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[No title page]

["What seems, at the seam"]



Gianni Pettena. Tumbleweeds Catcher—Salt Lake City, 1971.

A WORKING MOTIF: what seems, at the seams

The semi synonymous words SEEM and SEAM, and THEIR RELATION are my working motif for an investigation into the capacity to move from one kind of materiality to another, to work at the seam of intersection, to engage, and see what seems, at the seam.

ABSTRACT

This exegesis investigates what emerges out of hybrid references to artists of the first half of the 20th century as a way to inspire a sense of painting's specificity in my practice. Within the overlap of architecture, site, drawing, installation, and the exhibition, small, reflective encounters with painting's spatio-conceptual meaning are explored as they exist now, after the avant garde of abstraction, minimalism and conceptualism.

Philosophical ideas guide a non-strategic method of making art that uses abstract thinking as a way to encounter an agentic capacity from art and art making. This research studies the possibilities and impossibilities of an existentialist view of materiality as it applies to painting where substance and form manifest qualities of ideas and feeling. I evoke from language a grammatical register of comprehension beyond the rational, allowing words, objects or images do their own thinking.

This is what I understand to be a pragmatic poetic.

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INTRODUCTION:

“The variety of sight, basted with large tacking stitches onto the variety of hearing, those sewn temporarily to each other, and each one separately and both together tacked on to those of taste, smell and touch, piece by piece and in no particular order, working towards the definitive garment which never eventuates, forms components which are seen and which, on occasion, clash with the resulting variety or a neighbouring one.... This is how we originate and how we are formed: a slapdash piece of work, subject to the vagaries of time and the blunders of brief opportunities.”

Serres, Michel. (2008, p61)

My research uses a historiographic methodology, mining the rich seams of discovery by early 20th century artists, a time less concerned by anti-authorial pressures, in order to infiltrate conceptual notions around reference and copy, to see what can emerge at their borders now. I am not concerned with a linear view of the history of art where the monochrome is sequential to abstraction, and of abstraction to cubism. Rather it is somewhere in between the strata of avant garde vision of minimalism and the monochrome that I pitch my interest, somewhere within the fuzzy seams of the unfinished of the past and the potential of a future after minimalism, of an ‘almost’, for now.

My practice is empirically based research that examines ways of thinking about art through art making. A studio-based practice initiated a focus on understanding the nature of reality via sensitivity to substance and condition and their inherent capacity to evoke meaning. Having said this, an engagement with writers, artists and philosophers in particular has evolved into a significant aspect of my practice as well. This enquiry leans towards enactive ways of knowing so I have chosen philosophers whose writing and ideas I gain inspiration from as much for themselves as for guidance in the studio.

To know writers and philosophers through other writers is in keeping with this aspect of my practice. I am interested in the point of transference where past ideas meet present thinking, a repetition that becomes a re-petitioning of the past into an engagement in the present; it is at the boundaries that I become aware of where I have come from in my art practice, where I am now, how I got here, and where I might go next.

To refine this process further I find a particular strength in philosopher Michel Serres' tendency towards the action in the mix, of the verbal form of the nominal. He makes sense of muddled and ambiguous abstractions, in the camouflage of *“the variegated list... rather than honing in on the mot juste ... allow the series of words for variety themselves to variegate so that the soul, or centre of gravity of the sequence is to be found not in one particular location in it, but rather in the ramifying array or spraying out of the approximating terms themselves”*. (Connor, 2008, p5) There is tension in his connections, a small-talk of in-tensities, where the words form the thought, it is their ‘knowing’ themselves, and of the ‘way’ of their work, that encourage a morphing of abstract thinking with a linguistic mode of imaging.

It is difficult to distinguish between the ‘how’ and the ‘what’ of my research method. Not to categorise seems necessary, productive even, at the k(not, that nodal point of balancing the ‘is’ and the ‘is not’. Importantly it is in the manner, the ‘way’ of connection, its ‘grammar’, that a

kinaesthetic of exchange is performed; this is where my practice resides. Convolutions abound, are the very connective tissue of the structures of my practice, the strengthening points of a seemingly formless structure, when I don't know what I am doing, and as I do become aware, in the midst of instinctive and ever ranging directions, it is at the knots of their joining that I see the structures of my thinking emerge.

I selectively use conventional substances and methods of the painter to explore other relations painting has to its mediums, and to art, after the multimedia focus of recent art. It is in the paradoxical relations of the overlap of what is clear and what is hidden, ie. the ambiguities of intention in art making, that make the process of making paintings now so alluring, in a strangely cemented sort of way.

I explore the relation of abstract painting to architecture not only to engage a reality of presence that architecture gives, but also to explore questions about painting's specificity drawn out of the multiple and often subsumed relations of décor, site specificity, minimalist, conceptual and contextual relations of site and surface, of installation, display and exhibition. Multiple textures, of site and meaning where perplexity excites, incites, is let to stay.

Serres's notion of "small inclines", leanings, of staying in the midst of things suits me. To aim at a precise and quiet placement, a positing, rather than a strategic positioning, is particularly apt to a practice centred on abstract painting. I believe developments in abstraction in contemporary art almost *require* modest strides in the already well-spoken dialogues of geometry, form and paint. Divergent thinkings make their own 'brine' to float in, but they necessarily are small, multiple, and only for a while.

The agentic capacity of materiality, and the relations of contingency and encounter are important pathways to knowing a less anthropomorphic perception of our world. Acuity and attention to subtleties of engagement in my practice evoke potential and emergent relations. To listen closely, imaginatively, with a lightness of thought, to the resonances of my experiences of site/surface /media, to those movements and madneses of my practice, to achieve that pragmatic poetic I aspire to.

STRUCTURE:

The exegesis is divided into three sections: Perception, Materiality and Painting. This is a simple structure to 'pin' ideas upon, where ideas begin to grow, or jump into the next section, not unlike an abstract of Pettena's tumble weed catcher (cover page) perhaps.

Throughout the writing are modal shifts of tone which were instinctually driven but on reflection are representative of a tendency towards the multiple and the diverse. I hope to promote a more planar and topological reading, a 'clarity' of a different kind, of a project within many projects. The particularly ambiguous 'translations' of my own work not only intend an intimacy but also to glean meaning from my work after the fact of its making.

On considering the way of this writing, its 'life' and purpose, I intend it not only as an academic record of practice but also as a site to return to myself, to potentially re-gain inspiration. Therefore

the text is necessarily laden with quotation so as to incite new reflection, and new connections, after this. Perception is a slippery thing, landing where I want at the time, often different on the revisit; I view the inconclusive as not necessarily a non-productive thing.

The same is so in regard to the many often unanswered and 'scattered' questions. They are not posed serially, or necessarily to be answered there and then, or ever. They are a register of the directions of my thinking at the time, however they also contain the 'rawness of their own 'life', for a future moment. These questions can stand alone, singular statements, as a piece of a puzzle of its own.

PERCEPTION

MERLEAU-PONTY'S PHENOMENOLOGY

BACHELARD'S MATERIAL IMAGINATION

SERRES'S JUMBLES, AMIDST THE MIX

BLINKY PALERMO

ATSUKO TANAKA

JOSEPH BEUYS

CHARCAOL AND CHALK ON PAPER AND CARDBOARD

"HIS COAL DUST, HER SUEDE JACKET"

"GREEN SCREEN"

The concepts of dependence, independence, interdependence circulate the relations of my practice. How do I perceive the process of making art and of art that is made? When is a work 'finished'? How does the form of a work relate to its intended purpose? And how do different forms of work relate to each other? What are the demands and outcomes of site and surface? Why architecture?

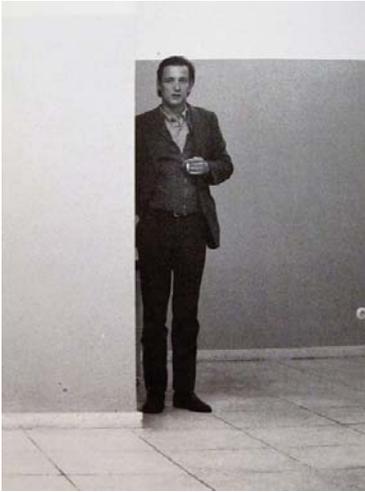
My practice revolves around drawing in one form or another. Work on paper can be preparatory, for later canvas or site works, or finished works themselves. Painting is drawing in a fluid medium, drawing is painting in a dry medium. However, with some regard for de Duve's announcements and annulments on the status of painting, I have exchanged the canvas for a wall surface, as a place to work out some things. The wall has less of a 'thingness', more an infrastructure to project upon, it holds the possibility of describing the way I imagine the monochromatic and rectangular, as thin and planar sheets of plastic colour, a 'something' (and not the 'nothing' of the void as is often described).

The wall seems less weighed down with political baggage, in fact, on the wall, everything seems ultra-thin. So thin as to function in the meta-space of viewing, a hologram of sorts; a space where a layer of paint can hold the 'immediacy' of a drawing, where we are constantly reminded of its readiness to move elsewhere, to 'the bigger picture' of past and present. That ephemeral nature drawing has that a canvas doesn't seem to manage. The wall allows a larger work, a spaciousness, a space to be in as well as a place to imagine; an embodiment and an imaginary operating together, to achieve a 'lifting' geometry, that 'float' of Malevich's Suprematism, without the 'heroic' looming of the marketable canvas, or the bind of the frame's four co-ordinates. At the wall I gained the larger 'canvas' of architectural space.

So, initially, for me, the wall was a side-step. To attempt to distance the situation of the painted canvas from its history [an impossible task of course] is a quest to understand the (ir)rationality of prioritising any painted image than that on a canvas. And so I moved on from these intimations to a more significantly productive interest in wall works as a place of display. The potential towards an understated largesse encouraged an embodiment with the materiality of the media, either drenched in the fluidity of paint, or gasping in the powdery dryness of pastel, charcoal and chalk. And a sense of potentiality of other relations occurred to me. Not only was the architectural site conducive to the formation of the work, the works became less about site per se, and more about place, I began to engage more *with* the site, than on or at a site. In the task of looking, "listening" to its particular qualities, the tensions of the site became the 'talk' of torque, not an empathic relation but more an attentiveness to the condition of the site itself, as emergent and equivocal.

