or singular reading of the work. Such a process of making implies an excess of elements *within* the work and an internal complexity. As Walters notes:

Colour plays against the grid and almost – but not quite – dissolves it... She creates dualities only to confound them, acknowledges opposites – between rational and sensual, natural and artificial, abstract and representational; perhaps even between masculine and feminine – only to dissolve them⁶⁶¹

These different modes of working are layered *into* rather than *on top of* one another as shown through the initial layers ‘dissolving’ and dispersing into other layers. This elongated process and multiple layering refer to the ‘system’ of her work and as merging and blurring with one another. Within this layering, there is a seemingly infinite system of marks and material elements, some stained into the canvas, others excessive in their repetitive layered material presence which create a complex sense of intermateriality. In the making of her work, Lee asserts that the layering of events creates a sense of anticipation, whereby whatever her preparations, she cannot fully predict what will emerge on canvas.⁶⁶² The material insurances of her marks that cannot be fully controlled create internal disturbances with the work. Whereas Irigaray challenges phallogocentrism through mimesis and ‘overmiming the miming imposed on women’, Lee’s work can be seen to ‘overmime’ the fragmentary, mobility and multiplicity that Irigaray has linked with the ‘feminine’.

In doing so, figure/ground, haptic/optic, surface/structure, microscopic/macroscopic relations are not set up but dispersed and dissolved through the opening up of a non-hierarchical heterogeneous spatiality in her surfaces. The spatiality is further expanded not only by the mass of details but the layers within the paintings and the materiality of the paint on the surface. Indeed, as Sarah Kent points out, the sensuality of Lee’s brushmarks appear in defiance and refusal to be contained by their structure.⁶⁶³ She collapses, divides and deliberately blurs superficial boundaries and neat conclusions, articulating painting’s qualities of ‘slippage’.⁶⁶⁴

⁶⁶¹ Walters, M. Rosa Lee: Painting as Lace-making, 1992, p72

⁶⁶² Lee, R. Threads, 2004, p122

⁶⁶³ Kent, S. Review of Rosa Lee exhibition in Time Out magazine, July 1990

⁶⁶⁴ Hill, E. Rosa Lee: Paintings, 2012, p5

Caught between these multiple levels, like Twombly some of Lee's paintings have been described as 'murky' or 'vague'⁶⁶⁵ and can be seen to operate within the interstitial spaces of *terrains vagues* amidst binaries. Rather than creating a sense of visual space within the work as Walters notes, whereby the "foreground and background flicker into reverse, smooth bands play against texture, until the flat surface wavers and takes on disconcerting depth",⁶⁶⁶ a multiplicity of non-oppositional spaces are opened up. Rather than the smudges or traces left by Twombly that evoke the poetic, the opening up of multiple spaces and binary relations, and their materiality exceed the order that underlies them and they can be seen to 'break' signifying structures like the poetic. Indeed, Lee herself states that painting in its 'silences' is well suited to the exploration of such paradoxes and dilemmas where conventional boundaries become blurred.⁶⁶⁷ Lee's works also refer to the poetic in that her patterns can be traced, but their intricate construction means that, like Twombly's work, they are never fully legible. This is further enhanced by the textures built up with incremental layers of wax-thickened paint.

1.3 Neal Rock: enfolding and expanding

Rock's paintings deal with the legacy of abstraction. Like my conceptualisation of *peinture féminine* as renegotiating the history and conventions of abstraction, he sees his work as having a sense of tradition and linearity, however beyond that it is 'porous'. Rather than rejecting Modernist abstraction or working in opposition to it, Rock acknowledges its history and reconceptualises abstract painting by pushing paint to its material and conceptual limits to create possibilities. However, whilst porosity implies the absorption of other things, I would argue that the strategies he employs open up his work internally in order for the conventions of Modernist abstraction to be disturbed. Rock's work appears as sculptural compositions built up through the layering of pigmented silicone, which have been piped, ladled and sculpted to create abstract forms⁶⁶⁸ (see figure 4.7). Although his works

⁶⁶⁵ Cornish, S. Rosa Lee and Sarah Dywer, 2010

⁶⁶⁶ Walters, M. Rosa Lee: Painting as Lace-making, 1992, p72

⁶⁶⁷ Lee, R. Threads, 2004, p121

⁶⁶⁸ Jones, H and Snoddy, S. Neal Rock: Fanestra and Other works, 2009, p4



Figure 4.7, Neal Rock, *Lethe*, 2009, pigmented silicone

are essentially sculptural, he does not see them as sculptural ‘objects’, but as painting.⁶⁶⁹ These ‘objects’, however they may physically manifest, are therefore requested to be viewed through the ‘lens’ of abstract painting. In doing so, they are both physically as well as conceptually ‘opened out’ in a similar way to *peinture féminine*. They are not expanded by being hybridised with sculpture but through Rock’s commitment to painting,⁶⁷⁰ and extending the language of abstract painting.

Rock asserts that he inflects the language of painting and pushes it to its limits to question what ‘paint’ is. He explores the vitality of painting as a medium by expanding the very notion of what paint may be where he conceptualises pigmented silicone as paint in which “paint is pigment plus medium”.⁶⁷¹ He aims to create:

An informative space ... where language or a set of languages are dismantled, or brought together, or inflected ... Inflection can be seen to bend things rather than the severing or cutting implied by rupture and where disconnection can enact inflection⁶⁷²

⁶⁶⁹ Jones, H and Snoddy, S. Neal Rock: *Fanestra and Other works*, 2009, p4

⁶⁷⁰ Rock, N. Interview with Helen Jones, 2009, p1

⁶⁷¹ Rock, N. Interview with Neal Rock, 2010, p26; see appendix A.

⁶⁷² *Ibid*, p33; see Appendix A

Rock asserts that his work is about “retrieving something and adding something vital now”.⁶⁷³ Whilst he indeed inflects the language of painting in terms of ‘distorting’ it and avoids any attempts to ‘rupture’ it which as I have discussed is problematic, it seems to me that his expansion of what painting is *stretches* rather than bends it so that its vitality isn’t something new added to it but a reconceptualisation of it. In doing so, he challenges the medium specificity of paint as privileged in Modernist abstraction but not through contaminating painting with other media.

Whilst I argue that Rock’s work embodies elements of *peinture féminine*, he does so in a much different way to Twombly and Lee. In his work, Rock applies paint in rich and impastoed strokes where he renders the painterly mark three-dimensionally through his use of silicone.⁶⁷⁴ He notes that his paintings are “built up layer after layer, taken apart and built back up again ... a repetitious activity of addition and subtraction”.⁶⁷⁵ Unlike Twombly and Lee who incorporate a multiplicity of layers *within* their work to open up a spatiality, Rock’s paintings are layered *onto* and *into* each other and have a physical internal material complexity. Whereas the heterogeneity of Twombly’s marks create a palimpsest *within* his surfaces, as the material layering of Rock’s work *is* the surface, they can be seen to form a materially overloaded palimpsest bearing the traces of marks within their layers.

Rock throws together binaries and oppositions to create new possibilities practically, not just theoretically.⁶⁷⁶ Indeed as Martin Herbert argues, his ‘delicate paint-bundles’ are “suspended already between oppositions and binaries”.⁶⁷⁷ Rather than exploring an ‘in-between’ or a ‘third space’, Rock explores *gradiations*,⁶⁷⁸ a multiplicity of spaces within the mixing together of binaries. His ‘material palimpsests’ trouble any distinction between the inside and the outside where the support is indistinguishable from the surface. This can be seen in particular in his freestanding paintings (see figure 4.8) where the materiality of his

⁶⁷³ Rock, N. Interview with Neal Rock, 2010, p12; see appendix A.

⁶⁷⁴ Herbert, M. Mercury Rising, 2009, p5

⁶⁷⁵ Rock, N. Interview with Helen Jones, 2009, p1

⁶⁷⁶ *Ibid*

⁶⁷⁷ Herbert, M. Op cit., 2009, p6

⁶⁷⁸ Rock, N. Op cit., 2010, p10; see Appendix A



Figure 4.8, Neal Rock, *Painting/Secured*, 2009, pigmented silicone and mixed media



Figure 4.9, Neal Rock, *Polaris Range*, 2003, pigmented silicone and mixed media

'marks' overspill their edges so that they are absorbed by the support. The support is engulfed in silicone paint, making it indistinguishable with the material and its surface, in doing so blurring any notion of the 'edge'. Some of his paintings absorb the wall space with what he calls "satellite pieces"; small attachments of silicone that spread away from the work

and give a sense of growth or expansion”.⁶⁷⁹ As Miles notes, the satellite pieces (see figure 4.9) “seem perpetually to spread, enveloping themselves and their environs in a baroque theatre”.⁶⁸⁰ The silicone appears to spread itself across and away from their support and others overflow their supports. They conflate the relationship between the surface and material where by encroaching the gallery space and growing outwards, the small pieces become small surfaces themselves made only of paint. They appear as individual entities and yet exist intermaterially in relation with the rest of his work.

Like Lee, Rock asserts that his work has a sense of order in the way that he approaches making. However, there is a sense that the materiality of the silicone paint challenges the system of repetitively building up layers to create infinite possibilities. As Miles notes, his paintings produce:

A gesturally ordered accumulation of material that pushes beyond abstraction into a literal presence that simply *is*, but that simultaneously speaks of its age⁶⁸¹ (my emphasis)

Although his manipulation of silicone as a painterly medium is quite technical in the sense that it requires a sense of order, the silicone and their forms have their own sense of self in the way that they droop and set. Thus whilst he tries to impose a sense of control, it is exceeded by the materiality of the work and the silicone manifesting in ways that weren't foreseen. Rock notes that the process of the work's production and the paintings themselves are 'unequivocally tied together and interthreaded' where “the end goal is, when it's successful ... the material manifestation of a way of thinking”.⁶⁸² Like the poetic as the aftermath of the quasacle, he is ultimately left with the evidence of the material logic of thinking, which is ultimately the painting and the silicone paint itself.

Although Rock considers previous works absolutely finished, he asserts that more recent works are shown as a work in process.⁶⁸³ The works seem to be articulations of moments of unfinishedness that are in the midst of process and doing. Indeed, Rock asserts

⁶⁷⁹ Rock, N. Interview with Helen Jones, 2009, p3

⁶⁸⁰ Miles, C. Neal Rock, 2006

⁶⁸¹ *Ibid*

⁶⁸² Rock, N. Interview with Neal Rock, 2010, p21; see appendix A

⁶⁸³ *Ibid*, p23; see Appendix A

that he is interested in the notion that the work is 'resting'; it isn't finished but at an intermediary stage. In this sense, the work can be seen to relate to the quascacle. The moment the silicone is laid down, it is gloopy and paint-like. However, he attempts to 'petrify' that moment by embedding it with steel and sculpting it.⁶⁸⁴ In doing so, slippages are sometimes enacted through the unexpected glooping of the silicone where bits fall and then dry mid-slippage. The use of silicone can be seen as a material utterance where the event of the droop, gloop and ooze is frozen in its becoming.

Like Twombly and Lee's paintings, Rock's work requires the viewer to engage in a different type of looking. His freestanding works (see figure 4.8) can be viewed by physically moving around the work in which the continuous surface makes any singular point of focus impossible. It seems that whilst viewing his work indeed involves 'grazing' through this movement, it also invites the viewer to 'peer' into the work. This is in part caused by the work's material ambiguousness and looking at the strangeness of the material. Moreover, as his marks – as also the surface – are enfolded and are 'self-touching', one must look *into* rather than simply *at* the work. The spaces opened up within his work are also physical ones. Indeed, when viewing his 'satellite pieces', again we must graze. However, elements of the work are not always visible as they are high up and nearly out of sight; they trouble any sense of pure visuality.

2. *Peinture féminine* and my art practice

Following on from this discussion, I will now discuss my own art practice in relation to *peinture féminine*. As noted in Chapter 2, my art practice has focused on the *process* of making rather than solely on the final outcome. Based on my writing//painting approach as underpinning my research, my art practice has been a 'material thinking' into abstract painting through the 'lens' of *l'écriture féminine*. It has formed a reflexive dialogue with the rest of my research, enabling my concept and practice of *peinture féminine* to emerge out of a reflexive interrelationship between the textual and the painterly.

⁶⁸⁴ Rock, N. Interview with Neal Rock, 2010, p26; see Appendix A

I will focus on five key bodies of work: two 'textstallations', 'book-paintings', 'painting-poems' and a 'painting-installation'. These bodies of work are part of my journey towards conceptualising *peinture féminine*. Rather than focusing on them as representing *peinture féminine* and difference, I will focus on them as material thinking and explorations of *l'écriture féminine* into *peinture féminine* and how they have manifested in the work through a focus on the performative element of painting where one may 'dive in and see what happens'.⁶⁸⁵ I will also draw out how my thinking into quasacles, the poetic and the intermaterial have manifested, building on my art-writing and research diary extracts *as signalled in the text in italics* that I have interwoven with my discussion.

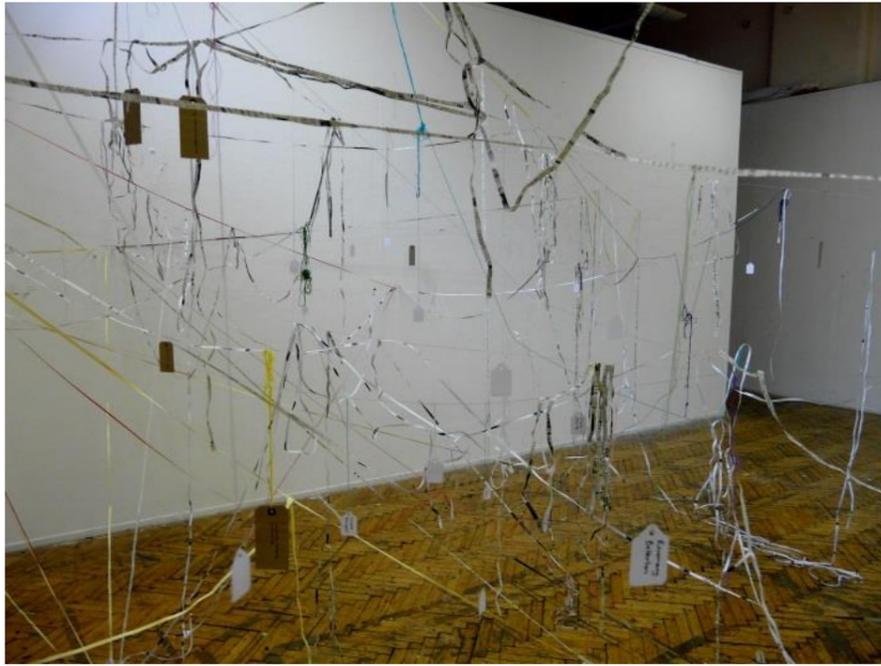
2.1 'Encounter with the text'

My piece of work *Encounter with the text* (2009) (see figure 4.10 – 4.15), is what I have termed a 'textstallation'. The term 'textstallation' has derived from two pieces of work that I originally created as a form of mapping as elaborated on in Chapter 2. In the textstallations, I mapped out my research beyond the two-dimensional surface I had previously been using through connecting together ideas three-dimensionally. Initially, the work was methodological; I aimed to articulate the complex and entangled ideas that had emerged through the research process that could no longer be contained and mapped onto a two-dimensional surface. I had no preconceived notion about how the work would evolve and performatively mapped into the space. The mapping emerged as a complex and intricate interweaving of different elements into what appeared as a textual installation or what I have named a 'textstallation'.

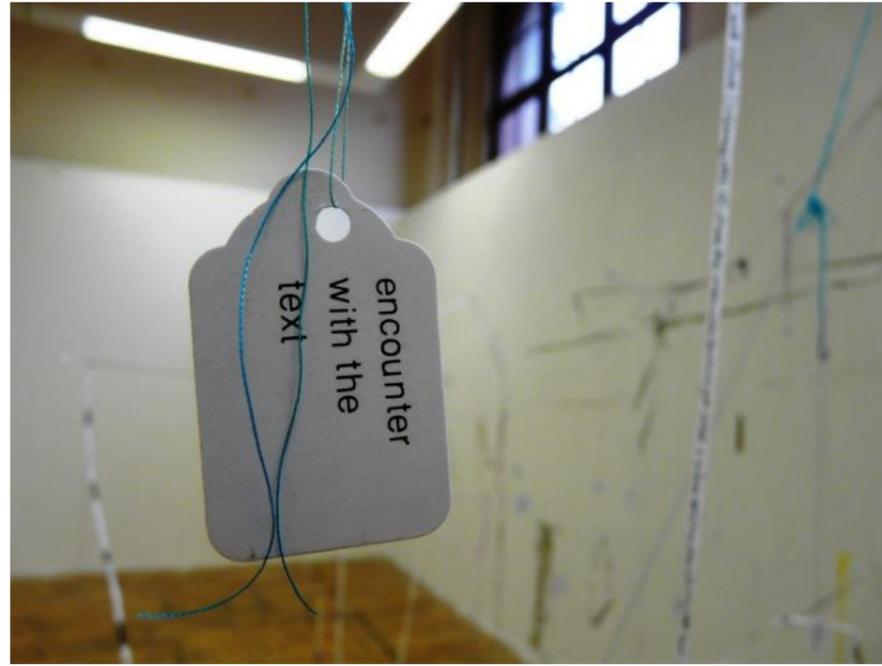
I start out by mapping areas on the gallery walls and on the floor based on key themes in my research such as 'intertextuality' and 'multiplicity'. I move through the space and interconnect them together with strips of text depending on their interrelation. As I continue, the connections start to become entangled and create interstices that appear between the connecting together of these ideas as suspended in the space. I start to identify elements of

⁶⁸⁵ Haseman, B. A Manifesto for Performative Research, 2006, p102

4.10



4.11



4.12



4.13



4.14



4.15

Figures 4.10 – 4.15, *Encounter with the text*, (2009)

l'écriture féminine or particular artist's work that seem to live in these interstices and I attach labels to these tangled masses. At first I connect together the different areas using long strips of newspaper. As the work builds up, I include strips of text from different languages, interweaving different narratives and different alphabets throughout the work. I continue to connect the text together and in doing so more areas open up amidst them which become part of the work.

It occurs to me that the multi-layered nature of this winding and connecting is linked to the thinking of l'écriture féminine and its qualities and so I interweave strips of text that I have been reading from Cixous, Irigaray and Barthes within the space as part of the work.

I realise that making the work is similar to how I normally create a painting; I map out areas on the surface with paint and then let abstract forms evolve through a reflexive dialogue with the different elements of the work such as colours, marks and the composition of the work.

After this realisation, I interconnect all of the elements that have emerged in the work throughout the space using brightly coloured threads and yarn to elaborate this link to abstract painting. The threads work in the same way as strips of text in being able to be unravelled across the space but they also resemble painterly marks of colour suspended across the space. In this sense, although the work is an installation, it also seems to think through elements of abstract painting.

My own writing was also interwoven throughout the other materials (see figure 4.12), taking the form of digitally printed, hand-printed and handwritten text. Texts, languages and ideas from different writers and my own words were connected together at particular moments in time and interwoven together throughout the space. The use of these different materials confused any singular reading of the work as each of the materials had different modes of signification. The labels (see figure 4.11) and some of the text existed on a semiotic level where meaning was signified through the textual. However, I saw the threads as existing in a similar way to the marks of abstract painting; as colour, marks and material elements not tied to any representational model. There were also different points in the work

where the textual elements were rendered unreadable. This was through incorporating texts in different languages or where multiple texts had become entangled together. These textual elements began to operate differently and I saw them as more aligned with that of abstract painting as they were non-signifying. In this sense, they could be seen as what I have termed the poetic; elements beyond the signifiable.

Through the process of layering together multiple elements in the space over the course of the week, I started to see that through the interconnections, a multiplicity of spaces emerged *within* the space of the textstallation. I realised that rather than being simply three-dimensional or sculptural, the textstallation instead was multi-dimensional and voluminous and that perhaps abstract painting could be opened out and conceptualised in this way. Furthermore, rather than existing as a static and fixed work, the textstallation evolved in the space so that the multiplicity of spaces shifted and moved through the becoming of the work. As its construction changed, the space gradually built up over time and existed in a different state each day; as a state of incompleteness and an infinite work in progress, reflecting the 'never-endingness' of writing in *l'écriture féminine*.⁶⁸⁶ Additionally, after the textstallation had been taken down, it then existed in a collapsed state taking the form of a complex and dense mass of text (see figure 4.15) where the spaces within it had again shifted. Like Rock's work, the entanglement of the textstallation in this form folded back in on itself, enfolding the multiplicity of textual elements within the work to create a different spatiality.

The textstallation could be seen to trouble and open out binary relations rooted in Modernist abstraction such as figure/ground, form/content, surface/structure relations through these spaces within and amidst structures and conventions. Any differentiation between surface and structure was troubled as it consisted of multiple different surfaces *within* the spaces of the textstallation, many of which were entangled together. Additionally, the multiplicity of surfaces disconcerted any notion of flatness. It had a sense of ambiguity in that the different elements were comparable to compositions and colour, not fixed to a

⁶⁸⁶ Cixous, H. *The Art of Innocence*, 1994, p 96

surface but suspended within the work. Although the making of the work could be seen as an event, or in fact a series of events, there were no 'gestures' involved in the making of the work in the typical sense of the mark of the Modernist index of expression and the act of making. The strips of paper were an indexical reference to my movement and thus the trace of my self in the work, yet the traces existed amidst or suspended with and amongst the spaces of the 'painting' and removed of any referentials. Rather than being in opposition to abstraction as a whole and the conventions embedded within it, it instead opened it up from the inside, reconstructing it as a renegotiation of painterly space through the opening up of multiple and heterogeneous spaces.

