

relationships between the three overlapping parts of a proposition, with the fourth part, “sense”, evident in the painting, itself. Finally, *The Planets* are discussed in detail, with special attention to the relationship that they have with scientific representations of planets.

In conclusion, the aim of the thesis is to contribute to the perception of painting as a careful, rigorous thinking practice that takes part in the creation and communication of new knowledge: That painting, as the image of thought, as a philosophy of sensation, takes part in the “conversation of the world”.¹³

¹³ Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, Princeton University Press, USA, 1979, p. 394.

Chapter 1. The Darkened Room

Painting, Modernity and Philosophy

Modernity¹⁴ is a movement, within painting, from one of revealing graceful nature (the beautiful) to one of expressing elegant thought (the interesting). In modern painting, it is through the expression of elegant thought that an individual's inner being is revealed as a spiritual necessity. However, spirituality is a somewhat strange topic to discuss within a largely secular context, so why is it appearing here? It is because a spiritual inner necessity is one of the important themes of modern painting and one that lies within self-expression. Interiority is a key concept here and one that needs thinking through in order to understand how painting can be recognised as a self-expressive image of thought. What needs to be recognised is the way that expressing an interiority has changed, through modern thinking, from attaining grace to reconciling with nature.¹⁵

The idea that there is an interiority separated from an exteriority, between which reconciliation is needed, has filled the imagination of western European thinking. This idea has been subject to many interpretations and taken many forms, but, within modernity, it reaches a special as well as a spatial intensity.¹⁶ Within modernity, the reconciliation of interior and exterior can no longer occur through religious means. The necessity for revealing natural grace has moved. It is no longer possible to make representations of nature that reflect a beauty of God's grace as if, by God's grace,

¹⁴ *Modern painting*, as a "period", is assumed to be approximately from the mid-19th century to the 1960s. Modern painting is characterised by the emergent questioning of the perspectivalism of Renaissance painting, as is shown in the paintings of Jacques Louis David (1748-1825). This historical approach to understanding modernity is based on the lineages of technique and simple understanding of modernity as the unity of practices that are concerned with space. This unity is usually understood as contributing to an orthodox modernity expressed in practices such as painting. The reaction against subsequent orthodoxy is one of self-examination at the very moment of self-expression. The result is a fragmentation or displacement of subjectivity as exhibited within practices. Consequently, postmodernism begins with a challenge to the unity of space (surface) central to modern painting, and indeed an attack on the unity that reflects the central theme of cultural modernism, the universality of Being. The return of plurality is generally the end of the purity of modernism. However, postmodernity is usually assumed to include modernity. For this reason, the term "modern painting" in this opening sentence refers both to its historical period, as well as to a much more integrated modernity as philosophy of sensation. This second version of modern painting is not bound by the time limits of historical periods nor to a limited understanding of technique used as evidence for lineage. This thesis provides a line of argument.

¹⁵ It would be easy to leap to a religious meaning here, but the reader is asked to see this line of thought as solely a description of a shift in thinking and practice.

¹⁶ The present tense is used here to indicate that this is a line of thought that is present now and which is co-present with other lines of thought.

nature is revealed as passionate visual experience of the world. Instead, each interiority must take part in representation, which it must do by *expressing* itself. A painter can no longer make images by divine inspiration. God, as a natural force, does not guide the modern painter's hand; rather painters do so for themselves.

That which is spiritual is resolutely divided from nature under modernity. Likewise, interiority is completely divided from exteriority by a surface. This surface is the specular mirror of nature, the lens or the window on the world. This surface must now be polished and focused in order to reveal a true picture of the world. Polishing visual metaphors provides a secular salvation for philosophy. For painting, polishing of technique is needed, so that metaphor and technique became intertwined within practice.

God, however, still spoke to humankind, but in two incompatible ways—one for each side of the absolute surface. The first, directed to the interior, was through the mind as prayer; the second, directed to sensory experience, was through the world as natural signs. God, and indeed “the word” or *logos*, was divided between affects and signs. The division of “the word” led to what Friedrich Nietzsche called “the death of God” and a kind of guilt, or “bad conscience”, about the world.¹⁷ For painters, each inner necessity is for re-unification of “the word”. Since space is both where *and* how this happened, it is as space that this re-unification must take place.

“The word” of modernity was divided between *res cogitans* (things of thought) and *res extensa* (things of space-time with dimensional extension). Despite the weakness of this idea, as shown by contemporary philosophical critique, it became very popular, perhaps more because it was aesthetically satisfying than because it was rational or arguable.

The reconciliation between interiority and exteriority became one that is between self as inner thought (the mind) and a body in the world (the body). It was as if each person must carry a new responsibility for the death or life of God, the unity of faith and saving of a holy spirit. Thinking becomes critical at this point because it presents a critique assembled with the various techniques for forming judgments, such as analysis and synthesis. This was all to be achieved through each person's individual

¹⁷ Friedrich Nietzsche, (Kaufman, W trans.), *The Gay Science*, Vintage Books, Random House, New York, USA, 1974 (first published 1882, this ed. based on second ed. 1887), p. 181, “The Madman” and in *Twilight of the Idols*.

reconciliation. Each person not only had to save himself or herself, but also and simultaneously, had to save their God. To express one's self as a painter, for example, was to re-unify mind and body within space, and in forming that unity to find spiritual salvation within the world. The mind was to express itself within a pictorial space that was unified with its surface, or body, in order to gain salvation or a kind of secular grace. The expression of an interiority was not only necessary for an individual's redemption, but also created the means of that redemption. Each person, in effect, became his or her own saviour. To take it out of its religious context, expressivity constitutes a kind of secular salvation that is found by understanding the world, for example, through science, art or philosophy.

However, modernity seems to have led us to rather a poor understanding of the world, as is now clear. We seem to have failed to reconcile the divided word, interiority with exteriority or mind with body. Modernity, as well as the image of the world that modernity provides, is haunted by the divided word and the death of God. It is as if God's ghost haunts the physicality of the existence of modern events. This spectre drives a desire for a melancholic resignation, or to an end, or to "the end of..." which is a popular feature of modernity.

Despite the inner necessity of expression in modern painting, there is a desire for an end or death or even a "bad conscience". Modernity is haunted by the melancholy desire for nihilism, found within its methods, oppositions and structures. Within modernity's assemblies and abstractions, there is a deep need for an end that appears as a desire for a firm foothold, a baseline, a ground zero or "laws". This is the desire for ideals, which is also the desire for a static timeless eternity held as absolute truth against an apparently duplicitous and shifting physical world. The need for ideals, or answers, can never be reconciled with a constantly changing world. Modernity's picture is not one that the world can reflect; idealism is far too possessive. The dynamic changing world is impeded by the claim that ideals make for expression within the world. Architecture, art and other design practices make representations that try to limit, modify and control the natural flows of the world as a matter of their expression. Design and art express this limiting, modifying and controlling. To do so requires possession of nature, as if it were a resource to be tamed and ordered. To be tamed and ordered requires knowledge, as is provided by science. Science, rather than

belief, becomes a means of access to the expression of ideals or what is good in terms of Being.

For modernity, therefore, it is laws of science that are substituted for “the word” and which provide a reunification of humankind (interior and exterior) through the application of rationality to the dividing surface. Experience is formed as inner representations of the world made precise by grinding the mirror or lens. The ultimate end for science is to complete a unified, absolute and precise representation of nature, or nature under laws.

Modernity can be understood as a kind of idealism and is a search for laws formed within images of thought. These laws are created using representation and produce axioms, or fixed “conceptual personæ”, as Deleuze and Guattari call them,¹⁸ about which nature turns, but which are filled with nihilism that distorts all forms of expression. This distortion has persistently pulled painting, especially in the 20th century, into oppositions such as representation versus abstraction and theory versus practice. The question for modernism, it seems, is to ask how not to be lured into binaries such as these and how to more adequately reflect Being.¹⁹

To answer this question for painting is to seek to understand what painting *is*. To do this, one needs to examine what pertains to painting that is not painting. This is because the essence of painting is not *painting*, *a painting* or *painting in general*, but thinking.²⁰ Practices are activities where thought is applied to raise the action within the practice to consciousness or “reflection”. Even unreflective gestures result in reflection if they exist within practices. To raise acts to consciousness, as painters do, requires raising thought to consciousness. It is here that modes of thought form lines of thinking that collect within a single work, *a painting*. Painting engages with a

¹⁸ Deleuze, Gilles and Guattari, Félix (Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell trans.), *What Is Philosophy?* Columbia University Press, NY, USA, 1994, p. 2. See footnote in text.

¹⁹ Being with a capital “B” refers to general being while being with a lower case “b” refers to an individual being.

²⁰ Martin Heidegger (David Farrell Krell ed.), *Basic Writings*, Routledge, UK, 1993, *The Question Concerning Technology*, pp. 311-346, especially pp. 311-3. Heidegger uses this argument to examine technology. The essence of technology is found in what is not technological that pertains to technology. Heidegger’s essay relies on the single-minded use of nature as “standing reserve”. This use requires representations. What he does not point out is that these representations take on a *homeliness* in relation to the *unhomeliness* (uncanniness) of nature. Within homeliness and unhomeliness, interiority is open to subliminal Being or de-subjectivisation. This creates images of technology that lead to both alienation and reconciliation beyond Heidegger’s authentic Being. In any case, the argument here merely draws on the form taken by the contextualisation of an “enframing” such as painting.

number of modes of thought that are not painting, but which together form painting. The various modes under which paintings exist need examination in order to discern the essence of painting.

The task begins where thinking *is* modern, or where modernity is deeply involved in its own metaphors and images, and, where the shift to unity of surface and picture, as *expression*, is the consequence of an inner necessity that conceals an inner guilt. Painting takes part in this shift by becoming a location for appearances under rules striving to represent nature, through both representation of form and representation of signs. This arrangement is central to western European philosophy, so that is now where the discussion will turn.

Interiority appears in a particularly metaphysical way within modern painting. The term “modern” is used here in its philosophical sense as well as its sense as an historical approach to painting.²¹ This presentation becomes one directed towards the *reception* of effects from visual events. Under the influence of Platonic thinking, pictures and images are presented to a passive “mind”.²² The senses present to the mind as second-hand, sensory “events”, as if they were a *picturing* of the world through representations. Painting becomes a second-hand, or even third-hand, presentation of events to the mind. This distance creates a desire to ensure that the steps between the event and the mind do not degrade the image. To overcome this degradation of appearances, modern thinking leads to a desire to present “the real” that sublimates directly to the “mind”.²³ The problem here is that this sublimation is assumed, almost automatically, to be a visual one, as if the relationship between the mind and the world relied solely upon sight, and indeed forms upon a visual surface or “glassy essence”, to which Rorty refers. This is because vision, or a certain model of vision, is the metaphor by which metaphysics has constituted its models of Being.

²¹ This means that it refers to the emergence of an ontology of precise representation, as in the philosophy of René Descartes, British Pragmatism (David Hume) and Immanuel Kant. The problem with modern painting is that it continues the centrality of representation, even in abstraction, where it is a representation of an inner, spiritual reality that replaces an outer, natural one. For a brief coverage see, Sir Anthony Kenny, *A New History of Western Philosophy, Volume 1, Ancient Philosophy*, Clarendon Press, UK, 2004.

²² Plato (427-347BC), (trans H D P Lee), *The Republic*, Penguin Classics, UK, 1955, in particular, pp. 274-277, “The Divided Line”, pp. 278-286, “The Cave Simile” and pp. 370-386, “Theory of Art”.

²³ The term “sublime” is used here in the scientific way to indicate the direct movement from one state to another without passing through the “natural” intermediate steps. This can be compared with the sublimation of carbon dioxide directly from solid to gas, without the intermediate liquid form usual with other substances, such as water.

The distinction between the world and the visual picturing of the world leads to a worrying property of sense-events, that of *doubt*, primarily about the veracity of visual picturing (representation) in relation to a sensual world, but secondarily about meaning in general. Along with vision, the senses include hearing, touch, smell and taste. To exclude them from one's picture of the world is to ensure a problematic dissonance between experience and representation. Intuitively the result is doubt about both the world and representations. The question of *representation*, in a number of fields under the influence of neo-Platonism, becomes an anxious one that is concerned with how to overcome the disconnection between representations and experience.

It is through this question that Enlightenment philosophy and painting are linked.²⁴ They are also linked, in more detailed ways, by concepts of a "subject" in relation to "objects" that are founded on the value of a fixed critical distance or *perspective*. Within Enlightenment thinking, one cannot know things accurately, precisely or clearly without a subjective position or point of view. The development of this point of view, or identity, as the pre-figured locus of judgment is one of the topics of epistemology, the nature of knowledge. As such, epistemology and ontology are tied together within the question of subject-object representation in both philosophy and painting.

In painting, this can be understood as corresponding to a conceptual subjectivity that is assumed within the making of the painting. This subjectivity is formed in relation to a *representation* of nature. The point of view of a painting is the point at which the *picture* is viewed (even when making the picture) rather than its surface alone. It is the abstraction, as conceptual or inner place, and the reduction of this point

²⁴ European Enlightenment refers to the period of about the 17th and 18th centuries in which rapid developments were made in many fields of knowledge, such as science and philosophy. Some of the philosophers associated with this period are René Descartes (1596-1650), Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), David Hume (1711-1776), John Locke (1632-1704), Baruch Spinoza (1632-1729) and GW Leibniz (1646-1716). Scientists include, of course, Isaac Newton (1642-1727), Robert Boyle (1627-1691) and Robert Hooke (1635-1703). The expansion of knowledge, in this period, also included art theory that seemed to have developed as a response to rapid philosophical developments and built upon the work of Renaissance artists of about a hundred years earlier. The list is generally outlined in Giorgio Vasari's (1511-1574) *Lives of the Artists, Sculptors and Architects*, although Vasari's text has been denigrated by many scholars for its, often, fantastic descriptions. Enlightenment art theory includes figures such as William Wotton (1666-1727), Nicolas Poussin (1594-1665), Charles Le Brun (1619-1690), Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) and Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten (1714-1762). The main theme was to bring "light" into darkness in the form of rationalism by reference to "the ancients", or mostly Plato's idealism and naturalism.

of view to a single static point, which characterises painting under the influence of the Classical revival or Renaissance. As a system, it is called “perspective”.

Perspectivalism is applied to the making of paintings, just as it is to philosophy, in the belief that it will more directly reveal graceful nature, or the beautiful. It is also perspective that enables a number of unifications, such as that of architectural space with pictorial space. The prime example of this is Filippo Brunelleschi’s *Tavoletto*, which is a mirror arrangement for checking a representation made using perspective drawing against the represented actual building.

Placing this perspectival point of view within a mental interiority or conceptual space is of major importance here. This can be contrasted with the actual construction of perspective drawing, where a vanishing point, horizon, convergence, atmosphere and a point of view are elements in a geometric method that involves several flat projections at the same time.²⁵ These are technical considerations. The technical point of view, however, only works when it is effectively taken as being the point of view of a “mind”, which is to say a “subjective” point of view.