However, as I became more responsive to the ambient qualities of place, I lost something for that, a sense of independence, an autonomy of practice. I sought it back, by way of drawing again, back to paper, as a neutral site. Within its four edges was not a completely autonomous 'realm' but certainly a place to explore those critical issues of framing which I needed to work with, to understand where the 'problem of the canvas' sits. I needed independently formed imagery to take to the site. And I had questions about the specific relations of the rectangle to a field of colour, and to the frame. What is the relationship between the iconographic and essentialist nature of colour and shape. And of the minimalist series, and the monochrome. What was the overall project of my practice as a painter?

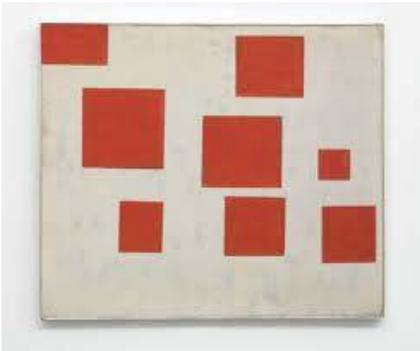
I looked to Blinky Palermo and Atsuko Tanaka to understand more of the relation between sites, and their differing modes of exhibition. Both artists demonstrate a linguistic capacity manifest in the material fabric-ation of their conceptual practices and within the very plastic nature of paint and fabric as media. When Germano Celant curated the 1976 Venice Biennale he had to look around for a painter, such was the underrepresentation of painters in the exhibition. Palermo was his choice because he “*proposed a new kind of relation to colour and to painting*” (Fer, 2004, p190) in his use of ‘found colour’ thereby bringing a conceptual dimension to painting and a levelled measure to the wider fields of commercial decor and design.



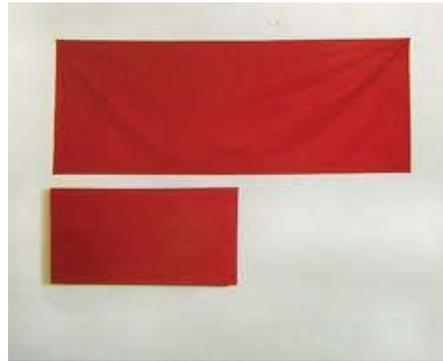
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In 1978 Palermo painted a wall on the landing of the main exhibition area in a rust-proof orange undercoat commercial paint as a response to the environmental theme of that year's Documenta. The heritage of his former teacher Joseph Beuys is evident. That the environs has agenda of its own, requiring an attention that could become a possible template for not only the care of the world's physical environment but of our attitude to that which is other than human is manifest in multiple ways in Palermo's work.

Palermo's "stoffbilder", literal fabrications, function as stretched colour field canvases. The abuttal of two and three colours of cotton cloth from the bolt connect decorative and art making conventions. The polemic of synthetic and natural was one of the myriad concerns in 60's politics. Palermo uses colour and fabric to 'speak' about this in multiple and diverse ways. He is well regarded today for his visionary porosity of method and production, seen early on and throughout his brief career in the grammatical readings of materiality's potential to 'speak softly' of *"the autonomy of painted shape ... so it would function indiscriminantly as both form and support."* (Rorimer, 1978) Anne Rorimer notes that Palermo's stoffbilder are "released from identification with any external referent, color is not subordinate to rectangularity but instead announces its field as an independent reality unimpeded by any need to suggest illusionistic space", a relation triggered by his precise understanding of colour field painting and of design. Rorimer's point could well be extended to his syntactical fusion of architecture and painting.

His practice of making the *"parts consistently take precedence over the whole"* (Fer, p193) not only brought a more contemporary form of Malevich's fragmented and geometric treatment of space and shape but more significantly extended the notion of space to the gallery room, the installation, and specifically the wall work. As Rorimer says, Palermo *"keeps on making things as well as his installations...(that) continue to have a relationship with abstract paintings, without being pictures"*. (Rorimer, 1978) Palermo's wall works exist so quietly as to almost not be there, until the clamour of the banal sharpens our attention to an unexpected and architectural treatment of gallery space.

Atsuko Tanaka joined the Japanese avant garde Gutai group in 1955. Their manifesto expresses a traditional Japanese Shinto understanding of a potentiality of spirit from the material. *"In Gutai art the human spirit and the material reach out their hands to each other, even though they are otherwise opposed to each other. The material is not absorbed by the spirit. The spirit does not force the material into submission. If one leaves the material as it is, presenting it just as material, then it starts to tell us something and speaks with a mighty voice."* (Yoshihara, 1956) Tanaka's very Japanese use of cloth, traditionally hung as divide between rooms or to define the room's function, fuses boundaries of art making, cultural tradition and spiritual belief, forming a concrete art that allows the fabric to speak for itself without much crafting of human hands.



The very naming of the 'work' of cutting cloth to state more from its simple materiality than it's duration of making brings an artist's particular offering of irony and insight into the social order of things, a posit that is still challenging today. *Katie Stone describes a work from a retrospective exhibition, Tanaka's "Work (Yellow Cloth)" (1955), as "commercial fabric panels cut directly from the roll and affixed to the wall ...as simultaneously like an impassioned renunciation of the past and the triumphant declaration of a free future. Re-hung fifty years later, its daring audacity remains."* Stone, Katie (2005) The work's freshness today is commensurate with the Gutai group's belief in materiality as the concretion of spirit and time. The Gutai's search for a concrete art beyond formalist abstraction are those of my own today. "Differentiation and intergration create mysterious effects" pronounces Yoshihara. Tanaka's tendency towards energetic connection is seen in the content and material of her work, from circular drawings to electric clothing and shop door bells, and, like Palermo, her work communicates a sense of cadence that speaks to the spirit of things today.



6



7

Maurice Merleau-Ponty explains our relation to the world as experientially bound to a primordial ground of the world, known through our bodily subjectivity. (Langer, p xvii) The way we come to know objects in our world is both perceptual and relative. To identify the variant qualities of any thing is not necessarily to attach meaning to that object in its entirety. Merleau-Ponty credits Sartre's existentialist way of knowing objects in their fullness as where each part affirms the whole. "Sartre writes in *"Being and Nothingness"* that each attribute 'reveals the being' of the object: "The lemon is extended through its qualities, and each of its qualities is extended throughout each of the others. It is the sourness of the lemon which is its yellow, it is the yellow of the lemon which is its sour". (Merleau-Ponty, 2004, p62) Merleau-Ponty's evocative description of "being honeyed" as "allow[ing] itself to be grasped, it soon creeps slyly from the fingers and returns to where it started from... revers[ing] the roles by grasping the hands of whoever would take hold of it." (Merleau-Ponty, 2004, p60-61) highlights the pervasive 'stickiness' of his understanding of the viscid nature of substances and situations and whilst it's appropriateness to a phenomenological way of knowing is clear, underneath his poetic is a glimmering of his later consideration of what contemporary philosopher Jane Bennett refers to as the vibrancy or alive-ness of things. This potential for a less anthropomorphic relation to our world than the body-sensitized subject phenomenology brings

(discussed in more depth later in this exegesis) holds a more empathetic cognition of the nature of a thing's own materiality and highlights a positioning of Sartre's existentialism to the phenomenological but more importantly, in the context of this writing, as a point of connection to an enhanced awareness of materiality as having potential for cognition in itself.

This reading is pertinent to understanding a series of drawings I began where the outcome is a by-product of the action of making, ie the relation between the making and the made; that interactive engagement with the materiality of media and surface that is the reality of their exchange. Thus the relation of abstraction to site becomes the subject of the research. Bojan Sarcevik puts it better: *"I don't think existence is a structure: it rather needs an appropriate structure to appear and disclose its originality. Its enscribed somewhere, in a place, in a moment, in a relationship."* (Sarcevik, 2004) Sher Doruff also considers the dynamic of the relation as *"a relay between and through vocabularies of practice"* (Doruff, p4). He describes a movement between the virtual and the actual as *"a lived interstice"*, (Doruff, p2) and of particular significance within art research. *"All this (inter)action of knowledge becoming-captured takes place while straddling the entryway between abstract machine and concrete assemblage. Between relational dust and reflective crystal."* (Doruff, p4)



8

9

The drawings in illustrations 8-13 were made with an intention to explore the sensate properties of their making, of charcoal and chalk, of green and grey colour, of dry pastel medium on the porous surfaces of paper and grey cardboard. The crumbling media brought a crumbling imagery of its own, texturally and spatially; it is a concretion of the breakages, the rolling, dragging and dryness of the experience of making. The blackened charcoal leaves a burnt staining in its wake across vaguely defined planes where the spatio-temporal and heady relations of image to page confuse. Only the textures and colours can be truly believed to have any reality.

The alliterative relation of the words and the subsequent synaesthetic 'relay' of overlap of the texture of their colouring is a sensual interstice, a spell from the spelt, which allows other fusions.



10

11



12

13

As with the sourness of Sartre's lemon, the grit of the green-grey. The associative qualities of two colours to our modern condition, of concrete and grass. Abstractions of surface, icon, and order. And of pastel medium and pastel colour.

Some drawings evolved, declared themselves finished quickly, others took days. What is interesting is the lack of evidence of this temporal difference. These are old and traditional concerns for painters. When and whether a work is finished, how is one image more 'honest' than another? Was it in the manner of making, or my intentions, and attentions, at the time, my organisation in the studio, my perception when I looked at it later? I privileged the unfinished appearance, striving

towards a levelled demeanour, despite each work's differing demands. I was struck with the old-fashioned feel of the practice of caring for a work until it was done, as different to the perhaps more procedural ethics of contemporary drawing manners. I felt a building of a kind of aesthetic ethic, of a way towards a painter's specificity perhaps. And of the relation of the studio, a 'foundry' of sorts, to a material practice.

"HER SUEDE JACKET, HIS COAL DUST"

To paint with powder, a distillation of red oxide powder, made liquid then layered back onto, into, the surface, with a broad painters brush. To liquid, then sediment, back to powder when touched. Andre's 'backdrop', the artist's work. A 'prop', questions the vertical and horizontal, as Stella might.