As the work evolved and became more complex and more fragile in its construction, I became physically immersed in the work as it expanded across the space and I had to physically manoeuvre around the work. At the end of the week, when I decided to leave the work neither in a state of being finished or unfinished, the textstallation could only be viewed by physically either standing within it or by standing at its peripheries. There was no distinct border between the inside and the outside and it made me think about the variability of what constitutes the 'edge'. There was no one singular point to view the work. Instead, like Twombly, Lee and Rock's work there were multiple ones, extending to the peripheral. It could be seen to include "momentary comings together taking place at the edges of the main event".⁶⁸⁷ Although the textstallation wasn't a 'painting' in a conventional sense, it allowed me to consider how abstract painting or *peinture féminine* may function as made up of complex and multiple spaces; one that could enable a reconstruction of abstract painting as allowing the 'feminine' subject to emerge, not wholly rejecting but troubling Modernist conventions which may be identified as 'masculinist'.

2.2 'Blisses of materiality'

I created a second textstallation called *Blisses of materiality* (2011) (see figures 4.16 - 4.25). It built on the first textstallation in a different physical space which was much larger

⁶⁸⁷ Rogoff, I. Words in Advance, 2000, p xvi

and included large pillars in the room. Although the work also functioned as a form of mapping to spatialise my ideas through making, I focused more on thinking through *l'écriture féminine* to consider abstract painting following on from the ideas that emerged in my first textstallation. When I created the second textstallation, I had also started to develop 'book-paintings', 'painting-poems' and had engaged with various experiments with paint. Thus, the work was in dialogue with other works and explorations, and compared to the first textstallation it emerged as much more complex.

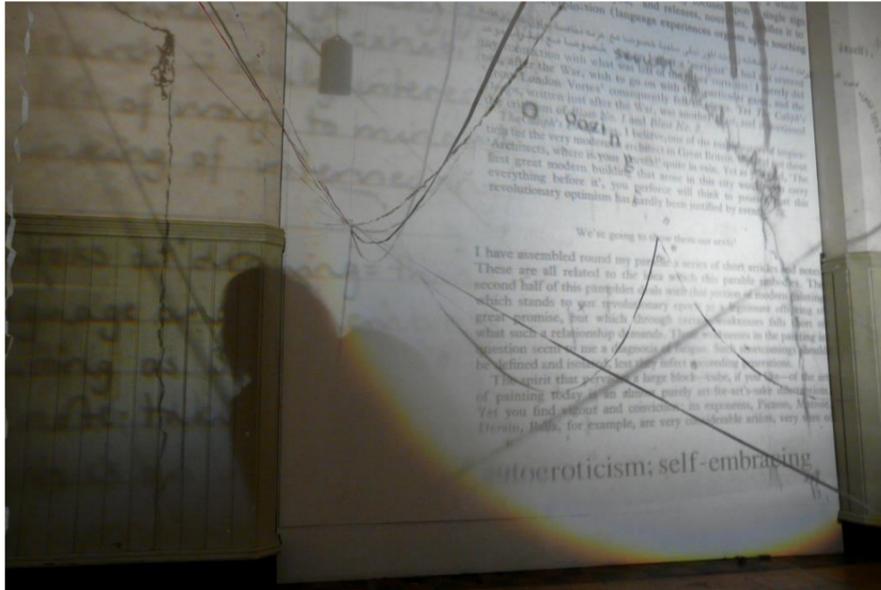
Strips of text were suspended across and throughout the space and wrapped around the pillars. In addition, the shadows of the strips of text also existed in the space as another layer. There were areas with text coming out of parts of the space (see figures 4.22 and 4.25) which appeared as moments of excess within the work as different textual elements appeared to overflow from areas in the space or cracks in the wall. Unlike the first textstallation, I also projected different things across and throughout the space. This included paint itself ⁶⁸⁸ (see figure 4.24) and also painting-poems and hybrid writing//painting 'moments' from my research diaries which had been photocopied onto acetate. Moreover, the elements of the work appeared more complex as these different projections were layered on top of each other.

In addition, I projected 'gestures' or marks in the space which derived from the textual rather than paint itself. The text that I projected became distorted and unreadable as it 'fell' in the space due to the scale of the projections and became abstracted. This included handwritten text in Arabic script, which to me was already unreadable and functioned instead as a diagrammatical form of mark-making. As Fischer notes, when using non-recognisable systems of signification where "neither artists nor viewers can understand the scripts, we are not concerned with signs and words. Our attention is drawn to their appearance instead."⁶⁸⁹ In this sense, the unreadable 'abstract' forms derived from the textual refer to the poetic as they could not be deciphered but seen to overflow normative textual signification. Moreover,

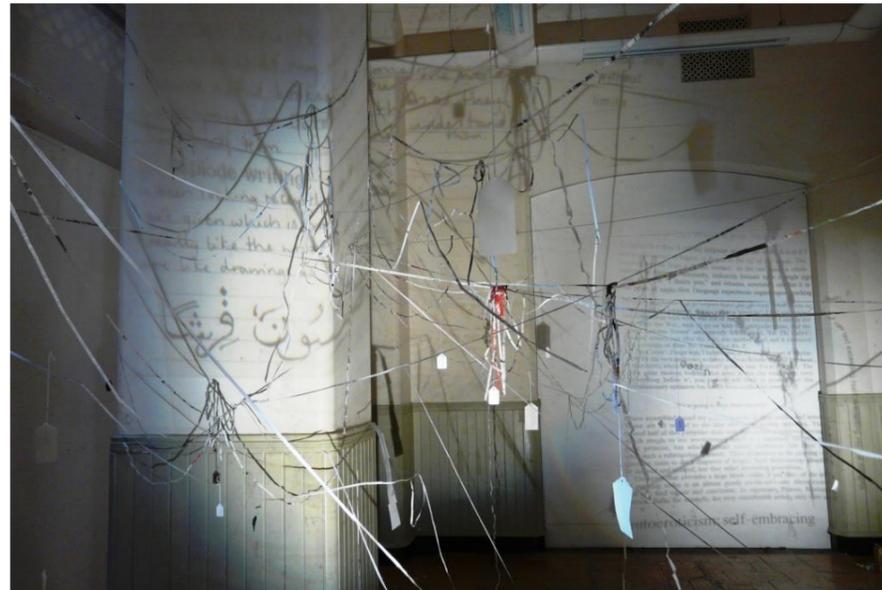
⁶⁸⁸ These included splashes, drips and chance marks collected on acetate or copied onto acetate from the studio.

⁶⁸⁹ Fischer, P. *Abstraction, Gesture, Ecriture*, 1999, p20

4.16



4.17



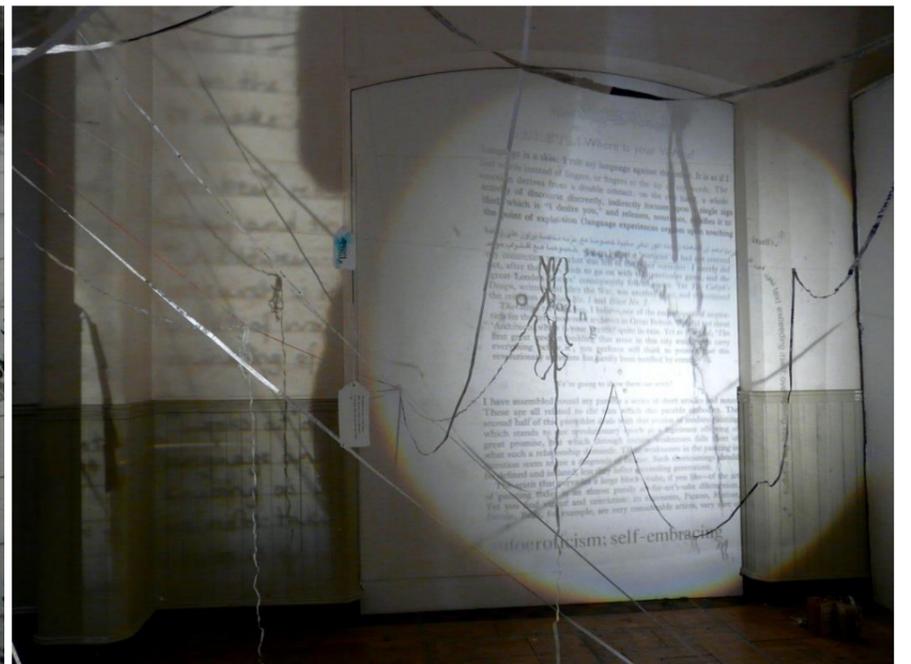
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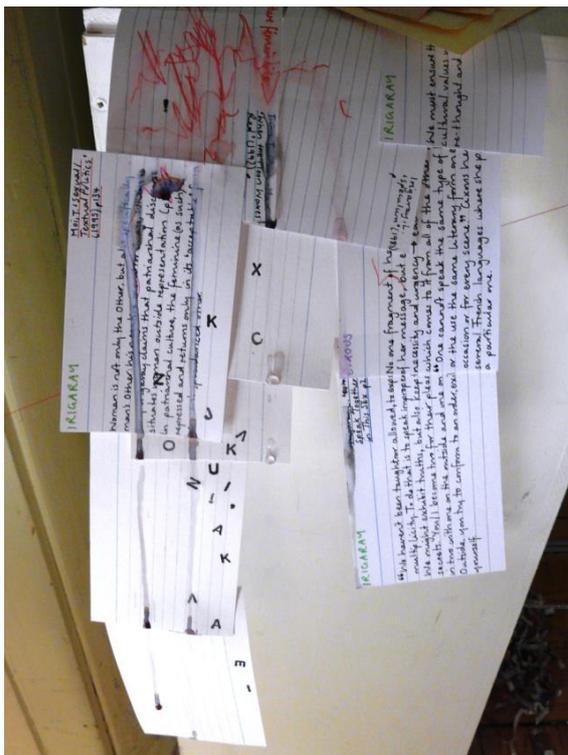
4.20



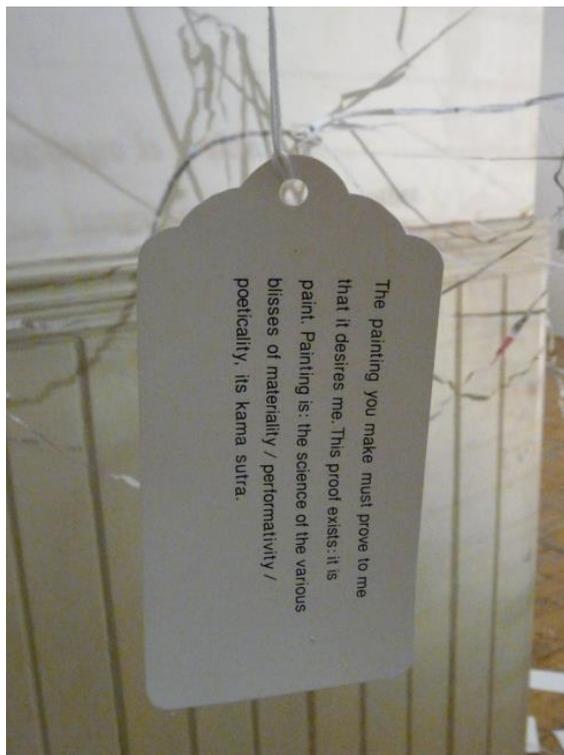
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Figures 4.16 – 4.21 detail of *Blisses of materiality*, (2011)

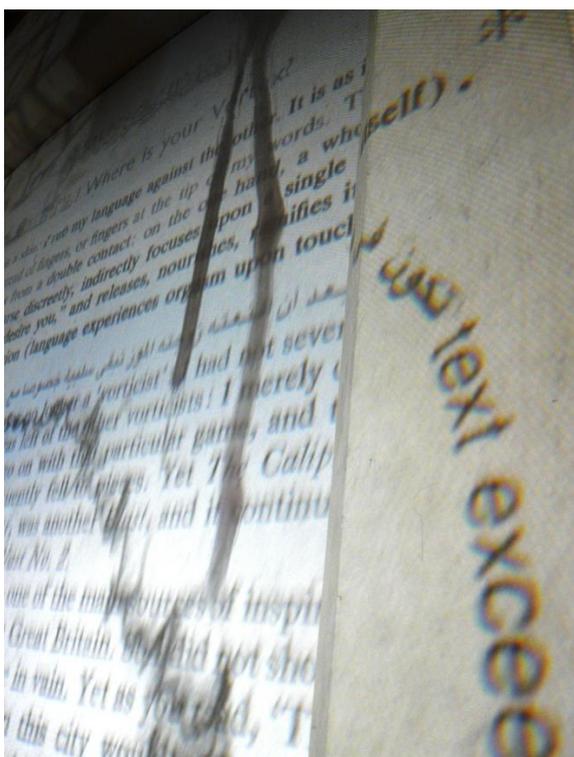
4.22



4.23



4.24



4.25



Figures 4.22 – 4.25 detail of *Blisses of materiality*, (2011)

the breaks and collisions of poetic language could be seen in the heterogeneity of different textual elements and their different states of readability.

The words came to resemble abstract painterly marks that did not clearly signify anything specific but instead related to the textual at a very broad level. Like the words of poetry, they simply existed as a spatial reality.⁶⁹⁰ There were multiple visual and textual registers in the work layered together which were both readable and unreadable. At certain points, there were also labels amongst these spaces. These included hand-printed labels which contained text about 'the Pleasure of Paint' on them.⁶⁹¹ These labels further enunciated the interrelation between painting and the subversive potential of *l'écriture féminine* as a practice of writing (see figure 4.23).

As part of the work, I moved my desk (see figure 4.19) from my studio into the space. As I made the textstallation, I worked at the desk and wrote about the making of the work both in my research diary and through art-writing. As a result, 'moments' occurred on and around the desk through the interrelation of writing and painting. These included text found on the desk such as singular Turkish words that I had previously cut out. There were also collisions of different elements of the work (see figure 4.20) which could be seen as slippages between the intertextual and intermaterial dialogue that was in the process of becoming as I continuously expanded the work.

I now have to climb in and around the work to continue to work on it and to explore it. It's begun to be a very physical task. The layering of everything and the spatiality of the work has built up. It appears different each time I look at it as the work develops and from looking at it from different viewpoints. I project different things into the space and the work continuously changes. The strips of text are both textual and material things and they seem to create abstract and gestural marks suspended within the space. The work is also unstable and shifts as I move around. I have to crouch down to see the multiplicity of detail in the space which exists amongst the strips of text and multiple elements amidst them. Occasionally, I stumble

⁶⁹⁰ Carrión, U. as mentioned in his work *The New Art of Making Books*, (1975), a manifesto in the form of a type-written facsimile.

⁶⁹¹ These labels were taken from Roland Barthes' text *The Pleasure of the Text* (1973). An example of this as shown in figure 4.23 is: "The painting you make must prove to me that it desires me. This proof exists: it is paint. Painting is: the science of the various blisses of materiality / performativity / poeticity, its karma sutra". Although these labels signified at a poetic level, this signification was disturbed through the poetic nature of the text, or what Barthes calls the *jouissance* of the text and also further through the transposition to the text referring to the painterly instead of the textual.

across a word lying randomly in the space. They seem to be little areas of excess that interweave with the rest of the work. Extra little bits are starting to build up now; there is Turkish text coming out of some of the words projected onto the back wall and a cluster of Norwegian words on the floor beneath it.

Because this space was larger and had entrance/exits at both ends of the space, it required a very different encounter as the viewer had to move through the work to get through the space. Unlike the first textstallation, the work could only be viewed from being within and amidst it as it was not possible for it all to fit in my vision. The work appeared to trouble scopic modes of viewing and phallogocentrism through a 'viewing' which was peripheral as the work extended to the edges of my vision from every angle I looked at it. By being installational and constructed across and throughout the space, the 'painting' had no clear edges. The notion of the edges and the 'frame', and also of margins and peripheries emerged as something central to the work and in thinking of painting as a spatiality. The textstallation had neither an inside nor outside and yet also both as the boundaries, edges and peripheries were blurred and unclear. Indeed, I was not inside or outside the work but of the work as it was in a state of becoming. There were different levels of focus from looking at the small detail to exploring the work as a whole, which was further enhanced by the multiplicity of elements in the work.

The multiplicity and heterogeneity of the work as more layered than the previous textstallation further opened out spaces in the work and I started to consider it as a spatiality made up of more complex and multiple spaces. It also made me consider the intermaterial through the multiple materialities of the elements within the space and that in addition to the multiple spaces could expand binary thinking. It seemed that the intermaterial was also in dialogue with the intertextual, further elaborating its internal complexity. It could be argued to be somewhere amidst writing//painting. As the space was only lit with spotlights and projectors as it was an underground space, when documenting the work it could not be photographed in certain parts without the blurry projection of my shadowy self in the work

(see figure 4.16 and 4.21). Added to the layers of elements that made up the 'painting', my own shadow as the trace of my body was also present in some of the photographs, but as an entity that was shifting and mobile, rather like the structures of the 'painting' itself. It also made me aware that there was a mobility amongst these elements, not just in trying to make sense of the work as a whole because of the multiplicity of the work, but as it shifted through its construction and its fragile nature when I manoeuvred around the work.

2.3 Book-paintings

After creating the first textstallation, I continued to explore *l'écriture féminine* in relation to abstract painting and created what I have termed 'book-paintings' (2010-2012) (see figure 4.26). At the time, I was examining key ideas in *l'écriture féminine* such as poeticity, intertextuality, multiplicity and challenging the boundaries of the text. I also started to think about the materiality of writing and Barthes' *The Pleasure of the Text* in which he talks about the *jouissance* of writing.⁶⁹² I experimented firstly in my research diary with combining handwritten and transferred text, the texture of paper, layering text together as well as thinking



Figure 4.26 *I desire language*, (2010), painting on book

⁶⁹² In *The Pleasure of the Text*, (1973) Barthes differentiated between the 'readerly' text as incorporating *plaisir* (pleasure) and the 'writerly' text as incorporating *jouissance* (most closely translatable as bliss or orgasm). He asserted that the readerly text does not change the reader as a subject, but the writerly text can 'explode' literary codes and has a transformative potential for the subject. It is the writerly text that can be seen as aligned with *l'écriture féminine*.

about the normative structures that determine how text fits on the page. It felt like a natural progression to use book pages rather than the stretched canvas as a substrate to work on, particularly after the research diary had started to evolve to be quite hybrid in terms of being a sculptural object. In the book-paintings, I began to consider how these ideas could be thought *through* in painterly terms in relation to abstract painting.

*I want to expand on the sculptural form that the research diary has taken and see if this can be built on in some way; working into the pages and exploring the notion of text physically transcending its margins, and the physical book as an object itself.*⁶⁹³

In the book-paintings, I painted directly onto the book pages. Rather than creating images or paintings, I experimented with mark-making and worked into the pages reflexively responding to the marks. I was interested in the marks that had emerged in my second textstallation that had been abstracted from copies of hand-drawn foreign text and used this as the basis of my mark-making. These painterly marks extended at certain points into embroidery to create hybrid 'moments' within the book-paintings. Looking through the 'lens' of *l'écriture féminine*, it seems that the stitching manifested physically as an excess of the painterly mark; shifting them from being flat on the page surface to being more tactile. In addition, the stitching also went *into* and *through* the pages, further challenging the flatness of the page by occupying a space *within* the book.

I continued to think about *l'écriture féminine* textually by interweaving fragments from a multiplicity of texts from different languages and different alphabets⁶⁹⁴ into the books (see figure 4.27). I responded to the text already in the books⁶⁹⁵ by layering them with fragments of the different texts and with paint in a way that rendered them unreadable and instead functioned diagrammatically. As I added these texts to the book-paintings they were not

⁶⁹³ Research diary extract 11.06.2010

⁶⁹⁴ These included text in German, Spanish, Russian, Turkish, Norwegian and Vietnamese, and Roman, Cyrillic, Arabic, Sanskrit and Mandarin alphabets.

⁶⁹⁵ The books I chose were mostly books of poetry where the structuration of the text could already be seen to be disturbed and exceed normative communicative textual signification. For example, I used a book of Persian poetry called *The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*. Many of these books were dual texts including original foreign texts, such as poetry by Ezra Pound in both English and Italian. In addition, I chose books because of their physical appearance. All of the books I used were second-hand, some dating back to the 1920s which were held together at the spine using threads because of their age. They were thus physically as well as structurally 'volatile'.



Figure 4.27, detail of *I desire language*, (2010)

added in the order that they appeared in their original text; instead, I cut them up and added them arbitrarily. When using the foreign texts, they were also added from left to right, so that text in Arabic or Mandarin for example, were added in reverse to how they signify language conventionally. The text on the pages, whilst unreadable to me, could indeed be deciphered by those fluent in the languages I used. However, they were nonsensical through their disorder. Like the structuration of poetic language, the syntax and grammatical structures were disturbed and exceeded themselves, appearing as 'breaks' and 'silences'. Similar to the poetic elements that I identified in Twombly's work, they were also ambiguous and not fully decipherable. The text also exceeded the margins and physically overflowed the pages into unreadable textual forms (see figure 4.28). Some of the book-paintings included puddles of paint which appeared to seep out of the books (see figure 4.29). Here, I incorporated physical painterly gestures made with paint thickened with latex or pva glue. Compared to the other painterly marks which had absorbed into the pages and bled through at points into the other side, they appeared as excessive material forms. The 'edges' of the pages were blurred in their multiplicity and transgression through these overflowing marks and questioned any sense of the 'edge' of the work; they were part of the book-paintings and yet not 'inside' or on the surface of them.