The perspectival *picture* does not necessarily coincide with the surface of the canvas but must exist, instead, within a conceptual space: an inner “pictorial space” that is presented as beyond the painting’s surface. Consequently, the surface must become invisible in order to reveal the picture. The surface must be veiled or “darkened”. The surface can be thought of as an architectural event because it is part of the collection of surfaces that make up a room, but a surface with the special characteristic that it is an ambiguous surface. By darkening the surface or making it transparent, the (often-portable) canvas becomes a “hole” into which vision passes. The passing of vision is from the room, in which the canvas exists, into the picture. In representational painting, this replaces a precise physical location of a point of view in space and in relation to a surface, with an inner conceptual one in relation to a pictorial space. Representational painting thereby speaks directly to a world of

²⁵ Perspective has several approaches. These can be divided between those that represent things such as nature and buildings for the purposes of painting (called “painter’s perspective”) and those that represent buildings for the purposes of modelling either actual constructed buildings or proposed new buildings (called “constructed perspective”). The first type of perspective uses proportion and the geometric laws of convergence and so on to assemble a picture. The second type of perspective is usually associated with architecture. It is this second type that involves a method for constructing drawings using a plan and elevations that fully describe the building as an object. For a brief description of this type of perspective, see, Robert W Gill, *Basic Perspective*, Thames and Hudson, 1968.

thought. The viewer's interiority, or mind, is directly located within the *picture*, as if the picture were actually seen through a window. In order to make this location precise, the picture itself must have a precise spatial measure, or *perspective projection*, which corresponds to "real" space. In other words, the picture must *precisely represent measured space* for pictorial space to be equivalent to natural space. This approach to representation must elude actual physical vision, as well as the other senses. The mind, under this approach, must be seen as a resolution of the physicality of vision, on its own, into a single lens-like act formed, as an image of thought, inside a subjective mind.

In philosophy, precise subjective representation is the creation of a reflection of nature at a perspectival or critical distance, from a point of view, in specular metaphors (speculation), established to ensure objectivity or disinterested neutrality, free of the fleshy interest of the body.²⁶ In other words, the thing that does the thinking or claims to do so, the "mind", is taken to be a "glassy essence", as philosopher Richard Rorty calls it. A glassy essence precisely maps reality onto its surface under the conditions of correct reflective perspective in order to know what is true (real) against what is false (illusory).²⁷ Since the glassy essence is formed in the act of representing, an act that involves anxiety due to its exclusion of physicality, the resultant subjectivity is imbued with anxiety. Precision is one of many ways that this anxiety is addressed. In philosophy, it is within precise geometric metaphors, such as formal logic, but in painting, it is in the making of precise formal representations.

In representational painting, which is to say painting that corresponds to the precise critical subjectivity of Enlightenment philosophy, the "mirror of nature" takes the form of attempts (technical or metaphorical) to organise the elements of spatial experience so that there can be a clear and distinct correspondence between painting and nature. In other words, it must *look* real but simultaneously remain a work of art.

²⁶ The general discussion here is taken from Richard Rorty. The term "philosophy" is used in the same way that he uses it, which is strictly within the western European tradition and usually (and perhaps loosely) called "analytic" and "continental". His work is used because it is based on the visual metaphorical way of thinking of European philosophical traditions. Rorty has a long-term goal of providing a way for reconciling analytic and continental philosophy. This means that when he writes about philosophy, he is referring to both. Where he uses the term "continental philosophy", he is referring to mostly French and German traditions of *critical* philosophy and mostly to the traditions gleaned from Ancient philosophy therein. When he refers to analytic philosophy, Rorty means the traditions of logic, both formal and informal, in the work of Gottlob Frege and the English Empiricists. Rorty argues that both traditions are filled with disguised metaphors such as reflection ("glassy essence").

²⁷ Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, Princeton University Press, 1979, p. 7.

Sometimes this is formulated as a correspondence between three dimensions and two dimensions within the craft of representational painting. This approach can be found in Leonardo daVinci's notebooks, Albrecht Dürer's, *Dresden Sketchbooks* and in the perspectival techniques of Filippo Brunelleschi's "Tavoletto".²⁸ In later times, the correspondence is directed less towards the making of paintings and more towards signification within representation and then to the surface itself. This is measured through the determination with which a painter makes a work. For example, when the authority of the painter's intention is taken as paramount, the painting is said to express the painter's intention. In this case, applied to all kinds of painting, "interpretation" of the work reveals the intention of the painter, as a truth.

These theoretical ways of painting and thinking about painting, retain a "scientific" style, as urged by Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831) in his *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*. Hegel advocates a scientific understanding of art, as well as one that is philosophical. He ends his fifth chapter with:

Hence this point of view, as it is the reawakening of philosophy in general, so also is the reawakening of the science of art; and, indeed, it is this reawakening to which alone æsthetics as a science owes its true origin, and art its higher estimation.²⁹

Hegel reaches this conclusion through the reduction of painting to the scientific pursuit of beauty,³⁰ which he asserts is the way that the inner spiritual necessity of embodied Being expresses itself. This compares closely to other philosophical ways of thinking, where it is the "mirror of nature", as described by Richard Rorty, that is used to create *representations* under the conditions within which Being can be described as "natural philosophy" or "nature under laws".³¹ In other words, under this approach, both painting and philosophy are pursuing a secular kind of grace, which is founded on or equated with beauty and which expresses each individual's duty to

²⁸ Leonardo daVinci (Kemp, Martin, ed.), *On Painting*, Yale University Press, USA, 1989 and Edward MacCurdy (ed.), *The Notebooks of Leonardo Da Vinci*, Kopeck and Kopeck Press, USA, (Date not given, approx 2004), Walter L Strauss, (ed.), *The Human Figure by Albrecht Dürer, The Complete Dresden Sketchbook*, Dover Publications, NY, USA, 1972.

²⁹ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*, Penguin, London, 1993, p. 61.

³⁰ This appears to be an urging to return to the representation of graceful nature, but Hegel is including the inner "mind" as part of that nature. In this sense, he is urging his approach to painting as reconciliation with the world, typical of German Romantic philosophy.

³¹ Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, Princeton University Press, USA, 1979, is a summary of how philosophy has used this figure. His work covers a wide range of philosophers from this historical period, as well as the formation of divisions such as that between analytic philosophy and German idealism. For this reason, I have chosen to concentrate on this source.

pursue a spiritual purpose. In later chapters of *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*, the spiritual and cultural purpose of a scientific approach to art is revealed, much like the “ancient belief” that relieves René Descartes of the doubt in the absence of a necessity for God in *Meditations*.³² Hegel writes,

Still, as the beautiful unfolds itself in this region [of “free, and divine plasticity”] in the character of objective reality, and in so doing distinguishes within itself its individual aspects and elements, permitting them independent particularity, it follows that this centre erects its extremes, realised in their peculiar actuality, into its own antithesis. Thus one of these extremes comes to consist in an objectivity as yet devoid of mind, in the merely natural vesture of God. At this point the external takes plastic shape as something that has its spiritual aim and content, not in itself, but in another.³³

Hegel’s theory does not necessarily urge figurative representation, yet—because modern metaphysics is unconsciously assumed within many approaches to painting—this is precisely what has happened. The representation of inner spirit becomes the presentation of the signs and symbols of that inner spirit, reflected in the surface of the canvas. Paintings become a representation of the mirror of nature, a system of signs to be created and read scientifically. The “mirror of nature” is a “captivating image”³⁴ that sets out the conditions for the being of the disinterested subject that has “self” as a visual image of its own being. In terms of painting, the need for precision and specular reflection is the need to form subjectivity, as reflected in the mirror of nature. This leads to systematic rendering, linear perspective (and its “rules”) and a scientific approach to content or “*istoria*”.³⁵ What is painted becomes a system of signs under a scientific approach, made within systematic linear methods and highly skilled representational rendering. Perspective is established through precision in practice. In other words, the mirror of nature leads to a conversion of the visual field into a rational, perspectival field, plane or space.

For painting to correspond to philosophy, “the mirror of nature” or the “captivating image” can be found in the difference between the surface of the canvas and pictorial

³² René Descartes (Desmond M. Clarke trans.), *Meditations and Other Metaphysical Writings*, Penguin, UK and USA, 1998, p. 20.

³³ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*, Penguin, London, 1993, p. 89.

³⁴ Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, Princeton University Press, USA, 1979, p. 10, Introduction by the author.

³⁵ The term “*istoria*” is used in Leon Battista Alberti’s 15th century text, *On Painting*, (translated by John R. Spencer), New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970. It corresponds closely but not completely with what we would now call “content”.

depth. Just as they do in philosophical representation, depth and surface become a metaphorical assembly in need of an account.³⁶ Within this assembly, discrepancy between depth and surface leaves a mysterious space in need of an account or theory. Perspective is one theory that explains and prefigures the seeing of a painting as if it were reflected in a mirror or seen through a window. The technical aspects of perspective took some time to develop but, once created, a limit to representation appeared. Perspective became the form and limit of spatial meaning laid over the visual field.

In the 19th century, painters found this limit to meaning and, at that limit, reached a crisis. For the 19th century, this was the crisis of what to paint. Techniques of representation had reached a tense and complex peak, filled with variations on assemblies of the symbols and signs of religious and mythological themes, which led to a new search for reality. The result was a blunt revealing of “the real” (the Realist movement) that is comparable to Dickens in literature and is typified by the work of Gustav Courbet (1819-1877). Instead of the symbolic assemblies of fantastic images of bucolic scenes filled with nymphs and dryads, Gustav Courbet painted pictures of real people, by which he meant those that lived in cities, generally in poverty, and those that he knew. As with the *flâneur* from Charles Baudelaire’s *The Painter of Modern Life*, Courbet turned the perspectival field away from the artificial and towards what he saw as “reality”. Reality could now be received through painting as it could be through literature. The visual field, as a form of reality, thereby became a perspectival one at the same time that it began to express subjectivity. This left painting in a fragmented state where surface and depth were unreconciled. Painting could no longer rely on the clear separation of pictorial space and the invisible surface, thereby leading to discrepancies and differences about the role of surface and depth. The surface was taking on a symbolic role while depth was merging with surface effects.

Theories about painting are often about how these differences or discrepancies appear, especially as surface and depth in modern theories. Modern theories of painting describe surface and depth as if they were metaphysical effects. Along with

³⁶ The separation of truth from falsehood is often asserted to be a matter of seeing past a surface and into depth in philosophy. It is notable, however, that Friedrich Nietzsche asserts in his preface to *The Gay Science* that the Greek philosophers were “gloriously superficial”. See Friedrich Nietzsche, (Kaufman, W trans.), *The Gay Science*, Vintage Books, Random House, New York, USA, 1974, p. 38.

the difference or discrepancy, the value of painting comes about between the words used to describe the work and the work itself, just as the beauty of a painting seems to reside in the difference between pictorial depth and crafted qualities of the surface. There is a tension between the fixing of subjectivity for the purposes of perspective and the looseness of the spatial difference between surface and depth. This leaves painting in a state of ambiguity. There is always more to be found in painting besides representational precision and this makes the necessity of precision in representation both the result and the producer of anxiety. Each representational image becomes an anxious place, where the connection between illusion (anxiety about illusion inherent in representation) and resemblance (the production of likenesses) is never far from questions of morality.³⁷

The Mirror of Nature, The Glassy essence and Anti-ocularcentrism

In order for the *visual field* to become a *perspectival field*, it is necessary for representation, in both painting and philosophy, to rely on a particularly lens-like, reflective and monocular model of vision. The lens model consists of two steps. The first is made using the physics of the lens as if it were a model of physical vision. The second is to use this merging of the lens and physical vision as a metaphor for Being, in which interiority is divided from exteriority by a visual surface. The first step, which is to equate the physics of the lens with vision, assumes that vision is passive reception of light, much like a camera uses a lens to receive an impression from light. The second step uses passivity as the basis for interiority. From these two steps, a number of concepts emerge which have come to be assumed in western thinking and in many disciplines. One of the key concepts is the “disinterested” point of view or subjective mind.³⁸

The lens model of vision is one of the basic assumptions that underpins the beginning of the scientific study of perception, as outlined by Maurice Hershenson:

The study of visual space perception begins with the assumptions that the physical world exists and that its existence is independent of the observer. ...

³⁷ Plato, (H D P Lee trans.), *The Republic*, Penguin Classics, UK, 1955, pp. 274-7, pp. 278-86, pp. 370-83.

³⁸ The “disinterested point of view” is that which the subjective mind takes up in order to clarify, or “speculate”, to form subjectivity. Perspectivalism is when the image of thought becomes a representation.

The physical world exists outside the observer. The perceptual [within the] visual world is experienced by the observer. It is produced by activity in the eye-brain system when patterned light stimulates the eye of an observer.³⁹

Hershenson begins his work with this assumption, but the problems of active, constructive, physical seeing soon emerge. Donald Hoffman, another scientist, writes about the results of the scientific investigation of active seeing:

Perhaps the most surprising insight that has emerged from vision research is this: Vision is not merely a matter of passive perception[;] it is an intelligent process of active construction. What you see is invariably what your visual intelligence constructs.⁴⁰

Clearly, to base a theory of perception upon a lens model of vision is, while attractive in its geometric simplicity, inadequate from a contemporary scientific point of view. However, it is the underlying assumption of many ideas about painting. For example, when a “subject” (viewer) sees an “object” (painting), the passive subject-viewer passively, visually experiences what is presented in the painting. The object acquires authenticity by being attached to the intentions of its author, another “subject”, but one that creates the work and is therefore active.

The lens model of vision is used as both a metaphor in philosophy and as a pictorial device in painting, so it provides a connection between the two disciplines. Representation becomes the product of both philosophy and painting within this model. How to represent precisely becomes the task of both the metaphor of vision in philosophy and its use in the practice of painting. The lens-like, specular model provides a particularly distinct and precise subjective orientation or *perspective* from which representation can be relied upon to present the truth about the world.⁴¹ However, the image of the lens is merged with an image of a mirror. This is because the basis of the lens model is optical science. The dividing surface, or “glassy essence”, is so absolutely thin that it is both a lens *and* a mirror. This is what makes it possible to understand the lens model within the figure of a mirror. Richard Rorty’s

³⁹ Maurice Hershenson, *Visual Space Perception: A Primer*, MIT Press, USA, 1999, p. 1.

⁴⁰ Donald D Hoffman, *Visual Intelligence: How We Create What We See*, Norton, New York, London, UK, 1998, p. xii.

⁴¹ The “lens” is a model of the eye and the “mirror” is the model of how things are seen. The “lens” sees in the “mirror”. The “glassy essence” is a model of subjectivity in which a “lens” sees itself in a “mirror”. The “glassy essence” is a pure surface on which vision is all there is in the lens–mirror assembly. It is somewhat like Deleuze’s plane of presentation except that the plane of presentation involves presentation itself, rather than the construction of fixed representations of presentations.

figurative mirror can equally be understood as a figurative lens, in the following passage:

The picture which holds traditional philosophy captive is that of a mind as a great mirror, containing various representations—some accurate, some not—and capable of being studied by pure, non-empirical methods. Without the notion of the mind as mirror, the notion of knowledge as accuracy of representation would not have suggested itself. Without this latter notion, the strategy common to Descartes and Kant—getting more accurate representations by inspecting, repairing, and polishing the mirror, so to speak—would not have made sense.⁴²

While Richard Rorty's *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* outlines the criticism of ocularcentrism, it deals mostly with vision and its metaphors. Rorty steers well away from research on actual physical vision, preferring to focus on philosophical work. Little of this work examines the lens *as* the model of vision and indeed, even in the 20th century, as summarised by Martin Jay in *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth Century French Thought*,⁴³ much of the critique fails to distinguish between the metaphorical use of the lens-like model and actual vision. The main source of a critique of the lens model comes in an oblique way from phenomenologists such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty. This leads to confusion where vision itself is taken to actually *be* the lens-like model which is then included in the critical attack on reflection, speculation and other metaphors for thinking.