Ochre and talcum added to soften and soothe the harsh oxide dry. More versatile now, but more volatile too, the red provoked, floated into the air, fell to level surfaces, the studio floor, the pits of lungs. Of 'potent' and 'potential'. Of 'volatile' and 'volition'. Relations of reversal, both sides of the jump. She said "If you pinch me you will not feel the pain", to a stranger, a sailor at the dock. (Antonioni)



14



15



16

Gaston Bachelard says identification is the process of reflection, a way to know who we are. Watery reflections are “*the world want[ing] to see itself*”, (Bachelard, 1983) and to be seen. This percept, this imagination, he discovers by looking and listening to the ‘iconography’ of the world he lived in. And vice versa. His words “sing reality”. By participating in the resonances we hear the song. He takes this notion of entrance, of en-trance-ment of a multiplicity of soundings to a new ‘awakening’ by combining materialities, as happens in nature, when elements merge by alchemic processes. He tells us formal imagination needs the idea of composition, material imagination needs the idea of combination. Substance seen and substance sought, substance felt and substance found. Bachelard has enlivened a connectivity between self and matter in my practice. He says “*the hand also has its dreams and its hypotheses*”, (Bachelard, 1983, p107)) and of a “naïve chemistry” born from the work of homo faber. It is in the lifeblood of combination, of ourselves, our makings and the groundedness of our condition, that Bachelard inspires me.

Michel Serres, however, warns of being too persuaded by repetition, stating “*repetition is serious only in the beginning, but later it is not...the only serious thing is invention*”. (Serres, 1995, p22) Instead he draws our attention to the manner of its action. He writes in jumbles of seemingly unrelated mixes and muddles, scree and scrabble that somehow, through the mixing, make a new and almost touchable sense of complete insensibility! Here is an “ambivalency” that produces a performativity of relation. Serres believed Bachelard had “*consummated a rupture*’ between the material and the imagine. Perhaps a ‘rupture’, or crevice Serres aimed more to inhabit than speak of. Serres is anti – jargon. He prefers to “*remain as much as possible in everyday language –I simply use it in all its amplitude.*” (Serres, 1995, p23)

There are interesting parallels between Serres’ antipathy for technical jargon and issues of media and style in the visual arts. I don’t like to be consumed by technicality, I am more interested in the message expressed by its material nature. An ‘unfinished’ quality has an ambivalence that seems to avoid that authorial presence sometimes found in clarity. He says, “*Chaos takes her oldest name, noise.*” (Serres, 1995, p38) And noisy indeed are Serres’ strings of words. He uses a hermetic process of synthesis, bringing together groups of disparate relations that become a new ‘body’ of their own. A ‘noise’, seemingly of nonsense, yet perhaps more of a non-sense (not in the usual understanding of sense as linear) as an understanding of sense as a texture that is ‘felt’, or a tone ‘heard’, a tune ‘sung’. Among the syntheses of the synthesis. “*and so I wander. I let myself be led by fluctuation. I follow the relations and will soon regroup them.*” (Serres, 1995, p102)[END NOTE 2]



17

"GREEN SCREEN"

Aggregate, mix, was already there, a template then, a double template now, resting in a dusty Ackermann corridor of doors. Side by side, a middle is made, at the point of touch, of now and then, as together is, now.

The rectangle cuts the wall, shows below, and what was above, before. We know it, now we see it, there. Edges worn, shy registers in the paint, sit in the grit of the wall, of Malevich, Klein, [Rothko they said]. An addition. A screen to hide, or Beuys' bandage on the wounded wall. Or a screen to show, to warn and ware, both McLuhan's moments, just to be sure.

Warm grit, cooled by shape, dusty invasions to a smooth pliant paint. It feels nuclear, a 'new clear' of ambiguity, when radiation is kind.

The pale colour was made for the 'already made' of the earlier wall; a tentative colour to stay the tension of the two shapes. White to "milk out" the green oxide base colour becomes an emblem of distillation. A New Zealand institutional 'make-do' décor, matched to merge, the relation of inheritance, setting up a new relation, of a 'make-do' of an 'already done'?



Joseph Beuys might have said the wall ‘called’ to be worked on. Already half made, waiting for its other half, its ‘update’, to help carry the burden of its tattered age. He tells us he tries “*to realize what lies in the intention, one would say, what the intention wishes to realize; in other words, in the things that emerge and are not quite finished, I try to sense what is needed – what it is that the wood or stone wants...*” (Beuys, 2004, p30) He might have pointed to the talismanic energy, its hermetic function. This screened shape speaks of painting’s formative relation to digitalised screens, of Dashper’s ‘rounded squares’ to Klein’s cartoon to Malevich, and Beuys’ felt TV screen; all in a shape, a template of an imaginary, and the substance of the felt, and a monochrome.



19



20



21



22

Gregory Ulmer describes the essential shamanist nature of Joseph Beuys’ use of objects to produce effect as that of Derrida’s “*double inscription*”, (Ulmer, p251) where the effect of the reference happens without referring to anything, when the reference is supplied by the viewer. Ulmer calls them object-actions, which **act as**, and **are** “ciphers”, not only memory but models of memorability.

It is in Beuys' very interrogation of communication and materiality and the relation of the word to the object that we see an energy of exchange, a homeopathic functionality in the object, its healing potential through material substance. Ulmer points out that the paradoxical nature of shamanic action as seemingly authoritative is not really so. It is in the interaction between the particular and the general, where *"the personal self is used as a vehicle for a knowledge practise and is not explored for its own sake"*, (Ulmer, p231) that we see a 'middle' voice, less of the author, and more residential in, and residual of, the object. Ulmer calls on Roland Barthes (Ulmer, p231. Cite Barthes, note 13) to explain Beuys' propensity to write as ritual, ie. to [w]rite, where the performativity [of the image] speaks, and not the author (Ulmer, p231).

Beuys' sensitivity to care and acclimatization to condition, and of the substance of our world springs from his inquiry into the potential manifested in the materiality of substance. These qualities are salient to my quest towards a form of painting that relaxes the historical tensions between the authorial, subjectivity and commercial viability, and encourages sensitivity to the potential of materiality of not only media but art process and product; the 'work(ability)' of the art work, the double entendre of a communication about communication. Beuys acts as a guide towards a practice that aims to explore the metaphysical and the materiality of an art through its form, and not to polarize the two, nor prioritize either.

MATERIALITIES

YVES KLEIN MATTERS

JANE BENNETT'S "THING-POWER"

A SPECULATIVE REALISM

BRUNO LATOUR'S ACTANTS

BACHELARD and MANUEL de LANDA'S MINERAL-ITIES

SERRES'S PARASITIC

YVES KLEIN

JACOB KASSAY

JULIAN DASHPER

"A COVER, THOUGH NOT NECESSARILY A SUCCESSFUL ONE"

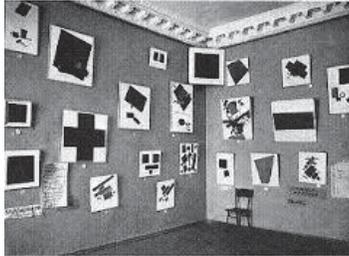
"WORK 3:3 WORK"

Italian artists such as Burri, Manzoni and Fontana alongside France's Yves Klein employed the materiality of media other than paint to evoke an everyday experience of 'life' from their canvases. This move 'beyond painting' is the genesis of a contemporary interest in the relation of matter and painting. Significant to the trajectory of this exegesis, Enrico Prampolini pin points the exactitude of that positioning for us. " *Encounters with matter were not about a battle against painting, but about taking to its extreme the idea of substituting completely and fundamentally the **reality of paint** with the **reality of matter***". (Miracco, p20, cite Enrico Prampolini) Miracco explains " *this explicit difference, which forms the basis for a coherent revisionist dialogue between artist and viewer, allows the viewer to distinguish completely a painted reality from a material reality, so that both can co-exist. The work of art is thus no longer confined arbitrarily within a pictorially defined dimension, but is able to extend towards a reality that can also be founded on matter*" (Miracco, p 20-21).

The metaphysical experience was an important aspect of art that seemingly became less so as artists such as Burri strove towards a grammar of the everyday from the materiality of their canvases. It all depends on which side of the divide one stands. In the past materialist artists strove to separate their intention from those of more spiritualist leanings. Having achieved that difference for us, we now can safely look forward without the same concerns and dare to think we might glean other understandings from the material. I am interested in the distinctions between these ways of knowing. Can painting, a painting, more precisely the canvas and the paint themselves, in the already well-established object nature of the monochrome canvas in particular, manage an evocation of a 'spirit of things', from its' very object nature?

Those black and white photographs of Yves Klein standing by his earliest monochromes, 'furnished' with their 'own' wooden stands, 'furnish' our perception with their materiality, their presence, 'family photos' they almost seem, and reminiscent of a similar sensibility in photographs of the first Suprematist paintings, a three-dimensionality in their angled hanging contrasting with the floating and flattened imagery. Klein's sponges on sticks have a similar 'spirited' contortion, of a personage perhaps. Except for the sponges with no stick, perhaps he used these to colour the others? They remain "in state". Contortions abound in the 'framed' structures of art, physical frames that hang, and geometric shapes, form[s] and colours 'framed' with iconographic presence. Within the concept of painting, noun and verb, between the material and the immaterial, all three observations open up particular avenues of this enquiry into painting, ie paintings in their relation to real space.

Rosicrucian philosophy is central to Klein's philosophy of matter, and his aim to achieve an immaterial sensibility with colour and painting. " *For Rosicrucians there is no such thing as empty space: all space is filled with "spirit" and matter is simply crystalized, inert spirit, the negative side of spirit.*" (Brougher, p29) It seemed a strange contradiction that Klein strove for an immateriality when his monochromes seem to manifest precisely painting's materiality. Now I see the 'appearance' of immateriality, ie the 'spirit' of the conceptual statement, when he played with the 'presence' of colour, foregrounding its material nature with the use of colour's base form, ie pigment as powder, " *lingering on the edge between material and immaterial sensibility, an attempt to tap into the connection between the physics of matter and the spirituality of the void.*" (*abstractgeologist, September, 2012*) And of course monochromatic, unified colour, and the monochrome object, is an intrinsic development of this relation.



23



24, 25

Klein's insistence on the materiality of colour as an aspect of the object nature of a painting brought about a hybridized and more expansive aesthetics, a "*double identity as both materially bound and immaterially inflected*"... "*This condition began to free colour from its immanent connection to a physical support and transformed into a medium in its own right.*" (Banai, p 36) It is this mediatory relation of not only the material with the immaterial, but also of the work of humans and the alchemy of nature, particularly noticeable in his experimentation with earth and fire images, which gives Klein's work a special significance when considering the relation of realism to materiality. Fuelled by a distinctly empiricist mode of production, Klein managed to entrench himself in the gap, the 'void' of sensibility, whereby painting could be understood in ways other than mere visibility, more a manifestation of a non-biological vitality, where a monochrome canvas becomes a "*site of germination*" (Banai, p39).