Figure 4.28, *Word-drafting*, (2010), book-painting



Figure 4.29 *We saw every flower*, (2012), book-painting

Whilst the book-paintings existed much differently to the textstallations, they also opened up multiple spaces within them, but with a different complexity and intermateriality. The physical form of the book-paintings could be seen as a layering of painterly spaces bound together in the structures of a book. They collapsed any distinction between the

surface and support where the work was layered into itself and included multiple surfaces within it. In doing so, they could be seen to challenge the Modernist flatness of the surface that refers only to itself, through the interrelation of multiple surfaces bound together as one 'painting'. The form of the book thus offered "the experience of a passage between several surfaces".⁶⁹⁶ It referred to the artist Ulises Carrión in his assertion that the book is a series of spaces made up of autonomous space-time moments.⁶⁹⁷ It could be seen to embody the self-differing specificity of the post-medium condition and reflect the impossibility of the Modernist hierarchy of the painterly surface through "the enactment of a kind of layering that can stand for, or allegorize, the self-differential condition of mediums themselves."⁶⁹⁸

Through the multi-layered structures of the books and the layering of its internal elements, the book-paintings did not 'reject' abstract painting or its conventions, but expanded it. They were complex in that they enfolded different elements within the books; different materialities, textualities and registers of readability into and through the pages and those which 'transcended' the structure of the books. In this sense they appeared like a palimpsest, although unlike those in Twombly's paintings they could physically be opened up and explored. They could be seen as intertextual through the transposition of different narratives, languages and textual systems, yet the intertextual was disturbed by its interrelation with the intermaterial. Through the making of the different book-paintings, elements of *l'écriture féminine* that I had been thinking about manifested in the work in both textual and painterly terms; they could be seen as encompassing qualities such as 'non-linearity', 'continuousness', 'tactility', 'overabundance' and 'heterogeneousness'.

2.4 Painting-poems

As well as working on my book-paintings, I also worked on individual book pages which I termed 'painting-poems'. I worked mostly on small-scale pages taken from poetic texts and old books about painting and writing. Like the rest of my work, I developed the

⁶⁹⁶ Krauss, R. *A Voyage on the North Sea: Art in the Age of the Post-medium Condition*, 2000, p52

⁶⁹⁷ Carrión, U. as mentioned in his work *The New Art of Making Books*, (1975), a manifesto in the form of a type-written facsimile.

⁶⁹⁸ Krauss, R. *Op cit*, 2000, p53

painting-poems through the 'lens' of *l'écriture féminine* as a form of material thinking in which to consider abstract painting. Compared to my other work, I experimented with materials such as paraffin wax mixed with pigment or oil paint to create painterly marks that oozed off the edges of the book pages (see figure 4.30). The wax-thickened paint had an excessive physicality that overflowed the margins of the pages and questioned what constituted the 'edge' of the work. In addition, I layered these marks with hand-printed letters which exceeded the sentences already on the page, appearing as a textual oozing into the



Figure 4.30, *Only at the moment I utter it*, (2011), text, wax-thickened paint and hand-printed letters on book page

margins. At various points, there were also slippages and hybrid 'moments' where printed letters slid into handwriting which then slid into painterly marks. The painting-poems can be seen to refer the poetic through exploiting the spatial possibilities of poetry and challenging typographic conventions within writing through the material and painterly. In addition, the wax dried at the moment of its manifestation and could be seen as a material utterance.

I also created painting-poems by taking different marks such as those found in my studio space, elements of other painting-poems and ‘moments’ in my research diaries and then continuously photocopying them and working into them (see figures 4.31 and 4.32). In doing so, the painterly and the textual became intertwined by being layered into each other and merging together.

I’ve been experimenting with layering different things together; collaging together bits of text and then working into them with paint, which I’ve then photocopied onto acetate, tracing paper and cartridge paper. I’ve then worked back into the copies with paint and layered them together. Some of the copies have been placed back to front and then I’ve copied those layers together and continued the process. Through this process, marks and words have become opaque, unreadable and distorted.⁶⁹⁹ I accidentally dripped paint onto the surface of the acetate and I discovered that if I photocopy something onto the wrong side, the ink does not bond properly to the surface if it gets wet. Slippages occurred where various letters, mostly unrecognisable anyway as they were Sanskrit and Vietnamese, slid down the surface. I photocopied these slippages and worked into them even more, layering more acetate on top and then photocopying them again to allow slippages amidst slippages.⁷⁰⁰

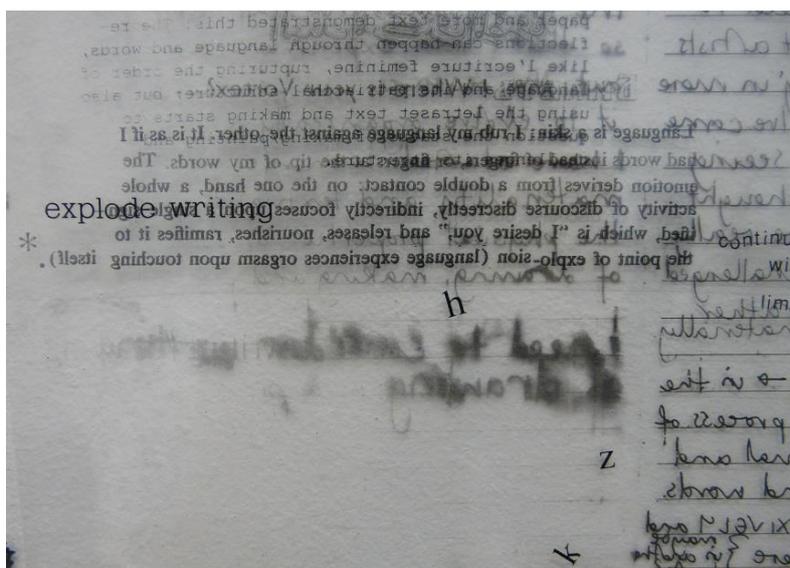


Figure 4.31, *Explode writing*, (2011), ink, paint and handprinted text on acetate

⁶⁹⁹ Research diary extract 28.11.2011

⁷⁰⁰ Research diary extract 02.12.2011



Figure 4.32, *Absolute fluidity*, (2012), paint and ink on paper

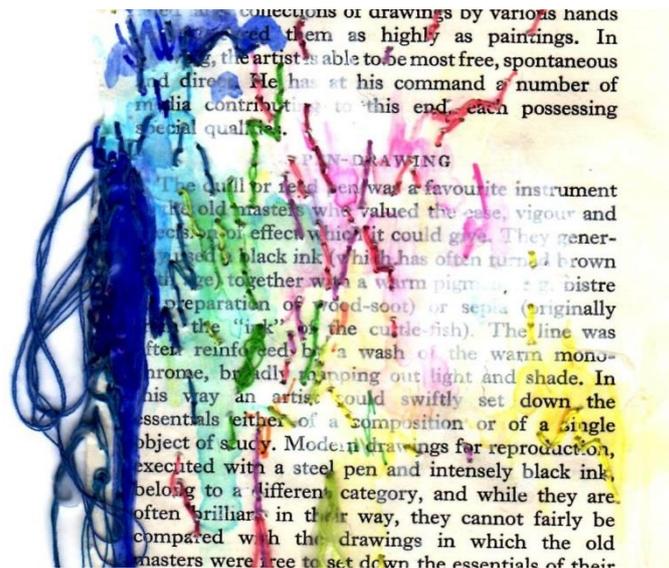


Figure 4.33, *Often brilliant in their way*, (2012) acrylic paint,
 wax-thickened paint and embroidery on book page

After repeatedly photocopying the painterly marks and text, the textual started to become illegible and the marks shifted from being ink, acrylic or embroidered marks to a representation of the mark rendered with the photocopier ink. Through the excessive layering together of different elements, in addition to the painterly, the painting-poems could be seen as poetic in the disruption of conventional forms of signification and the

interweaving of the material. They could be seen as painterly poems in which 'signs' exceeded themselves.

The intermateriality of the painting-poems was a layering between different elements, although compared to the textstallations and the book-paintings they were on a 'singular' surface. Any notion of flatness was troubled by the fact that although the painting-poems on the book pages were indeed a 'singular' surface, they were double-sided substrates. The stitching *through* the pages and the absorption of paint *into* the pages was visible on both sides, expanding the surface of the work so that it was continuous and that any notion of the 'edge' was collapsed. Like Lee's work, there was a multiplicity of detail but this detail had a sense of heterogeneousness in that there were different material and textual elements transposed into one another. In order to view the work, one could graze across the surface of the work because of the size of them. However because the painting-poems included both textual and painterly elements, any attempts to read the text was disrupted by both the abundance of layers including different languages and alphabets and the excess of the painterly and the textual. Any notion of pure visibility or the 'essence' of painting was disrupted through the heterogeneity of elements. Looking through the 'lens' of *l'écriture féminine*, the painting-poems emerged as both the textual manifesting visually and materially but also the painterly manifesting as well, existing somewhere between writing//painting.

2.5 'Continuous without limits'

Whilst making the book-paintings and painting-poems, I experimented with making painterly 'gestures'. The gestures were made individually over a long period of time in my studio and sculpture workshops. I wanted to build on the ideas that had emerged in my previous bodies of work and think through them in relation to *l'écriture féminine* in a more painterly sense. My piece of work *Continuous without limits* (2012) (see figures 4.34-4.43) explored the ideas I examined in the textstallations, book-paintings and other smaller continuous experiments that I had been engaged in concerning painting as a spatiality, in painterly, material and textual terms.

4.34



4.35



4.36



4.37



4.38



4.39

Figures 4.34 – 4.39 detail of *Continuous without limits*, (2012)

4.40



4.41



4.42



4.43



Figures 4.40 – 4.43 detail of *Continuous without limits*, (2012)

I created the 'painting-installation' over a period of ten days in a gallery space. It included gestures that I had already made and ones that I made in the gallery space in dialogue with the work as it evolved. The gestures were made using paint and different materials, including polyvinylacetate (pva), paraffin wax, glass wax, latex, vinyl and acrylic

medium (see figures 4.40 and 4.41). They referred to Rock when he said that “paint is pigment plus medium”⁷⁰¹ whether the medium is water, polyurethane foam or silicone. Some of the gestures were also embedded with text (see figure 4.43). Thus, the very notion of what paint could be was expanded through the use of materials.

I've decided to only use part of the space as it is so big. The gestures I've already made using latex, pva, paraffin and glass wax, along with the rest of my materials are in the space. At the moment, they resemble a taxonomy of painterly marks. I attach the marks I've made to the walls and work intuitively in choosing where to attach them in the space and what colours to use. I feel a sense of anxiety with getting going. When I made the textstallations, it involved a continuous engagement with making and I was always doing something with not too much thought as to what I was doing, yet it was a physically strenuous task. With this work, I stand back, think, add another gesture - it is a much more leisurely process.

I create more marks in relation to the other ones and see how they look; there are a lot more conscious decisions, even if they are intuitive or instinctive. I realise that although the process of making the work seems leisurely, it actually has a great complexity as each of the gestures I add to the space has been collected and amassed over a long period of time and each gesture has its own history. Each mark is the result of a long and complex dialogue between me, my writing and painting and the entire research process so far. As I make the work, the gestures are continuously on the move. The work exists in a state of unfinishedness; I constantly construct the work by adding more marks and layering them together whilst simultaneously taking marks away, moving them and painting over them.

As well as the gestures on the walls, I projected painterly marks and gestures made out of glass wax onto the wall (see figure 4.35). I painted directly onto the wall which took the form of experimental painterly marks. As a result of working quickly and performatively, there were also dribbles and splashes that had been caused accidentally in the ‘heat’ of making, some of which were miniscule specks of paint only visible on close inspection. As the work

⁷⁰¹ Rock, N. Interview with Neal Rock, 2010, p26; see Appendix A

evolved, I overpainted some of the marks so that all that remained were traces or the accidental splatters. As well as the interrelation between the gestures and marks on the walls, there were also puddles of paint and wax forms on the floor as well as latex puddles and dribbles (see figure 4.37 and 4.38) and vinyl pieces oozing off the sides of the plinths (see figure 4.34). Therefore, there was an interrelation between works on the walls and on the floors.

In addition to the multiplicity and heterogeneity of marks in different material forms and 'states' of materiality, 'excess' marks also existed as another layer in the space; there were marks which I had subconsciously smeared on my painting clothes whilst making the work and also on the walls. Additionally, there was a table which I had found already in the space which I used as an extra surface whilst making the work to put my gestures on (see figure 4.36). However, because the table already included an array of found marks it created a further intermaterial relation with the rest of the gestures in the space. Like my other bodies of work, the painting-installation had a complex intermateriality. It made me think about the internal complexity of painting through considering the whole space as a painting and the gestures as resembling marks on a canvas. The way the gestures were spread throughout the space seemed to reference the language of painting, such as formal qualities like colours, shapes and compositions and also of the process of painting whereby marks are constructed and deconstructed. In this sense, the work appeared as a painterly space and also a 'painting', one in which the language of abstract painting had been expanded through the opening out of binary thinking. Indeed, the 'surface' of the painting was also the surface of the individual marks and there was no 'edge' of the work as it seemed to exist as a continuous multiplicity with the gallery space.

More so than my other work, the 'painting-installation' referred to the process of painting and the 'heat' of making tied up with the painterly and could be seen to incorporate quasacles, or perhaps more precisely: what is left of the becoming of the quasacle. Reconceptualising paint as being made up of pigment and other 'mediums' such as vinyl,

wax and latex, meant that these materials behaved differently from acrylic or oil paint. For example, the vinyl dried as it was in the process of dripping rather than *after* it had dripped. The paraffin wax shapes were similar in that the hot wax cooled on impact as they were poured into cold water; setting in their material utterance in a state of fluidity. Rather than the quasacles manifesting as chance effects such as dried on canvas, they instead manifested at the moment of their utterance.

I have realised that the way of putting the gestures on the wall is analogous to conventional ways of painting. Marks are added bit by bit, and then I then step back and look at the work, reflecting on different factors such as composition, colour and the aesthetic qualities of the work and then I add the next mark in relation, creating a dialogue of painting. In the same way that I would add and repaint areas of colours or particular gestures whilst painting in the conventional sense, I have added and removed marks from the wall in the same way. This has made me consider that the work is not merely visual representations of paint, but that the gestures on the walls are simply paint; a medium combined with pigment exploiting the very materiality of paint. Moreover, in the work I am not 'painting' in the conventional sense, but constructing or making paintings or other things that question or refer to painting.

Because of the size of the space, and the layering of the gestures on the floors, walls and plinths, the work could not be read in the normative way of how one may read a painting. There was a contrast between very small gestures and large and excessively material gestures. Some of the dribbles at the very top of the space seemed to have their own narrative and required the viewer to look up and away from the rest of the work. In this sense, they referred to the discrepancy in scale in Twombly and Lee's paintings where the figure/ground relation is challenged. Like the textstallations, the peripheries and margins of the work appeared equally important as they could not be differentiated from any singular or fixed centre of the work as the viewer could only encounter the work from being within it. In addition, the peripheries of the work themselves shifted as one grazed across the space or

moved. As Cixous notes in her own practice of *l'écriture féminine*, the centre is ungraspable and continuously changes.

Like the textstallations, the work constantly changed; it existed as a work in progress in a constant state of becoming and had a sense of unfixity. Different elements were layered together and as I kept physically removing and reattaching the gestures to see how they worked, there was a continuous infinite deferral of the material mark both in the way they were viewed and their relation with one another. Moreover, as there was no 'edge' to the work, the relation of these different marks appeared unending. The 'painting-installation' did not reject structures and conventions, but through the different elements that I argue relate to *peinture féminine* they disturbed binary thinking through their interrelation and the internal complexity of the work.

3. Conclusions

From exploring Twombly, Lee and Rock's work in relation to my concept and practice of *peinture féminine*, I argue that their work encompasses 'more complex and multiple spaces' and opens out structures and conventions embedded within abstract painting. This analysis has led me to see how *peinture féminine* and its elements have visually manifested in their work and opened it up internally through incorporating its logic. Whilst the work of each is conceptually and visually very different, they appear to refer to a particular interplay of the elements that I argue make up *peinture féminine*. In doing so, some common themes have emerged such as 'multiplicity', 'detail', 'excess' and a consideration of modes of looking.

My own art practice in addition to my research diary and art-writing has enabled me to make sense of the material thinking that I have engaged with throughout my research. From using *l'écriture féminine* as a 'lens' see abstract painting, it has become clear that its qualities and thinking have manifested in my practice. However, through using my writing//painting approach there has been a reflexive dialogue between the two where the

textual has also manifested as painting and as somewhere amidst writing and painting. This approach has moved on from transferring or applying *l'écriture féminine* to abstract painting or as a metaphor for the 'feminine' which as I have argued are problematic. The manifestations of *l'écriture féminine* through this relation have renegotiated and opened out structures and conventions embedded in abstract painting, enabling me to see it with 'new eyes'.

Through opening out conventions and binary thinking, 'difference' has been allowed to 'come-into-being' or as Ettinger asserts, be 'routed' into the artwork through the *process* of painting and writing//painting through the 'heat' of making and enfolded into this spatiality. However, whilst this moves on from problems of *representing* difference in abstract painting, it raises questions about 'difference' as manifesting in other artist's work. This is both in relation to the nature of looking and what 'difference' may be seen to encompass and points to further consideration of the "collaborative venture of making and looking".⁷⁰² It also asserts that 'difference' in abstract painting can be conceptualised not just in terms of sexual difference but also extends to *différance* in terms of the intermateriality of a work.

⁷⁰² Fortnum, R. *Seeing and Feeling*, 2004, p142

Conclusions

In this thesis I have interrogated the concept and practice of *l'écriture féminine* and explored the ways in which it can be employed to provide new possibilities for abstract painting today. I have examined the extent to which it can be useful to develop spaces for the 'feminine' in abstract painting and elaborated on what the 'feminine' may mean. In doing so, I have put forward a new concept and practice of *peinture féminine* which I argue reconceptualises abstract painting in its negotiation of Modernist abstraction, which is still a matter of great importance today.

I will now bring together the main themes of my research. I shall firstly reintroduce my three research aims which are as follows:

1. To critically analyse *l'écriture féminine*; establishing it as a framework to consider 'women's' contemporary abstract painting practice and to explore the possibility of an alternative textual and material 'space' for representation by 'feminine' subjectivities.
2. To consider the extent to which sexual differentiation can be made to manifest or emerge through processes of production within the expanded field of abstract painting that problematises structures and conventions historically identified as 'masculine' within painting.
3. To develop a hybrid writing//painting methodology that can potentially destabilise the masculine/feminine dualistic relation as identified within *l'écriture féminine* and feminist critiques of Modernist art practice.

I will examine to what extent these aims have been met and in doing so, will explicate my contributions to knowledge. I will finish by highlighting areas for further research and questions that have arisen through my research yet have been beyond its scope to examine them more fully.

1. A new analysis of *l'écriture féminine* as a historical concept and practice

My original intention was to use *l'écriture féminine* as a framework to provide possibilities for contemporary women's abstract painting. I was initially puzzled by why *l'écriture féminine* was popular in the 1970s to mid-1990s and was of use for artists including abstract painters at this time, but that it no longer seems relevant nor appeals to women artists today or those invested in challenging phallogentrism. My critical interrogation of *l'écriture féminine* has led me to discover that it has emerged out of a specific socio-cultural context of French *féminité* as located in psychoanalysis. However, I have asserted that it has been interpreted differently in Anglo-American thought and has evolved outside of its initial context as a more generalised term. I have argued that this has been caused by a conflation between 'French feminism' and *féminité*, and Anglo-American feminism which focused on political equality between men and women.

I have concluded that the concept and practice of *l'écriture féminine* shares common thinking by Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva. Central to all three, is a critique of phallogentrism and its embeddedness in language and culture and a focus on non-oppositional difference which moves on from the 'masculine' as the privileged term and the 'feminine' as marginalised. These underlying ideas are brought together in their exploration of a practice of 'feminine' writing to articulate the 'feminine' as not fashioned by phallogentrism. Despite this common thinking, *l'écriture féminine* is grounded in the individual strategies and analyses offered by Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva. For example, Irigaray enters her *parler femme* or *l'écriture féminine* through mimesis as a challenge to specularisation and the logic of the 'Same' and perhaps most notably, Kristeva has elaborated on the Imaginary, reconceptualising it as the semiotic. In addition to the common thinking underlying their individual strategies, I have concluded that *l'écriture féminine* also incorporates textual qualities that manifest in the *practice* of 'feminine' writing. As drawn out through my analysis of Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva's individual thinking, I have elucidated these qualities through an intertextual dialogue of the textual practice of *l'écriture féminine* and argued that

whilst deriving from their individual thinking and strategies, these qualities overlap with one another.

Through this exploration, I have located *l'écriture féminine* as a historical concept and practice, rooted in a set of concerns at a particular socio-cultural moment. My critical exploration contributes an in-depth analysis of *l'écriture féminine* in relation to its French roots, bringing together the thinking of *l'écriture féminine* as grounded in the individual work of Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva and also encompassing overlapping textual qualities such as 'multiplicity', 'excess' and 'flux'. This analysis is the first study of its kind and locates *l'écriture féminine* as accurately historically grounded as a more complex practice than has previously been perceived.

2. Exposing embedded structures of abstraction as not rigidly phallogocentric

My examination of *l'écriture féminine* in relation to women's art practice led me to interrogate why abstraction has been so problematic for women's and feminist art practice. It became clear that painting has been identified as a historically privileged medium in which the male artist was dominant. In addition, Modernist abstraction emerged as a dominant canon which has been described as a 'monocentric hegemony',⁷⁰³ privileging the American white hetero-normative male subject and marginalising those who did not conform to this stereotype. The Modernist male artist was constructed around heterosexual masculinity; through narratives of artists who were championed as 'aggressive' and 'passionate'⁷⁰⁴ and language used to describe male artistic activity in terms of 'vigour' and 'genius'. This has located Modernist abstraction as invested in power structures that privileged men and has been gendered as 'patriarchal' and 'masculinist' by feminist and other critiques.⁷⁰⁵

Such power structures in Modernist abstraction have been amplified by Greenberg as the critic *par excellence* in which the so-called 'unmediated' expression of the artist and the creative subject as disembodied and yet inherently 'masculine' was attributed to the

⁷⁰³ Buchloch, B. *Theories of Art After Minimalism and Pop*, 1987, p66

⁷⁰⁴ Fischer, P. *Abstraction, Gesture, Ecriture: Paintings from the Daros Collection*, 1999, p16

⁷⁰⁵ Frascina, F. *The Politics of Representation*, 1993, p103

creative male subject as phallogentric. The 'conventions' of abstraction as dictated by Greenbergian orthodoxy such as medium specificity, the pure 'essence' or 'truth' of abstract painting, flatness and pure viscosity have also been dominant and been put forward as the elements of abstraction that made it 'high art' and 'superior' to other media. However, I have argued that these conventions are not themselves rigidly 'masculinist', 'patriarchal' or 'phallogentric' per se. Rather, by being bound with Modernist abstraction as a movement that has been perceived as 'masculinist', they have been interpreted as 'masculine'. Through my interrogation, I have concluded that the omission of women artists from the mainstream and of women abstract painters within the hegemony of Modernist abstraction was conflated with the rejection of and attempts to rupture abstract painting based on these conventions being seen as 'masculine' and 'masculinist'.