Rorty, in general, attempts to explain the tensions in visual metaphors that are used by philosophy. He does not, however, discuss the appropriateness, or otherwise, of the lens-like visual metaphor about physical vision. He does not draw a distinction between various scientific theories of actual physiological vision and the use of lenses, mirrors or other vision-like models as metaphors for knowing and being. Science has now largely abandoned the lens as a model for physiological vision, mostly referring only to the lens in the eye as an element of a much more complex physical assembly.⁴⁴

⁴² Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, Princeton University Press, USA, 1979, p. 12.

⁴³ Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth Century French Thought*, University of California Press, USA, 1994.

⁴⁴ For a scientific point of view, see Donald D Hoffman, *Visual Intelligence: How We Create What We See*, Norton, New York, London, UK, 1998 and the much more positivist Maurice Hershenson, *Visual Space Perception: A Primer*, MIT Press, USA, 1999, for general coverage of scientific work on vision.

On the other hand, Martin Jay in *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth Century French Thought* offers a broader analysis, including non-philosophical contributions to the discourse on vision.⁴⁵ Jay's analysis makes it possible to read philosophical works by authors, such as Jacques Derrida, within an artistic context as well as within philosophy.⁴⁶ Jay's argument can be characterised as a survey of "anti-ocularcentrism", which is a term that Jay sets in a broad cultural context.⁴⁷ By showing the broader context for philosophy, Jay opens the questions that philosophy asks about vision to an interdisciplinary discussion involving fields such as European philosophy, history and painting. For instance, Derridean "différance" can be understood as reminding one that text, like painting, must be made visible and that this making visible relies on the material in which it is practised.⁴⁸ Jay also reminds us of Derrida's position on representation, usually referred to as a philosophical orientation, but in this case, in relation to painting:

Mimicry, visual or linguistic, is never perfect because there is no self-contained, entirely unified original referent prior to the speculative process which could be seamlessly reproduced. Mimesis should not become what Derrida calls "mimetologism," a visual version of logocentrism ...⁴⁹

Mimetologism can be briefly summarised as the rational account of spatial precision within resemblance in any field that uses representations. When vision is the primary sense within which resemblance is determined, mimetologism becomes a form that argues for representation using visual means. When the lens-like model of vision is assumed to be a model for vision, resemblance is over-laid with representation with the result that perspectivalism enters the visual field. In effect, the visual field becomes the perspectival field.

⁴⁵ Martin Jay (1944-), *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth Century French Thought*, University of California Press, USA, 1994.

⁴⁶ Philosopher Jacques Derrida (1930-2004). This is quite different to reading philosophical works that concern painting directly, such as Derrida's *The Truth in Painting*. These second type of works are addressed to painting under the conditions of philosophy as conceived by the author and include a tendency to predetermine such terms as *aesthetics*. In a Deleuzian sense, it is far more "productive" to use works that are not directly concerned with painting and deal with issues such as Being, that are not preconceived as painting.

⁴⁷ Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth Century French Thought*, University of California Press, USA, 1994, Ch. 9 "Phallogocularcentrism": Derrida and Irigaray'.

⁴⁸ Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth Century French Thought*, University of California Press, USA, 1994, p. 504.

⁴⁹ Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth Century French Thought*, University of California Press, USA, 1994, p. 505.

Linear perspective is a form of practice that embodies this dominance of the perspectival field. Raising this as a question is central to the texts to which Jay refers. For example, Jay explains this as connected, within Derrida's work, to the philosophical orientation of logocentrism. Jay explains that this is founded in and on Enlightenment subjectivity. As such, the critique of vision often appears within critiques of Enlightenment philosophy.

By investigating Derrida's work in this way, Jay has enabled painting to become a focus for the question of *mimetologism* as if it were the problem of how resemblance becomes representation. *Resemblance* is obscured or covered over with representation by modern metaphysics because modern metaphysics demands critical precision through the precise location of a point of view. For painting, this means that resemblance is always masked by representation when it is argued to have a critical precision, even in non-representational painting.

For critical precision, the point of view must be disembodied. To be disembodied, the point of view must not be capable of physical movement. It must therefore be without space. To move one's point of view is to lose precision.⁵⁰ Physicality, then, is a threat to a precise point of view. Subjective movement of the point of view occurs when the actual physical eyes move—for example, when eyes change their position in order to focus on a particular part of a painting that is in a different relation to the picture's space than the point it left. Movement of this kind reintroduces physicality into seeing pictorial space of paintings, which is especially important in relation to painting that has been thought of as a timeless slice of actual events.

Mobile or *immanent* subjectivity undoes representation by reminding one that one's seeing is an act by a body: the receiving and resistance to light of a mobile organ, which, bruise-like, bears the trace of that receiving at the same time as it feels the movement of the muscles and other tissues that are moved in order to make reception. To a perspectival point of view, the picture's space is grasped at first glance and, in that first glance, from one infinitely small or dimensionless point of view. This point of view breaks free of the bodily function of seeing in an instant by being free of dimensional volume, thereby releasing the picture into the interiority of a mind. In order to retain a correspondence with nature, pictorial space must have

⁵⁰ This is similar to the problem of formal logic that asserts a precise and timeless symbolic form as a truth-telling model of Being, as discussed later in this chapter.

continuity and a consistency that corresponds, *at the instant of breaking free*, with natural space. A perspectival point of view carries with it the argument for this correspondence by presenting itself as a complete and unified presentation of space that is there to be seen in one complete and unified instant. However, movement of the eyes never takes place within an actual instant but takes time and is subject to sensations of the body. Any particular part of a painting is always to some extent separated from its other parts by actual physical vision. One's focus moves about the surface according to intensities and lines of sight traced on the canvas. A *subjective* point of view sees a perspectival picture as equivalent to that which is *outside* the picture or in "nature". This equivalence is seemingly reached by the correspondence between subjective perspectivalism and pictorial perspectivalism. A subjective position is fixed in relation to the particular instance of perspective. This is achieved in precise representation, within pictorial space, where elements outside the painting correspond with those inside. This occurs according to the conditions under which Being is known in metaphysics, such as under form, colour, tone, shape and scale. These elements are understood under the terms of point, line and plane, and are subject to "laws" such as convergence, diminution and atmosphere. It is these laws that address a disembodied mind, thereby alienating mobile subjectivity. No longer is there a physical procession along or around a painting; instead the viewing mind is assumed to be precisely still at a single point. Since the point of view is of the mind, the mind is motionless, even when the body, including each eye, is not. This means that the mind must also be a point outside space, but also one that uses the division between outside and inside to act within a spatial world. The eye that is addressed by painting, in this sense, is now the static inner eye of the mind rather than the mobile physical eye of the body. Mobile subjectivity challenges the assumed address of painting to this static inner eye by revealing its actuality as an embodied eye. The physical pleasure of seeing, the processional movement of the eye around the surface and the physical feeling of seeing all contribute to this mobile subjectivity.

Because the idea of a static mind is also an idea of a neutral, detached and "disinterested" mind, representation in painting also has a confirming role in theories of Being. Jay shows that this confirming role is underpinned with anti-ocularcentrism. Jay argues that, under the influence of modern metaphysics, the various disciplines and fields he describes are, to some extent, imbued with anti-

ocularcentrism. Painting, through its inclusion in Jay's description, is included in this general cultural milieu of modern metaphysics.

Jay's argument leads to the conclusion that anti-ocularcentrism is an essential part of using vision as a metaphor for thinking. In other words, since modern metaphysics has used vision largely, as its central metaphor, vision will also be a central theme in its critique.

The central theme in modern metaphysics, under a Neoplatonic influence, is the problem of representation. The pursuit of precision takes various forms that rely on vision (geometric ratios and so on) as a metaphor. This is so, even when visual metaphors are submerged in the rational systems of such fields as formal logic. Vision is used as an argumentative metaphor that provides precision. Vision alone is assumed to provide precise objective representation. However, representation is also a reduced double of "reality" and one that, no matter how precise, evokes absences and doubt. Indeed, vision, when used, as the sole metaphor for reality, seems to isolate experience from reality at the very same time that it brings experience closer to a precise representation. Naturally, vision becomes the focus of attention when trying to find out how to overcome this problem. In the process, however, like a kind of limit that one finds in exponential curves in geometry, one also finds a limit in the critique of vision. This limit becomes an end when there is nothing left to say. A silence is reached, at which point no more can be added; finality is reached, which, if one demands an outcome, becomes a crisis. The use of vision as a metaphor starts to fail or collapse, and the whole framework has to be changed. The mistake here is to think of this as a revolution. Later, in Chapter 4, this is expanded upon.

Within painting, like many other fields, anti-ocularcentrism might eventually lead to an "end" or "crisis" of this kind. Within this crisis, painting's place in art would be questioned. This questioning would be based on the measure of painting's productivity of representations. Poor productions are representations that do not seem to correspond with nature. Painting that attempts to correspond with inner nature is an attempt to forestall this tendency. Painting does so by claiming a precise representation of that which cannot be judged, or by the assertion that inner subjectivity must be received, like a kind of faith. After such a crisis, painting would be seen as a weakened form of productivity, and would have to relinquish its

automatic authority as an art object. Painting must then always present an argument for its status as art.

Yet painting continues, so either the crisis that Jay describes is not universal or it has been eluded somehow. The work of painting proceeds, but under the condition that it must now argue for its presence, as art.

The most strident anti-ocularcentrism, according to Jay, comes from its main source, which is French philosophy, especially, but not limited to, French Enlightenment philosophy. Jay's is a surprisingly contentious claim that he then argues in broad and multidisciplinary ways. A certain kind of visual analogy is inherently a part of modern metaphysical thinking in which pictures of the world are made within an inner space of thought and set before an inner eye, or a mind. This, according to a tradition often attributed to René Descartes, is the mind that uses visual objects, things conceived visually in thought, to understand the world. As Jay points out, "[Descartes] called his own philosophical quest a journey in which he tried 'to be a spectator rather than an actor'.⁵¹

This mind also knows itself through self-examination, which is to say by making a visual object of thought, as if in a mirror. To do this the mind requires a reflective process and one that fits the lens-like model of vision. Reflection must become specular in order to provide the precise image of one's self that corresponds to the precise image one has of the world and which is represented as the metaphysical model of subject-object. What has to be excluded is diffuse reflection. This exclusion is due to diffuse reflection's connection to movement and to the dislocation of the subjective point of view. The point of view is diffused and therefore precision for precise location of the point of view is weakened.

A reflected visual object of thought comes not from sense experience, but from an interiority or a space of thinking, or, in other words, a given mind-as-space within which thought events occur. As such, space might be said to be *a priori* knowledge and so is transcendental, indeed an element of *transcendental subjectivity*.⁵² This visually modelled, spatial pre-figuring of a self is "outside" the space of the world,

⁵¹ Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth Century French Thought*, University of California Press, USA, 1994, p. 81.

⁵² See, McNeill W. and Feldman K. S. (eds.), *Continental Philosophy*, Blackwell, UK, 1998, p7-23, the section from Kant, Immanuel, 1781, *Critique of Pure Reason*.

something like a soul-space, which causes persistent uneasiness in philosophical thinking from the time that it was described by René Descartes in the 18th century and before.

Yet this space must have a form. Events occur in this space, not according to natural space, but in the form of precession and succession. The form of the Enlightenment self, as Immanuel Kant writes in *Critique of Pure Reason*, is *time* and it is a special kind of dimensional and linear time to which events conform.⁵³ Events occur over a certain amount of linear time, occupying it dimensionally in the same way that events occupy natural space as extended things. For Kant, time becomes a space for a visual subject—an intuitive *a priori* dimension into which objective events are immersed before each subject. This dimension is the form of the mind for Kant while the form of things is space. Thus, time and space both become voids, or abstract “dimensions”, to be filled, rather than qualities of events.

Jay shows how many critiques of Kant and other Enlightenment philosophy argue that concepts, such as Kant’s, are founded on ocularcentrism. Jay, in describing the criticism, shows that this visually modelled way of thinking or “ocularcentrism”, has been set out in philosophical critique in such an oppositional way it that leads to limitations and conflicts. Jay then shows that instead of being thought of as an opposition, ocularcentrism is actually a complex interweaving of conceptual arguments about space, time and representation. Enlightenment and modern philosophy creates a suspicion about the effectiveness of visual models of subjectivity due to its highly developed visual metaphors. More significantly, vision emerges as part of a traditional way of thinking within a broader discussion about Being. Jay explains that there are other ways of thinking with vision besides the ocularcentric way (for example, Baroque spatial thinking or *haptic* space in which what is visual is also tactile and, through this double being, negotiates the world as “real”). Jay’s work touches on more detailed implications, such as the significance of vision within Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s new visual ontology, which is found within the branch of philosophy called phenomenology.⁵⁴ An example that Jay uses is the implication, for

⁵³ Immanuel Kant, (Guyer, P and Wood, A trans.), *Critique of Pure Reason*, Cambridge University Press, UK, 2000 (first published 1998), p. 178-80.

⁵⁴ Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961), phenomenologist philosopher. See especially, Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth Century French Thought*, University of California Press, USA, 1994, pp. 300-320.

Merleau-Ponty, of the body when thinking reflectively. Jay reminds the reader that Merleau-Ponty referred to Dutch descriptive painting as an alternative to Brunelleschian perspective, because Dutch painting is based on a painter's vision that is likened to a mirror point of view rather than the lens-model that Brunelleschi used. The mirror shows that one is a seeing body, a being that is embodied and so in the world, the world of vision rather than the lens-model that assembles objects before subjects.⁵⁵ In Jay, subjectivity is an ambiguous and complex anti-ocularcentrism,

The antiocularcentric discourse that I hope to examine is precisely that: an often unsystematic, sometimes internally contradictory texture of statements, associations, and metaphors that never fully cohere in a rigorous way. No single figure expresses all of its dimensions and none would be likely to accept them all, even if they were explicitly posed as positive arguments. Nor has there been anything like a conscious conspiracy determining its dissemination. However, as a powerful if at times subliminal context, the discourse we will explore has helped shape the attitudes of a wide variety of French intellectuals who share little else in terms of their disciplines, politics, or theoretical self-consciousness. At times, it provides them with a vocabulary to discuss other issues, such as subjectivity, the Enlightenment, and humanism.⁵⁶

An implied theme in the later sections of Jay's work is that the very existence of the visual subject is challenged, which may indeed lead, Jay suggests, to the collapse of subjectivity altogether. Vision, as the "master sense of the modern era" is also the sense upon which models of subjectivity are based.⁵⁷ Any critique of that sense is likely to lead to a sense of doubt about the whole notion of subjectivity. Jay notes, for example, that the voracity of the surrealist version of anti-ocularcentrism is equally an attack on Enlightenment subjectivity. The following quote from Jay summarises how he sees the attitude of Surrealists to the main features of ocularcentrism:

In the case of Surrealism, it is readily apparent that speculative reason, bathing in the light of clear and distinct ideas mirrored in the mind's eye, and mimetic observation,

⁵⁵ Jay does not refer to the importance of this as a metaphor nor does he relate it to actual physical vision, as has been noted previously.