26



27

Klein's way of knowing colour through its alchemic inherence calls to mind Joseph Beuys' lemon batteries, his energisers; at first they seemed like jokes, 'colourful' puns. [END NOTE 1] I pondered other viabilities after acknowledging existent colour. And I understand now why I lean and lay my canvases around the studio, and why I re-arrange them. Or even why I want to paint monochromes to begin with. Their blankness allows projection onto them, but maybe they are projecting back to me! Is this why I like images of monochromes from the side view, and insist on painting the sides of the canvas, so I can feel their 'figuration', see their 'profile', so to speak? Or why I place twigs or rocks near them in the studio? Is it a way to enhance invisible aspects, by highlighting physical presence? The doubling of colour's materiality and conceptuality, or 'spirit', (Sartre's lemon) could perhaps function in the same way in the form of a monochrome. It's blank-ness a projection screen, its blank-et a protection from sight, screening its own selves. Language has a life force that opens other sides of knowing, art's histories do, colour does, so can the monochrome?

So if colour is a material how does it operate, and where? Merleau-Ponty points me to the tangibility of the colour red and the manner of colour's relation to its earthly dimension, ie its mineral origins. *"A certain red is also a fossil drawn up from the depths of imaginary world...less a color or a thing, therefore, than a difference between things and colors, a momentary crystallization of colored being or of visibility."* (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p 132) Maybe there was in fact nothing incidental about my fascination with red; the base-ness of its pigment, one of art's 'earth colours', with the intensity of Wellington's red rocks, and Pukekohe clays, red perhaps has come from the depths and surfaces of my experiences.

Merleau-Ponty also uses that Beuysian concept of the talisman as a way of re-garding colour's affective properties, but almost always in relation to a human subjectivity. He explores the edges of the divide between subject and object through their relation to each other. The word *regard* here seems demonstrative of an animating principle imbedded in the process of looking, or as the French say, "regardez". Is this the same as to re-guard, to protect, to look again? To "look after" we would say in English; and from what, the projected meaning of the other perhaps? Protected with the cloak or veil of our sight? Is this also Merleau-Ponty attempting to retract a little from his earlier phenomenological model when he asks: *How does it happen that my look, enveloping them, does not hide them, and, finally, that, veiling them, it unveils them?"* (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p131)

Speculative realism is a new philosophy that hones connections between the material and perception. With a view to move on from post-modernist deconstructions, writers such as Christopher Vitale venture into the potential of a philosophy which will help us to deal with the complex realities of today. Vitale follows the Deleuzian notion of multiple nodes of empiricist mutations as a way forward. He suggests Gilles Deleuze's ever productive brand of positivism alongside a "hermeneutics of suspicion" (Paul Ricoeur) leaves us in a constant circulatory position without escape from sceptical methodology. He prescribes a detour from this catch-22 of anti-systems to Deleuze's ever-mutating systems that bounce off each other's mutations. Deleuze's approach is *"the other path, proliferation. And so long as there is within one's system a site for pure proliferation, one which in theory can unravel your system, then you have an anti-system that passes the skeptical attack of post-structuralism."* (Vitale, 2012)

Current ecological urgencies require more thinking on reality itself as independent from humanity. Bruno Latour's reasoning features in an anthology of writings around this new-found philosophy. "Latour argues for a *irreductionism in which all entities are equally real (though not equally strong) insofar as they act on other entities*" where *"the incorporeal and the corporeal realms are equally capable of having effects on the world"* (Bryant, Srnicek, Harman, p5). Latour theorizes a freedom from comparison where variability defines a capacity of things, to produce in its own way, its own category, of the *"different way the being has of altering itself"*, (Latour, 2011, p313) when *"the phenomenon is not a phenomenon of anything else. What is attached to the phenomenon does not lead either to the stand holding it up, nor to the mind that has it in sight: it has better things to do: it is a grown-up: it is self-sufficient; it can quite simply lead to other phenomena..."* (Latour, 2011, p317).

Vitale's advice to 'proliferation' and Latour's 'phenomenon' can translate as artistic methodology that allows obsessive compulsions, intensities of focus on peculiar interests, repetitive practices that can 'unravel' (in) their own doing; and of work, the working at and making of something, as a method of 'tricking' something else out of it, a séance of sorts. Like attracts like, and in the doing, another 'doing', another movement happens. Of a series of serials perhaps?

Jane Bennett looks to Latour to challenge the traditional separation of life and matter, suggesting a reconsideration of the emergent potential in the vitality in matter, which she describes as *"thing-power"* and *"the force of things"*. She uses Latour's notion of *"an actant"*, that is a human or nonhuman source of action, to vocalize her notion of "thing-power". *"An actant can be human or not, or most likely a combination of both. Latour defines it as "something that acts or to which activity is granted by others. It implies no special motivation of human individual actors, nor of humans in general"* (Bennett, note 24, p30). Bennett admits to an already long but undermined history in philosophy on the idea of vibrant matter, distinguishing her contemporary trajectory to be *"less on the enhancement to human relational capacities resulting from affective catalysts and more on the catalyst itself as it exists in non-human bodies."* (Bennett, p27) It is her insistence on a non-anthropocentric attitude, less *"embodied"* with human meaning, which supports her view that everyday objects manifest a force or existence of their own.

It is the potential of the monochrome as a particular kind of painting, with its emphasis on painting's object nature, its relation to colour, and colour's relation as a primary substance that locate my interest in Bennett's theories. The volatility, and volition of the earth's powders is a disseminating

force here. Even earlier in Rotorua I was fascinated by tourists remarking on NZ red and green (oxide) roofs, seen from the plane; was attracted to the red-brown iron oxide staining paint on fences and Maori carvings. For 20 years I lived amongst the brown swirl of mud pools, where people commonly die if they fall asleep near the low and yellowy inhales of sulphur vapour. Minerals that move, vibrancy is that land's middle name.

Bachelard speaks of a 'mineral-ity' intrinsic to the pre-modern imagination, of copper, lead, tin... and planetary connections... where "*metals thrived in the imagination of our ancestors*" (Bachelard, 2002, p182). His material imagination "holds fast to concrete meanings" (Bachelard, 2002, p185). His allusion to the substance of life found in the age of metals, and their metallic 'fire', has a persuasive and alchemic symmetry in the activation of the new, "*Only metal rejuvenates according to the great rhythm, dreamed as the tenacity of life, embedded in hard, profound matter*" (Bachelard, 2002, p186). Bachelard dreams of the 'seed' as not a small centre of power, but as more intrinsic, as he says "of becoming, not being", and as threaded "throughout the homogenous metal".

Contemporary scientist philosopher Manuel de Landa takes a 'geo-logic' to the complexity of behaviors of matter as the aggregation of solids, of matter's self-organizing structures. He avows the philosophies of Deleuze and Guattari as significant to understanding matter with their "*idea that all structures, whether natural or social, are indeed different expressions of a single matter-energy behaving dynamically*". (de Landa, 2006). de Landa links the neo-materialist term 'mineralization' to a more precise functionality for art. He conceptualizes mineralization as similar to geological and biological processes that compose and de-compose, compress and de-compress, and applies the same process of "fossilization" to artworks. 'Abstractgeology' comments on de Landa's concept of "*traces of autopoietic machines that have been swept up and deposited by the flows of matter and energy. The remains are left behind as new forms emerge within new relations and systems of reference to be carried onward into the continuous remaking of old fossils.*" (abstractgeology, 2012)

I see these "traces" evidenced in the connectivity of artists praxes over time through the interpretations, transformations, traces made visible by the material nature of their art. Of one and many conversations, strategies and strata. On one level obvious, pragmatic; on another, mysterious, energizing. I think it's all in the turn of the thing.



“a cover, though not necessarily a successful one”

The grounding nature of the cloth, the picnic cloth, as we all sat down to share the long time of the day’s events, and higher, on the wall, the illusive watery yellow of paint, and daylight, moved in and out of sight, of the ties of our vision. Why yellow someone asked? Lemon I said. Universal grey softened with cloth; coloured paint, weakened with water. Large and loud though they were, strong enough to break the clamorous length of the room, still weak enough to bring forth the hollow beneath the flooring. Beuys might have smiled, the grammar of the material, drilling below. We cover what we don’t know, highlight what we do.

Of test[ing] spaces. And the desire to see what will happen, in the act of making and in the act of showing. Will ideas, those invisibilities, gain something, in the making, and in their showing? What ‘forces’ will I uncover? Or cover? I felt the urge to join in with the irregular layering of construction board on top of the concrete flooring, to do more of the same, to build on (it). The floor hid a hollow space, the grease pit of an engine workshop. Oil ‘calling’ for water, a divination of sorts? To divine/to divide: to divine is to foreknow, foretell; to divide between what is and what is not; an edge, rim, of an [im]material pairing.



“work 3: 3 work”

A moroon(ed) red, 4 cupboards run in a row, singular across the wall, multiples repeating each other. A minimalist’s fanciful relevance and a builder’s practicality. An edition of colour, mixed, each batch slightly different, yet the same. A decorator’s unity, a dimension of things perhaps.

Tim was excited the image wasn’t quite level, that the builder would have struggled with the cupboards too. I thought of Palermo’s levels, and thought the wall work to be a level. Level to the site or not, it would be a leveling, in its monochromatic way.

The pink work has a second half on the other side of the room, a long drawing (out), a stretching, on an unprinted roll of wallpaper, of watered yellow ochre sections, 10 to be exact, buttressed against another stretch of watered lemon sections, 10 to be symmetric.

Someone had asked me earlier where does “Green Screen” begin and end. I thought the whole of the corridor was the work there. Here the work unfolds as one, two or three. Leaving the chairs and tables of the coffee drinkers in the exhibition space, the link to life was perhaps too close, no-one mentioned it, but I liked that. To listen to the place.