I have argued that abstract painting does not exist independently from its historicity as bound up with Modernist abstraction and must continually negotiate it. However, I have concluded that its structures and conventions are not 'stable' and are in fact changeable. I have developed four models which conceptualise what I argue are the four main ways that artists have engaged with abstract painting as shown in diagrams 3.3, 3.4, 3.6 and 3.7. They put forward this conflation as being bound with binary logic where debates surrounding abstract painting have been interpreted as abstract/realist, feminist/patriarchal, traditional/new media and Modernist/postmodernist.⁷⁰⁶ Feminist critiques of abstract painting have also situated figure/ground, gesture/canvas relations as being analogous to significations such as active/passive and 'masculine'/'feminine'. My diagrams and their theoretical underpinning are important because they offer new ways of visualising how artists have engaged with abstract painting in attempts to challenge the thinking, structures and conventions of Modernist abstraction.

⁷⁰⁶ Betterton, R. *Unframing Women's Painting*, 2004, p2

3. A critique of *l'écriture féminine* as coming to a stasis in women's abstract painting

My fourth model is centred on my interrogation of the ways in which women abstract painters engaged with *l'écriture féminine* to explore 'feminine' and 'feminist' possibilities for abstract painting. It refers to women painters who created a 'feminine' abstract painting practice as an 'alternative' to Modernist abstraction as 'masculine'. My interrogation surrounding this model offers an in-depth analysis in which I argue that its associated problematics have contributed to *l'écriture féminine* coming to a theoretical and practical stasis in the mid-1990s where it ceased to be useful to artists. I have demonstrated that there was a disjuncture between French and Anglo-American thought which resulted in *l'écriture féminine* being over-simplified, misinterpreted and gaining a 'bad reputation'. I have also argued that there was a disjuncture in how it has been used in theoretical and practical terms.

I have put forward an analysis in which practically, artists 'translated' or 'applied' central ideas and the textual qualities of *l'écriture féminine* to abstract painting. I have argued that these qualities have also been interpreted literally and metaphorically in paint as 'flowing', fluid' and 'swirling' as a 'feminine' alternative to the perceived aggressive and linear qualities of 'masculine' painting. Additionally, qualities such as the 'tactile', 'excess' and 'abundance' were literally and metaphorically translated into paint and the painterly to inscribe the 'feminine' and the female body to challenge patriarchal structures. Based on my diagram 3.6, I have argued that the development of an 'alternative' feminine language or aesthetic to move on from Modernist abstraction and phallogentrism has been problematic. It has been set up oppositionally to 'masculine' abstract painting and both maintains the status quo and ignores non-oppositional thinking as central to *l'écriture féminine*. It also highlights that whilst an alternative 'feminine' language can be seen to disrupt phallogentrism, it runs the risk of being essentialist and universalist in attributing characteristics to a 'feminine' visual aesthetic. My analysis contributes a historical critique, situating the engagement of *l'écriture féminine* and abstract painting between the 1970s and mid-1990s. My model also

highlights problems of translating the textual to the painterly and that such abstract painting practice ignores the complexity of *l'écriture féminine* and its roots in psychoanalysis.

4. *L'écriture féminine* as a 'lens' to see abstract painting

My first research aim sought to establish *l'écriture féminine* as a *framework* to consider abstract painting. However, it became apparent that because *l'écriture féminine* is a historical concept and practice that in addition came to a standstill in relation to abstract painting, it instead needed to be *reframed* to be taken forward in order to provide any new possibilities for abstract painting today. This has meant a shift from visualising *l'écriture féminine* as a framework to seeing it as a 'lens'. A framework refers to a supporting or underlying structure that supports an idea that is a rigidly set configuration of components. This implies that if *l'écriture féminine* is used as a 'framework' to think about abstract painting, it is as a historical concept and cannot be taken apart and reconfigured.

Conceptualising *l'écriture féminine* as a 'lens' instead allows it to be seen as a curved structure or transparent material that refracts and opens out its thinking where it is able to be reconfigured and particular elements taken forward. It instead refers to a mode of vision in which to examine abstraction and abstract painting through the 'eyes' of *l'écriture féminine* which has enabled me to distill elements from it as being useful to abstract painting, forming my concept and practice of *peinture féminine*. Seeing *l'écriture féminine* as a 'lens' has also been significant because it underlies my writing//painting approach. Rather than translating elements of *l'écriture féminine* into painting, it has informed my material thinking through a reflexive writing//painting dialogue, allowing its textual qualities to instead manifest in my work and in doing so contributing to my conceptualisation and practice of *peinture féminine*. Such a shift is tied in with Proust's quote in the introduction in which he asserts that "the real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes, but in seeking new eyes".⁷⁰⁷ Thus, by distilling elements using *l'écriture féminine* as a 'lens', I have been able to see things anew.

⁷⁰⁷ Proust, M. *La Prisonnière*, 1923, p237

5. Elaborating the 'feminine'

A reframing of *l'écriture féminine* has involved thinking about the 'feminine' and the sign 'woman' in relation to more recent thinking about subjectivity in order to take it forward. *L'écriture féminine* has been interpreted in terms of gender and has been referred to as being specifically for 'woman'. This has in part been through translations of the French word *féminité*; whilst it can be translated into English to mean 'femininity' as was asserted by Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva, it can also be taken to mean 'woman's' or 'female'. I have put forward the 'feminine' in *peinture féminine* as non-gendered and occupying a pre-linguistic space following on from Cixous and Kristeva rather than having a specific relation to female morphology as proposed by Irigaray. Rather, 'woman' is not necessarily linked to a female body and the 'feminine' is not necessarily linked with the sign 'woman'.

My first aim was to explore *l'écriture féminine* as a framework for *women's* contemporary abstract painting practice. My thinking however has shifted from considering abstract painting in terms of 'woman' and gender specificity to using the term 'feminine'. It moves on from the term 'woman' as used in feminism as a fight for equality against men where gender has been seen to mirror sex and been seen in terms of man/woman. To move forward, my concept and practice of *peinture féminine* takes into consideration gender as theorised as an unstable and performative construct as proposed by Butler, where 'woman' is not defined by a female body and is not fixed. It is not limited to women but all subjects with an investment in challenging power structures and finding new ways of articulation and making in relation to difference as encompassing a 'sheerness of difference'. Rather than exploring the 'feminine' in relation to women as embodied subjects, *peinture féminine* moves away from female authorship as I have demonstrated by my claims for Cy Twombly and Neal Rock as two male artists whose work I argue can be interpreted as *peinture féminine*.

In its consideration of difference, my research highlights the limitations of Phallic models of psychoanalysis that are defined by castration as forming the basis of *l'écriture féminine*. I have acknowledged Ettinger's intrauterine space and Matrixial difference as

useful in forming a supplementary perspective to the Symbolic. My research makes explicit the differentiation between feminist and 'feminine', opening up broader questions about what feminism may encompass today; that whilst it is a fight for the equality of women, it is polysemic and overlaps with other discourses that fight for marginalised subjectivities as extending to race, ethnicity and sexuality.

6. *Peinture féminine* as a new way of conceptualising abstract painting

My concept and practice of *peinture féminine* offers a contribution to knowledge by offering a new way of conceptualising abstract painting that moves on from the problematics I identified in my diagrams. It provides a means to renegotiate the embedded structures and conventions of Modernist abstraction within abstract painting by building on certain elements that I have distilled from *l'écriture féminine*. I have taken forward the notion of non-oppositional thinking as central to *l'écriture féminine* and Cixous' notion of being 'in-between' an opposition to reconceptualise abstract painting as a heterogeneous spatiality comprising more complex and multiple spaces. This enables abstract painting to be seen as expanded within itself to open up spaces within and amidst binary oppositions. It is not about inbetweenness *per se* but puts forward these spaces as reshaping binary thinking.

By using *l'écriture féminine* as a 'lens', qualities of *l'écriture féminine* such as 'unfixity', 'multiplicity', 'mobility' and 'continuousness' have manifested through my thinking, both conceptually and materially, in my own art practice. I have built on these qualities in addition to Irigaray's concept of 'volume' to put forward this spatiality as one in which these spaces are shifting and in a continuous state of becoming. By acknowledging the conventions and structures of abstraction as not rigidly phallogentric, in addition to the mobility amidst them in which these structures are not 'set' but are part of an organic entity that is expanding where spaces shift and move to create internal disturbances, abstract painting can be seen as a sphere of possibility.

Peinture féminine is important because artists today are still trying to negotiate the legacy of abstraction. Moreover, many artists invested in elaborating ways to rethink phallogentrism today are looking to other media and strategies outside abstract painting to examine 'feminine' or 'feminist' possibilities. If I may be so bold, I would argue that *peinture féminine* is *vital* in moving this debate on from previous logics based on rejecting, 'rupturing' or hybridising abstract painting and its embedded conventions, and on from 'alternative' practices of 'feminine' abstract painting which I have shown through my own models. Rather, it reconceptualises abstract painting as a concept and practice, allowing it to be seen with new 'eyes'.

7. A move from representation to becoming in abstract painting

My initial aim was to examine an "alternative space for representation for the 'feminine'". However, as my exploration in Chapter 1 shows, attempts to represent or express the 'feminine' in visual terms through abstract painting is problematic. Indeed, how can one visualise or render the 'feminine' without avoiding the problems of essentialising it or setting it up in opposition to the 'masculine' through a visual aesthetic? *Peinture féminine* presupposes a shift from representing difference to its 'coming-into-being' or 'manifesting' through the processes of material production. It contributes to broadening debates concerning visual representation and offers ways of thinking about difference in abstract painting through three interrelated elements that I have drawn from *l'écriture féminine*: quasacles, the poetic and the intermaterial. These elements are not reducible to a visual aesthetic, but I argue their interplay allows for difference to be enfolded into the multiple spaces that have unfolded through *peinture féminine*.

The quasacle builds on *l'écriture féminine* as foremost a practice and Kristeva's notion that the heterogeneous dimension of language not caught up in signification can allow *signifiante* to reactivate the semiotic. It refers to the 'heat' and experience of practice⁷⁰⁸ in which the artist is immersed in the work, and making as a means of an engagement that

⁷⁰⁸ Bolt, B. *Art Beyond Representation: The Performative Power of the Image*, 2004, p5

brings into 'being in the work' something that has previously not existed⁷⁰⁹ to enable difference to be 'routed' into the aesthetic realm of art as arising through making.⁷¹⁰ The poetic as linked to the quasacle refers to its *affect* as seen as a material utterance or in colour for example, which exceeds signification. Rather than seeing the material as simply exceeding signification, my notion of intermateriality puts forward ways of making sense of the internal complexity and mobility of elements within *peinture féminine*. Their interrelation allows oppositions identified in abstract painting to be opened up through the spatiality of *peinture féminine* and shifts from attempts to represent the 'feminine' by transferring or applying elements of *l'écriture féminine* materially, to enable difference to *manifest* and be enfolded into its spatiality.

8. Writing//painting as troubling binary thinking

My third research aim was to develop a hybrid writing//painting methodology to potentially destabilise the masculine/feminine opposition identified in *l'écriture féminine* and feminist critiques of Modernist art practice. My methodology has provided a logic that has fed into my research and thus into *peinture féminine* which has troubled binary thinking and opened up multiple spaces. Using *l'écriture féminine* as a 'lens' has been rooted in my writing//painting methodology; rather than simply transposing the textual *into* the painterly, the writing//painting approach has put them forward as intertwined within this relation. This has shifted from attempts to 'transfer' or 'apply' *l'écriture féminine* materially to allow aspects that I have distilled to manifest through material thinking. Conceptualising the textual and painterly, intertextual and intermaterial and theory and practice as entangled have informed a reflexive dialogue that has been fundamental in allowing *peinture féminine* to emerge in unpredictable ways. My writing//painting approach is not hybrid per se as my intention was. Rather, it opens up spaces amidst the intertwining of elements to allow for hybrid 'moments', collisions and slippages. These elements have been central to *peinture féminine* in its opening out of abstract painting and binary thinking. My writing//painting methodology

⁷⁰⁹ Betterton, R. *Unframing Women's Painting*, 2004, p6

⁷¹⁰ Ettinger, B. *The Matrixial Borderspace*, 2006, p47

contributes non-oppositional and non-hierarchical ways of approaching art-practice-research which is useful for those invested in feminist politics and challenging dominant and binary modes of thinking as well as artist-researchers thinking about the relationship between theory and practice and material epistemologies.

As part of my writing//painting methodology, I have contributed three new strategies of mapping, using a research diary and art-writing. They can be seen as interrelated modes of thinking that are a relation of multiple parts⁷¹¹ which have been fundamental to the development of my research. Mapping has been a performative practice that through privileging 'wandering' has enabled the crossing over of multiple ideas within my research and opened up new spaces and thinking. It can be seen to be amidst oppositions and has been important in the development of my textstallations which in turn have informed *peinture féminine*. My research diary has offered a multi-layered meta-narrative not only allowing a thinking through of ideas and gathering ideas together, but for the writing//painting relation and the intertextual and intermaterial to be elaborated within it. It has enabled hybrid 'moments' as part of my research to inform the development of *peinture féminine*. My art-writing has also been important both through the practice of writing and through its interweaving with my discussion of my own art practice and the work of others in Chapter 4 as mobilising theorisation. Whilst developed as part of my art-practice-research as responsive to my research aims, these three strategies can be developed by other artist-researchers in reference to their own art-practice-research as reflexively responding to their research and to make sense of material thinking.

9. Moving forward; considerations for future research

The theme of vision has been implicit throughout my research which has been teased out through the shift in utilising *l'écriture féminine* as a 'lens' rather than a framework. This has further been drawn out through my reference to Proust which has become a 'motif' for my research; to 'see' abstract painting with 'new eyes' rather than to create alternative

⁷¹¹ Holdridge, L. and Macleod, K. Related Objects of Thought: art and thought, theory and practice, 2006, p144

practices. Whilst the making of my art work has been part of my research and has informed the development of my concept and practice of *peinture féminine*, it was not until analysing the work of other artists and my own art practice and bringing everything together that ideas concerning vision and visuality became more explicit.

This has raised important questions concerning visuality and modes of looking in relation to binary thinking and difference that have been beyond the scope of my research to investigate in depth but that need to be explored in relation to my research in order to push the debate further forward. In abstract painting, there is not a clear relation between the presentation of the work and the ideas put forth by the artist and its reception by the viewer. Indeed as Richards notes, the artist has no ultimate control over the ways their work will be read or used by future generations.⁷¹² The relationship between the artwork and the viewer is thus “not only very particular, but awkward and challenging”.⁷¹³ Following on from my concept and practice of *peinture féminine*, an investigation into how it relates to modes of looking such as glancing, glimpsing, grazing and gazing would be fruitful in elaborating how difference may arise through looking. It would be productive to consider the intersubjective relationship between the artwork, artist and viewer and ‘seeing’ difference in others’ work and also as arising in the viewer. An exploration of Ettinger’s Matrixial gaze as evoking archaic relations with the Other/mother to open a borderlinking time-space as not tied to a Phallic model would also prove useful.⁷¹⁴

9. Summary

Despite being located as a historical concept and practice as I have argued, *l’écriture féminine* can indeed be used as a ‘lens’ to reconceptualise abstract painting. In doing so, by distilling useful elements from *l’écriture féminine*, I have taken them forward to contribute a new concept and practice of *peinture féminine*. *Peinture féminine* acknowledges the structures and conventions of Modernist abstraction as bound up with abstract painting, but

⁷¹² Richards, M. K. Reframing Derrida, 2008, p162

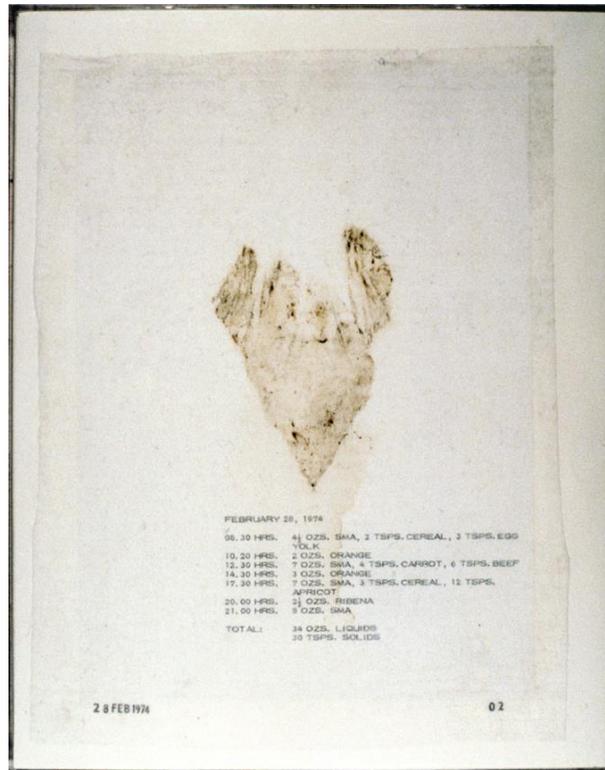
⁷¹³ Macleod, L. and Holdridge, K. Related Objects of Thought: art and thought, theory and practice, 2006, p149

⁷¹⁴ Ettinger, B. The Matrixial Borderspace, 2006, p45

that they are not phallogentric per se. Rather, these structures and conventions are 'unstable' and when opened up and expanded internally through *péinture féminine*, can reconceptualise abstract painting as a heterogeneous spatiality in a process of becoming as comprising 'more complex and multiple spaces'. Rather than representing difference, through this unfolding, difference can 'come-into-being' and be enfolded within this spatiality through processes of making and the interplay of three elements of *péinture féminine* that I have developed from *l'écriture féminine*: quasacles, the poetic and the intermaterial. The 'feminine' here is elaborated as not tied to gender but as a multiplicity of difference not limited to women. Difference can also be seen to incorporate *différance*. A writing//painting approach is fundamental in facilitating a reflexive and entangled relation between the textual and the painterly, the intertextual and the intermaterial and theory and practice and allows for abstract painting to be seen with 'new eyes'. This art-practice-research is of use for artists and theorists from a range of discourses including painting, feminism and subjectivity, with an interest in elaborating ways to problematise phallogentrism and oppositional thinking.

Image plates

1. Mary Kelly, detail from *Post-partum document*, 1973-99, mixed media installation



2. Judy Chicago, *The Dinner Party*, 1974-79, ceramic, porcelain and textiles



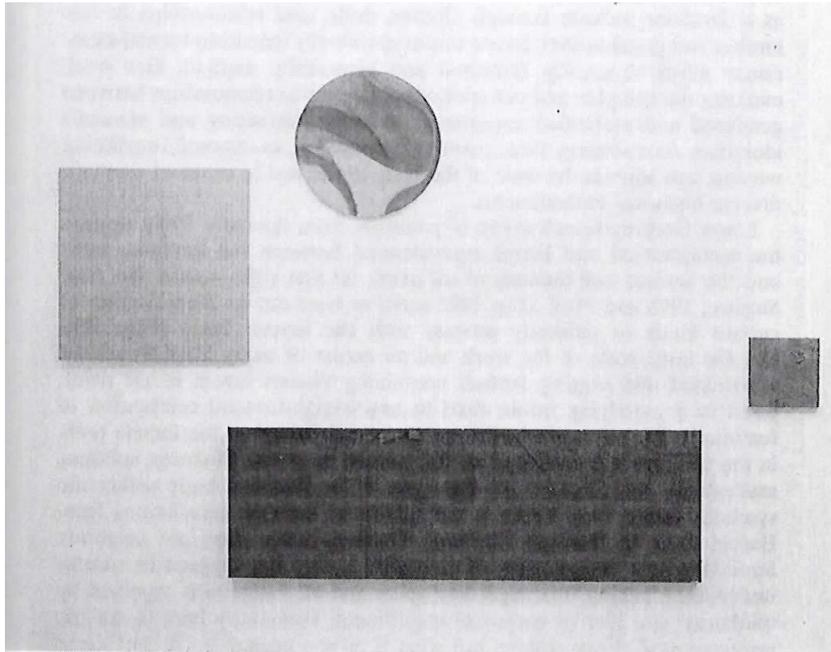
3. Jenny Saville, *Plan*, 1993, oil on canvas



4. Helen Frankenthaler, *Flood*, 1967, polymer on canvas



5. Eve Muske, *orange, blue, mirror, skin, grid*, 1992, mixed-media on canvas installation



6. Kay Sage, *I Saw Three Cities*, 1944, oil on canvas



7. Shirley Kaneda, *The Contradiction of Affirmation*, 1993, oil on linen



8. Mira Schor, *Slit of Paint*, 1994, oil on canvas



9. *Mapchester*, data image with gpx traces from live walking project using OpenStreetMap (OSM) and GPS, 2006



10. *Yourwhere*, live mapping project at Wolverhampton Art Gallery led by artist Kathrin Bohm, 2009



11. Elizabeth Price, *Boulder*, 1996 - ongoing, packing tape



12. David Reed, *Judy's Bedroom*, 1992, mixed-media installation



13. Jessica Stockholder, *Paint Thing*, 2008, mixed-media painting



14. Denyse Thomasos, *Sailor 1*, 2000, oil on board



Glossary of terms and translations

Key: Term, (*original term if a translation*), key proponent

The Anal stage, (Freud):

The 'anal' stage is the second of three stages of psychosexual development put forward by Freud. Here the child's interest changes and the source of pleasure shifts from being 'oral' to 'anal'. At this stage, the child is taught to gain control of their bodily functions through toilet training. They become less passive and more mobile and communicable which shifts the relationship between the parent and the child from total dependence as a result.