⁵⁶ Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth Century French Thought*, University of California Press, USA, 1994, p. 16.

⁵⁷ Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth Century French Thought*, University of California Press, USA, 1994, p. 543.

trusting in the reflected light of objects apparent to the two physiological eyes, were both explicitly scorned.⁵⁸

Jay summarises the attacks on vision that emerge from the distrust of ocularcentrism with the following:

The invisible, hermeneutic harmony of Pan (the son of Hermes) that Serres [Philosopher Michel Serres (1930-)] claims now reigns in “the age of the message” is still a long way off. And happily so, I would add, for vision and visuality in all their rich and contradictory variety can still provide us mortals with insights and perspectives, speculations and observations, enlightenments and illuminations, that even a god may envy.⁵⁹

Both Jay and Rorty, however, do not clearly distinguish between physical or physiological vision and lens-like models of vision. Nor does either author distinguish between visual space and perspectival space. Vision remains, for both Jay and Rorty, an activity of the mind fixed in relation to its objects. The lens model and physical vision are not compared and the effects of this elision are not specifically discussed. Jay and Rorty are unable to discuss painting in terms of the difference between perspectival and visual space, or in terms of the overlay of perspectival space on visual space that results from the use of a lens-like model of vision within “the mirror of nature”. The result is that the problems of painting, as thoughtful technique, are unclear and remain within a tension between representation and abstraction. Either the visual subject, founded on inner representations, remains a lens-based metaphor or it is sublimated by its connection with other aspects of physicality, as in the Baroque sublime. Likewise, painting remains either a representational approach to visual events (representation) or a sublimated version of objects themselves (abstraction).

Neither Rorty nor Jay shows how the question of ocularcentrism might unfold, especially in painting. Theirs is a narrative approach that relates what has been done in the various fields they address, rather than an examination of the physical sources of visual metaphors. As already noted, the question of the senses is glossed over in both works in that it is only touched very lightly by Jay’s reference to Merleau-Ponty. Painting needs a more involved examination of these areas to escape the opposition

⁵⁸ Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth Century French Thought*, University of California Press, USA, 1994, p. 236.

⁵⁹ Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth Century French Thought*, University of California Press, USA, 1994, p. 594.

between abstraction and representation, and the fact that this position is bound to Enlightenment metaphysics. If subjectivity is challenged at the same time that the existence of painting has to be argued for due to its “death”, then those features of painting that lead to what amounts to a metaphysical attack and which lead to terms like “illusion” need to be reviewed and reorganised. Painting needs to be seen in terms of its physical sources within *surface and depth, space and becoming*, to answer these metaphysical questions. Indeed, painting necessarily becomes philosophy of sensation.

The Importance of Deleuze and Guattari for Painting

Deleuze and Guattari are philosophers of immanence.⁶⁰ Immanence is concerned with what is at hand, what can be grasped (actually sensed or felt) and with what changes, and with “becomings”⁶¹ rather than objects. Deleuze and Guattari describe a way of being and knowing that is freed from transcendentalism and representation. They are concerned with the dynamics of being, or of existence as change. As such, theirs is a shift from Being to becoming as an image of thought. They remind us persistently of the threat that representation, transcendentalism, idealism and anything that creates “objects” pose for becoming. Through careful and extensive examination of concepts, they show us that all conceptual thinking needs to be re-thought in terms of becoming.

Deleuze, writing alone as well as with Guattari, provides an effective conceptual approach to the metaphysics of painting. Writing together, they refer to art, especially painting, as *language of sensation*.⁶² With the language of sensation, painting as

⁶⁰ The Deleuzo-Guattarian method is constructive. They assemble abstractions as “reality”. Abstractions for Deleuze and Guattari are becomings. This approach can be compared to Kant’s schema, on which Deleuze lectured between 1978 and 1984 at Vincennes. Schemata are productive modes of space and time applied to synthesised concepts. For instance, measurement is a schema for difference in ratio. This makes Deleuze and Guattari sometimes seem as if they are moving into pure abstract constructions, much like a kind of free mathematics. They claim, however, that theirs is a philosophy of immanence or becoming. Indeed John Rajchman, in his introduction to Gilles Deleuze, *Pure Immanence: Essays on a Life*, Zone Books, USA, 2002, reminds readers that Deleuze is above all, a logician. See Paul Patton (ed.), *Deleuze: A Critical Reader*, Blackwell, Oxford (DCR), UK, 1996, pp. 1-17. See also Deleuze, Gilles with Parnet, Claire (Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Haberjam trans.), *Dialogues II*, Continuum, Athlone Press, UK, 1977, pp. 124-134, the first section of Chapter 4, *Many Politics*.

⁶¹ For a short description of Deleuze and Guattari’s “becomings”, see, Gilles Deleuze, (Joughin, M trans.), *Negotiations, 1972-1990*, Columbia University Press, USA, 1995 (in French, 1990), pp. 171-176.

⁶² Gilles Deleuze, and Félix Guattari (Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell trans.), *What Is Philosophy?* Columbia University Press, NY, USA, 1994, p. 176.

philosophy of sensation can be discussed. The language that they use, and which is used to describe their work, concerns dynamic conditions rather than the static geometric states that are the focus of many Enlightenment philosophers, especially logicians, even though they draw on many philosophers interested in immanence.

Their later writing is highly evocative and filled with striking imagery (for instance, “animal becomings”), such as in *A Thousand Plateaus*, in which they believed they had broken free of the academicism of institutional philosophical writing.⁶³ This, they believed, was the revival of a productive approach to philosophy rather than the fundamentally historicist approach that was associated with philosophers such as Immanuel Kant and GWF Hegel. This productivity interested both authors and especially Deleuze. In an interview with Christian Descamps, Deleuze says of *A Thousand Plateaus*:

[T]he question that interests us in relation to *A Thousand Plateaus* is whether there are any resonances, common ground, with what other writers, musicians, painters, philosophers, and sociologists are doing or trying to do, ...⁶⁴

As philosophers of becoming, Deleuze and Guattari are concerned with the movement of “lines”. In the same interview concerning *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze says:

What we called a “map”, or sometimes a “diagram”, is a set of various interacting lines... There are of course many different kinds of lines, both in art and a society or a person. Some lines represent something, others are abstract. Some lines have various segments. Others don't. Some weave through a space, others go in a certain direction. Some lines, no matter whether or not they are abstract, trace an outline, others don't. The most beautiful ones do. We think lines are the basic components of things and events. So everything has its geography, its cartography, its diagram.⁶⁵

Lines, for Deleuze and Guattari, are not the static lines of grids, squares and cubes. Instead, they are becoming lines that move much like the horizon moves as one's actual position moves and so they need to be described in terms of what creates movement, such as forces and directions. Terms such as “centrifugal” and “vector”

⁶³ See Interview with Gilles Deleuze, Gilles Deleuze (Joughin, M trans.), *Negotiations, 1972-1990*, Columbia University Press, USA, 1995, pp. 23-34.

⁶⁴ Gilles Deleuze, (Joughin, M trans.), *Negotiations, 1972-1990*, Columbia University Press, USA, 1995, p. 27.

⁶⁵ Gilles Deleuze (Joughin, M trans.), *Negotiations, 1972-1990*, Columbia University Press, USA, 1995.

refer to dynamic states with force and direction and so are appropriate when describing and using their work.

In *What is Philosophy?* a later work, Deleuze and Guattari explain their “system”⁶⁶ in general terms using diagrammatic thinking.⁶⁷ For Deleuze and Guattari a system is an open state of becoming, or, insofar as it is a Deleuzian term, it is de-territorialising.

In an answer to a question about the traditional philosophical qualities of *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze asserts that he takes a broader approach to philosophical systems than the restricted “little series”⁶⁸ he says are attached to academic philosophy.

Deleuze and Guattari explain their system in a style that sometimes seems to gloss over the important but detailed distinctions within general fields such as science and art. However, notions such as “science” are used in general abstract terms, as *types* (in a Nietzschean sense, as metonymic), rather than as reductive abstractions of disciplines. Types can be thought of as approaches to questions within which a world view or mode of thought is assembled. In this view, all fields are combinations of discipline types that are balanced according to the traditions of each field. For example, there are aspects of art and philosophy as discipline types within the field of science. In *What is Philosophy?*, Deleuze and Guattari have created a system that links these discipline types in a diagrammatic way. Deleuze, as Paul Patton has described, is committed to idea of “philosophy as system”.⁶⁹ The Deleuzo-Guattarian system provides a general theoretical context for art and in particular painting, which relates art to the other disciplines of science and philosophy. Deleuze and Guattari isolate three categories, *science*, *philosophy* and *art* that are differentiated according to the following:

Philosophy is focused on the creation of concepts.

Art is focused on the creation of percepts.

⁶⁶ It has been noted by philosopher Michel Foucault that Deleuze and Guattari are the last great philosophical system builders, particularly of the 20th century.

⁶⁷ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell trans.), *What Is Philosophy?* Columbia University Press, NY, USA, 1994, pp. 117-199, Part 2 “Philosophy, Science, Logic, and Art”

⁶⁸ Gilles Deleuze (Joughin, M trans.), *Negotiations, 1972-1990*, Columbia University Press, USA, 1995, p. 31.

⁶⁹ Paul Patton (ed.), *Deleuze: A Critical Reader*, Blackwell, Oxford (DCR), UK, 1996, p. 1.

Science is focused on the creation of propositions.⁷⁰

In a more developed explanation, Deleuze and Guattari claim:

What defines thought in its three forms - art, science, and philosophy - is always confronting chaos, laying out a plane, throwing a plane over chaos. But philosophy wants to save the infinite by giving it consistency: it lays out the plane of immanence that, through the action of conceptual personae, takes events or consistent concepts to infinity. Science on the other hand, relinquishes the infinite in order to gain reference: it lays out a plane of simple undefined coordinates that each time, through the action of partial observers, defines states of affairs, functions, or referential propositions. Art wants to create the finite that restores the infinite: it lays out a plane of composition that, in turn, through the action of aesthetic figures, bears monuments or composite sensations.⁷¹

This is then summarised in the following triangular form:

With its concepts, philosophy brings forth events. Art erects monuments with its sensations. Science constructs states of affairs with its functions. A rich tissue of correspondences can be established between the planes.⁷²

Deleuze and Guattari then show how each of the three positions in their model can be constituted by the others. For example, describing painting as the creation of sensations (or percepts) that are made using a combination of concepts and propositions.⁷³ Concepts are constituted of propositions about percepts in philosophy:

But the network has its culminating points, where sensation itself becomes sensation of concept or function, where the concept becomes concept of function or of sensation, where function becomes function of sensation or concept. And none of these elements can appear without the other being still to come, still indeterminate or unknown. Each created element on a plane calls on other heterogeneous elements, which are still to be created on other planes: thought is heterogenesis.⁷⁴

⁷⁰Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell trans.), *What Is Philosophy?* Columbia University Press, NY, USA, 1994, p. 197.

⁷¹Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell trans.), *What Is Philosophy?* Columbia University Press, NY, USA, 1994, p. 197.

⁷²Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell trans.), *What Is Philosophy?* Columbia University Press, NY, USA, 1994, p. 199.

⁷³ It is not clear from the texts, but a percept would be an event of perception if one follows Deleuze and Guattari's method, in which all concepts are becoming.

⁷⁴Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell trans.), *What Is Philosophy?* Columbia University Press, NY, USA, 1994, p.199

Deleuze is committed to diagrammatic thinking, especially when describing systems. His diagrams are usually in words, only sometimes appearing as drawings. Behind many of Deleuze’s text diagrams are the linear assemblies that diagrams suggest. The following diagram (Figure 1.1) is a summary of the Deleuzo-Guattarian model.

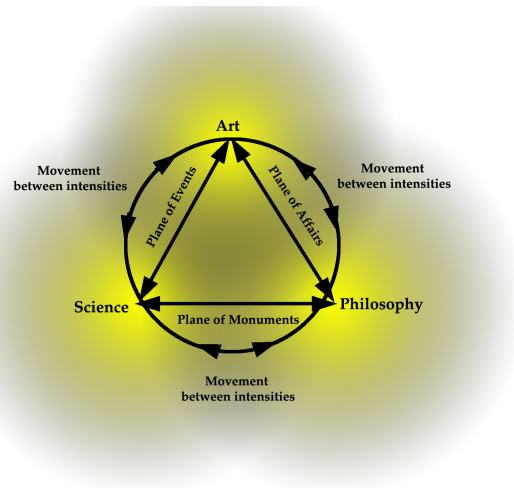


Figure 1.1 Diagram of Deleuze and Guattari’s Theory of Art, Philosophy and Science.

The common ground between painting (art) and philosophy is constituted as a plane of affairs, or plane of “scientific propositions”, within which concepts are combined to form sensations in paintings (art) and within which percepts are combined to form concepts in philosophy. Science, in this model, also requires a distinction that Deleuze and Guattari use in *A Thousand Plateaus*, between “axiomatic” or “Royal” science on the one hand, and “nomad” or “minor” science on the other. Axiomatic science is the science of laws, while nomad science is concerned with contingency of making. As such, nomadic science is how problems of making are solved. Scientific propositions can be of either kind, but in painting the focus is on the techniques and processes of (or problems of, or approaches of or something else) nomad sciences. For instance, the technique for figurative representation shown in Dürer’s *Dresden Sketch Books*⁷⁵ is based on proceeding by problems of measurement towards “rules”, but these can only be acted upon intuitively when composing a particular scene.

⁷⁵ Strauss, Walter L (ed.), *The Human Figure by Albrecht Dürer: The Complete Dresden Sketchbook*, Dover Publications, NY, USA, 1972, See figure Figure 3.1.

Axiomatic or scientific painting is that which asserts laws, especially laws of representation. For example, perspective can be a “law” because it is asserted as a way to produce an image of the real. However, nomadic sciences mean that to make a painting is to make nomadic propositions. This means that, through nomadic propositions, painting makes correspondences between science and philosophy, rather than with what is “natural” or “real”. Unfolding this idea draws painting out of the problem of representation versus abstraction, into one of resemblance and becoming.

To move between philosophy and painting, to operate within “nomad” thought or to make paintings as nomadic propositions, requires abandonment of one’s ground. This implies the adoption or, at least, recognition of the necessity of darkness, both as an *aesthetic figure* (compositional strategy or scheme) and as a *conceptual persona* (metaphorical strategy or schema). In other words, the light of reason must give way to other, darker ways of thinking.