I think of my work as an attachment or addition, not an alteration, nor intervention, other terms of current art praxes. In the addition a more analogical relation occurs. Deleuze and Guatarri describe their notion of 'becoming' as a chameleon-like process, seen in the Pink Panther's colouring in the world its colour, pink on pink "*in such a way that it becomes imperceptible itself*" where "*the camouflaged organism slips between an autonomous self and an environment, the singular and the organizational, the visible and the invisible*" (cite Jahn, p11, note 5). Of the relation of slippage, between that of the autonomous self and an environment, when "*– it vacillates from its very contextual instability, unconscious at times of its aptitude for adaptation.*"(cite Jahn, p11)

The hybrid is also intrinsic to Michel Serres' theory of "small inclines" and of the parasite, "*the thermal exciter*" whose small irritations "*reinforce its resistance and increases its adaptability*". "*Far from transforming a system, changing its nature, its form, its elements, its relations, and its pathways, ...the parasite makes it change state differentially. It inclines it.*" (Jahn cite Serres, 2010, p19) Serres says the message always arriving "burdened", declaring the site of the parasite as that of the exchanger, who is "*in the most profitable of positions, at the intersection of relations...the one who succeeds in the relation of the many*". (Serres, 2007, p42-43) He speaks of time as "folded, wadded up" whereby traversing its topology allows for the visibility of unnoticed correlations, where "*two systems look at each other and describe the same world*"... "*to explicate, that is "to unpleat" ... "he makes folds; he implicates something that his movements then explicate.*" (Serres, 2007, p63).

James Joyce's word "geometer" combines matrix, mater (mother) and meter with geo- (earth) into "*a pregnant metaphor making geometry, a discipline of measurement, prediction and conceiving*"(cite Frascari, p45). This describes a geometry similar to my imagine, of shape that "longs" to build, painted 'sheets' of colour as building material, and a desire to form, make, grow; the 'organics' of the painter's 'trade', aligned with a building of the poetic, of the imaginary. Art convention still 'names', contextualizes artworks according to their way of functioning. To separate is to define? To define is to separate? Are these works sculpture, painting, installations? The neutrality of the word 'work' works well to avoid any nominalism, yet we make boundaries so we can break them; wall drawing so as not to be confused with canvas painting for example (we don't say "wall painting" that I am aware of). Is this a little too close to Palermo's bouncing between the decorative and art? Are my works "room drawings" that draw rooms?

Jacob Kassay caught my attention as a reluctant star of the American art scene. His silver plated monochromes very quickly hit record prices in the midst of a world recession. The works' mirrored surfaces reflect the subsistence of art making and the art world's relation to capitalism (his chromed silver that crosses palms) as much as the gallery space. The agency of art, in all its forms. It is the less public play around art making, in his reported shyness about his success, and his subsequent use of the entirely different substance of sacking (hessian to painters) that I see traces of connective presence. The trail from Klein's use of the more precious gold, the alchemic relation to gold's special vitality, speculative trading and the loss of a gold standard align in the hyper-contrast of sacking and 'sacked', of pauper's knap sacks and earlier recessions. Add Burri's thread bare canvases to the mix, and it's all there in the fabric of things.

Kassay's exhibitions themselves hold an equally interesting quietude and exacting observation. There is a tangibility to the interplay between the works themselves, and their relation in the gallery, where the galleries become 'rooms' of a much more intimate, almost suburban pursuit. As Anthony

Huberman remarks “These are paintings about being in a room with paintings.” (Huberman, 2010) In Kassay’s more recent work he strings a long sheet of white muslin across a breezy exhibition space. Reading the exhibition details, they seem to include the open window as a work too. A breath of fresh air, to be able to open a window in an exhibition, seems amazingly fresh I think. Is it an installation? An exhibition? A site work? Nominalism doesn’t help here. A notion of a complex perplexity does.



31



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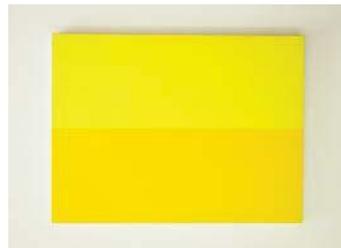
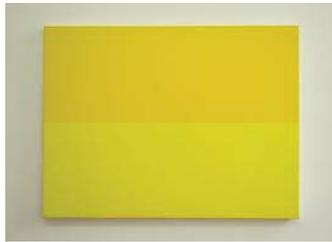


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I seek a sense of this tangibility of material and concept in my practice and find it often to be just out of range, probably because of a deliberately diverse range of enquiry to make the most of the university resources. Now Kassay draws me towards wanting a more specific point of investigation, of the beauty in concept, and of the maximalisms around the monochrome again. And to slow down, to a more reflective pace, a particularly minimalist lesson perhaps?

Julian Dashper is a conceptual artist whose work covertly investigates art itself, and in particular abstraction’s relation to minimalism. Influenced by the specific relations between Klein and Malevich, there is a historiographic residue to Dashper’s conceptual abstraction. *“I made an abstract art.’ What I am saying is I don’t make work in the abstract way, but I actually make abstract*

art. Make is the key word. So I'm making it like a thing, like a chair or a table. I identify it as an object. I'm making it as a noun." (Dashper, 1997) His use of the industrial product is all about addition, of building onto the conceptual framework of painting, and of the material nature of the canvas as emblematic of painting. He makes the canvas 'work', to earn its keep, as the very structure of painting. By opening the debate to the actuality of the 'substance' of painting without the anthropomorphism of the painter's mark, the canvas ground has its own subjectivity, as it does the historical invention of Manzoni through to Andre.



34, 35,



36



37



38

A comment Dashper made in regard to monochromatic painting's objecthood or 'thingness' parallels De Landa's geological take on art's stories: "*I think it is quite easy to argue that this quality of 'thingness' has developed to such an extent that painting, both intellectually and physically, now has a self sustaining life of its own.*" (Dashper, 1997, P26) Dashper's attention to the substance and

subsistence of art has an inherent linguistic aspect. It is in the declared secrets that his work is so interesting. 'It', the work, talks about art at every step. The action of copying, Latour's 'actant', imbedded in the minimalist practice of repetition is a basic structural device of inherence, of its declared self.

Dashper brings a sense of duration to the canvas, a hold on the potential in things, stilling discovery to the slower pace of emergence, through a level dialogue with the materiality of the serial. Malevich's corners, Klein's voids and the Bauhaus modular, even Rosicrucian and Masonic connections of above below, the two L's of the set square and the compass, all come to mind, all borne of building, copying, repetition, where new dimensions occur. I see here not so much the post-modernist referential so much as a speculation on what will be left, after or at the divide. The en-twin-e-ment of things, of the Greek god Morpheus, shape former for the dreamer, of morphed combinations and the morph(-ine) of sleep. A sleeping beauty, in the idea. [END NOTE 3]

PAINTING

DE DUVE, VERWOERT and BOIS'S SPECIFICITY

BOCHNER'S MEASURE

ADORNO'S NEGATIVE DIALECTIC

JULIAN KLEIN'S FRAMEWORK

NOE'S AMODAL COLOUR

DAVID THOMAS

JOHN NIXON

THE WALL and PAPER DRAWINGS

PAPER and COLOURED WATER DRAWINGS

PASTELLED MONOCHROMES

SIX RED RECTANGLES

Thierry de Duve theorised that the 'unfinished' painting, that blank and monochromatic canvas, is the missing link between Duchamp's "Fountain" and representational painting. He wondered on the impact of Greenburg's notorious statement "*a picture stops being a picture and turns into an arbitrary object*" (de Duve cite, 1998, p205) for its prescriptive and limiting effect on the painters of the 1960's. "*They must have felt that it was impossible to be a significant artist without being a painter and at the same time that it was impossible to pursue modernist painting without going beyond the monochromatic literal flatness of Stella... at that point they would cease to be painters and would produce merely "arbitrary objects"*" (de Duve, 1998, p204).

I ponder on these issues today as they relate to sur-face, the face of paper and canvas. Can I do with paint on paper what the monochrome does with paint on canvas – where and when does the 'picture' become an object? Does it necessarily reside in, or on the canvas? To get an idea off the seemingly wider paper surface and onto a canvas seems nigh on impossible without losing the immediacy, that drawn quality, to be the 'thought picture' I hope for. The canvas is such a loaded gun. Or is it that the page and the wall are not? Is it a question of framing? Is it that the page doesn't demand such a deliberated effort? Is this the 'baggage' of old judgment? The sense of presence, of painting, is harder to achieve on canvas. Has it become a more a 'sculptural' demand, now, after the object nature of the monochrome? Did the effect of a Greenburg/Stella diatribe 'push painting to the wall'? And what are the relations of abstraction to the monochrome? These are specifically painting's questions.

Jan Verwoert brings a contemporary jive to painting's relativity. He necessitates that the painter dialogue with the medium itself to discover a grammatic criticality. He points us to Yve-Alain Bois's understanding of painting as being inherently conceptual: "*its self-referentiality and self-criticality addresses its material qualities as well as the symbolic grammar of its own formal language*" (cite Verwoert, 2005). Bois's notion of the grammar of painting involves the "moments of impossibility" that spring from art's conventionality, evolving, revolving, into other more contingent inventions. He suggests looking for other analyses than deconstruction. He points to a second meaning of deconstruction, of "*the sense of inescapability from closure*" (Bois, p237). Maybe the copy, as simple repetition, can function less as a replication and rather a re-petitioning, a gathering [of histories, of names], and a placing, a re-partitioning, of putting this part with another part, to break a strong hold of past connections, so as to edge towards something else? Bois adds: "*painting might not be dead... its vitality will only be tested when we deal with the task of mourning*" and "*emerge in the conjunctive deconstruction of the three instances that modernist painting has disassociated (the imaginary, the real, and the symbolic).*" (Bois, p243) Could a copy be the "other side" of the thing, more a topological copying, from the verbal, ie the action of copying as performative, that together make something new? A kind of tantric balancing act, of an enactive centering that allows a stilling of perception from the reality of repetition in order for something else to be made visible, to be caught occurring.