Chora (*khôra*), Kristeva:

Chora is a Greek word that means enclosed space or receptacle. It was defined by Plato in his text *Timeus* as an invisible and formless being that in some mysterious way partakes of the intelligible and yet is unnamable and incomprehensible. Kristeva borrows the term chora from Plato as building on Freud's *trieb*, to refer to the primary processes and instinctual drives which are predominantly oral and anal and also simultaneously dichotomous and heterogeneous and present before the child enters into the phallic stage. Kristeva's chora is uncertain, and lacks unity and identity. However unlike Plato who saw the chora as incomprehensible, Kristeva aims to articulate the chora through the semiotic disposition of language.

Deconstruction, Derrida:

For Derrida, all texts and metaphysical thought are based on structural oppositions that privilege one term and marginalise the other. Deconstruction is not a negative activity or simply taking something apart, but affirms the systems we need to challenge. It is a process that is always at work and provides a critique of Western philosophy. It aims to expose and subvert oppositions and dualistic hierarchies, emphasising the importance of the marginal which is why Derrida claims to speak from the 'margins of philosophy'. The deconstruction of binary oppositions is not based on neutralisation but on displacing and overturning them. Displacement is closely linked to *différance* (see below).

Différance, Derrida:

Différance is taken from the words to *differ* and to *defer*. It plays on the distinction between the audible and the written which is signalled in the 'a' which differentiates it from the French word *différence*, a distinction that is not audible but seen in writing. *Différance* exceeds and

disturbs conventional language and representation. It is the systematic play of differences based on the active and passive production of intervals and spaces in which elements are related together. It also refers to deferral whereby something signifies by being deferred to another element as part of an economy of traces. Terms do not have an absolute or fixed meaning as they are infinitely in deferral and meaning is constantly changing and never truly present. Thus, a text encompassing *différance* is never complete as new interpretations, meanings and relations come to light. In *différance*, meaning is not produced in the closure of binary oppositions but in the free play of the signifier.

Drive (*treib*), Freud:

The 'drives' derive from Freud's *Treib* and are referred to in French psychoanalysis as *la pulsion*. They relate to the instinctual pre-Oedipal drives of the subject, which are repressed in order for the formation of 'normative' identity.

***Féminité*:**

The French word *féminité* directly translates to 'femininity' in English. However, depending on its context, it can also mean 'feminine', 'female', 'women's', 'women' or 'femaleness'. In translations of Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva's texts these terms are sometimes interchangeable and prone to being misinterpreted in English.

French feminism:

French feminism focused on philosophical and literary approaches, often incorporating metaphorical writing to challenge phallogentrism and explore theories of the body, rather than being overtly political. It is different to Anglo-American feminist movements which developed at the same time, which instead focused on the political equality between men and women. Overall, French feminist writers did not associate themselves with Anglo-American feminism.

Imaginary (*imaginaire*), Lacan:

The Imaginary realm refers to the formation of the ego in the Mirror Stage and the 'other' that the child identifies itself with. It is in the Imaginary where the child develops the intellectual act of self-recognition, which enables it to function as 'I'. The Imaginary is pre-Symbolic as it is the realm where the child exists before it is constituted as a speaking subject in the Symbolic. The Imaginary dimension of language refers to signifieds; unstable meanings that have not yet been associated with the signifiers that emerge from language. The subject's identity (as constituted through language) is thus unstable in the Imaginary. At this stage it is a question of rediscovering the unconscious and the effects discovered at the level of the

materially unstable elements, which constitute the chain of language. Irigaray later developed the Imaginary as a 'feminine' model.

Intertextuality (*intertextualité*), Kristeva:

The term intertextuality was coined by Kristeva. It is defined in *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1979) as the transposition of one or more systems of signs, resulting in a new position and articulation in a text. It involves the components that make up a textual system (such as a novel), rather than the interrelations between different authors or texts as has been commonly been understood in Anglo-American thinking.

Jouissance (*jouissance*):

Jouissance cannot be fully translated into English. It can loosely be defined as 'bliss' or 'pleasure'. However, it also translates as 'orgasm' and connotes sexual pleasure. For Lacan, jouissance goes beyond an economy of sexual pleasure and is an essentially phallic and a typically 'masculine' function. He argued that there also exists a 'feminine' jouissance that is the pleasure of the 'Other', however it is indefinable and can be experienced unknowingly by both women and men. The notion of a specifically 'feminine' jouissance features in Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva's development of *l'écriture féminine*. Roland Barthes also explores the jouissance of writing in his book *The Pleasure of the Text* (1975).

The Matrixial, Ettinger:

The Matrixial is the intrauterine or womb space the child inhabits before it is born and is part of the Real, or as Ettinger terms, the 'corpoReal'. It is first mentioned by Freud, however Ettinger develops it and proposes the subject as constantly co-emerging 'I's' and 'non-I's' with the body of the mother it shares. She coined the term 'subjectivity-as-encounter' and 'an-other sexual difference' to account for this co-emerging. According to the Matrixial, the subject is several and becoming, made up of 'jointness-in-separateness'. It constitutes what Ettinger terms transsubjectivity whereby sexual difference comes from several co-emerging subjects at shared borderspaces. Whereas Freud argues that the intrauterine space disappears when the subject enters castration, for Ettinger it continues through severality and transsubjective relations. Her reformulation of subject and other displaces the Phallus as the 'master signifier' as put forward by Lacan. The Matrixial does not reject Lacan's Symbolic but offers a supplementary perspective where subjectivity is not thought of solely through castration.

The Mirror Stage, Lacan:

The Mirror Stage is the first time that the child considers itself as a unitary being by thinking of itself as 'I' in relationship to an image that it starts to understand as representing itself. Whereas the child previously experienced itself as a shapeless mass, it now gains a sense of wholeness and completeness between its inner and outer self. For Lacan, it is the child's identification with its reflection and discovery of self as an intellectual act that leads to the formation of the ego.

Name of the Father (*Nom du père*), Lacan:

The 'Name of the Father' is a position that exists within the Symbolic order. It is a metaphor that signifies the Symbolic father and also the absence of the mother in the Oedipal complex. It is a paternal function that regulates the Law and language as it is the signifier that permits signification to occur normatively (so that the subject does not develop psychosis, neurosis or hysteria), through allowing the subject to be constituted towards it in terms of desire in the Oedipal complex.

The Oedipal complex, Freud:

The Oedipal complex refers to the process of psychosexual development and according to Freud normally occurs in children between the ages of three and five. It refers to the emotions and sexual desires that the child keeps in the unconscious through repression. In the Oedipal Complex, the mother is the first sexual object desired by both sexes. For the boy this is strengthened by the boy's perception of his father as a threat and a rival who he subsequently rejects and wants to remove. Through the realisation that other people do not also possess the penis (such as the girl and the mother) and are anatomically different from him, the boy develops 'castration anxiety' through fear of losing his own penis. The threat of castration however, eventually marks the decline of his Oedipal complex and compels him to 'healthily' abandon and repress these sexual desires to fit in with society. For Freud, the little girl too experiences 'castration anxiety'. However, the threat of castration is manifested through what Freud terms 'penis envy'; in her clitoris, she thought she had a significant phallic organ that gave sexual pleasure, but instead the girl realises that she lacks this. At this stage, the girl desires a penis and the power it represents. As the mother does not have a penis and thus refuses her one, she turns her desire from the mother to the father, wanting to obtain from him the penis she lacks. In doing so, the girl hostilely rejects the mother whom she blames for not having a penis.

The Oral stage, (Freud):

The 'oral' stage is the first of three stages of psychosexual development put forward by Freud. The infant's interest is predominantly oral and pleasure is derived from the mouth; through sucking, biting and crying. Here, the infant is passive and largely dependent on the actions of others.

other (*le petit autre*), Lacan:

Lacan differentiated between the 'other' and the 'Other'. The 'other' originates from the Mirror Stage, where it is not a real 'other' as such, but the reflection and projection of the ego. This 'other' belongs to the realm of the Imaginary where the self constitutes the ego. As well as the 'other' in the mirror as part of the Mirror Stage, the subject comes to recognise all other people as 'others' treating them as suitable objects of projection and identification.

Other (*le grande Autre*), Lacan:

Compared to the 'other', the 'Other' indicates a radical otherness beyond the Imaginary which is situated in the Symbolic. It is constituted by the entire Symbolic realm of human productions, revealing itself in language and other structures such as the laws that govern societal rules. The 'Other' for the child is embodied by the mother and it is from this 'Other' that the child acquires language as well as the set of laws and hypotheses to which she subscribes. When the child identifies the role of the father in the mother and its own life, it identifies that they exist within a wider social realm. The subject therefore comes into being by means of its relationship with otherness and is developed in the discourse of the 'Other'.

Parergon, Derrida:

In *The Truth in Painting* (1987), Derrida introduces the parergon as something that is not part of a work (the ergon), nor outside it. For Derrida, the painting exists simultaneously in two separate realms: in comparison to the painting, the frame is part of the wall and in comparison to the wall, the frame is part of the painting. Thus, it is impossible to definitively establish what is and what is not inside the frame. He argues that painting has an in-between structural specificity; a space which is neither inside nor outside. Derrida describes the partition of the 'edge' as the 'passé-partout'; a structure with an unfixed and movable base that simultaneously links and separates the painting and the frame. The parergon disconcerts oppositional thinking whereby the double articulation of the frame questions and reverses hierarchies. He locates the frame and its uncertain and in-between specificity as the site of meaning in subversive works.

The Phallic stage, (Freud):

When the child is around four to five years old, it then enters the 'phallic' stage. At this stage, pleasure shifts to the genitals where the opposite sex begins to arouse curiosity. For boys, the phallic stage is made apparent by the fact that they have learnt how to derive 'pleasurable sensations' from their small penis and connect this state of excitement to their ideas of sexual intercourse. Freud argued that girls also do the same, however it is with their 'penis-equivalent' or 'truncated penis'; the 'still smaller clitoris'. For the girl at this stage, only the clitoris is involved in sexual pleasure and the 'feminine' vagina is still undiscovered by both sexes.

Real (*réel*), Lacan:

The Real is a state most closely associated with feelings of need experienced as a newborn child. It is best thought of as ineffable and unimaginable as it cannot be expressed by language; it is by its very nature indescribable. For everything that is recognised by a means of a signifier, the Real is that which remains imperceptible and unsymbolised as it is that which is outside language. The Real may only be experienced as eruptions in gaps in the Symbolic and can be seen in behaviours associated with the bodily drives. It is characterised by impossible states shown through manifestations of absolute terror or enjoyment. It is this total enjoyment which Lacan termed *jouissance* (see previous).

Semiotic (*le sémiotique*), Kristeva:

Kristeva's 'semiotic' is different from 'semiotics'; the study of signs which in French is *la sémiotique* and differentiated by its gender. Kristeva also refers to her notion of the semiotic as *semanalysis* to avoid confusion with 'semiotics'. It refers to the 'prephonological' and is anterior to the Mirror Stage. It is the disposition within the body of instinctual drives as they affect language and its practice. The semiotic refers to the taking apart of the sign to establish new modes of signification through *signifiance* (see below).

Signifiance (*signifiance*), Kristeva:

Signifiance is a term developed by Kristeva to refer to the heterogeneous workings of language that articulates the interplay between semiotic and Symbolic. It is through the operations of signifiance that the 'subject-in-process' (*étrangers à nous-mêmes*) can emerge.

Symbolic (*le symbolique*), Lacan:

Lacan's Symbolic comes into being around the time of the Mirror Stage as the subject enters language and signification. The Symbolic dimension of language is that of the signifier where

meaning comes into being through words, as opposed to abstract concepts that dominate the Imaginary. Lacan asserts that the Symbolic, like language pre-exists the individual; it brings into being all phenomena which exist because they have been symbolised, manifesting in language, laws and societal structures. The Imaginary and Symbolic are overlapping constructs as language consists of both signifiers and signifieds.

Writing (*écriture*):

Unlike its English translation, the French word *écriture* is polysemic and can be seen to produce 'poetic language' as opposed to just writing. It is usually signified in French by its context. *Écriture* also refers to Derrida's notion of 'expanded writing'. According to Peter Fischer in *Abstraction Gesture Écriture* (1999), p20, *écriture* operates on four levels: as a system of notation for language and thought using conventional forms of graphic signs; the form of the written sign used for this representation (letters, calligraphic signs, hieroglyphs); the personal manner in which these signs are written down such as individual handwriting and the act of writing – both physical and intellectual, like the free association of ideas and abstract forms of expression or surrealist automatic writing.

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Appendix A - Interview with Neal Rock 03.2010

JT: I don't know if you want me to start off with some questions?

NR: It's up to you, I'm easy really, I can start by ... I couldn't find the Helen Molesworth text.

JT: Yes, I found the book. I couldn't get hold of it though. I think it was called something landscape.

NR: Landscape Confections.

JT: Yes, it's not in my library so I might see if I can get hold of it.

NR: I did have it, but my gallery's got it in LA. I gave it to them last October as I had to give it back. But, I also don't know whether she specifically mentions it in the book, because, I remembered also that when she's talking about this kind of feminine space in practice, she's talking about it, um, in one of the exhibition venues. I was at Orange County, the Orange County Museum of Art. I walked in when she was giving a guided tour. I think it is in the book, but she elaborated in the talk, um, and it was weird because as I walked in she was talking about my work.

JT: [Laughs]

NR: And she's specifically talking about craft and about me deliberately using craft as a kind of de-canonising in a way or an opening out a field of possibility within, kind of, post-war painting because craft was seen as something that wasn't serious, that wasn't, um, it didn't pertain to a rigorous intellectual practice and she mentioned me and people like Jim Hodges who used strategies, deliberate strategies of craft to subvert that. I think it's partially through, I mean I do remember, quite clearly when I left Saint Martins that nobody was really making, people weren't, artists like Zebedee Jones or Clem Crosby or Torie Begg, it looked serious, you know, it looked, um ... quite stoic, you know.

JT: Was this in 2000?

NR: Yeah, yeah, 2000. I remember that there were a lot of different painters at the time in London, um, you know, so you also had people like Sophie von Hellerman and, um, Neil Tait was starting a show. You know, different kinds of painters but specifically painters dealing with the legacy of abstraction in London. They weren't dealing with it in the way that I, you know, and also there was this ghostly presence of Bernard Frize hanging over all of them.

JT: Yeah.

NR: Which didn't seem to be acknowledged, um, it certainly wasn't acknowledged in the press releases or in the gallery blurb that these painters were, in some instances, really just copying the intellectual project.

JT: Um hm.

NR: Rather than extending the intellectual project of Bernard Frize, particularly somebody like, erm, Ian Davenport and, um, err ... Jonathan Parsons, who I know him a little bit so it feels, kind of disloyal to say it, but, I mean, he was basically making Bernard Frize paintings. So, I felt that, I needed to do something else really, um ... something that was a bit more, kind of irreverent if I was going to try and work within this, kind of legacy of medium specificity, performative making, erm, yeah.

JT: It will be interesting what my readings of your work are then, because actually one of the things that I was going to ask you, because I've read quite a lot about what people have written about your work and obviously, people ... obviously you yourself reference that your work, um, is in dialogue with abstraction, and, that kind of historical painterly movement. And I was wondering, did you set out with a specific strategy? Was it to question abstraction or to challenge it, or was it to just kind of, re-engage it or rethink it in the work?

NR: Yeah, I err, I'm trying to think really, I don't think there was anything as cogent as an absolute deliberate calculated strategy. Err, I knew that there were, I mean it was really to do with who I found the most interesting, in terms of painting.

JT: Yeah.

NR: Because I was also looking at people, I was also really interested in artists that weren't painters. And I was also interested in things that had nothing to do with art. In a sense, you know and I've mentioned this in a lot of different contexts, that, I grew up watching a lot of horror films. Um, I grew up in front of the TV. So for me, there's always been this uncomfortable relationship between, kind of being in the world, being this kid that was, essentially, dumped in front of the TV set, um, and just absorbing all this stuff, and I always go back to looking at Sam Raimi films and George Romero films, John Carpenter films, and at the same time, absorbing a certain canon of Western painting from, erm, anybody from, erm ... Caspar David Friedrich, Turner, Hopper, um, Giorgio Morandi, erm, Giorgio de Chirico. And then, this fascination with the New York School, because when I was at school, art college, in '99, 2000, it was almost considered, it was almost a given that, the New York School was the worst thing you could look to for influence. So, Pollock was a kind of end game of a certain kind of making work. And, I didn't think that. I mean, I looked at Bernard Frize and particularly Fabian Marcaccio. What I saw in their work was, a lot of potential that

they didn't quite realise themselves. So, at the time when I think I left, it was more about, for me, working through Bernard Frize and Fabian Marcaccio to get to someplace else. So really, I mean, and at the same time, failing at that was a better way forward than looking at Torie Begg, for example.

JT: Yeah.

NR: Which, yeah, I mean, it wasn't going anywhere. It hasn't gone anywhere I don't think. Since, erm, yeah.

JT: It's interesting because I think the status of painting in perhaps the past twenty years has, because we've gone through so many historical movements, it seems to be, maybe in the last ten years, a kind of like, a static phase, so I see your work very much as, kind of, re-thinking it and reconsidering and renegotiating painting in a contemporary context. But, I don't think it's necessarily deliberate, there are a lot of strategies that you've used that I can make references to, that, um, of ways in which you've done that. I also wanted to ask as well, erm, I mean, I know a lot of people ask it, but you quite clearly locate yourself within the discourse of painting and, um, call yourself a painter. I wondered, when I read about your work, a lot of people refer to the work as 'objects', and I wondered if you see them as paintings, or as 'things', or do they resist categorisation? I was just interested in what you 'see' them as.

NR: Yeah, I see ... I don't see the objects as specifically any one thing, um, I don't see them as objects. I look at the project, and the project is a painting project.

JT: Yeah.

NR: And, I think that sometimes in that painting project, I produce objects, I find objects, I find things and alter them, erm, I make things with silicone paint. Um, but essentially, I think that it's a project that's concerned with how to extend certain languages. In a way, the project is quite Modernist in a sense that it believes in a sense of tradition and it believes in a kind of linearity, but within that, it's porous.

JT: Yeah.

NR: You know, it's not, erm, "oh well, if I make this, that means that I'm going to contribute to the history of this". Nothing's as clear as that, I think it's an understanding, that the whole, erm ... cultural geography is really, really mixed up.

JT: Um.

NR: And, part of the challenge is to orchestrate, in a sense they're trying to orchestrate something that's a value, out of a received value judgment. Um, the things that people take for granted are the things that people take as givens. Um, but I, you know, it's made more complicated because painting, in a way painting doesn't really exist today.

JT: Um.

NR: There are different painting practices that come from different cultural traditions. I was talking to a painter, um, last week who is, couldn't be more different to me if he tried to. He's shown a lot. Um, should I mention his name? I mean, I could mention him to you but it doesn't really matter.

JT: You don't have to.

NR: Well, it gives you an idea of his practice you know.

JT: Yeah, yeah.

NR: He's a painter called Joel Tomlin and he used to show with the Max Wigram Gallery quite a few years ago. Um, and if you look at where his painting practice comes from, it's like another world. I mean, he was talking to me about, um, Plein Air painting and, um, Merlin James, the painter Merlin James. So again, there's somebody who couldn't be more different to me, but Merlin's practice and Joel's practice buys into a completely different set of historical moments that then inflect the way they produce work. Um, and it was quite funny that Joel said something like, "well you know, working class kids look to America for painting, erm, when I was young, but middle class kids looked back to Paris".

JT: [Laughs]

NR: So there was this kind of really weird class judgement, and it wasn't a value judgement, it was simply like, well, you know, you were a working class kid looking at American horror movies and I was brought up in a middle class family and I was taken to museums and shown, you know, Seurat or Sickert. It's quite funny.

JT: I was going to say, erm, with your work located in the discourse of painting, it pushes what painting is to its very limit, and it, so that it's ... and I think maybe that this is symptomatic of contemporary painting, that it's reshaped by other discourses, it doesn't remain by itself, we don't quite know what painting is today.

NR: Um.

JT: Erm, and I was wondering is this, is the notion of painting in an 'expanded field', erm, is that, do you think that is something that defines what contemporary painting is? Or what painting is perhaps now compared to twenty years ago, ten years ago?

NR: I think even though I use it, like in my research proposal, in my question I use the word 'expanded painting', but, or 'extended painting' or in the 'expanded field', you know, um ... it's a hugely problematic term for me, erm, in that it implies that it wasn't, you know, there's an implication that paint wasn't, kind of, there was a time when it wasn't complex and it was quite simple in a way that it did things this way or that it did that way. It's a kind of real, you know, it's a historical naivety to assume, um, that there was, um, what you see if you look in a kind of lazy research way, if you just look at history survey books, you'll just see "oh yeah, in the 80's it was, you know, neo-expressionism, in the 70s it was minimalism", and we know that's not the case. Um, so for me ... I think really, if you can take anything from it, what it does is, which I think seems true to me is that there is this heavily pluralistic state.

JT: Yeah.

NR: Um, and actually I probably might have more in common with somebody that doesn't paint at all than I would with a painter. So, for example, I've probably got more in common with a sculptor like Matt Frank than I do a painter like Merlin James. Um, and it's to do with where the conversations attach themselves, to popular culture or to certain ideas of authenticity or authorship. Um ... yeah ... it'd be interesting to see where this expanded field thing goes.