Deleuze and Guattari describe darkness as universal blackness:

But ultimately the universe appears as the area of plain, uniform color [*l’aplat*], the single great plane, the colored void, the monochrome infinite. The French window, as in Matisse, now opens only onto an area of plain uniform black.⁷⁶

For Deleuze and Guattari, blackness is the undifferentiated possibility of becoming within which propositions are assembled to reveal concepts. This blackness, however, must be understood within the broader Deleuzo-Guattarian strategy of dynamic universality, rather than within a static uniformity. Becoming blackness might be undifferentiated in terms of objects, but it is still a flux of movement or a wriggling mass of universal possibility.⁷⁷ To darken, then, is to move towards the indeterminacy of universal possibility and away from determination.

Deleuze and Guattari offer propositions as the presentation of *functions*, or assemblies of the elements of functions, called “functives”.⁷⁸ According to Deleuze and Guattari, functives may be assembled as concepts or as scientific propositions. We can take these to be propositions of nomadic science and as such are the

⁷⁶ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell trans.), *What Is Philosophy?* Columbia University Press, NY, USA, 1994, p. 180.

⁷⁷ This is quite different to the image of an endless static mass described by Descartes in *La Dioptrique*.

⁷⁸ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell trans.), *What Is Philosophy?* Columbia University Press, NY, USA, 1994, p. 117.

constitutive elements of painting. However, propositions about an indeterminate future reveal new modes and name the intersection of modes (“denomination”, to be discussed further in chapter 5). Each mode of being is darkened to allow another mode to intersect or overlap it. Each mode of being is revealed by the presentation of functions or functives assembled as propositions in paint, but these presentations of functives must merge to reveal becoming on a “plane”. The plane of the painting must have both a singularity as well as a multiplicity and so it has both autonomy and *polynomy*.⁷⁹ This merging results in a “plane of immanence”⁸⁰ or a way of thinking in which one is *in the thing* one represents to one’s self, in this case, *in* the painting. For painting, this is the proposition of a technique that enables the painter to “reflect and communicate” in the mode of a scientist, but according to concepts in the mode of a philosopher. For painting, this is the *seeing-in*, in which to *see* is, in a sense, to *be* in the painting.

Paintings, if they are to be thought of as becomings, must not only pose propositions but also describe how being exists within the Being of a proposition.⁸¹ A proposition is a conceptual leap into the indeterminate, into darkness or the wriggling mass of universal possibility, within which being and Being find a relationship. There is no way to determine this before hand and so there is no way to prepare a path. Instead, a path must be merely begun.

So for paintings, a proposition is a launch, or leap, into the space within which percepts occur, which is then reflected and communicated through the technical manufacturing of the work. The painter is within a darkened space within which all that can be done is making. This darkened space is *secret* according to Merleau-Ponty, like the “secret blackness of milk” that he quotes from Paul Valery,⁸² and is the space for gathering thoughts about thought. It is not the public space of institutional philosophy or other academic disciplines. The world of making paintings is certainly

⁷⁹ The term *polynomy* is used, in this thesis, in preference to heteronomy because *Poly* (many) and *nomos* (name) together refer to the naming of a multiplicity of functionaries, each of which is qualified according to a variable, as in the mathematical term “polynomial”. *Hetero-* refers to an “other” and a “difference” as predicative of some primary condition, such as gender, rather than to functional cooperation of a “many” which are the same but variable. Polynomials function as a single multivalent whole, but, as is revealed in mathematical graphing them, each has a different “direction” or vector.

⁸⁰ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell trans.), *What Is Philosophy?* Columbia University Press, NY, USA, 1994, p. 117.

⁸¹ The final chapter of this thesis takes up painting as proposition in more detail.

⁸² Maurice Merleau-Ponty (Lingis, A trans.), *The Visible and the Invisible*, Northwestern University Press, USA, 2000, p. 150.

not a world of laws, such as those of institutional disciplines. Instead, it is a world of contingency, necessity and possibility. It is, as such, *immanent*.⁸³

Darkness is a feature of an aesthetic of immanence,⁸⁴ or the at-handed-ness of Being, that is necessary for a philosophy of sensation. Darkness in painting is the aestheticisation of a conceptual leap into propositional thinking; a visual “what if?” This immanence ties Deleuze and Guattari’s thinking to the visual tradition of western thought and connects it to painting. It is within and from this darkness that the “rich tissue of correspondences”⁸⁵ that Deleuze and Guattari argue for, with their dynamic triangular model of art, science and philosophy, can be made in painting.

Darkness and Ambiguity

In proposing a common ground between painting and philosophy, Deleuze and Guattari offer a way of understanding this common ground as a space of change, a flow or plane of becoming, rather than the static and timeless world of idealism that remains so influential within modern thinking. As such, painting retains the *question inherent within a proposition*, perhaps best stated as “What is that?” when looking at a painting. As Deleuze and Guattari write at the conclusion of *What is Philosophy?*:

In this submersion [the chaos into which the brain leaps] it seems that there is extracted from the chaos the shadow of the “people to come” in the form that art, but also philosophy and science, summon forth: mass-people, world-people, brain-people, chaos-people—nonthinking thought that lodges in the three, like Klee’s nonconceptual concept or Kandinsky’s internal silence.⁸⁶

⁸³ *Immanent* is defined by the *Macquarie Dictionary* as, “remaining within; indwelling; inherent”. The Latin etymology of *immanent* suggests “at-handed-ness” as well.

⁸⁴ *Immanence*, is a term used by Deleuze and Deleuze and Guattari. It is drawn, in part, from Spinoza’s *The Emendation of the Intellect*. This term is developed in several texts, but most succinctly, in *What Is Philosophy?* It is also explained by Deleuze in the series of lectures titled *Sur Spinoza*, which were given at Vincennes in the mid 1970’s. Chapter 2, of *What Is Philosophy?* is titled “The Plane of Immanence”. The following from that chapter sets the scene for this concept:

The plane of immanence is not a concept that is or can be thought but rather the image of thought, the image thought gives itself of what it means to think, to make use of thought, to find one’s bearings in thought. [p. 37]

So, as the image of thought it is also the image of practices, such as painting.

⁸⁵ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell trans.), *What Is Philosophy?* Columbia University Press, NY, USA, 1994, p199

⁸⁶ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell trans.), *What Is Philosophy?* Columbia University Press, NY, USA, 1994, p. 218

In the paintings of Wassily Kandinsky,⁸⁷ internal silence is formed in darkness and is bound to visual ambiguity. The question “What is it?” remains undetermined. The attachment of ambiguity to visibility is significant for painting and, within that ambiguity about painting, an interweaving and mutual constitution of theory and practice can be found. An ambiguous form can be dark in a conceptual way because it is *conceptually* ambiguous, even when it is presented as a distinct shape in a painting.

In Kandinsky’s painting *Improvisation 31 or Sea Battle* (Figure 1.4), darkness is not primarily a technical strategy but is, instead, an aestheticised metaphorical concept, which for Kandinsky has a *moral* purpose. What is at stake, in Kandinsky’s work, is to understand painting as philosophical through this conceptual reading of blackness. It is a question of understanding the use of black as both a technical strategy and a means of expression for thought. In other words, the possibility of thought is equal in painting to any other form of thought, as well as being reflected in other forms of thought, such as writing.

What Kandinsky makes of this is another issue. The introduction to Kandinsky’s text *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* asserts an inner relation in which there is a “moral and spiritual atmosphere”, which needs to be revived against the “useless game” of “ape-like” materialism in order to revive the soul both of the artist and the “observer”.⁸⁸ For Kandinsky, materialism is a necessity that must now be surpassed in order to move to the next stage of human spiritual progress, which he likens, in chapter 2 of *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, to a triangle. For Kandinsky, this triangle is moving or growing.

Kandinsky writes in the first chapter of *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*,

The life of the spirit may be fairly represented in a diagram as a large acute-angled triangle divided horizontally into unequal parts with the narrowest segment uppermost. The lower the segment the greater it is in breadth, depth, and area.

The whole triangle is moving slowly, almost invisible forwards and upwards. Where the apex was today the second segment is tomorrow; what today can be understood only by the apex and to the rest of the triangle is complete gibberish, forms tomorrow the true thought and feeling of the second segment.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Artist and theorist Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944).

⁸⁸ Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, Dover Press, UK, 1977, p. 1-2.

⁸⁹ Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, Dover Press, UK, 1977, p. 6.

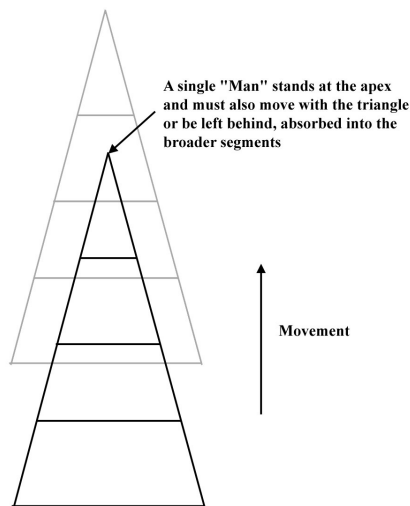


Figure 1.2 *The Movement of the Triangle*, from Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, Dover Press, UK, 1977, pp. 6-7.

“In every segment of the triangle are artists” Kandinsky writes.⁹⁰ Not all artists are suited to the apex of the triangle: only a few, “such as Beethoven”.⁹¹ Kandinsky does not make clear what the qualities of the apex dwelling artist are. Each work of art for Kandinsky builds another apex on the previous one, providing more climbing space for the occupants of the triangle as they struggle to move up, sometimes to fall down, and mostly to end up in the middle. The apex is extended only if there is someone capable of occupying it. Meanwhile the whole edifice keeps growing. In limiting his “simile”, Kandinsky writes:

This simile of the triangle cannot be said to express every aspect of the spiritual life. For instance, there is never an absolute shadow-side to the picture, never a piece of unrelieved gloom.⁹²

This gloom is that which causes the collapse, at least partially, of the “edifice” due to the specificity of spiritual “food”. “Small quantities” of darkness in the form of “spiritual food” from the wrong level will weigh artists down, dragging them down a segment. The same “food” that serves to weigh down artists from one level would be quite appropriate for those of a lower level. What is “food” for some is “poison” for others. Darkness and light are relative and interchangeable in spiritual terms, but appear as discrete parcels and must be placed in the correct segment of the triangle.⁹³

⁹⁰ Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, Dover Press, UK, 1977, p. 7.

⁹¹ Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, Dover Press, UK, 1977, p. 7.

⁹² Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, Dover Press, UK, 1977, p. 7.

⁹³ Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, Dover Press, UK, 1977, p. 7.

The following diagram shows how each parcel of darkness focuses on the apex to which it is directed.

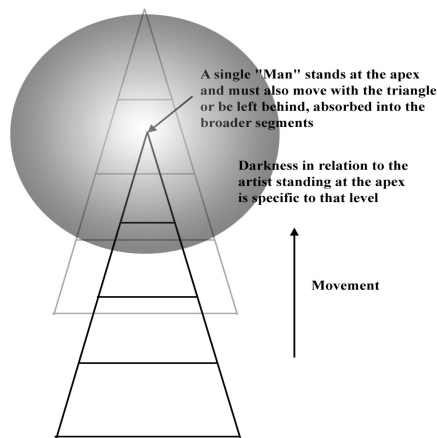


Figure 1.3 *The Movement of the Triangle* after Kandinsky.

The interplay of darkness and light is a necessary dynamic assembly in Kandinsky's painting, which expresses the necessary triangle of spirituality. The metaphysics of his paintings are not a text or interpretation of imagery, but are rather the direct expressive qualities of dark and light and, as a development of dark and light, colour.

Kandinsky's conceptual aestheticisation of darkness in *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* also proposed a moral meaning for colour. Colour, for Kandinsky, is part of the means by which "internal truth"⁹⁴ is pursued by the individual. Internal truth is necessary for fulfilment as a human being, which Kandinsky took to be a moral duty for each individual and a choice against his understanding of materialism or what could also be called mere appearances.

Our minds, which even now are only just awakening after years of materialism, are infected with the despair of unbelief, of lack of purpose and ideal. The nightmare of materialism, which has turned the life of the universe into an evil, useless game, is not yet past; it holds the awakening soul still in its grip.⁹⁵

For Kandinsky, this moral duty is an ascent towards the apex of the "spiritual triangle".⁹⁶ Kandinsky connects this ascent to "evolution" and then associates the moral choice to move upward with whiteness (a white fertilizing ray) and the move

⁹⁴ Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, Dover Press, UK, 1977, p. 9

⁹⁵ Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, Dover Press, UK, 1977, p. 2.

⁹⁶ Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, Dover Press, UK, 1977, p. 8, also chapter "The Movement of The Triangle"

downwards with blackness (a black, death-bringing hand). For Kandinsky, colour begins with the basic black and white contrast and provides the raw material for the ascent within the triangle. Painting becomes a kind of culinary process in which matter has a metaphysical meaning when acted upon as painting.

In an essay *On the Problem of Form*, Kandinsky writes using a metaphor combined (perhaps mixed) from architecture and cooking,

Matter is here a storeroom and from it the spirit chooses what is especially necessary for it – just as the cook would.

That is the positive, the creative. That is the good. *The white, fertilizing ray.* [italics in original]

People are blinded.

The black hand is laid over their eyes. The black hand belongs to him who hates. He who hates endeavours, with all means, to hold back the evolution, the elevation.

That is the negative, the destructive. That is the evil. *The black, death-bringing hand.*⁹⁷ [Italics in original]

Perhaps influenced by Madam Blavatsky's Theosophy,⁹⁸ and certainly related to Hegel's "inner necessity",⁹⁹ Kandinsky goes on to describe the avant-garde revolutionary evolution of "the new" taking the place of "the old" according to the spirit of the time and the resultant progress to spiritual enlightenment. This moral attachment to black and white and, later, to colour, reveals a strange conflict between Kandinsky's written ideas and his paintings. The metaphor of darkness emerges from its hiding place beneath Kandinsky's righteous "white, fertilizing ray" with, apparently, a necessary role in the expression of inner necessity.

⁹⁷Wassily Kandinsky, 1912, "On the Problem of Form", in Herschel B. Chipp, (ed.) with contributions from Peter Selz and Joshua C. Taylor, *Theories of Modern Art, A Source Book by Artists and Critics*, Uni of California Press, USA, 1968, p. 155. The article originally appeared in *Der Blau Reiter*, (Munich: R Piper, 1912), pp. 74-100.

⁹⁸ Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831-1891) founded the Theosophical Society in 1875. Theosophy was a concoction of various "oriental" philosophies that became a cult-like organisation particularly attractive to those suspicious of science and Christianity. For a brief description and text, see the extract from "Isis Unveiled" by Madam Blavatsky in Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, (eds.), *Art In Theory, 1900-1990, An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, Blackwell, USA, 1992, pp. 745-750.

⁹⁹ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (Bernard Bosanquet trans.), *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*, Penguin, London, UK, 1993, p. 61, and chapter III "The Conception of Artistic Beauty", pp. 27-61. It should be noted here that Deleuze had a strong antipathy to Hegel for his determination of linear history and progress. This is mentioned by Deleuze in Gilles Deleuze with Claire Parnet (Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Haberjam trans.), *Dialogues II*, Continuum, Athlone Press, UK, 1977, p. 14, and Gilles Deleuze, (Joughin, M trans), *Negotiations, 1972-1990*, Columbia University Press, USA, 1995, p. 6.