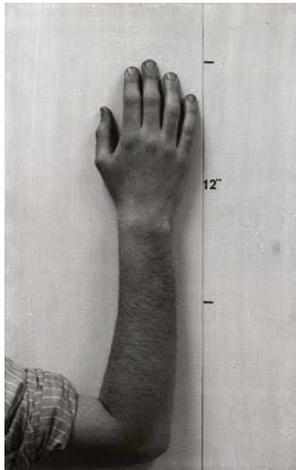
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Wall-and-paper Drawings

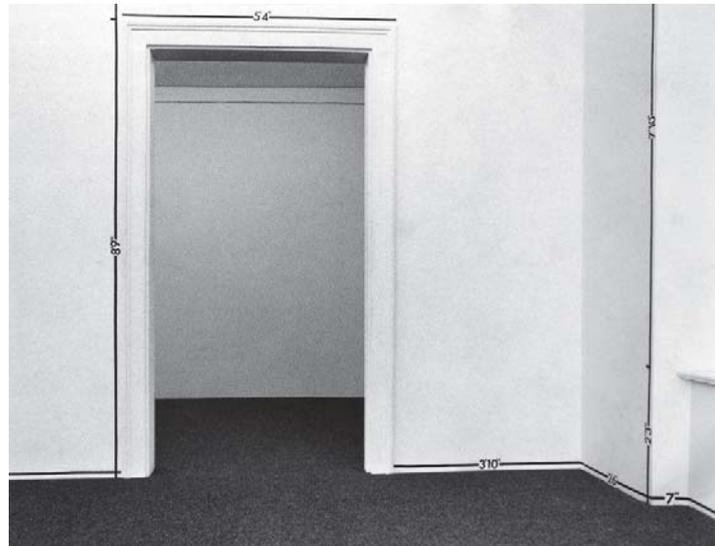
Drawings in the paint and pastel, a lot of water, the soft absorb of unprinted wallpaper, a portable place, which I could keep, to explore. Expansive, the 'imagine' of geometry. Is it real, is it not? I wanted some independence, autonomy, to find other meanings, away from the 'bodies' in the wall. Everything eventually becomes a case.

In the first studio space, the 'engineer's tomb'. Of width, and wider. Dimension. The roll like the wall, a 'whole' surface, a 'basic' to a minimalist aesthetic. Rectangular shapes and spaces, buttressed and overlapped, the transparent paint catches them, sealing the view of it.

Mel Bochner describes the agency of perception as how we understand information in relation to “externally maintained constants”... *“Wallworks ... cannot be “held”, only seen. As such they are neither copy nor paradigm. Art of this nature is not secondly present, its uniqueness (single placedness) is its co-existent unity with its own appearance.”* (Bochner, 2008, p73) He theorises on the difference between the words ‘imaging’ as representational function, a “shift in referential frames” and ‘imagine’ as a projection, as *“the exteriorizing of ideas about the nature of things seen. It reproduces that which is initially without product. There is an overlap in the mind of these two dissimilar activities. We cannot see what we can’t imagine”.* (Bochner, 2008, p74)



42



43

Bochner was interested in *“how an artwork existed for thought. What could thought do with it? Then, taking a phenomenological approach, how did this specific work exist for experience? And finally, how did this experience exist for thought?”* (Bochner, 2008, p32) He insisted that his wall drawings were not so much “things”, more significantly he was not making “things” so much as “doing drawings” which he called “thought models”. Bochner seems to neutralise the conflicting positions of the conceptual and the art object. Perhaps his empiricism could be understood as operating not only at the pragmatic end of art making but also at its metaphorical seam with philosophy? Does the series measure, phenomenologically? Could we ‘think’ of cupboards measuring the wall, of doors measuring between walls; does a wall painting measure the wall or ourselves? Is measure reflection, and does reflection divide? The roll of paper gave me a place to work with existential relations of shape and space. The angle of the photographs in illustrations 39-41 show small drawings laid out on long horizontal rolls of paper. Small thoughts about larger spaces. After these drawings I moved to a new studio, to the pristine place mentioned earlier. And things changed dramatically.

The Pastelled Monochromes.

The studio in the new building had new and bright colours, no saturated oxide tones. I wanted that depth back, of time, the 'institutional' blankness of the old studio. In this studio I fermented pastelled red oxide to a range of dull and skinnied colours to see that red 'glow' dissipate. The lightness, from colour 'weakened' with water, now lightened with white. The 'blanc' [FR.] in 'blank' [Eng.] Could I make the same colour by another means. Dry pastel transforms into pastel colour, pinks come out of red. Building one with two.

Colour bears its own truth. Measured with white, the pastelled blankness binds easily to the buff white canvas, like hands and honey, and more than adherence. The dusty lightness stares back at me.



44



45

What is it about pastel color that suddenly draws me and why now? To tease out the pure, the original, to see what comes of it perhaps. Easy to work with, its brush lines show only in the light. Mute, dumb, blunt as a monochrome is. Where does the colour start and stop? Shades of colour act like shadow, really there but really not. Are they the same shade and shading what? It seems important to know the difference. The canvases leant on the studio walls for some time before I joined them together. I just needed to know them a bit.



46 - 49



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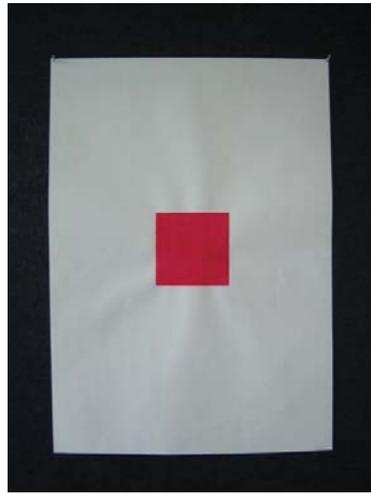
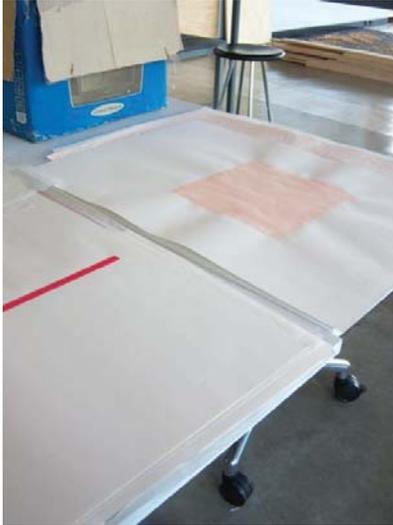
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In the earlier pastel drawings scraping and rubbing were an attempt to merge with the support, to grind and rub the colour in, to meet the divide between surface and media. The painted pastel colour seemed absorbed by the canvas, yet I knew it was not. So I found an un-sized low GSM paper which bubbled and buckled as paper does. Watery paint has other manners.

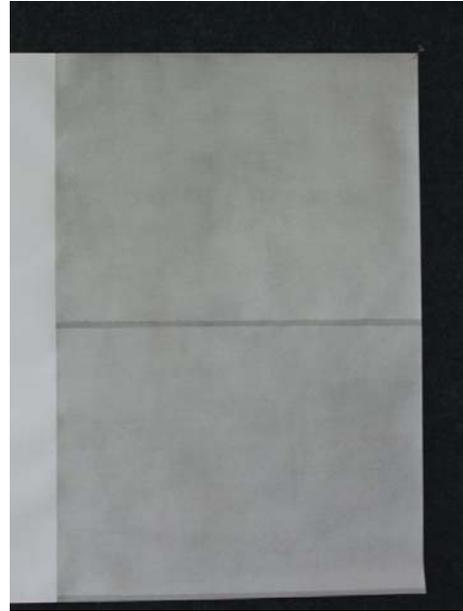
Theodore Adorno writes of a 'swarm of vitalities' where *"one can only "circle" around a concept until one gets dizzy or arrives at the point at which nonidentity with the real can no longer be ignored."* (cite Bennett, p31) Adorno's longing for access to thing-power and his underlying belief in the elusive nature of the gap between object and representation, is explained in his theory of "negative dialectics": *"Nonidentity" is an elusive force but not wholly out of human experience, but rather a "nagging feeling that something has been left out"* (cite Bennett, p13-14). Adorno suggests we accentuate this discomfort in order to trick meaning from it, a kind of homeopathic treatment that involves a close aesthetic and intellectual attention to that ability conceptualization has of obscuring its own inadequacy, and highlight that which escapes its concept.

Is this the chase that is not, a pretending, (the pre-tense), before I know what I am doing, staying open to what 'it', the canvas and paint, might want? "Non-identities", are they things that I didn't know before? When the paint is watery, free flowing, unassuming on the inexpensive surface, quick to apply, and relationships become as fluid as the media itself. 'Dumb' shapes and muted colours speak composition and composure. Is paling the colour a kind of nonidentity? Is the monochrome itself a nonidentity, neither painting nor object, but both? A minimalist 'look', quick to see? Is the work more present for being less so? Is this Adorno's theory? To expose the cloaking mechanism of the thing's own conceptualization, the exposure itself intensifies the felt presence of nonidentity, of what is, and what is not of my making? What denied possibilities exist in minimalism? Is the implicit representational nature of abstraction that Dashper speaks of and the impossibility of its own aim not to represent itself the same as Adorno's non-identity? Is this that almost diagrammatic quality? Is the monochrome capable of spirit and the banal? Tantric art seems exactly that.

Alva Noe has compared the way we see colour to the way we understand perspectival shape, as enactive experience, that is, in relation to where we stand. He points out that colour also varies as one moves, that *"colour-critical conditions"* such as ambient light or chromatic properties of surrounding light alter the perceived qualitative properties of colour. What is interesting is his insistence on our ability to perceive the constancy of colour despite these contingent factors. *"We experience the presence of a uniform color that, strictly speaking, we do not see. Or rather the actual uniform color ...is present in perception amodally ... Crucially, we can experience the wall as uniform in color and as differently coloured across its surface"*(Noe, p128). He explains this as the difference between the representation of experience and the sensation of experience, going on to say that *"the sameness of colour is a matter of potential appearance over time"* (Noe, p132). However he adds, *"colors, unlike shapes, it would seem, are themselves looks"*, that *"this would seem to make apparent colors, the looks of colors, a notion that is probably not coherent"* Noe,(p133). I am curious about 'the look' of Malevich's singular suprematist shapes and their tendency towards the iconographic, and the pictorial. Is Noe's theory applicable to geometric shapes and would it explain the dialectic between the tantric image and the pictorial nature of a singular shape, or the shape of a monochrome?



52 - 56



57, 58

The Paper and Coloured Water Drawings

Images here, in the room, shapes; images distant, we fill in the gaps. "It's off in the distance. It came into the room. It's here in the circle." (In The Cut", Jane Campion film, 2003) Malevich knew something but I don't know what. Repeat is to try, to find something lost. "It's here in the circle", tight as a drum. Both sides of Serres' ocean, from the ripple in the middle to one grain of the ground.