JT: I think in the 'expanded field' in terms of painting as well, it's very much an emergent terminology as well, it's something that's come out quite recently because of the way that painting's developed, no-one really knows what's happening and what to term it as well. And, always something is labelled as something, if people don't know what it is.

NR: Um. Yeah I think it's, in that sense it's also just an easy way to kind of, you know, you just put this huge umbrella term over something, because you can't really define it. And also there's a sense of, um, there's a writer called Martin Herbert, erm, who wrote a catalogue essay for the Walsall show.

JT: Yes, I've read his essay.

NR: I can't remember whether he mentioned it in the catalogue essay or whether it was a conversation I had with him. I think it might have been a conversation we had. We met a few times, and, um, we were talking about how painting, more than a lot of other disciplines or discourses are complex because on the one hand you have the market, and painting, because of what it is, is always going to be complicit with, it's always going to be bought and

sold, so that you're not necessarily seeing painting shown that is critical, you're also seeing stuff that's, um, really fashionable, it pertains to taste. What we were saying is that there has to be in some ways, a way of discerning, um ... having this kind of value or a set of value systems where you can try to understand if something is critically engaged, and then, how is it critically engaged, to something that is just fashionable at the moment. Um, and that can be quite difficult. I mean, I was trying to do that. Um, I've tried to pinpoint practices that I felt have tried to, in themselves move debate on, and then, looked for, kind of, latencies within them. Um, and I think in some ways, those paintings from the '90s are a classic example of the way that the market interferes, um, because Ian Davenport was making perfectly good, promising, exciting paintings when he was at Goldsmiths.

JT: Yeah, there's a big group of artists around that time as well, isn't there?

NR: Yeah. From Goldsmiths, well, not his year but yeah, around that time. So, you've got people like Brad Lochore, um, Alex Landrum, Glenn Brown.

JT: Yeah.

NR: Um, Gary Hume, obviously, um, Alexis Harding a little bit later on. And in many ways they all started out with a very good opening, if you think of it as a game, they all had a really good opening gambit, you know. They started off really well, they said "okay how about this", but then they just kept on pausing the initial question. Like, Ian Davenport's practice has basically, in a way, been the reposing of questions that he was asking in his degree show. Um, and that's absurd to me. You know, um, but then getting involved in the market in that way, um, it's easy to judge it isn't it.

JT: Um. In relation to my research, I've been examining feminist readings of painting, and I think feminism itself anyway has evolved from the etymology of what it originally was anyway, so, you might not agree with my readings of the work but one of the things I was wondering about was if we consider from certain perspectives, Western discourse as being phallogocentric, where, erm, language and philosophy is governed by phallogocentric structures, which are essentially, I don't like using the terminology but, but there essentially labelled as 'masculine', erm, I wondered if you had ever thought about if your work, erm, intentionally challenges structures that could be identified as 'masculine' within the work?

NR: Um, well ...

JT: In the history of painting.

NR: [sighs]

JT: Which I appreciate is a very massive messy question!

NR: [laughs] Yeah, well, there's certain interpretations of post-war American art that are kind of macho, right, and um, that's not just the New York School that's kind of, Donald Judd, even Anthony Caro, they're dominant discourses right, um, and you could argue that the insertion of other value systems, like craft, like dumbing down the mundane, the incidental, popular culture, films, like Sam Raimi's Evil Dead. Now you put Sam Raimi's Evil Dead, which is a kind of a really badly, well not badly made but it's a, um, it's a visceral, kind of comedy horror that doesn't attempt to be high culture and you could argue that is a very deliberate way of erm, bringing certain phallogentric conversations into another kind of conversation.

JT: Yeah.

NR: Um, I wouldn't have used the word 'phallogentric' [laughs].

JT: Well, I don't really like the term as it categorises subjectivities.

NR: But, you know.

JT: Dominant discourses maybe.

NR: Yeah, exactly, but you know it's not, err, it is true that those thoughts, um the New York School and certain discourses like Minimalism were dominated by males, it was a man's game basically, wasn't it? Um, you know, um ... but you know, the thing is with that, is that it has happened a lot over the last fifteen years, um, you could even argue twenty years where artists have, um ... deliberately used strategies of subversion to take those conversations somewhere else. Um, Liz Larner's work, do you know Liz Larner's work in LA?

JT: Yeah.

NR: She's a really good example of somebody that took formalist sculpture into, through her mentor Ken Price, um, I believe Ken Price taught her, I mean I know she's very much influenced by Ken Price, because Ken Price was influenced by ceramics as well. Um, so the template is, the template for that kind of movement, um ... is, I would say pretty much historical.

JT: Um.

NR: In a sense that it is not part of a contemporary moment, um, well, it is in the sense that she's still alive and she's still making work, but the contribution is something that I feel is something that is way before our generation.

JT: Yeah.

NR: And then you've got somebody like, um, Sterling Ruby who does other things again, erm, this idea of, you know the outsider, street culture, um, how he uses a bit of an archeaux of street art and Britain's not into a conversation with objects that are neither paintings or sculptures. Um, I mean the question really for that kind of discourse will be where do you take it now?

JT: Um. Well, I think, one of the problematic things about, particularly feminist art is that it is often set up in opposition with dominant art, or, you know 'masculinist' or 'phallogocentric' art.

NR: And confirming it, right?

JT: Yeah, kind of like, sustaining being in binary opposition. So, one of the things I was thinking about, and also Martin Herbert mentions it in his essay in the Fanestra book ...

NR: Um.

JT: ... he says that your work is suspended between binaries and oppositions. And I was wondering, have you thought, or how do you feel about embodying, rather than a binary opposition as being two polar opposites, but embodying some sort of 'inbetween-ness'? Or, some sort of 'within-ness' of the binary opposition that feminists and theorists would say governs Western discourse?

NR: Yeah, yeah. Um ... this goes back to an interesting conversation I had with Dave Burrows. Um, and I actually wasn't aware of it, um, but we were talking about, um, part of my project here is this idea of the Herm, which I think is in the Fanestra book.

JT: Yep.

NR: Um, and extending the Herm, out of a kind of, err, a kind of morphological likeness to what a Herm is to a more, kind of, cultural conversation about what a Herm can do. Erm, and then Dave, err, I think when I first moved back to London, erm, in September or October, he was trying to get his head around this Herm, and he said, "well, what is this, what is this Herm though? Err, you know, is it a historical framing of it" and he said, "well is it about affect then?" Err, meaning, you know, obviously is it just about the physical thing that you encounter? And I said, "well actually there's a code of affect, you know, just because you say affect doesn't immediately put it into this realm of the physical being of now".

JT: Yeah, yeah.

NR: There's a code, you know, there's a history of, erm, continental philosophy that relates to the 'in itself', the 'being', the 'now'. And then, you see, he said we could talk about

Barthes' notion of the, um, the neutral, which I didn't know about. Have you read about the neutral?

JT: Yeah, Barthes features in here (refers to notes) [laughs].

NR: Ah.

JT: Yeah, yeah.

NR: Well, I didn't know about this notion of the neutral and this notion of the third space.

JT: Well, that was my reading, but I thought not necessarily something you'd considered.

NR: No.

JT: But actually it sits really well with that, kind of debate.

NR: The problem I have with that is that the third space is no longer the third space. Because even when, erm, when I was at Saint Martins, there was a lot of conversation around, um, the 'in-between' space.

JT: Yeah, yeah.

NR: Now, the problem with the in-between space is, is that it's not really the in-between space. The in-between space is pretty much in-between the polarities.

JT: Yep.

NR: Which, is a problem.

JT: That's, yeah, that's exactly what I've been considering. Because, erm, I don't really like the term 'in-between', I've been thinking of it as a spatiality of there being two polar opposites, but actually, what's in-between is kind of like a 'within' or an 'in-the-midst-of' where instead of it being one thing, like the 'French feminists' would say that there would be a third space but, I'm thinking about it as being a complex multiplicity of spaces, where actually, it's not, it's kind of, the space in-between is really blurry and it's kind of shifting and mutating and it's far more complex than just being a 'third' 'in-between' space. It's kind of like a within-ness or between-ness.

NR: Um.

JT: But I think, sometimes as well, which is quite interesting, we can think of it, like, outside of the binary as being elsewhere or beyond it as well. So there's also a sense of, like, outside and inside.

NR: Exactly, yeah.

JT: And, I don't, that kind of spatiality is quite ...?

NR: Well, I think of it in terms of, I still think in terms of binaries and in terms of oppositions, but what I think is important to me, is that, if you throw enough contradictions together, and this relates to this idea of these many, many different gradations, that if you throw a lot of binaries together, erm, and figure out ways in which they can be configured, then, other possibilities happen.

JT: Um.

NR: And for me, that's, you can see that in practice.

JT: Yeah.

NR: And it doesn't have to happen in theory. When you look at Bernard Frize, one of the things that first drew me to Bernard Frize was that I quite clearly got from it, that he was committed to a legacy of conceptualism, and a Duchampian legacy as well, erm, and at the same time he was also a product of, err, the fact that he was painting, he was also a sensualist, he was romantic.

JT: Yeah.

NR: Um, he believed in the object, he believed that this thing that was left as residue has a sensuous, um, affectation to it. And they were, for quite some time, two very different worlds.

JT: Uh hm.

NR: On the one hand, you had, you know, Duchampians or a legacy of Duchamp. On the other hand you had people like Jackson Pollock. They wouldn't go together, um, but you put it together and practice like that, what you have is something that, erm, still hasn't been unpacked by another generation of painters.

JT: Yeah.

NR: You've had painters that have alluded to Bernard Frize, like, um Jonathan Parsons, or Ian Davenport, or, you know, whoever, err, Jason Martin to a certain point. But none of them, in their allusions, have managed to figure out how, that practice can go somewhere else. And the same thing is true of Blinky Palermo and Imi Knoebel. I've been looking a lot at Blinky Palermo and Knoebel at the moment.

JT: Yeah.

NR: Um, and it, you know, there was a particular moment, I was in LA in January and I saw the Blinky Palermo retrospective at, err, LACMA and there was upstairs above the exhibition

on a different floor there was series of works by, um Knoebel called 'The Latinists', I don't know if you know of 'The Latinists'?

JT: No, I haven't heard of it.

NR: It's bizarre. It's quite typical of Knoebel's work actually, but it was done in the late 80s, um, and I still can't get my head around it. Um, but what I feel is that those two artists, painters, um, were trying to figure out the way in which painting can figure an understanding of being in the world. But, without offering anything.

JT: Um hm.

NR: You know, it was all about the frame, the edge, the surface ... juxtaposition. Um, movement, but then, not, you know, saying that these co-ordinates are important but we're not going to tell you why they're important or what you're going to do with them. And then you get somebody like, erm, Angela de la Cruz, basically, who is a kind of a sentimentalist, she organises the work so that it pertains to being about the way in which we frame being in the world.

JT: Yeah. But, they're so considered, they're so conceptual even though they're painting that ...

NR: They fall back into an anthropomorphic sentimentality. So that, you know, it kind of sags, like somebody would sag. She goes back into a dialogue with the body in a really obvious way. Erm, and I don't know many painters that are not, that are, you know, really trying to think about how those things can be taken somewhere else. And in a sense, that's got nothing to do with 'expanded painting', or, it's to do with maybe understanding or looking at historical moments of production. And seeing what was being thought through and then what the challenge is, you know.

JT: It's interesting you talking about, erm, Duchamp and, was it, Duchamp and Frize? As two ways of ...

NR: Duchamp and, well, in Frize, I think that you have Duchamp and Pollock together.

JT: Pollock, sorry, yes.

NR: Yeah.

JT: Erm, because I've been thinking a lot about painting in a contemporary context and the vitality of painting, because I wonder if the vitality of painting and a rethinking of the work and maybe a rethinking of abstraction, whether that's deliberate or it's just kind of emerged ... as being something, erm, quite necessary to contemporary painting and the status of, erm, and

like, the current status of painting? I was wondering if the idea of vitality and rethinking things so that they're so current is a big part of your work?

NR: No, I don't think it's about the vitality of, err, the current. Um, for me, I think it's about ... and I think I've moved from, I'm still ignorant, but I was a lot more ignorant five years ago, and I was really fucking ignorant ten years ago.

JT: [laughs]

NR: Um, and within that sense of not knowing enough ... like not, erm, (sighs) not really, and even now I don't think I'm really ... finding out what the important things were.

JT: Um.

NR: For me, you know, historically, and in a sense, from my perspective, if you don't understand, if you don't really understand the importance of certain moments of production, then how can you produce anything yourself?

JT: Um.

NR: So, it's not really, in a way it's that idea of retrieval, like what you retrieve and then if your methods of interpretation and understanding are powerful enough, hopefully that sense of retrieval will add to something vital, now. So, to me it's really about a relationship with the past, um, and what, kind of, latencies are there, you know, what things hide. Like when I went to see the Blinky Palermo retrospective, I've only seen images of Palermo's work and they don't look that great, and it's just kind of, yeah, '60's, Minimalist, phenomenological ...

JT: Yeah.

NR: ... um, but when you see a lot of work in one space, in the flesh, and you suddenly realise, this person was really thinking about some serious big things.

JT: Um, because I admired Bernard Frize's work, but until I'd actually encountered them as being there, it's a whole other ...

NR: Um.

JT: ... it's a whole other thing to actually see them in front of you.

NR: Yeah. I mean, in terms of the physical presence?

JT: Yeah, the physical presence of them and I think, um, how they're made as well, because that was something else I was going to talk about later on, is the process of making and how that informs the work as well. Erm, in the essay by Martin Herbert, and reading about your work, there's quite a lot of references to the idea of excess that came up quite frequently.

Um, someone said “the sweetness of the work was excessive” and they were also described as “sculpturally and materially overloaded”.

NR: Um.

JT: As a positive thing! And, erm, they were described as “densely layered glistening constructions that are Baroque in their decorative excess”.

NR: [laughs]

JT: And I was wondering if, if I look at the idea of *l'écriture féminine*, the idea of excess in language is used to, erm, rupture phallogentric structures or dominant modes of signification.

NR: Um.

JT: Do you think, perhaps, it's the idea of excess, not necessarily in the ... maybe the excess of the materiality or maybe the excess in the physicality, but also in terms of the excess of the excess of the concept of painting. Do you think that's something that's ... I know you don't intend to rupture the binary system in any way, but do you think that's an important idea in, kind of, rethinking and transforming abstraction?

NR: Hmm. Erm, do I? Um ... Well, excess, even from the very beginning, people would comment about this, kind of overloaded, Baroque, sensuous, erm ... I, it depends, there's so many different ways you can approach that.

JT: Um.

NR: Um ... [sighs], in terms of, the kind of painting I was interested in, erm, I knew early on that there was, I mean I always had an interest in Baroque art and I've, over the years I've learnt more about Baroque. I mean, in the beginning, there was, like, this kind of A Level understanding of, oh yeah, Baroque, excessive, Caravaggio, etc, you could go on, right? And then, over the years, I've hit the Baroque from different angles, um, and one of the best explanations I've had of the Baroque, came from, err, Jorge Luis Borges, you know the writer, erm, and I didn't know at first, but I was quite curious and he defined his writing as Baroque, erm, and there's a quote I've got, in one of my books somewhere, where he defines the Baroque as that which is constantly in danger of exhausting itself. So the Baroque then becomes about excess and fatigue, excess and exhaustion. So in a way, erm, it's about an exhaustion of possibility.

JT: Yeah.

NR: Um, but then working through, and of course there was a certain Postmodern moment in the '90s where people were talking about Postmodernism and, err, the end of painting,

and this idea of ending something, and then ending it again, erm, and then working through that. And I think that in some ways the work is a product of that voice and debate, erm, but it's also a strategy of working through a material ontology which a lot of my research is, I think is going to be around the idea of material ontology, because I think it's really, really important.

JT: Yeah.

NR: And that's when, really the material of silicone itself becomes, well it's always been important to me. I mean, I knew, even when I first started using it, just after art school, I mean I knew it was used in horror films, I knew it was used in prosthetics.

JT: Yeah.

NR: I've never really gone into a strategy of creating a practice that's tried to, you know, quite cleverly tried to talk about those different industries.

JT: Yeah.

NR: Um, but this idea of the excess of the body, is, you know, the, erm, the physical and cultural limitations of the body. Um, and of course, there's been a whole, erm, dense history of the last forty or fifty years, erm, since Pollock and performance art. Kaprow has actually been quite a big influence, err, Alan Kaprow's essays, and then you know, you've got gender identity politics, feminist theory. They all have various claims on the body, erm, and I had a big blast at that at Saint Martins. I had a huge blast at post-feminist, erm, kind of body critique if you like. People like, erm, Julia Kristeva ...

JT: Yeah.

NR: Peggy Phelan and I still can't pick up any of those books, which I know is a horrible thing to say.

JT: Well, Kristeva's one of the people I'm looking at, but her work borders heavily on psychoanalysis ...

NR: Yeah.

JT: ... and she's one of the writers out of the three main writers that I'm exploring at the moment that I struggle with the most.

NR: She draws on Lacan a lot doesn't she, I think?

JT: Yeah.

NR: Yeah, and I can't get into Lacan, to be honest, erm, and I mean, at one point I probably will have to but, I don't know, there's just some things I just have an aversion to, do you know what I mean?

JT: Um.

NR: And also I think that, there's some people here doing research, that, erm, one person's heavily into Lacan and it's something that I don't think you can know a little bit about it, you need to get into it.

JT: Yeah, yeah.

NR: Erm, and I think my understanding of the body has been almost a product of, not wanting to get into that literature too much.

JT: Yeah.

NR: Um, but using popular culture as a way to talk about, this, deep anxiety and uncertainty over bodily matter.

JT: Yeah.

NR: Erm ... which is also part of, really part of, I guess, our generation's concerns really, isn't it? The mutability of the body. You've got people like Matthew Barney ...

JT: Yeah.

NR: ... erm, the list goes on. There's loads of artists.

JT: And, I guess when you engage in making something anyway, it's inevitable, the relationship of your own body to making the work, is always going to become, whether you think it's important or not, it's something that's loaded, in terms of making the work.

NR: Um.

JT: And, particularly in terms of, especially in the past thirty, forty years of people thinking about subjectivity and gender and identity and sexuality and stuff like that.

NR: Yeah.

JT: I mean, I didn't see that as something necessarily, you've deliberately tried to show in the work.

NR: I acknowledged it, in the beginning, with the Polari.

JT: Yes, I was going to ask you, because that was really interesting that you, erm ...

NR: I mean, I deliberately wanted to reference something that, err ... heavily referenced gay subculture.

JT: Yeah.

NR: Erm, particularly as an artist that wasn't gay, erm, so that it wasn't me trying to make a claim for my particular identity, but that it was this kind of polymorphous dimension to the, what I've tried to create in this polymorphous dimension that, it's neither masculine nor feminine.

JT: Yeah.

NR: Not straight, not gay, not bisexual. I mean even I have a problem with bisexual.

JT: I mean, even in *l'écriture féminine*, Cixous terms the 'third' space that we touched upon as bisexual, but that's what I'm trying to get away from, that, in a sense it is still labelling that other space. I think essentially this space would be undefined, which is, I don't know if it's possible to refer to something that's undefined, but ...

NR: Well, even if it's, well, my problem with it is that bisexual implies that your fifty percent one and fifty percent the other.

JT: You're both, yeah.

NR: And you leave that in the middle and that's the way it is, and of course, that's an absurd way of looking at it.

JT: Um.

NR: Erm, so yeah, the 'Polari Range' was really quite clear a thing and that was the only time that I erm, deliberately referenced something like that. Because I felt that it was clearly in the work anyway, it didn't have to be, erm ... there were, I think there were deeper structures that I was interested in, like in the Hydan project I did with Newbetter. And 'hydan' is an old English word, it's the etymology of the word hut, but it's also the etymology of the word hide, and of course within this idea of post-war abstraction, this idea of, erm, something being revealed, the facticity of a painting, the purity, the kind of Greenburgian notion of the logic of the material, and then you play back into this idea of an illusion and theatricality and something that's a bit deviant from that. Erm ... hydan's a great word.

JT: I was really interested in your references to Polari and also, erm, from reading interviews and what you've said about the work, and being interested the etymology of words and also the use of metaphors and analogy.

NR: Um.

JT: It's like, for example, Fanestra being both the entanglement of the kite strings and the Italian word for 'window' as well.

NR: Um, yeah.

JT: And I think, although we've kind of touched on it a bit, is there something about finding sites of representation for marginalised subjectivities ...

NR: Um.

JT: ... mainly I was thinking in reference to Polari, erm, and also ideas of either language or poeticality that are quite important in the work?

NR: Yeah, yeah, sure. Because I think this relates back to this idea of history and this idea of erm, what you've retrieved, what's retrievable, what's hidden, what's not hidden, um, and then how you make sense of it.

JT: Um.

NR: And so, I think one of the reasons why I was so moved by the Palermo show and the Knoebel installation, is that they're both really, really interested in the frame. So obviously, I mean in some cases, with Knoebel, there are literal frames, but it's an understanding that subjectivity is enacted through the frames that permit that subjectivity to enact. Um, and painting's always been about those kind of frames.

JT: Um, in different cultural contexts.

NR: Yeah, in different cultural contexts. And in some ways, you know, you could call it frames of permission.

JT: Um.

NR: What frames give you the permission to do this? Or, to do that? Um, and one of the other research students who was here earlier this morning, we were talking about, erm ... err, my mind's gone blank! Err, frames of, err, that's it, yeah, the tail wagging the dog. Erm, that every practice in a way, when you go into somebody's studio or to an exhibition, is in some ways a declaration of what they've given themselves permission to do.

JT: Um.

NR: Like, what I basically believe in is what is on the wall now. I mean, this is the result of me believing in certain things, from certain parts of history. And if you go upstairs, you'll see, um, her work, she would be, kind of revealing what she buys into. Um, and I think one of the things that those artists do, like Palermo and erm, Knoebel, is that they actually don't give

you that, what they give you is, well, we're going to tell you that these frames are really important. Um, and in that sense, they're seen as, kind of, structuralists.