Moving from Kandinsky's text to one of his paintings, one can find the same use of darkness. In this sense, Kandinsky's painting can be understood as a visible and silent world that is imbued with his understanding of a necessary and moral spirituality, as interplay of dark and light.¹⁰⁰

The dark patch at the bottom right hand corner of Kandinsky's painting *Improvisation 31 or Sea Battle* (Figure 1.4) alerts one to the other smaller dark patches and lines throughout the painting. Colour seems to be "behind" the dark pieces, which provide a window-like structure, crossing the diagonal arrangement of the coloured sections, through which to see the colour. One patch of mauve, just left of centre and about one third from the bottom of the canvas, seems to be merged with the black mark adjacent to it, even emerging from it. This brings the mauve patch "forward" and, at the same time, gives it its own internal depth. The painting gains its complex depths within its colours through the action of darkness, even when the dark areas are distinct and hard-edged.

Darkness is a structuring base or "spiritual food" from which colours emerge in this work—a pictorial space in which Kandinsky's inner truth can appear. Kandinsky is proposing, within his "technique", a process by which concepts appear as *aestheticised* within painting (as paint on canvas, instead of as a metaphor by a writer). A mark is made which proposes a movement within the work from darkness to light, from an absence of colour to the presence of colour. The darkness in Kandinsky's paintings provides an inner visual silence from which colours emerge as visual "sound". The black shapes he uses are forms that silently *aestheticise* the "shadow" of the "people to come" who Deleuze and Guattari say are emerging from the inner noisy cosmic chaos. Darkness is that which allows the colours in the rest of the canvas to *be* those figures.

¹⁰⁰ Kandinsky's silence or inner visual silence, is a clarifying effect used to make precise visual worlds in which the "noise" of silence does not interfere with the visual relations within his work. Silence is literal for Kandinsky and yet has a figurative role as well, but whether that figurative role is metaphoric, synecdochic, metonymic or perhaps even ironic is not clear, except in specific cases. Silence allows Kandinsky to replace what is uncertain in the world with what is certain in vision. This is different to Bridget Riley, who, in adopting a silent world, finds certainty in worldly visual experiences, which then become ideas for paintings.

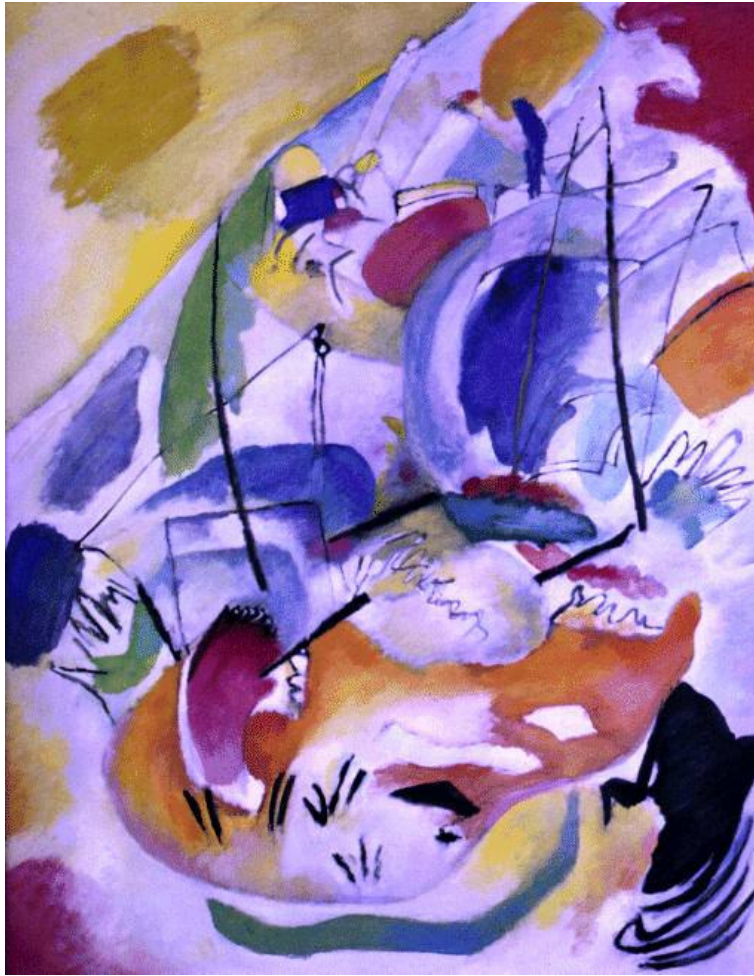


Figure 1.4 Wassily Kandinsky, *Improvisation 31 or Sea Battle*, 1913, Oil on canvas, 145 cm x 119.7 cm.

Later, after WW1, Kandinsky's work changes to a more hard-edged, geometric or mechanical approach but with an added amount of black in the paintings. As Kandinsky's personal life becomes more involved with various political, educational and social problems in western Europe, he seems to need more blackness and more silencing figures, such as compositional assemblies formed from a diagonal cross. Black is used in a more consciously technical way after WW1, but like work before the WW1, the blackness still provides focal points on the canvas through which other forms, such as diagonal crosses, appear. The following painting from 1923, *On White II* (Figure 1.5), made during Kandinsky's Bauhaus period, shows how the black is used not so much as a window through which the colours' spatial structure is read, but, rather, becomes the structure itself. The diagonal cross composition that Kandinsky now preferred includes the black areas, which have become central to the composition.



Figure 1.5 Wassily Kandinsky, *On White II*, 1923, Oil on canvas, 105 cm x 98 cm.¹⁰¹

This change in Kandinsky's work parallels the radical change to hard edges and geometric shapes preferred by artists, designers and architects at the Bauhaus, after WW1. The influence of an industrial approach to art and design, as in the work of László Moholy-Nagy, characterised the shift in emphasis at the Bauhaus to industrialisation. The painting *On White II* (Figure 1.5) was made at approximately the same time as the Bauhaus manifesto. The address was delivered by the architect Walter Gropius, in the early 1920s, as his inaugurating address at the new location of the Bauhaus at Weimar. This was an ideological shift from the hand-æsthetic of craftsmanship to industrial manufacture and "design".¹⁰² Then, in 1939, the year of the start of WW II and well after his move to Paris, Kandinsky painted *Composition X* (Figure 1.6).

¹⁰¹ Downloaded from <http://www.ibiblio.org/wm/paint/auth/kandinsky/> on 13/11/2003

¹⁰² See Frank Whitford, *Bauhaus*, Thames and Hudson, London, UK, 1995, pp. 123-135. The description of Moholy-Nagy's entry to the Bauhaus is emblematic of the shift in direction.



Figure 1.6 Wassily Kandinsky, *Composition X*, Oil on canvas, 1939, 130 cm x 195 cm.¹⁰³

The painting consists of coloured objects assembled on the black ground. “Spiritual food” has become a black, void-like silent background that replaced the white spiritual light of earlier work. Notably, the coloured shapes are edged in black and upon close inspection and judging by the brush strokes and outlines between the black “background” and the coloured “forms” that Kandinsky filled in the black ground after the coloured areas were completed. This can be seen at the lower section, centre of the painting, where the outline around the coloured areas is clearly different to the more textured infill of black.

In this painting, there is no simple representational relationship between colour as an artistic practice and colour as a metaphor. Colour is the emergent feature of this work. Against the black ground, colour emerges from the silence. The black ground holds back the inner chaotic noise in order to allow the colours to appear. There is, of course, some connection between the public world of early 20th century Europe and Kandinsky’s inner chaos, but an answer to this connection can only be hinted at by tracing his use of black. A more determined reading of Kandinsky’s use of darkness can be found by closely relating his theoretical approach to his painting.

This is reflected in the section called “Theory” in *Concerning the Spiritual In Art*,¹⁰⁴ in which Kandinsky writes that colours, by revealing the inner truth (or

¹⁰³ Downloaded from <http://www.ibiblio.org/wm/paint/auth/kandinsky/> on 13/11/2003.

¹⁰⁴ Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, Dover Press, UK, 1977, pp. 46-52.

aestheticising his ideas), are set out as signifying emotions through abstract relations with other colours. Kandinsky writes in this section:

A red sky suggests to us sunset, or fire, and has a consequent effect upon us – of either splendour or menace. Much depends on the way in which other objects are treated in connection with this red sky. If the treatment is faithful to nature, but all the same harmonious, the naturalistic appeal of the sky is strengthened. If, however, the other objects are treated in a way [that] is more abstract, they tend to lessen, if not destroy, the naturalistic appeal of the sky.

The spectator is too ready to look for a meaning in the picture – i.e., some outward connection between its various parts. ... Instead of allowing the inner value of the work to appear [its abstract associations], he worries himself in looking for “closeness to nature”...¹⁰⁵

Given the technique of colour change at the intersection of shapes, one can see that black is a *productive* shade in this painting, a neutral “ground”, rather than the negative colour Kandinsky writes about in 1912. In particular, the irregular bluish disk just left of centre at the top of the painting, a kind of negative sun, seems to gain its colour by virtue of being in front of the black ground in *Composition X*. This visual effect is created by changing the colour of the disk at its intersection with the adjacent brown shape in conjunction with the faded edge of the bluish shape. In effect, the bluish shape appears to be transparent, with the black showing through as a blue background. Black is transformed from the “death-bringing hand” to a productive event in the space of the picture, and a kind of black-base from which all colours spring and to which all colours return. The infinite blackness of Deleuze and Guattari seems to have already appeared in paint in the late 1930s.

It should also be noted that when one looks carefully at the shapes, it becomes apparent that the painting actually has a representational quality in which two figures stand under a pale blue sun. Both are holding books, the one on the right is wearing a dress and the one on the left, the vestige of a tie. Both seem to be singing, if one can take the various lines around their faces to resemble music staves, vibrations or the representation of speech sounds. Did Kandinsky resort to a kind of representational painting? Is he making a point about sound by trying to show how “abstraction” can assemble a sensory experience other than visibility?

¹⁰⁵ Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, Dover Press, UK, 1977, pp. 48-49.

The painting is contrarily quiet (and black) when one sees its resemblance to things that signify music and sound in nature. It is as if darkness does not allow the representation of the visible signification of sound, such as music notation, graphs of sound waves or images of vibrations. The signs themselves seem more silent when they appear in a picture where they cannot be heard as music, only “read”, and so cannot have fulfilment as sound within the pictorial space of the painting, only outside it. In “real-life”, or the natural world, musical notation—even if it is purely decorative—always seems as if it were a potential sound: it indicates sounds. It is only within the space of the picture that it remains silent. Texts of this kind either remain silent within (conceptual) darkness, within the pictorial space of the painting, or lead out of the painting, into (conceptual) lightness and to a correspondence with nature through “reading”.

The rich tissue of correspondences, that Deleuze and Guattari describe, requires a way of seeing the space of a flat canvas surface as a multi-layered visual world. In one sense a painting can be understood through seeing depth; in another sense, it can be understood through seeing surfaces. In depth, can be found representation and evoked presences; in surfaces, can be found expressivity of visual events.

In order to see both modes of painting and thereby both to practice painting and to see it, seeing must become outlandish, uncanny or strange. That which is not visible can be recognised only in the relationship between surface and depth. Since this is a question of the visual effect of the painting for each person as well as for people in general, it is metaphysics of sensation, or, as this thesis describes, philosophy of sensation. The space that painters’ ideas inhabit must then have its own multiplying architecture, ambiguously thought, darkened within the picture so as not to predetermine outcomes, and nevertheless consisting of the memory of their techniques in colour, shade and line, paint and the canvas, the studio and a strange way of seeing the world.

Chapter 2. Surface and Depth: Seeing As and Seeing

In

Strange seeing involves a contradiction of what in the branch of philosophy, called logic, is called the “law of identity”, in which a thing is equal only and completely to itself.¹⁰⁶ The law of identity is upheld in two ways: as a determined equation of the actual and the virtual and as a reductive approximation of events. To break the law of identity is to enter the non-equation of the actual and the virtual and non-reductive approximation of events. It is to enter multiple spaces or planes, and as such multiple modes of thought. In other words, to break the law of identity is to admit multiple being. Strange seeing is to see multiple being within multiple spaces.

A strange way of seeing always has a number of different, and at times inconsistent, logical frameworks. Logical frameworks appear as modes of action, events or changes. In the case of painting, inconsistency of modes takes the simple spatial form of seeing both the depth and the surface of a sheet of canvas stretched over a timber frame. The surface is one mode and the pictorial depth of a painting is another. The act of painting is an expression of the attraction that exists between these modes. The surface wants to be depth and depth wants to be surface.

It is by using the Deleuzian terms “sense” and “nonsense” to describe this multivalent space in painting that becoming can be revealed.

Gilles Deleuze, in *Logic of Sense*, adopts a Nietzschean approach to the question of sense and nonsense.¹⁰⁷ “Gloriously superficial” is the way that Nietzsche describes the Greek philosophers.¹⁰⁸ Like the Greeks, Deleuze deliberately uses a superficial approach to *sense* and *nonsense*, but it is superficiality “out of profundity”.¹⁰⁹ Applied to painting, the sense of a surface is concerned with the expressivity, which is to say its colours, textures, scale and forms. Also in painting, depth is a “nonsense”

¹⁰⁶ This is the central “law”, upon which formal logic is based. For a brief description, see; RC Jeffrey 1967, *Formal Logic: Its Scope and Limits*, McGraw-Hill, USA; Wolfram, S, 1989, *Philosophical Logic*, Routledge, UK; Sir Anthony Kenny, 2004, *A New History of Western Philosophy, Volume 1, Ancient Philosophy*, Clarendon Press, UK.

¹⁰⁷ Gilles Deleuze, (ed. C Boundas, trans M Lester) *Logic of Sense*, Columbia University Press, USA, 1990.

¹⁰⁸ Friedrich Nietzsche, (trans: W Kaufman), *The Gay Science*, Vintage Books, Random House, New York, USA. 1974. See page 38.

¹⁰⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, (trans: W Kaufman), *The Gay Science*, Vintage Books, Random House, New York, USA. 1974. See page 38.

implicated within and by surface sense. For all forms of painting, including abstraction and representation, this interrelation of surface and depth, as sense and nonsense, is central. Abstraction, in a general sense, is set in opposition to representation and, as such, is often asserted as *flat* while representation is asserted to have depth. That which is taken from the surface into depth, when depth is seen, divides sense from nonsense. For instance, perspective takes only what it needs from its surface to give the appearance of a spatial dimension to depth. Perspective is a construction that divides sense from nonsense as if it were depth. But this complete alignment of surface and depth with sense and nonsense—described as representation against abstraction—can appear to be misleading. Both abstraction and representation are a *folding* together of surface and depth as well as a sense and nonsense. Sense and nonsense provide the opening through which this assumed opposition between abstraction and representation can be examined.

By accepting the *nonsense* of depth, which is to say the sense of the *picture*, the surface of painting becomes *sense*. Thereby, in contrary and contradictory forms, painting must both be a surface and a depth, a sense and nonsense, *at the same time*. This is the secret and strange, practice of painting that concerns the interplay of surface and depth as well as sense and nonsense. Against the general demand for a universal truth, surface and depth are complications that always need an argument. The sense and nonsense of painting are perpetually in need of explanation, justification and theorisation. Theories of surface and depth complicate the issue of painting, rather than simplify it. Depth is more than perspectival space, just as surface is more than the craft of making a picture. This chapter is just that: *an account of surface and depth* in terms of pictures.