*It's in the particularity, the quality of that certain red, that the chase begins. There it is. Can I make it again, in another way. What **is** that colour? I know it, from various places, not one at all. That watery red, water(ed) melon perhaps?*

'Office' grey, it's not any grey. It's in its way of being grey. Not of a substance, like concrete or lint, but a photo-copied and multiplied. Our A4 grey for an eternity now. A shallow grey, light hearted even, nothing to it, to produce that.

Images of geometry seem 'natural' on paper and transposed to the wall, yet on canvas they appear soulless and empty. The wall provides the same open meta-framework a piece of paper does, we associate paper with other frameworks as well, such as the open-ended nature of knowledge in books, in the ongoing lines of script, or sheet music for example. Walls are also part of a wider world, of architectural structure and decorative dimension. But canvas is always another matter, and in those words rests the issue, it IS, in fact, ANOTHER MATTER, a very different materiality, of woven surface, not only of its formative substances of cotton, linen, or hemp, but of the philosophical and historical weave and warp of THE canvas as a framework of itself, in the meta and mater of it.

In a literal sense framing is about edge but in a meta-relational sense framing has to do with how we perceive a work. Julian Klein's "artistic theory of relativity" considers the 'room for play' between the corporeal reality of objects and the boundaries of the perceptions we hold of them (Klein, J 2010). He describes an artistic mode of perception as an experiential mode of finding one's self outside and inside the frame as a kind of liminal state where we can function artistically at the edge of an "assumed reality" and an "invented reality", where one reality is no more nor less constructed than the other. *"If a portion of our awareness however is still watching the framework from the outside, it is precisely this that forms the artistic part of our perspective: the point at which we see ourselves as being within a second framework is always the point at which we observe ourselves from the outside and thus from an artistic perspective."* (Klein, J, p133). [END NOTE 4]

Klein refines his study to stable frameworks, "refuges" from which we can understand things when multiple frameworks overlap. He explains that within the 'refuge' of one system our interpretations of things outside that system are flavoured, that this referential relativity is important as we only enter and exit each artistic mode rather than tarry long enough to 'play', we stop asking questions about specific meanings of the modes, and simply comply with the modes. He explains that *"art is the act of playing with frames – or a framed aesthetic experience, or an aesthetic experience of frameworks, or the perception of framed perceptions, whichever order best describes the situation at hand. In any case, in the artistic mode, a framework and a doubled perception come into play, interacting with each other."* (Klein, J. p136)

Interior and exterior relations such as these are useful to understanding David Thomas's monochromes as encouraging a closer understanding of the complexities of the world. He believes art can aid the *"negotiation of the world", a negotiation between knowledge and experience", to become more attentive to perspectival, spatial and colour relations from "objects that are made for that purpose."* (Thomas, 2007) Thomas highlights the acute meaning of things, his interest in precision is not so much about the materiality of the media but of the sensitivities developed through the contingent effects of their use. *"It's not that the works or colours can mean anything. They have specific readings, but they are complex and dependent upon contexts. We need to be sensitive to context if we are to retrieve useful meaning"*. (Thomas, 2009, p35)

Thomas's exhibitions are invested with diverse and prolific arrangements of "composite realities", differing modes of representation that manifest perception as something to be noticed. It is in this attention that he encourages *"other layers of experience to be manifest and reflected on ... (to) become aware of how thoughts are active, how our mind and feelings function"* (Thomas, 2009, p37). In Thomas's most recent exhibition TIMELINES AND COLOUR FIELDS, 2012 we see people photographed walking 'behind' a narrow, elongated form, which seem to 'spin' into flattened shape in nearby paintings. A web of temporal illusion is spun, somewhere between my knowledge of Thomas's earlier photographs of people taking a monochrome for walk and the perspectival illusion of a painted monochrome on the photo surface, and that whirling 'stick' of time that seemingly lands back into the spatio-dimensions of his pale canvases.



59 - 61

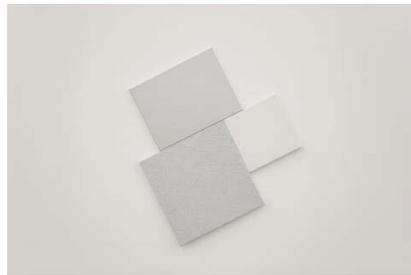


62, 63

I feel as if I too have jumped somewhere! Perhaps from the a priori of Malevich's Black Square (Bochner, p112) into Yves Klein's void, then to the vortex of Julian Klein's relativities. The exchange between the 2dimensional and 3dimensional works marks Thomas's precise attention to placement and place within the exhibition format. Of course I surmise all this from that other formatting system, the WWW, where everything looks uniform. If we don't pay a close attention we fall, it seems.

John Nixon also uses the potential of the exhibition but to a different end than Thomas. His EPW project emphasises the same porosity and experimentation of Thomas's practice but with an intense focus on the deictic of Constructivist art and the ethics in particular, of studio practice itself and of the facture of research. Nixon writes in his "Notes on the Experimental Painting Workshop [EPW]" that "*the EPW is an index of its own materiality and its methods of production... The exhibition is provisional in relation to the particular space to be used for display and to the possibilities already realised.*" (Nixon, 1994) To experiment within the compression of 'the project' allows Nixon a freedom to truly explore the complexities of modernism within its relation to contemporary art. As Judy Annear says, "*He is at liberty to re-activate various aspects of his past as part of his present investigation.*" (Annear, 1993) This diffusive manner of practice extends that "*centrifugal approach, instead of the centripetal one seen in abstract art*" (Gutai Manifesto, 1956) aspired to by the Gutai group, to accommodate his "organising principle" in the diverse structure of display. Hence Nixon is still able to explore some very particular essences of art making, within the dialectic of the singular to the whole. As Annear puts it, "*In its apparent singularity, the thesis has many parts, like leaves in a book, or the apples in an orchard.*" (Annear, 1993)

Nixon has cleverly found a methodology of working with specificity without reducing the diversity of content, rationale and form. His attitude towards repetition helps me clarify how to work within some of the relativities of serial paintings, the monochrome and minimalism. In an interview with Ben Curnow Nixon explains repetition as *“more to do with the reinforcement of the position; it’s more iconoclastic. I’m not interested in serial art. I am interested in the broader picture. My overall work is a refutation of repetitiveness.”* (Nixon, 1994) A similar sensitivity to art’s functionality is seen in Nixon’s approach to research (*“I am interested in other artists.”*) (Nixon, 1994) and reiterates his concern for the dissemination of knowledge rather than the mystical. As he says, *“It’s not to do with personal research for the sake of being hermetic; quite the opposite...the value in an artist’s work is how much other artists can take from that work...what I’m trying to do in my exhibitions, my texts, is offer an exposition of ideas.”* (Nixon, 1994) This ‘currency’ between artists brings an active renewal to art making. More than simply a shared heritage, this is a dissemination of knowledge acted out through the clarity of the present. To know Malevich after Minimalism, is not so much a retro-fit but, as Nixon puts it, *“the redevelopment of painting as an act of nomination”*. A speculative dimension from the retrospect perhaps?



64



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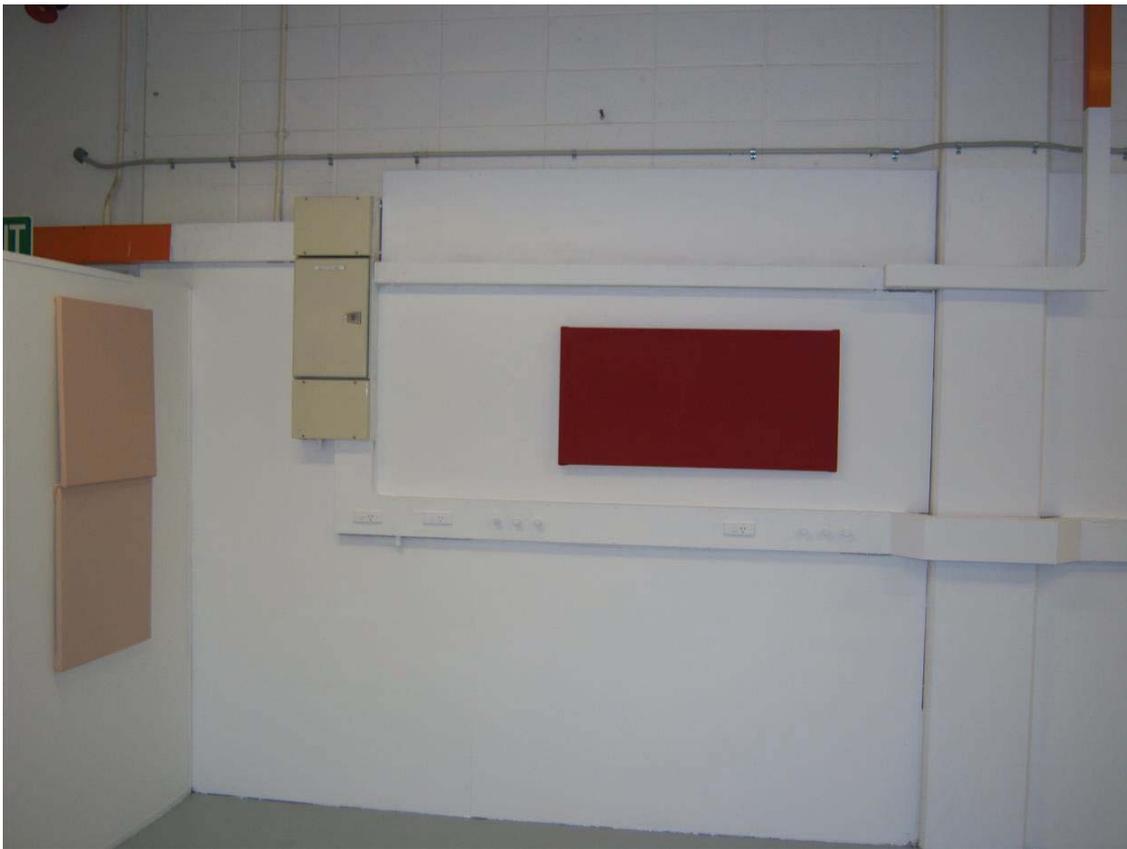
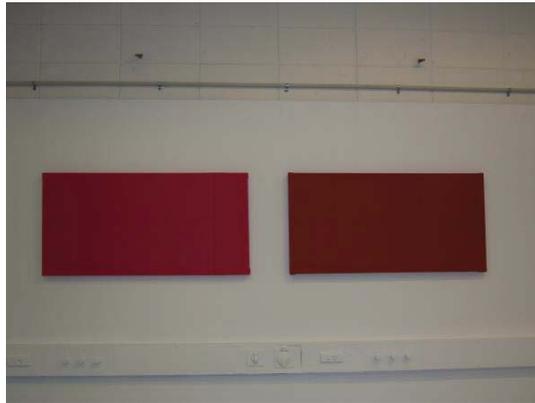
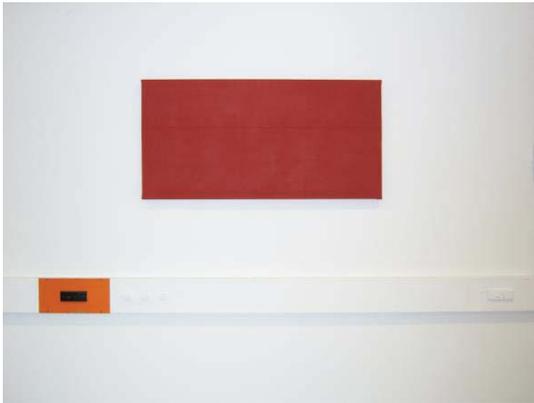
I see the potential here to bring a communicative property to the obscure yet obvious nature of abstraction. A ‘diagrammatic’ way of speaking to others, not necessarily to an elite, those ‘in the