JT: Yeah.

NR: Sensuous structuralists. Erm, but I, yeah, I think it's so important for, I mean, not just painting, I mean, for me, it's rich with painting.

JT: Yeah.

NR: Erm, but that idea of framing. And what is permissible in a way, erm, and I don't think I've really succeeded in doing that, to be honest, largely over the years. I mean, that's one of the reasons why I'm doing this now and I'm here. I think it's time to get serious.

JT: But it is such a complex thing, you need to, sometimes it's not just enough to make work without, like, really being in-depthly, like theoretically engaged.

NR: Yeah.

JT: It's just such a complex thing, the reading and research and making, they're all quite simultaneous and kind of overlap and interweave with each other in a sense.

NR: Yeah they do.

JT: And I suppose it's also about re-thinking the framing of things.

NR: Yeah, absolutely. But, I think for me, one of the dangers of 'practice-based' research that I've seen over the years, um not over the years though, before I came here, erm, and I started to, for about two years before I came here I was thinking a lot about research and that it's not been great in this country over the years, particularly in painting.

JT: The term 'practice-based' or 'practice-led' anyway is so, is so problematic in itself.

NR: Yeah, of course, yeah, yeah, sure.

JT: And it's only recently, in the past ten years that people have tried to rethink practice and theory. Ten years ago they were seen as totally separate things and in fact, I gave a talk, which was not in a Fine Art context as such, about practice and theory being in dialogue with each other and they just thought it was awful and they were so shocked and thought it was so controversial ...

NR: Really?

JT: ... that practice and theory should be in dialogue, and I suggested, maybe, a bound thesis, that needs to be rethought because, that's just the theory, you know, the thesis needs

to embody practice and theory being in a relationship, and that was really controversial for them. I think that it's still something currently, even though it's quite emergent, that's quite an issue.

NR: Yeah.

JT: I don't know if it's specifically in British research culture, I'm not sure?

NR: Well, I mean, it doesn't happen so much in America, because it doesn't exist in America.

JT: Um.

NR: Really, there's only, erm, there are practice-based research, err, PhDs in America, but there aren't, to my knowledge, there aren't any straight laced Fine Art, Painting, Sculpture. There are like weird subjects, like, um, a practice-based PhD in 'Cultural Media and Time-based Studies' and that kind of thing. Erm, and they, it hasn't been embraced over there.

JT: Um.

NR: Um, so you are looking at, really Europe and Australasia for the most part. Erm, but um, yeah, unfortunately we're doing, well fortunately or unfortunately we're at a time when we're still pretty much cultural guinea pigs.

JT: Yeah.

NR: Um, but as long as you go into it with a clear sense of what you think it should be, like I personally think that, in a very, in a really sort of didactic way, I think you need to make sure that you come out of this situation a better artist than what you did coming in. And what that means to me is that the work has a deeper connection, erm, and that *you* come out with a deeper connection.

JT: Yeah.

NR: Um, so that, yeah, you may know more, but you can also remain playful. I did a talk at Saint Martins about, erm, six months ago, five months ago, erm, and I made a really flippant remark. Somebody asked me about practice-based research and I said, well, it's like a foundation for grown-ups.

JT: [laughs]

NR: Erm, and I regretted it when I said it, but I mean, it was a reaction to the sense of, you come here and you're doing research that is serious.

JT: Yeah.

NR: And that all of a sudden the playfulness goes.

JT: And also it's traditionally more hierarchical than 'practice'.

NR: Um, yeah well, you know, everything kind of becomes subsumed into this idea of the research.

JT: Yeah.

NR: You know, which is seen as, kind of rigorous and methodological.

JT: Yep.

NR: And I've seen it, I've actually seen it in different people's practices where the curiosity and the playfulness and the actual material thinking completely disappears. Or almost completely disappears. Um, and it's happened here at various instances, and I think that's a real tragedy to be honest.

JT: So, is it important for you that your artwork retains that sense of rigor in terms of, what people would normally associate with research?

NR: Um, no, I, erm ... [sighs] I wouldn't necessarily want people to think that.

JT: But then again, people interpret what they do so it's ...

NR: Yeah, yeah, um, I personally feel that ... and this is highly contentious, but I think that doing a practice-based PhD, in some senses you should have already made a contribution. Or ... can prove that you're aware of the contributions in the field. Um, and have a trajectory for where you can go within that. I think a lot of people get into that, not really knowing the field.

JT: Um.

NR: Not really knowing how they can work within it, and then they get a bit lost.

JT: Yeah.

NR: And then all of a sudden you get ... a heavy, err, reliance on critical theory.

JT: Yeah.

NR: To back up something.

JT: Yeah, and then it becomes theory justifying practice and practice explaining theory.

NR: Exactly, exactly.

JT: Are we okay for time?

NR: Yeah, yeah that's fine, yeah.

JT: Um, I was wondering if I could talk about your individual subjective experiences of - I say 'painting' in inverted commas - but painting as in your practice. So, I was thinking, do you see the artworks as a process, rather than an end product?

NR: Um.

JT: Or do you see the actual painting as the actual process of making. Are they quite like, interchangeable things?

NR: Yeah, they're very interchangeable, yeah. Because what you're left with is the evidence of the material logic of thinking. I mean, ultimately you end up with an art object.

JT: Um.

NR: But to then say that, that is the, I mean, yeah that is the end goal, but in a sense, the end goal is, when it's successful, is the, is kind of the material manifestation of the way of thinking.

JT: Yeah.

NR: Like these new things that I'm working on. Erm ... yeah they're static objects that exist on the wall, but could I have envisioned this four days ago? Absolutely not. Erm ... I'm really excited about these at the moment actually, these are new pieces. But, erm, so yeah they're both, it's erm, it's not a means to, basically the means and the ends are unequivocally, err, tied together. They're so interthreaded ...

JT: Yeah.

NR: ... um, and that's why I kind of get a bit annoyed sometimes when people say, "oh well, you know, you make art objects" and it's like, well ...

JT: [laughs]

NR: It kind of implies that I'm just kind of, cynically producing these ...

JT: 'Things'.

NR: These 'things', you know, erm.

JT: Do you think your process of making quite intense then? And do you make, and do you think in that dialogue of making, knowledge is gained, even if you don't know what it is at the time?

NR: Um.

JT: Through the actual process of doing, as well as from making something and circulating it in the context of being in an art gallery?

NR: I think knowledge is, err ...

JT: Although that's broad asking what knowledge is anyway [laughs].

NR: Yeah, yeah, yeah. I think that, um, I oscillate between going with, kind of, you know, your proverbial gut instinct and, erm, um, this kind of ... other kind of thinking which is looking at the work, erm, after it's finished and finding ... [sighs] it's both ... I think over the years, I've developed this sense of knowing when something works.

JT: Um.

NR: And then knowing that I can live with that. Like these at the moment (refers to new work in space), I don't know exactly, I couldn't tell you why they're really exciting for me right now. But, I know I am excited by them and I know that, one of the reasons is that they offer a certain set of possibilities that I couldn't foresee, so this piece for example, this piece on the wall here, is more in key to some older work.

JT: That reminds me of the Fanestra work at Walsall.

NR: Yes, exactly. It's much closer to processes that I'd kind of discovered in LA. Um, there are different ways I've glazed these which are quite different, um, but this, even though it's close to being a resolved piece of work, it offers less possibility than these pieces (refers to new work on opposite side of studio). Um, and I think that's what it's about, it's about what kind of possibility a work, err, can offer.

JT: Um.

NR: Um, and that's what I get excited about. Because when a certain possibility is offered up, it essentially, for me means that there's something happening in the production of meaning that didn't, that you couldn't have seen, foreseen before. Um, I think that's really, really important and then when it gets put in an exhibition space, it's a different kind of thing, because then you have to ... for me, I'm always concerned with the frame of, erm, like I could make more of them, but then how they then get put into a space, in what way, erm, it's different forms of thinking I think, you know there's a material thinking, the logic of creating possibility and then there's a framing of what that means in relation to the kind of ideas, culturally that you've come from. Erm, and that's come up in conversations with quite a few artists recently, this idea of, erm, editing, as a material process.

JT: Um.

NR: Erm, there's a friend of mine in the East End, a painter, who makes a lot of work, forty percent of it is good, twenty percent of it is very good, the rest is kind of average. And, without an understanding of the process of editing as fundamental to how the work is read, the work gets lost, you know.

JT: Um. One of the things that I'm really interested in is the process of making, and kind of, the self-dialogue that an artist has with themselves, when they're creating the work.

NR: Um.

JT: But I don't think that dialogue is just while you're creating the work, it's an ongoing dialogue that maybe you've had for ten years, and that the dialogues of making different pieces of work, kind of overlap with each other. So, essentially, it becomes really messy, of how things inform each other and how your experiences inform each other and how, maybe, making something five years ago or how you saw something, interact, and how you end up doing things.

NR: Um.

JT: But also, I think that dialogue is always in a sense of unfinishedness. Do you ever see the work as finished, even when it's in a gallery space? Or do you think, they're kind of, articulations of moments of unfinishedness?

NR: Yeah, they used to be absolutely finished. Erm, but now I'm starting to, erm, especially with, I mean, I haven't got them here but I've got some found pieces that I've incorporated into the work, like that chair, erm. This idea that, what you end up showing is, erm, always in a sense, work in progress, it's becoming more important. And that's another thing that, um, I keep on harping on about, err, Imi Knoebel all the time at the moment, um, it's terrible, I'm seeing Imi Knoebel everywhere!

JT: [laughs]

NR: I went into the sculpture department, erm, a couple of days ago, and somebody had left, erm, this is really embarrassing, erm, somebody had left a load of empty crates, all over the place, and I thought, and it was in the, erm, exhibition space over there, and I thought, it was an exhibition.

JT: [laughs]

NR: Because it reminded me of an Imi Knoebel, do you know Imi Knoebel's 'Room 19'?

JT: Yeah, yeah.

NR: It looked really like Imi Knoebel's 'Room 19', I was like "oh, who did this piece?" and then somebody went "it's just crates that somebody's left there". Um, but that idea of, and again, Knoebel is really good at it, is the notion that something is just resting. It's neither finished, erm, it's in an intermediary stage. Erm, I quite like that actually. And some of the found objects I think that they will not just be attached to one work, that they will reoccur in different installations.

JT: Because I thought that was interesting in Fanestra, how some of the pieces were literally, like balancing on the edge of, like, erm ...

NR: Um, plinths.

JT: Yeah, plinths and things, that they looked, like they were in movement almost. And, these look really interesting [referring to new work in studio] because they look like, from knowing what the rest of your work's like, in some sort of process of doing and you're not sure whether they're finished.

NR: Yeah, I quite like them. Yeah, there's something ...

JT: There's something fresh, and like, there's a lot of tension within them, which is ...

NR: Yeah, it sounds terrible to say this, but I'm really into these at the moment.

JT: [laughs] You've got to embrace those moments! [laughs]

NR: (laughs) I do, because I give myself such a hard time.

JT: [laughs]

NR: Seriously, I give myself such a hard time, and I think I've been trying to work, I mean, one of the reasons for being here also, is, once I finished the work for Fanestra, for the New Art Gallery Walsall, I pretty much knew I was coming to a, not so much an end of a way of working, but I'd resolved certain things, but I knew I needed to ...

JT: Like the end of a stage.

NR: The end of a certain stage, erm, if you look at that piece, it's like a very small version of Fanestra.

JT: Um.

NR: Which I wanted to do to see if I could make one on a smaller scale. Um, but there was not much ... performative thinking, you know, all the processes that went into that, I pretty much had already learned beforehand. Erm, but some of these new things.

JT: And, err is this a new one? (refers to work on studio wall).

NR: Actually, that's literally, probably about two hours old.

JT: [laughs]

NR: Before you came, I put the skin over it, um. So, yeah, yeah, this thing right now feels quite exciting.

JT: Actually, the idea, of, um, performativity and things being performative was one of the things that I really picked out of the work. And, also the idea of performativity is something that appears in my research, that's a strategy used in *l'écriture féminine* as well. I was wondering, when you work with - because I haven't worked with silicone before - when you work with the materials, do you let the materials, kind of, evolve? Is it quite a self-reflexive material or do you have a vague idea of what you want to achieve? Or is a lot of it experimentation and pushing those ideas?

NR: Actually, erm, a lot of it, I would say ninety nine percent of it is systemic. Um, and I think that's always been something I've been intrigued by. Because, you know, a lot of the work I've been interested in, like Bernard Frize, erm, like certain writers that I have a lot of admiration for, like George Perec or Italo Calvino, there's a systemic way which they approach making.

JT: Um.

NR: Um, but they, you know, erm, a system is imposed so that it can be ruptured. Erm, and that's quite, err, an established way of making certain kinds of work, um, and I think for me that's always been the case. I create, I essentially create systems and what I'm looking for is the rupture within the system each time, and over the years, what happens is, with various kinds of ruptures, the rupture then forms the system and there's this kind of ping pong match that goes on. So, in the beginning it was with silicone through icing cake nozzles, which I've pretty much done for the last twelve years. Um, but then something happens in the way you lay it down, or, a certain kind of produce, one of the problems I wanted to deal with in the New Art Gallery was that my work had always had a binary between the surface, which was the silicone, and then the substructure which was expanded foam or MDF, or whatever, or Styrofoam actually in the later works. Um, and I really wanted to break down the relationship between the physical support and the surface. Um, I've gone again, with these pieces back into the binary, but with this work, um, the actual form of the work is inseparable from the surface, which I felt was really important at the time.

JT: So, are these just silicone or have they got bases under?

NR: Well, there are steel strips enmeshed ...

JT: Aaaaah.

NR: ... within them. So essentially what we have is this (refers to steel strip on floor), which would have been fully laid out flat on the floor. Um, silicone is piped on one side, left to dry, turned over, piped on the other side. So, essentially, you have a steel strip, erm, embedded, sandwiched between two bits of silicone, so essentially you have a sculptable paint mark, um, I should have some here actually.

JT: One of the things that I think is really interesting and this is what I have previously tried to create in my own work with, erm, polyurethane foam is kind of, like, create the aesthetic of the gestural mark, but also the self-reflexiveness of paint as being, like, oozing and dribbling. And I think looking at these, they look, they look like they resemble the self-reflexiveness of paint, like they look like they should be oozing, but really silicone is actually quite hard, and I was wondering how is the, is the fact that paint isn't controllable at all, does that reflect the way that you work with the silicone or is that just, maybe is the painting just a historical reference instead?

NR: Erm, what do you mean?

JT: I'm wondering if, when you work using silicone, do you refer at all or think about what it's like to actually work with paint and the actual properties of paint?

NR: Oh yeah.

JT: Because it oozes and it's, in a sense really uncontrollable. Because that's why I used the polyurethane foam, because you can capture the dribbles and oozes and stuff.

NR: Yeah sure.

JT: But instead, this is actually, although it looks like it should be moving and dribbling, because it's glistening as well, but instead it's actually quite hard.

NR: Exactly yeah, well the thing is, it's kind of, what you're saying is true but then what you say is also false because, err, first of all it is paint.

JT: Yes.

NR: I mean, paint is pigment plus medium, right?

JT: Yeah.

NR: So you can have silicone paint, oil paint, water paint, erm ...

JT: Polyurethane paint.

NR: Polyurethane paint.

JT: [laughs]

NR: You know, err, but what it does do from the moment when you lay down the silicone, it is clearly gloopy and droopy.

JT: Yeah.

NR: And erm, paint-like. Um, but then what you're doing is, you're err, or what I'm doing is err, I'm petrifying that moment by then embedding it within steel and then sculpting it, so it's weird.

JT: Is that, where you think it, where being systematic comes in and you've got to, kind of control the material a bit?

NR: Yeah well, it's, this goes back to the systemic doesn't it? It's ultimately a form of control, but you impose the control to try to, kind of break that control.

JT: Yeah.

NR: Um, and I don't know of any other way in a sense because, you know, you can't, I don't think you start with freedom do you?

JT: Um.

NR: You don't start with this infinite erm, menu of possibilities. You start with a few options.

JT: Or with restrictions?

NR: Yeah, and you think what are your options? So these are the options and then you have to, it's that old ball game isn't it of, you know, you start off by erm, this goes back to Alan Kaprow and I think he uses Winnicott's notion of, um, err, mimesis, and childplay. You start off, you kind of copy the guy or the girl that you think is great and you can do this and then somewhere along the line something happens, or a series of things happen, where it suddenly becomes recognised as a language that you've been seen to do, but you know, there's no magic tricks. If you look at the trajectory, most practices, they start off looking like, in some cases, almost exactly like somebody they were interested in before.

JT: Um.

NR: I mean, Arshile Gorky is a classic example, who essentially was looking at Picasso and Miro, um, and then there was that weird bit where they were kind of gloopy Miro's, watery Miro's, Arshile Gorky's.

JT: [laughs]

NR: And you know, and the difference between the gloopy, drippy, watery Miro and his work, is like, there's not that much difference.

JT: Yeah, yeah.

NR: But then, that's where that spark of something, that in the systemic, erm, I think that's what I kind of work from, I guess, I don't know.

JT: When you make work, I'm thinking really because I've seen these ones, are they made up through a process of layering as well?

NR: Um, yeah.

JT: And is it also, a kind of deconstructing and constructing kind of thing, because I was thinking of them being quite, erm, through that process of like, subtraction and addition, that the forms of the work are always mutating and evolving and shifting, until they're finished and on the gallery wall.

NR: Um.

JT: And that reflects how they're displayed as well, as kind of, in collectives and how maybe, you know, there's the spatters on the wall. I was wondering then, if the process of making as being, like a deconstruction and construction, does that affect how you think in terms of showing your work as well?

NR: In some cases, yeah. The framing of that material production is something I've always tried to consider, for that always to be a consideration, so from, erm, the show at FA Projects, the Polari work, things were, the paintings were at different heights and in different configurations. Um, I think the frame, but I think in all cases up until very recently, um, even at the Walsall show, the framing of the work was, err ... secondary, really.

JT: Um.

NR: I mean, they're heavily considered, I mean the most integrated would have been the collaboration with Newbetter I think though, I don't know. It's difficult to say, I feel like, that the framing needs to be more material, on a kind of level playing field maybe? But without trying to lose, erm, especially within the context of research, it's very easy to get involved in framing.

JT: Yeah.

NR: Um, and then the framing suddenly becomes, you know, I don't want to be like, err ...

JT: Well, particularly when you're thinking of framing whilst you're making the work as well.

NR: Yeah, well, I don't know if that's a bad thing, but if you, if it becomes about, I think if you start ... I've seen artists do it before and they start playing, kind of, clever games with framing, and if the work is about that, that's fine, but erm, I think it'll be quite a shame for, erm, because in a way it becomes institutionalised or you create this plausible context for not necessarily making strong work. Um, and I think that's something to worry about, but at the same time, I mean it's all about balance isn't it?

JT: Um. I'm thinking of the idea of materiality, and for me, that's quite central to the work. And I was thinking, that it's maybe the sense of materiality that pushes the work into being, putting it into a contemporary context, in terms of rethinking abstraction.

NR: Um.

JT: Erm, and rethinking traditional conventions of painting, and maybe that excessive materiality. What does the notion of materiality mean to you in terms of creating the work, but also how you think about the artwork as a whole as well? Or, how central is the idea of materiality?

NR: Um. It's absolutely crucial, because I think that in some ways the whole project, if you want to call it that, rests upon a certain idea of a legacy of materiality within an ontological understanding of material practice within abstraction. Um, and it's really important that the material that I use has a mutability to it, that it has the ability to morph into and address, different, erm, often disparate concerns, and I think that's really the, kind of, well, you know, if there was an opening gambit that's the kind of, opening gambit. I think in so many ways, I've been guilty of not, maybe I haven't been guilty, I don't know, I sometimes feel like I haven't pushed it enough, you know. Um, the idea of, because you know, I've actually started to go back into Greenberg right now, and I'm reading over Greenberg's essays, um, and maybe a bit of err, I have to get back into, err, phenomenology and Heidegger and Husserl.

JT: I think because of the status of where painting is now, people have moved so far away from Greenberg ...

NR: Exactly.

JT: ... that actually it's important to, kind of, comment on it as well, because I think with feminism and *l'écriture féminine*, people have moved so far away from them, they don't really know what ...

NR: What the original context was really about.

JT: Yeah, what it was really about, and in a way, my research is about rethinking these things in a different framework, but rethinking what they actually intended to do.

NR: Exactly.

JT: Because, particularly feminism has moved so far away from what it ever intended to do, particularly in the political context of what it intended to do anyway ...

NR: Um.

JT: Um, that I think, particularly, erm, with abstraction as well as with feminism, it's got its own stigma, so to kind of, delve into them and to re-contextualise them is quite important.

NR: Yeah, I think it goes back to this idea of retrieval doesn't it?

JT: Um.

NR: You retrieve it for yourself, because, you can if you want to, rest upon the received secondary text that tells you what they're about.

JT: Um.

NR: But, unless you actually, and you know, feminism has been as stigmatised as, err, Greenberg.

JT: Yeah, yeah. And if anything, they're in opposition to each other.

NR: And they are, kind of in opposition, or at least they seem to be in opposition.

JT: Yeah.

NR: Erm, for me, it's that curiosity. Well, you know, Greenberg wasn't, and feminism wasn't this angelic thing that floated down from above, and certainly it was there and we've taken it. They've come from somewhere.

JT: Yeah.

NR: Greenberg was a product of something.

JT: Yeah, and it happened at the time that it did because it needed to happen.

NR: Exactly, yeah. Um, it's trying to find out the politics of why, particularly Greenberg had these, err, I mean, they changed in his later writings, but um, had sterling qualities of judgment that were fundamental to erm, obviously to him, but to the kind of, values that arose out of the New York School, for example. Erm, and then that sense of medium specificity, the notion of purity, erm, what do they mean, in this, kind of, conversation? And it's not about retrieving a kind of, nostalgia, it's not a nostalgic yearning for that lost moment, "oh, I wish I could be like that again", you know?