Gombrich and Wollheim: Seeing-as and Seeing-in

Two authors who have attempted to give such an account of surface and depth are Ernst Gombrich (1909-2001) and Richard Wollheim (1923-2003).

Gombrich's argument is based on the idea that the context of seeing creates the conditions under which "illusion" can take place. Illusion, for Gombrich, depends upon two concepts: "schema-and-correction" (art history) and "seeing-as"

(psychology).¹¹⁰ Gombrich, in the opening pages of *Art and Illusion*, uses the example of tracing of one's head in a mirror:

I specify the bathroom mirror because the experiment [that] I urge the reader to make succeeds best if the mirror is a little clouded by steam. It is a fascinating exercise in illusionist representation to trace one's head on the surface of the mirror and to clear the area enclosed by the outline. For only when we have actually done this do we realize how small the image is which gives us the illusion of seeing ourselves 'face to face'.¹¹¹

Gombrich then explains the technical geometry of why the outline drawn on the mirror's surface is half the size of our head:

To be exact, it must be precisely half the size of our head. I do not want to trouble the reader with geometric proof of this fact, though basically it is simple: since the mirror will always appear to be halfway between me and my reflection, the size on its surface will be half of its apparent size.¹¹²

Diagrammatically, this can be represented "side on" as shown in Figure 2.1.

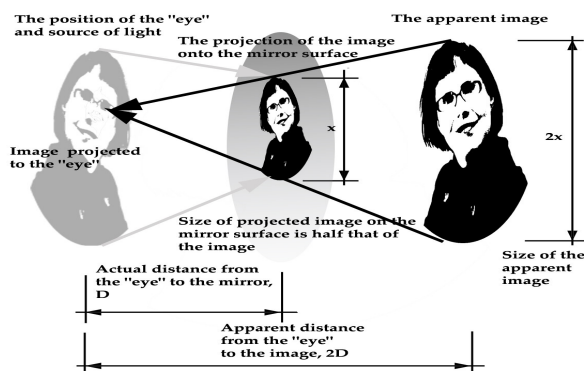


Figure 2.1 Gombrich's *mirror experiment*.¹¹³

¹¹⁰ I have used a variation of the analysis of Mark Rollins, "Pictorial Representation", Ch 26 of B Gaut and D McIver Lopes, *The Routledge Companion to Aesthetics*, Routledge, UK, 2001, p. 305-308. It should be pointed out that the term *schema* is Kantian. It appears in *Critique of Pure Reason* and refers to the means given to concepts that make them productive in space and time. Deleuze describes this in detail in his Lectures on Kant at Vincennes between 1978 and 1984. Gombrich is writing at a time (1959) when neo-Kantianism is very popular. Neo-Kantianism is usually, however, more associated with cybernetics and computer studies. For a brief summary of this, see; D Tofts, A Jonson and A Cavallaro, *Prefiguring Cyberculture, An Intellectual History*, MIT Press/Power Institute, USA, 2002, especially the section by Evelyn Fox Keller.

¹¹¹ Ernst H Gombrich, *Art and Illusion*, 6th Edition, Phaidon Press, UK, 1988, p. 5.

¹¹² Ernst H Gombrich, *Art and Illusion*, 6th Edition, Phaidon Press, UK, 1988, p. 5.

¹¹³ It should be noted that this is not the scientific diagram of the view of an object in a mirror. In the scientific diagram, the image is the result of an illusion that reflected light is not actually reflected but comes from "behind" the surface of the mirror. The scientific diagram emphasises this.

The face we see as “real” is the same size as we believe ourselves to be, and the image traced on the surface of the mirror is half this size. We are seeing what, for Gombrich, is an illusion of representation. His opening analogy, apart from setting out a geometric explanation of representation, demonstrates Gombrich’s concern with the question of “illusion” in painting.¹¹⁴ The “law” invoked for this is that of “similar triangles” (see Figure 2.2).

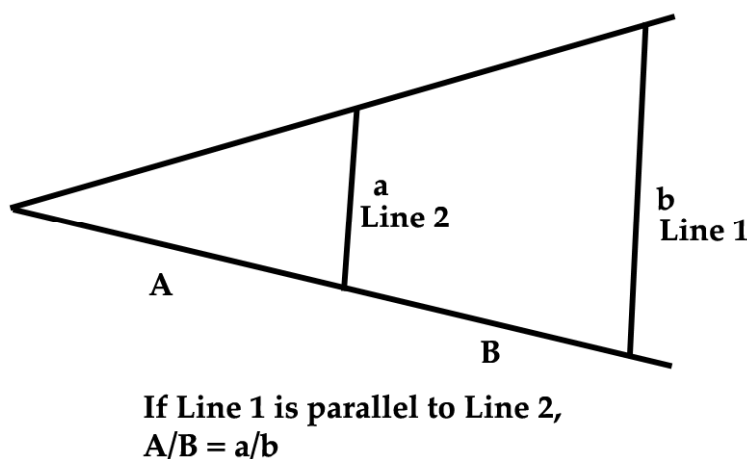


Figure 2.2 *The Rule of Similar Triangles.*

In relation to Gombrich’s mirror experiment, Line 2 corresponds to surface of the mirror and Line 1, the apparent position of the head, while the point at the apex of the triangle corresponds to the “mind’s eye”.

The rule of similar triangles is an *a priori*, self-evident geometric rule.¹¹⁵ Gombrich uses this geometric rule as a basis for understanding the world as representation. In its simplest form, Line 2 is *seen as* Line 1. This is a representational convention, the nature of which is revealed by the concept of similar triangles. The

¹¹⁴ There is a sense of morality attached to the term “illusion” that adds a normalising flavour to Gombrich’s argument. This is important within a broader philosophical context, but will not be discussed here.

¹¹⁵ More precisely, it is a *synthetic a priori* conceptual assembly. *A priori* knowledge is that which is known without experience, although for Kant this knowledge is stimulated or evoked by experience. Kant did not believe that there were certain innate items of knowledge such as those of logic before actual experience. *Synthesis* is to assemble parts to form another part or “whole”. *Synthesis* has the special feature of resulting in new knowledge. When applied to *a priori* concepts, *synthesis*, according to Kant, produces new knowledge. For example, by adding the concept of proportion to the concept of triangles, we derive the rule of similar triangles, without actually experiencing the triangle as sense experience. This way of thinking relies on the separation of an inner world of representation from an outer world of essentially unknowable objects. See, Kant, Immanuel, (trans, Guyer, P and Wood, A), *Critique of Pure Reason*, Cambridge University Press, UK, 2000, pp. 6-7, and pp. 176-182.

direct experience of the world is changed from an experience of directly seeing things, to an experience of seeing things as made manifest within representations. Representations can now be inferred from experience by a geometric understanding that is analogous to a *ratio*, of Line 2 inferred as a scaled proportion of Line 1. In this analogical use of a geometric rule, one's geometric understanding of one's own mental objects reveals the world. For example, I see a mental reflection, called a "representation", of a thing instead of the thing. By making such a point, Gombrich is reflecting a more general philosophical theory about knowing the world based on representation. In this philosophical position, the world is only experienced as representation. From representations, "things" are synthesised within thought and *actual* things, or things "in themselves", are intuited.¹¹⁶

Gombrich's appeal to identifiable truth implies that the use of this geometric rule is primarily as an assumption about the purpose of painting. The assumption in question is that the purpose of painting is to make precise "illusions" of what one sees in nature.

Gombrich writes:

Works of art are not mirrors, but they share with mirrors that elusive magic of transformation, which is so hard to put into words.¹¹⁷

Works of art are, for Gombrich, magical illusions in which visual trickery, using geometry, makes it possible for us to look into a space and see "reflections", either natural or un-natural, or combinations of both. For Gombrich, what makes it trickery is that our mind's eye cannot see both the surface and the interior of the picture at the same time and in the same way as we cannot see the surface of the mirror and the image that it reflects at the same time. This is because the surface and the picture, due to the technical trickery, are incompatible or contradict the law of identity. In other words, Gombrich believes that it is impossible for us to see a contradiction of this law within a representation. What he is describing is close to an explanation of *trompe*

¹¹⁶ This is the general philosophical position of 19th and 20th century "neo-Kantian" philosophy. For a general description of neo-Kantianism, see, Bullock, Alan, Stallybrass, O, and Trombley, S, Eds, *The Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought, Second Edition*, London, UK, 1977. See also Immanuel Kant, (Guyer, P and Wood, A trans.), *Critique of Pure Reason*, Cambridge University Press, UK, 2000.

¹¹⁷ Ernst H Gombrich, *Art and Illusion*, 6th Edition, Phaidon Press, UK, 1988, p. 5.

l'oeil, in which the image-ness of an image is disguised by visual blending of worlds.¹¹⁸

The internal contradiction of Gombrich's theory now becomes clear. The surface of the painting, as a truth, and the "illusion" of the picture cannot be seen at the same time simply because one cannot "see" the truth and, simultaneously, be mistaken. In other words, for Gombrich, vision cannot break the law of identity fundamental to formal logic. Gombrich has assumed that natural logic is actually formal logic. However, truth can be reflected in the interior world of works of art as long as one remembers that one is handing over one's vision to an illusionary or nonsensical process. One need not apply rational reductive thinking to what one sees in a painting, except within the local and particular logic of the work. So, while Gombrich reminds us that a painting is not *literally* a mirror, he leaves open the idea that a painting is a *figurative* mirror.

According to Gombrich, when one *looks* at a painting, one *cannot* simultaneously be aware of the image in a painting, abstract or otherwise, as well as notice the craft of the painting's surface. One must willingly adopt the fantasy of seeing the painting *as if it were* real and, at another discrete moment, see the surface on which it has been made. In effect, the surface must give way to the nonsense of depth. Likewise, the depth must give way to the sense of the surface, but the two cannot visually coexist. The viewer sees into the depth of the work by reading signs of assembled and conventional reality in the image. In Gombrich's theory, this can only be achieved by suspending reliance upon certain clues such as those of "real" space, and replacing them with a *representation* of those clues. According to Gombrich, this suspension-of-seeing-the-surface (much like the suspension of disbelief in theatre) is a combination of historical trajectories and psychological effect. It is essential that one concede the truth of reality in order to experience the illusion of painting.

In "Part Three, VII. Conditions of Illusion, III" in *Art and Illusion*, Gombrich cites many examples to show that illusion is necessary in order to see the picture within a painting.¹¹⁹ He describes "illusions" as the discrepancies between knowledge of the

¹¹⁸ *Trompe l'oeil* relies on far more than the simple surprise of discovering an illusion within a surface. The techniques of *trompe l'oeil* disguise surfaces using contexts and framing well outside the limits of the painting surface. The interplay of room and surface including the architectural forms is a central part of the charm of the illusion of *trompe l'oeil*.

¹¹⁹ Ernst H Gombrich, *Art and Illusion*, 6th Edition, Phaidon Press, UK, 1988, p. 176-186.

“real” and its representation. Objects, such as coloured shapes on the surface of the painting, are described as incomplete because they are represented as “behind” other objects. For example, a coloured “L” shape can represent a square if it is read as having a shape in front of it that covers a “view” of one corner of the “square”. As such, the whole object need not be shown. Shapes are completed by what Gombrich calls an “intellectual inference”, somewhat like “closure” due to the psychological and conventional rules of representation.¹²⁰ Gombrich’s assumption is that reality equals the representation or “mental picture of reality” that is derived from the surface according to representational conventions. The surface always leads to a distortion whereby the reality of the surface (coloured shapes) gives way to the illusion of completed objects. Yet, simultaneously, pictorial representation is always *incomplete* due to this reliance on illusion. The result is that, if knowledge is the discernment of truth by matching objects of mainly visual experience to objects of thought, then painting cannot be understood as revealing knowledge. Gombrich is consistent here with his assumption of the formal law of identity and his questioning of its reliance on representation.

This suggests a traditional philosophical theme in which morality is attached to discerning the *true* from the *false*. Illusion is the failure of this discernment, due to a failure of the will. It is as if, for Gombrich, painters are deliberately failing to discern the true from the false. The problem with this tendency, when considered within the 20th century discourse in which Gombrich was writing, is that the desire for the *truth* requires a paradigm that prefigures its form (a supplement). The paradigm, in Gombrich’s case, is that of transcendental subjectivity-objectivity or modern metaphysics. Gombrich assumes a *modernistic* way of thinking, but at the same time claims that the theory operates in *all* ways of thinking. In other words, Gombrich assumes within his theory Rorty’s Mirror of Nature and the “glassy essence”, as discussed in Chapter 1. This requires that the surface remove itself from the seeing of the picture; otherwise, it will corrupt that seeing. According to Gombrich, pure

¹²⁰ Ernst H Gombrich, *Art and Illusion*, 6th Edition, Phaidon Press, UK, 1988, p. 177. This connects Gombrich’s work to Gestalt theory, but he does not explicitly mention Gestalt in relation to this point. In other places, Gombrich refers to examples of authors’ use of Gestalt, an idea that Gombrich refers to as “in the air”, E H Gombrich, *Art and Illusion*, 6th Edition, Phaidon Press, UK, 1988, p. 22. Gombrich uses the term in the conventional way for Gestalt theorists to mean subjective form. This thread cannot be pursued here.

reflective painting will provide accurate pictures of the universal truth of nature. This position leaves him open to the kind of criticism that Wollheim presents.

Wollheim criticises Gombrich for attaching too much significance to the connection between illusion and his concept of “seeing-as”. For Wollheim, Gombrich’s connection between illusion and seeing-as creates an insistence upon a representational fantasy for the viewer. It is the metaphysics of this fantasy, that Wollheim addresses, rather than its moral implications. What is not apparent in Wollheim’s critique is that Gombrich’s strong attachment to the moral concept of illusion or a *falseness of seeing* is also a denial of painting as knowledge. Gombrich seems to be concerned that we, as viewers, might misunderstand the painting, much like the birds that famously pecked at the paintings of grapes. For Gombrich, this is anxiety about what happens in unconscious seeing. Implied in Gombrich’s argument is the idea that one is seeing more than one ought to if what one seeks to see is the truth. His theory implies that consciousness acts as a filter or assembler of phenomena from basic effects and, in the process, eliminating what is not needed to produce truth.¹²¹

Wollheim asserts, contrary to Gombrich, that our ability to see the image is not exclusive of our ability to see the surface of the painting. In other words seeing-as is never an *absolute* seeing. The seen surface is not an absolute mirror or lens. Wollheim is taking an implicit position against the equation of truth with its objective representation as “mental image”, and so is abandoning the law of identity. As such, Wollheim is aligned with postmodern philosophical de-subjectivisation, de-centring or “fragmentation” associated with philosophical concepts such as “deconstruction”.¹²²

Fragmentation is one of the necessary concepts for this point of view. Fragmentation occurs in the recessional displacement of the subject. This is when subjectivity makes an object of itself, only to find that the object persistently fails

¹²¹ This is a reduced or simplified version of Kant in which there is only one truth to be discovered where the creation of objects presupposes their existence. Kant never intended that objects in themselves pre-existed phenomena. For Kant, being engages with being through representations.