know', but those who care to know. To find a 'lost tribe'? It is that connectedness seen in the artists already mentioned in this exegesis, as well as the philosophers' musings on perception, that are as much about the perceiver as the state of that which is perceived, and of the potential from an agentic capacity itself. The jump from the material to the immaterial seems not an unsurprising concern for a people in the age of the digital machine.

THE RED RECTANGLES

Hermetic (sealed) and experimental, manifest in the banal of the Red and the Rectangular. I nominate these rectangles shape, space, and form. All of these. On the fabric of the canvas, through the seal of the paint. The red waxing seal opens other openings of Malevich's Black Square. Mine of jam, rhubarb (good for the heart), and red denim colour. Red with white to lighten, reverse Seurat's optic merger, and mix it while wet. Will it arrive the same colour, or will they both forget.





SUMMARY

Jan Verwoert asks *“whether we cannot discover something moving—motions, things, creatures, ideas that will not be sacrificed but will stay alive and wiggling, moving in their erratic motion: motives that move things, souls and thoughts, like locomotives—always un poco loco—throughout the history of art and philosophy.”* (Verwoert, 2009)

Verwoert’s “poco loco”, of little madneses and movements, is an inspirational motif, was so to that of my own, of working at the seam of things, to see what will happen. Verwoert emphasises movement however, something I had to pick up on the journey, in the movement itself. I had imagined a more stolid place, the sewn seam, where two things meet. But movement is important. I had to go there to know there. So I followed an obsession, my “poco loco”, with red and green oxide powders, the attractants (Latours “actants” perhaps) charged with vibrant colour and something more I thought. I could sense it, an unexplainable thing, embarrassing to mention. It was in its emission, that the powder spoke colour, the tangible imagine. The material germ of the abstract idea was of its own reckoning.

Michel Serres concern for the relation of things began another journey as well. One which asks for the common logic of analysis, at least I had thought. But as I read him some more, in the way of his words, I flipped into something more, not something else but something more. Serres’ jumbled diversions, of thoughts that move and change from one listing to the next, from one logic to the next, sorted to include, and so set the motion of the motif, became the madness, the ‘redness’ of the thing.

Jane Bennett translates Beuys’s and Bachelard’s clear message of imaginings and care to a contemporary urgency to acknowledge the ground force of things, of the power of things. It was never a case of believing for me, but more how to act, after that. But no need, the force is its own, not mine, Latour’s “grown up”, it seems. I only need bear witness. We are not the only measure of things. Art is grounded in repetition, in its love of histories and objects, to understand the philosophies of the separate and the whole; the notion of iconography is intrinsically about the series and the one. A series has additions, and constants, their traces of overlap, in the action of the making, and of the made. Repetition holds and repetition moves, it’s in the sedimentation of the thing.

The abstract of the series seems about quantity, of many and more, yet there remains the facture of the thing, its singularity, its identity, unity, as one. So perhaps it’s about quality, if it’s just the one? But where is that one, inside the many, or outside on its own? It’s in the ambiguity, the secret of the thing, a concept of connectivity, of communication, to those who see it. This, as that hermetic quality art can get. How to describe ‘it’, know it, is the thing. Perhaps another name for it was beauty, aesthetic, but that came with rules. This is something more, in the action of the thing, of how it moves, where it moves, but never why, for it’s not ours, and not for us to ask, to judge. Just to bear witness. Ambiguities require a refined attentiveness, as slow often moves to the quick reversal of things.

Colour I trust, even in all its variants it never pretends. It is its own, Latour’s “grown up”, an immaterial material, a substance that moves, and painting is its architecture. It seems perception sits in the seams of materiality.

To speculate, imagine, and engage in the synaesthesia of things. This writing is a life of its' own, the materiality of the words has made it my practice too.

END NOTES:

1. Nicolas Bourriaud also notes a theoretical connection of Beuy's methodology to that of Klein's: *"The theory of qualitative economy developed by Klein's work would also find an echo in the overall anthropology of Joseph Beuys. The "overcoming of the problematic of art" announced by the former is answered by the expanded concept of art elaborated by the latter..."* (Bourriaud, p40)
2. Latour asks Serres about *"the need for a synthesis that will have nothing to do with the content, with the repetition of a certain language, but, rather, with a certain way of moving from place to place. The synthesis is going to come from this way of moving."* SERRES answers *"That's exactly it. Relations are, in fact, ways of moving from place to place, or of wandering"*. (Serres, 1995, p102)
3. *"I'm a purist about that sense of aesthetics in terms of how a work is made. I don't deny it even though aesthetics to many people is a dirty word...I'd like to talk about this [the 'beauty of an idea'] in relation to abstraction because it seems to me this is a very beautiful idea, particular at this point in time – the idea of minimalism..."* (Dashper, 1997, p27)
4. Klein cites cognition scientists' recent discovery of the closely linked functions of "introspection, the 'parking of meta-intentions and the simultaneous representation of multiple identities for the very same content (decoupling)" (Klein, J. p 133) as being in the same area of the brain and of their simultaneous functionality.

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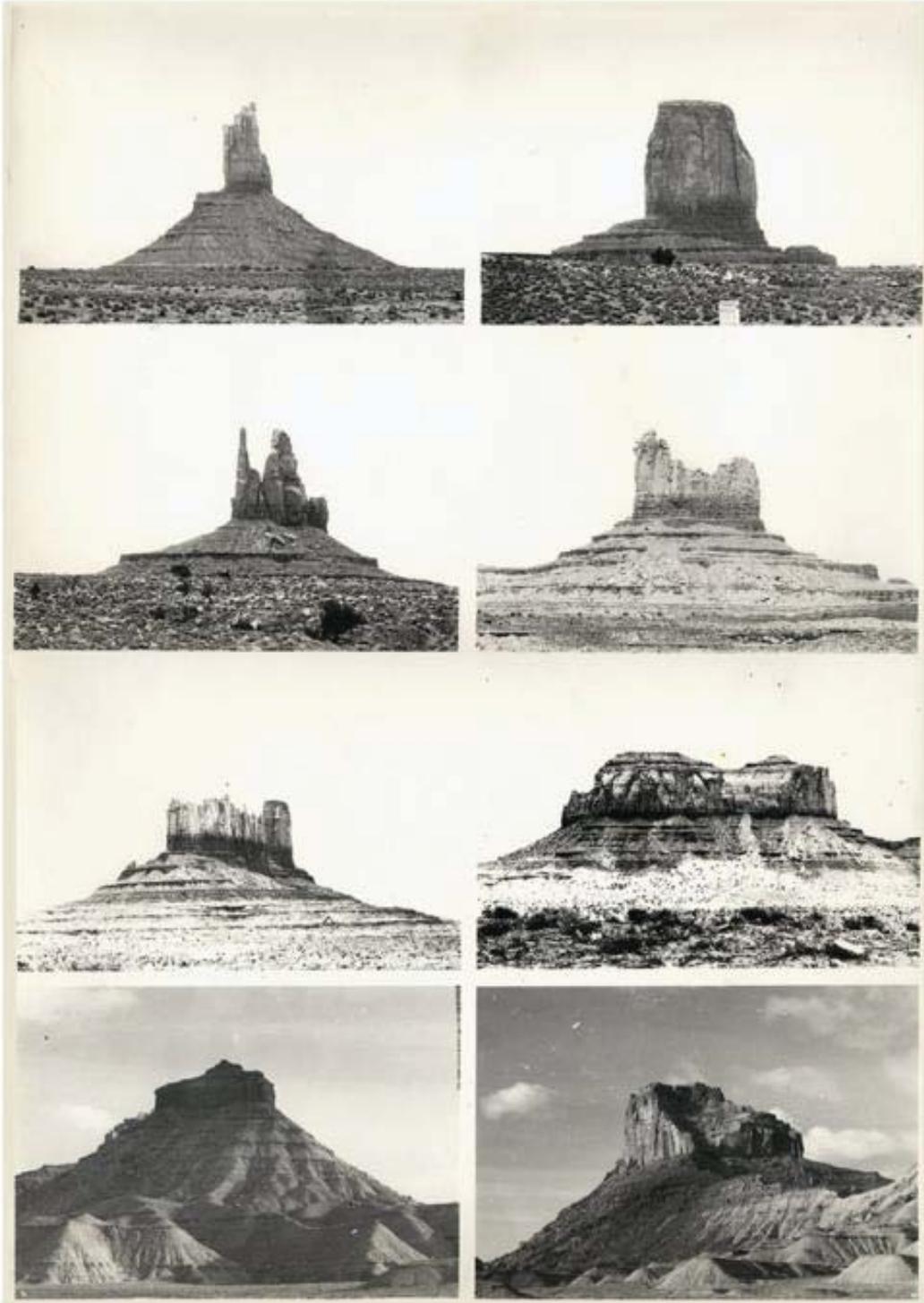
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