JT: Yeah. Well, it's a different time, so it can never ...

NR: Yeah, well it can never go back there, you know, in a sense, like going back to, well, I don't know a huge deal about original feminist texts, but, erm, I'm probably, I'm about eighty percent sure you can discover some really exciting things.

JT: Especially for abstraction and feminism to sit next to each other, when they've been, I don't think they've been polarised themselves, but readings have over time, have evolved to become polarised, I don't think they ever intended to directly, erm, be dualistic or anything.

NR: Yeah sure.

JT: I've recently been reading Barbara Bolt and she says: "when materiality insists, the visual language begins to stutter, mumble and whisper". So in the sense of, erm, things being ruptured, whether or not that's maybe phallogentric, or maybe it's just a structure or system in the work that's ruptured, do you think that the notion of materiality is able to, or maybe through the sense of excess, rupture and challenge things? Is materiality important in creating rupture?

NR: Um, yeah, yeah, of course, I mean, in the sense that, erm, the material practice, err, sets up to, well, not that it sets up to deliberately rupture.

JT: Um.

NR: But there is an understanding within that systemic, erm, interaction, that rupturing ... you know, you can use different words.

JT: Yeah.

NR: Um, that is an informative space if you like, um, where language or a set of languages, erm, are dismantled.

JT: Um.

NR: Or brought together or inflected. I like to use the word inflection a lot, um, because I hate the word new.

JT: Yeah.

NR: But inflected, the etymology of inflicted means to bend, right, so I quite like bending things. I mean, I quite like bending things literally, obviously, but, um, this idea of bending and inflection obviously pertains to language, of inflecting a way of working.

JT: Yeah, and I think that the word rupture anyway insinuates that it ruptures in the sense of a break and it's never actually able to, kind of, rethink itself again.

NR: Whereas inflection, when you bend something, you can always bend it back, you know. Yeah, it doesn't talk about cutting. Erm, I'm not necessarily interested in cutting things or sort of, severing things or disconnecting them. I'm interested in disconnection, but I think I'm interested in disconnection from the perspective that a disconnection can enact an inflection. Like, for example, a misreading of something can be just as important as a so-called corrective one.

JT: Yeah, yeah.

NR: Because what that does is it creates a kind of inflection of, you know, um, a certain text. Like, you could really not understand a text by Foucault and really misread it, but in that misreading, something really interesting could happen, and I think that ties into this idea of being right or wrong, that you can be really wrong in something, but it produces something that is really right. Well, you could argue, what do you mean by wrong and what do you mean by right?

JT: Yeah.

NR: But, um, a sense of a kind of, what would be conceived of as a naïve understanding of an idea, used and creating, an aesthetic dialogue that's really rewarding. So sometimes I think you have to really dumb down something to make it work, because it can allow you to do more stuff.

JT: And if you overthink things too much, they can also not work.

NR: Yeah, yeah of course, definitely. If you just, um, I mean, I spend you know, I wake up in the middle of the night, it's such a cliché of a tortured Modernist, you know [laughs].

JT: A tortured 'masculine' artist [laughs].

NR: Yeah, exactly, you know, "oh no, the silicone!"

JT: [laughs] I think when I did my BA degree, which was painting in much more conventional terms and looking at Abstract Expressionism for example, I think there were some painters

who sort of emulated being a tortured artist, because it was, kind of like, that you weren't allowed to do that anymore and that was a historical thing that was over ...

NR: [laughs]

JT: ... and I thought that was quite interesting in the dialogue of ...

NR: Being tortured?!

JT: [laughs] ... the intensity and the yearning to paint and the quickness of it. Actually, the notion of quickness is something that I picked up on about your work because of references to Calvino talking about quickness ...

NR: Um.

JT: ... where the mind is presented with a rush of simultaneous ideas.

NR: Um.

JT: Erm, and that they're so abundant we can't think of them all at once, and I was wondering, in the process of making the work, well, even though now we know that maybe it's a tortured process ... [laughs]

NR: [laughs]

JT: ... what is the sort of self-dialogue that happens in the making of the work?

NR: Right, okay, yeah, I think there's a huge mythology surrounding thought practice.

JT: Although you're not necessarily aware of it.

NR: Yeah, yeah, I don't really think, there's that much that happens in the thought processes of making work. You know, have I got the milk for tonight? It's not, err ... I think when you work within this kind of, systemic way, if you work in a systemic way, um, I don't think there's a lot to be gleaned from the thought processes that happens in the process of making, erm, what happens and where the dialogue occurs is, um, when a material performs in a way that ... I'm not really putting this the right way. Um, I think it's not conscious, and I'm not talking about 'the subconscious'.

JT: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

NR: Its, err ...

JT: I think it's something we don't articulate which is why it's hard to articulate, and because we're engaged in *them*, it's hard to say what *they* are.

NR: Yeah, I don't think it's, err, for me, at least, there's no self-talk that happens that is directly connected to what happens here (refers to studio). Um, and especially with these new pieces, where a lot of it is just kind of, really ... a sense of how something might look a certain way, or a sense of gravity, a sense of pull, a sense of being, they're kind of very formal ways of talking about work. Um, but then when you're left with something like that, it's more than the sum of its parts and then I start to think about, well, okay, well how does that relate to what this earlier body of work has done, what does that relate to and I constantly think about, even today, I think about Frize and um, other kind of, contributions that are kind of bubbling away.

JT: Yeah.

NR: Erm, because, you know, it would be perfectly fine on its own merits, but unless it's talking to these other things, I don't really see the point.

JT: Yeah. One of the things in my research that I've been trying to develop is, erm, the term 'intermateriality'. And in, well *l'écriture féminine* and French feminism to label it as such, and also Derrida and Barthes, they talk about the idea of intertextuality ...

NR: Um.

JT: ... where different textualities, kind of, collide with each other, so that the text is read through different meanings and people interact with it in different ways.

NR: Yeah.

JT: So, I was thinking about, in making work, how different materialities can, kind of collide with each other, but also that the materialities can overlap with different knowledges and different material processes and different strategies, erm, maybe to subvert structures as well, and I was wondering, do you think the notion of intermateriality perhaps refers to pieces of your work or your way of working?

NR: Yeah, but it's just a very ... [pauses].

JT: It's very broad.

NR: Yeah it is, but I have a perverse sense of logic, because I essentially use silicone, right, which is, erm ... okay, let me try and put this in another way. I think that I came of age, for lack of a better term, as an artist in a post-medium age.

JT: Um.

NR: So in other words, so the lingua franca of the art world was post-medium, post-video, anything's possible, erm, draw from anything you want, it can be pottery, gardening, erm,

post-colonial studies, abstract painting, it all comes together and what you get is this, kind of post-medium, post-discipline moment, erm and I felt I was a painter born into that moment, but I quite like, I'm perversely interested in the kind of commitment to a specific material, but not necessarily a traditional material like oil paint.

JT: Yeah.

NR: A really non-traditional medium like silicone, which already had in it a kind of Duchampian sense of being a kind of ready-made, a set of cultural co-ordinates, so that even though physically I was using a specific material, that material had an application in the wider culture. Like, oil paint doesn't have a societal wide application, neither does watercolour. Silicone, is in, you know, everything and what I liked was that I was working with an idea that was materially specific which was quite Modernist and quite Greenbergian, but that medium specificity was pluralistic, because the medium already had this cultural baggage, erm, and what I like about it is, that it really collides, this is what I mean about colliding in these oppositions.

JT: Yeah.

NR: So, in the one sense you have a commitment, a really old fashioned commitment to medium specificity, but within this notion of an expanded field of painting.

JT: Um.

NR: Which makes the whole thing absurd, you know. And, I quite like that absurdity, because it is absurd, you know, the idea of, you can't, you know, you cannot be medium specific and if you're a serious artist, you can't be committed to exploring one material. Um, you have to be somebody like, erm, I don't know, Goshka Macuga to be serious. You know, erm, that's what I, yeah, so it's the perversity of those exchanges, um, and I've forgotten your origin question now. What was your original question?

JT: I think it was about things being 'intermaterial'.

NR: Oh, intermateriality.

JT: And also how, maybe, sometimes when the work is displayed, there's a different relation with all the different works and how there's a material relationship with everything as well.

NR: Well, yeah, I think the intermaterial, I think in some ways that's what's kind of expected now, isn't it?

JT: Um.

NR: And that's what I find, that's what, for me, it's about going back and retrieving things that are useful, erm, because I don't know if it's useful to, erm, having an artist to, kind of, collect these value judgments from, you know, what is good and what is not good. And in some ways it's about what is useful, erm ... you know, you can have a practice that is materially specific in some sense, but then, like you say, it opens itself out to this kind of plurality at the same time. Um, but you can have, you can bring two things together really that are really opposing, or a number of things that don't really fit and try to work out how they can fit.

JT: And sometimes I think, I'm quite interested in the idea of slippages, you know when two things maybe collide with each other and then little slippages occur that we don't necessarily know what they are.

NR: Yeah, yeah, well, the so-called 'happy accident' really, erm, which is a kind of part of that whole cliché of thinking "oh you can't, that's not possible anymore". And somebody, I think it was Glenn Brown, or, erm, one of the artists from the Goldsmiths generation said that what they liked about painting was the fact that it was considered dead, that it was, err, I think it was Jan Verwoert, he said a lot of interesting things about painting and I think he talked about how something can be really political when it's seen to be, at a precise moment, when it seemed to be really passive or really naff, um, err, what's the word he used? Peripheral.

JT: Um.

NR: Um, that you can work from the peripheries and within that sense of being peripheral there's a real sense of activation or empowerment.

JT: Um.

NR: Erm, which goes back to this idea of the feminist space, which in some ways started as a way of creating a space for something that was peripheral.

JT: Yeah.

NR: Um, and became central and became marginalised again and so you have these movements from a centre to a periphery to a centre again.

JT: Yeah, and it was when it was stigmatised that I think that it became central and it became, almost like dominant so that it could challenge anything that wasn't, that was 'masculinist' as such.

NR: Yeah, yeah, sure, and then it became peripheral again in a way.

JT: Yeah.

NR: And oh, we can't talk about phallogentrism now either, that's something peripheral.

JT: The idea of, erm, peripheries has been argued to be a feminist methodology, err, Judith Halberstam has a really good term when she talks about feminist methodologies and making work, she calls it as a 'scavenger methodology'.

NR: Um.

JT: So, we scavenge different things or ideas from making, from culture or different things.

NR: Non-hierarchical.

JT: Yeah, a non-hierarchical scavenging from the peripheries of different things.

NR: Yeah, exactly.

JT: And then we utilise them and let them, kind of manifest and re-circulate how we want them to.

NR: Well, I think I've read that before and it might have even been from that source, this idea of a feminist space as very deliberately non-hierarchical, but it is, erm, horizontal, that it doesn't actually try to suggest any value judgments, that it just posits things.

JT: Um.

NR: Erm, and I don't necessarily think it's essentially just a feminist space that's created that. Erm, it's also a condition of a, kind of, contemporary moment, isn't it?

JT: I think now as well, particularly, maybe in the past ten or twenty years, that space has become, it relates to Queer Theory and all sorts of different things, which is why I was so interested in Polari, how that, kind of emerged, because that's become quite an emergent discourse I think. Queer Theory strategies have overlapped a lot with new ways of looking at feminism and stuff like that. I'm kind of in the margins of Queer Theory and other discourses and that they infiltrate the main body of my research a bit.

NR: Um.

JT: It's kind of a new thing to me at the moment.

NR: Yeah, but I've never, I have to say, to my detriment, I've never really looked at Queer Theory. Erm, but I have to say, I mean, there's a certain set, there are certain reasons why I think that's happened and I had a big blast of it at Saint Martins and it left me quite cold because I didn't feel I related to it.

JT: Um.

NR: Um, the critical framework seminars at Saint Martins were run by a woman called Kate Love.

JT: Yeah, I've come across Kate Love.

NR: Yeah, she's had connections to, she's a big fan of Kristeva and Judith Butler.

JT: Yeah.

NR: Erm, Rosalind Krauss and she would get people in from Leeds who are part of that, you know, Leeds was the centre for people like Gavin Butt for example, and you know, Gavin Butt is great, but I just, you know, I wasn't interested in what he was saying. It seems to be a dominant discourse.

JT: Um.

NR: But anyway, I think one of the reasons why I've kind of, really just not looked over that stuff is those kind of, early experiences in a way. Which I think it's my fault, I mean I shouldn't let that colour my, erm, but in some ways I'm just a crusty old painter as well, I need to ... I'm a bit of a romantic, I like to read, erm, I do read philosophy but I also consider it to be, you know, fiction is philosophy isn't it?

JT: Um, yeah.

NR: Everything is materials, erm, so anyway, yeah.

JT: Erm, I think maybe we've touched on this. Erm, although your work has been described as 'grotesque' and referencing horror films watched in childhood, erm, it's also been described in terms of being pleasurable, where surfaces have been described as 'visceral', and words such as 'moistened', 'glistening', 'voluptuous' and 'deliciousness' have been used to describe your work.

NR: Um.

JT: Martin Herbert describes it as "sensuously tinted silicone" and Martin Holman likens it to a "gastronomic orgy".

NR: [laughs]

JT: And says the work includes "sumptuous tongue-licks of extruded, striated silicone suffused with a spectrum of semi-translucent pastel colours". Erm, so I was thinking in terms of pleasure in a couple of ways. Firstly in terms of Roland Barthes' 'The Pleasure of the Text' where he looks at, erm, two types of pleasure, there's pleasure and *jouissance* which is more like bliss ...

NR: Um.

JT: ... although it can't really be translated fully accurately, and he talks about how the pure orgasmic bliss ruptures pleasure, which is seen as a more linear and hierarchical, sort of dominant discourse and I was wondering if, is the pleasure of paint and the pleasure of its material potential and the pleasure of making with paint, is that something that's quite important to your work? And when you make them do you, and I think this maybe relates to the colours that are used as well, but do you want them to be specifically grotesque or do you want them to be pleasurable?

NR: I think that the, yeah this goes back to this idea of contradiction again, doesn't it, that it's actually both at the same time.

JT: Um.

NR: Erm, and there's various different reasons for that, erm, that I could go into kind of, autobiographical, err, details, erm, about repulsion and attraction, um, there's also you know, in *jouissance*, that notion of, I think there's a sense of, or there's an underlying, context of, erm, transcendence within that, within that sense of something being repulsive and quite seductive and attractive, what it is really is a sense of oscillation to different states that when you encounter an object that there's a sense that something pulls you in, that you physically want to, you know, touch the work that it becomes haptic.

JT: I did touch it before, sorry [laughs].

NR: [laughs]

JT: I've never been allowed to touch them in a gallery, but, err, I think they invite you to do that.

NR: Yeah, they invite you to do that, but at the same time, erm, especially in some installations, erm, the ones that I've done here, objects actually get in the way of you getting, being able to get to the, I mean, even in the New Art Gallery, it was quite a deliberate strategy that if you walked into the space from the lift, or any particular entrance, in most positions in the gallery you could never see all the works at once. There were different plinths and different pieces obscuring your view of other pieces, um, so that it ties in quite closely to my interest in the physical movement of a body, erm, that you are drawn to and brought back and stopped from, erm, which essentially kind of draws from a project which was initiated by people like Richard Serra or Carl Andre or Donald Judd, um, that they, particularly Richard Serra, who was really interested in how objects construct the sense of the body being an object. You know, erm, and I mean, there's a residue of that in my

thinking, that in the encountering of these things that we cannot help but think about the state of us, the ontological stuff that we *are*, erm, is brought into, and I think that's why my work has failed in the past. There was a period from about late 2004 through to about 2007 where I left to live in America, where the work became quite anthropomorphic, well not literally, but it looked far more bodily.

JT: Yeah.

NR: Um, and I think, for me, that's where the work started to really fail, you know, once you start seeing a face or a head, that wonderment, that sense of not knowing completely goes with it.

JT: I think you talked about in something, in reference to, erm, Bernard Frize's work, that it's like, the not knowing how it's made that's what makes it ...

NR: Yeah, sure.

JT: ... so interesting.

NR: Yeah, it's that conundrum, the political dimension of Frize's work is so canny, that you look at this object and it's quite decorative and pretty and seductive and you go up to it and it's beautiful and has a presence on the wall and you almost don't think about how it's made and you start looking at it and you think, well actually, that's kind of impossible to do, you can't do that and then you think well maybe, four hands, five hands?

JT: [laughs]

NR: And then he starts talking about this idea of community and a community of people working together in a language that was to do with the artist genius, erm, which is a kind of genius statement in a way. It brings this, kind of, erm ... New York Project of the atomic self, the solitary artist genius into this kind of, political climate of the '60s, where you have the generation of the kind of, left wing writers that still inform the way we think today like Barthes and Derrida and Foucault, um, yeah, so anyway we were talking about repulsion and attraction, yeah.

JT: Yeah, because I think, I've been thinking about pleasure, because it's the notion of *jouissance* is used by, in *l'écriture féminine* as, although it's potentially problematic because they refer to it as woman's libidinal pleasure as being able to rupture, as being different from a man's, which is quite problematic, but I was just thinking in terms of, erm, of, not sexuality, but of it being quite sensuous and if it was read in feminist terms and that quote taken out of context, it sounds quite sexual I think, so it's just an interesting reference to those ideas of

kind of, not necessarily bodily pleasure, but, kind of, polymorphous references I suppose and the pleasure of materials and paint.

NR: Yeah, I've written in my notes that, erm ... and I haven't really talked about it that much, but, erm the notion of fetish as um, as a way of talking about disconnection, um, and I use that word fetish in the sense of a disconnection between means and ends, right, erm, and I think in that sense, I do think that the work operates fetishistically in that there is a disconnection, to a sense of bodily pleasure or a sense of bodily touch or a sense of bodily associations, so the work opens up a conversation where you feel there is something sensuous about it and something organic that pertains to sensuality and pleasure, but there is no literal, and especially in the newer works, there is no real reference ...

JT: Yeah.

NR: ... to the body in a morphological likeness, it doesn't look like the body.

JT: Yeah.

NR: Erm, there is a, there's an absolute uncertainty about how it's made so that you don't know, because, you know, the other big thing about Modernist painting was indexicality, right. The indexical relationship of the hand, the arm, the body to the object, erm, which is where Kaprow comes in, he moves the sites back to the body itself. So for me, it's then about, well these things are not made in an obviously indexical way that they seem to defy certain laws.

JT: Yeah.

NR: Um, and that to me is, err, I've written about it in several different books over the years, like my journals over the years and it's usually the same thing about that the disconnection is really important as a mechanism for creating work, erm, and I still think that is the case, I still think that there is this census of the disconnections where the work, kind of, fails to, you know, I don't think there's an overarching statement that's being made and within that, these senses of disconnections, bodily disconnections, spatial disconnections are actually really, really important.

JT: Yeah, and them being subtleties as well I think.

NR: And the subtleties, yeah, and I think in some ways that's something I haven't really capitalised on. I think in the early work, it was all about material presence, it wasn't about, I mean what constitutes material presence as a sense of space and absence.

JT: Yeah.

NR: Um, and I think the work at Walsall started to show that I was interested in the spaces and the gaps between the pieces and that these objects, um, like the piece of foam, for example ...

JT: Oh yeah, yeah.

NR: ... erm, you're not quite sure, and I'm not quite sure what the, there are kinds of things you can think about, but essentially, they kind of, there isn't a kind of, an A to B linear narrative, they kind of jar.

JT: They're kind of fragmented.

NR: Or they fragment, yeah, so in terms of that idea of links to sexuality, this kind of means and ends, kind of fetishistic kind of break up, um, is a generated moment I think, I'm not sure.

JT: It's interesting the idea of being fragmented, because I think, I think you've said something about living in LA, that it required a different address of physical space because of the way it's a really fragmented city, that there's no epicenter, it's just kind of multiple fragments.

NR: Yeah, sure, yeah, yeah.

JT: Do you think working there has informed working in that fragmented way? Or is that just an inevitable way of how the work evolved?

NR: I don't know, it's difficult for me to say, you know. I don't know, if I was to make a guess, I would say, if I was to take an educated guess I would say that living in LA has had to have had an effect on my production.

JT: Yeah, but you don't know consciously, sure.

NR: But, I mean I don't know, I moved there and I can't give you the alternative reality ...

JT: [laughs]

NR: ... I can't give you the work as if I'd never left the East End of London.

JT: Yeah.

NR: I do know that when I first moved there the work that I made really was the work in the Walsall show, that's what I made in LA for the most part.

JT: Because that was in the LA gallery as well, wasn't it?

NR: Yeah, I showed it at the LA gallery as well, erm, and yeah, I mean I think that the sense of space and the sense of absence and the sense of displacement came through in the work. Um, but it's easy to add that kind of narrative onto the work isn't it?

JT: Um.

NR: It's easy to look at it and think, oh yeah, because in some ways it's a real cliché to talk about LA as ...

JT: Yeah, yeah.

NR: I mean, I think that the clichés are true. I feel that this idea of LA being disconnected and fragmented and displaced and, erm [sighs] yeah, all those things, I felt that to be my experience of LA. But, when you talk about those kind of things in LA, people go, oh yeah, everybody talks about disconnection, fragmentation, displacement, because they're so obvious in some ways, um, but in a weird way if you look at the production of a lot of LA art, especially LA art as being received well abroad, they all in various ways have distinct relationships with displacement and loss.

JT: Yeah.

NR: Jason Rhodes, I think it's impossible to look at Jason Rhodes' production and contribution without knowing really where it's come from. I look at a Jason Rhodes installation now and I just, kind of feel like I understand it so much more than what I would have done before, you know, um, so ... but, I'm back in London, well I'm living in-between, but in some ways I feel like my time here is meditating on what that is.

JT: Yeah. Erm, I'm going to leave it there as I've kept you a while! Thanks for your time.