¹²² “Deconstruction” is a term that was famously coined by Jacques Derrida. It does not mean to pull apart, but rather to reorient texts in order to find hidden purposes and motivations. These are often contradictory to the face value of the text. See Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology (Corrected edition)*, (Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak trans), The John Hopkins University Press, USA, 1998 and Christopher Norris, *Deconstruction In Theory and Practice*, Routledge, UK, 1993.

self-completion because the represented object requires another, outside representation in order to gain completion. To achieve precision in representation, one needs the pure specular mirror of rational thought, if not an actual mirror. However, if one takes the mirror as illusory or *displacing* (even as in scale displacement), how is it possible to make an object of one's self *through* representation? Fragmentation can be thought of here as the result of a confrontation between transcendental subjectivity on the one hand, and shifting or displaced objectivity on the other. Quite simply, one cannot actually be one's own reflection.

Postmodern thinking, with its acceptance of multiplicity and multi-valence, recognises this paradox, whereas modern thinking, in its 20th century incarnation, strives for a universal ratio against which to measure truth in representations.

Wollheim is arguing from a point of view in which questioning of being remains open. By contrast, Gombrich is assuming a modern approach by arguing within an assumed Kantian transcendental subjectivity that searches for a precise ratio-driven truth. For Gombrich, painting addresses a visually constituted mind that is usually associated with Enlightenment thinking and is the basis for modernity in many fields. The transcendental subject is a destination for representations in which thinking is merged with seeing to form an inner being or mind. It is painting's role to address this mental destination, using the body—including vision—as a rather unreliable, but correctable, lens. Wollheim separates vision from the mental processes of knowing and introduces imagining as its replacement. For Wollheim, one can imagine things without imagining seeing them and so can see things and then imagine them not as seen things, but just as things.

Wollheim's critique of seeing-as is summarised in the abstract terms of seeing "x" as "f", in which he points out that to see "x" as "f" is to go beyond *seeing* to *imagining* that "x" is "f".¹²³ However, because "x" is different to "f", something about "f" is *overlooked* (difference) in order for "x" to be seen as "f". But it is this very difference, now overlooked or "masked", which "sustain" seeing-as. This means that

¹²³ Richard Wollheim, *Art and Its Objects*, 2nd Edition, Cambridge University Press, UK, 1980, p. 222-3.

to see “x” as “f” is to adopt a contradiction masked by the means by which that contradiction is known.¹²⁴

Although Wollheim concludes his summary of Gombrich’s seeing-as with the line, “so twofoldness in the case of seeing-as is ruled out”,¹²⁵ he does not make clear precisely where the masking of each part of the two forms of seeing occurs. Painting seems to have been left out at the crucial moment. This is because a painting, for Wollheim, is not a representing object that presents a picture to the disembodied mind, but a much broader visual event. This masking is the overlaying of visual events in the painting, where the painting is a cultural and historical event. Understanding this leads Wollheim to the conclusion that Gombrich’s seeing-as needs another concept, that of “seeing-in”. Wollheim offers seeing-in not only as an alternative concept to seeing-as, but also as one that includes it.

Seeing-in by contrast [with seeing-as], is not an exercise in visual curiosity about a present object. It is the cultivation of a special kind of visual experience, which fastens upon certain objects in the environment for its furtherance.

Wollheim then provides the first characteristic of seeing-in:

... [I]t can be [an] experience of a particular, or it can be an experience of a state of affairs. ... A state of affairs can be seen in a particular [way].¹²⁶

Wollheim is arguing that cultivated visual experience is different from the desire to see or “curiosity”. Certain objects, he claims, offer a type of visual experience in which depth appears beyond a surface. Convergent lines (perspective) on a flat sheet (painting or drawing) presented to a vertical individual (viewer) in a vertical plane present objects of this kind. He then derives two more characteristics of seeing-in:

[T]he contingency of localization and the possibility of twofold attention.¹²⁷

Localisation means the continuity of meaning between the artwork and its context. In other words, the painting is understood as an architectural effect within which a spatial event is constituted. In the example of the convergent lines, the flat surface is

¹²⁴ What Wollheim does not write, but perhaps could have, is that Gombrich’s seeing-as assumes that seeing-as is applied equally to the painting and to its image (*istoria*), as if they were the same thing and, being the same thing, deal with the same kind of objects as those not in the painting. For example, a picture of a house would be considered in the same way as an actual house.

¹²⁵ Richard Wollheim, *Art and Its Objects*, 2nd Edition, Cambridge University Press, UK, 1980, p. 223.

¹²⁶ Richard Wollheim, *Art and Its Objects*, 2nd Edition, Cambridge University Press, UK, 1980, p. 223.

¹²⁷ Richard Wollheim, *Art and Its Objects*, 2nd Edition, Cambridge University Press, UK, 1980, p. 224.

taken for granted as a site for seeing-in. This is because of the conditions of its location, such as a gallery or a drawing board. In this context, the surface becomes invisible, in order to enable *seeing-in*.

Thus, twofold attention is seeing the architectural context, or room, in which the painting is located, while at the same time, looking *into* the painting. In other words, the being of the space of the painting is simultaneously architectural and pictorial. The viewer has to see in this twofold way to make the painting work, as a painting. The result is a dual form of being in which the viewer takes part, with the artist, rather than merely receiving an image or internal representation. In this sense, when Wollheim is talking about the artist, he is also describing the viewer.

Wollheim concludes in an indeterminate way with the following:

Indeed he constantly seeks an evermore-intimate rapport between the two experiences, but how this is to be described is a challenge to phenomenological acuity which I cannot think how to meet.¹²⁸

The artist and viewer are left, in Wollheim's theory, in a state of negotiation in which twofoldness of space, constituted as flatness and depth, is in a state of flux. Negotiation is according to the limits of media, both in surface and depth.

Two-fold Attention: Archi-Natural and Pictorial Space

Wollheim concludes by linking the masking of contingency with the possibility of twofold attention. But this needs more explanation than the hasty ending that Wollheim provides. To do this the concepts of "archi-natural" space and "pictorial" space are needed.

"Archi-natural" space is a shorthand way of describing the space of scientific or technical enframing and is *space conceived so that it can be represented*. The prefix "archi-" is added to indicate this representational nature. Architecture is both the representation *of* a building, such as with drawings or models, as well as what is represented *by* the building, such as "school", "hospital". Within architecture, these two forms of representation are merged with precise techniques of representation, such as orthography and perspective projection, and through careful building techniques. For example, the drawings are often regarded as necessarily an accurate

¹²⁸ Richard Wollheim, *Art and Its Objects*, 2nd Edition, Cambridge University Press, UK, 1980, p. 224.

representation of what will be built. When merged, the two forms of representation are regarded as equivalent and form a single architectural *design*. In order to achieve this equivalence, or *design*, each form of representation needs to be constructed using a common ground, which for architecture is geometry. The geometry of architectural drawing is the same as the geometry of buildings. This, in turn, relies on the “laws” of geometric representation such as orthographic projection and constructed perspective. The unity of architectural *design* relies completely upon these laws. As such, architecture is the *unfolding of buildings as representation*. If this is applied to nature by adding the prefix “archi-” to “nature”, one can say that *archi-nature is the unfolding of nature as representation*.

Materiality, form, scale, colour, texture and all the techniques of perspective and representational painting are directed to the unfolding of nature as representation within pictorial space. Archi-nature is, therefore, the result of a certain way of looking at the world, as if it were *there to be represented*.

Pictorial space, particularly western European pictorial space, is what one looks into when one looks beyond the surface of the picture. Wollheim describes space for “seeing-in”. Representation is driven by the need to see archi-nature. However, there is more to pictorial space than representation, even though representation of archi-nature is often the dominant way in which pictorial space is understood. The representation of archi-nature, because it requires precise representation, lays a perspectival field over the visual field. This disguises the difference between what is visual and what is perspectival.

The history of pictorial space is different to the history of representation of archi-natural space. It is in their correspondences that their histories are blended and representation takes on the form of a grammar, as described by Hubert Damisch in *The Origin of Perspective*.¹²⁹ Parallel lines constitute a correspondence between archi-natural space and pictorial space that invokes different contingencies for each space. The visual experience of parallel lines within each space is quite different, but the contingent locality of parallel lines is similar. This is because “parallel” is a term that is an element within the “laws” of both archi-nature and representation. One can look into the painting and “see” the parallel lines going on forever into the distance, never

¹²⁹ Hubert Damisch, 1994, *The Origin of Perspective*, (John Goodman trans.), MIT Press, USA, p. 25, *Introduction*.

meeting, just as they do when they are the localised archi-natural particular of railway tracks. Alternatively, one can see that the lines are converging at a point. One can be quite clear that both contingencies exist at the same time, switching at will between them, even consciously remembering one while looking at the other, indeed *seeing one in the other* (see Figure 2.3).

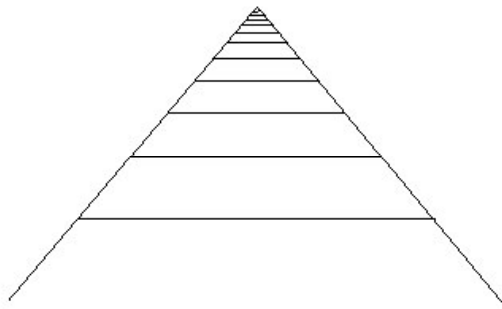


Figure 2.3 Perspectival Recession or Parallel Lines.

When looking at the *localised* particular railway tracks (actually being there and seeing the actual tracks), scientific laws (such as: “parallel lines do not meet”) are applied to archi-nature (experience to be represented). In this actual setting, the intensity of actual experience makes it difficult to find other spaces, such as those of perspective, where “parallel lines meet at the vanishing point”. The vanishing point for parallel lines is part of another kind of law, rather than that of archi-nature. To see both kinds of laws takes a way of seeing that is contradictory to the idea that a law is in fact a law. Instead, the viewer or artist needs to see laws as correspondences or constructions within which space occurs. One needs to see the correspondences in order to make representations and especially to reveal what is not being seen when adhering to one kind of law.

When looking at the actual track, can one see anything other than the nearness of the tracks at one’s feet and their distance as one’s eyes lift towards the horizon? Who can see those tracks as anything other than never meeting? Who can see them as converging on a flat plane presented vertically before one’s upright body and meeting at a point at the same level as one’s eyes? This other way of seeing is alien to everyday experience. The intensity of actual experience reinforces the view of perspectival depth as a “real” experience. Parallel lines *do not meet* in “real” experience, which is experience assembled from archi-nature. This is why it is necessary to mask or darken archi-nature in order to *see into* pictorial space. Without

this darkening, the natural laws of perspective would contradict the natural laws of pictorial space.

The Codification of Pictorial Space: Representation of Spatial Concepts

If there is a grammar in painting, it is far more complex than perspective alone. Codification of painting occurs within the techniques of painting, as well as within the picture. Besides the technical means of painting, the meaning of spaces, shapes, lines and colours must also be codified. However, codification itself is not enough. If the codification of the correspondence between spaces, shapes, lines and colours as well as perspective is taken as the form of painting, painting is bound to the effects it can create and it becomes “Op Art”, or optical art.¹³⁰ In Op Art, the science of visual perception becomes the conceptual basis for painting and painting becomes an experimental exercise concerned with perception.

Much of Victor Vasarely’s (1906-1997) work links colour with architectural concepts. Colour and geometry are unified within visual presentations of conceptual events. Space is conceptual space for Vasarely and this is what he presents in his works. As such they become representations of abstract events or, as they are called here, events in archi-natural space. Many of Vasarely’s works can be “read”, like architectural drawings, as complex coloured architectural surfaces that, like architectural renderings, are believable as architecture, or at least as objects that might be understood as architectural.¹³¹

¹³⁰ There are a number of architectural theorists that have argued that this is what needs to be done for architecture. For example, Francis DK Ching, *Architecture, Form, Space, and Order*, Wiley, USA, 1996, and William J Mitchell, *The Logic of Architecture, Design, Computation, and Cognition*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass, USA and London, UK, 1990.

¹³¹ It must be noted that this is a theme among others in Vasarely’s work. Many of his images are not reproducible as architectural objects; instead, they create an effect from the discordance between pictorial abstraction and architectural abstraction. This reflects the current state of affairs with the digital representation of architecture, where many competition entries in architecture cannot exist outside the three-dimensional digital space within which they have been modelled.

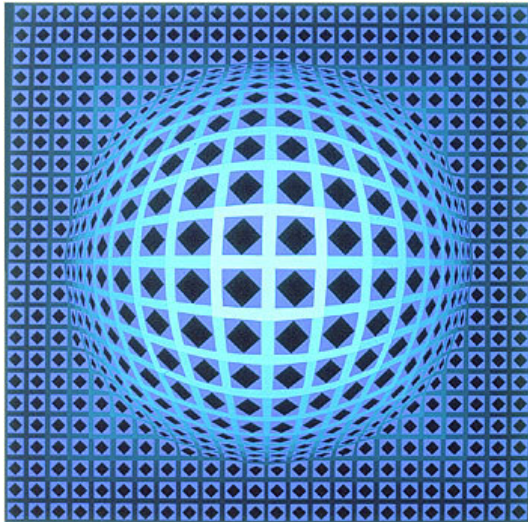


Figure 2.4 Victor Vasarely, *Struck*, 1984, 80 x 80 cm.¹³²

Op Art reflects the unification of space. Architectural space, or the space of architectural events, becomes the conceptual space for demonstrating scientific principles of spatial laws. Colour and line can be shown to have consistent, repeatable and determined meaning, even if that meaning is *aporetic*. Pictorial space becomes a Cartesian coordinate system in which the effects of architectural nature are repeated as the representational “illusion” to which Gombrich refers. The effect of Op Art is the dissonant thrill of that illusion, like an abstract version of *trompe l’oeil*. This dissonance was what Vasarely believed would universalise his art and, as such, make it accessible to everyone because it showed the unity of natural and pictorial space (paradoxically through their separation).

The following summary by Vasarely illustrates his belief that art was moving more to a concern with space:

...“plastic” triumphs over anecdote (Manet)—the first geometricization of the exterior world (Cézanne)—the conquest of pure colour (Matisse)—the explosion of representation (Picasso)—exterior vision changes to interior vision (Kandinsky)—a branch of painting dissolves into architecture, becoming polychromatic (Mondrian)—departure from the large plastic synthetics (Le Corbusier)—new plastic alphabets (Arp, Taeuber, Magnelli, Herbin)—abandoning volume for SPACE (Calder)...¹³³

Vasarely then proceeds to connect abstraction to an architectural approach:

¹³² Downloaded from <http://www.vasarely.org/virtual-gallery2.html>, 23/01/2004.

¹³³ Kristine Stiles and Peter Selz, (eds.), *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: A Sourcebook of Artist's Writings*, University of California Press, USA, 1996, p. 109.

Soon, form-colour invaded the entire two-dimensional surface, this metamorphosis of the painting-object, by way of architecture, [leads] to a spatial universe of polychromy.¹³⁴

But Vasarely, perhaps suspecting a trap, then claims to have escaped architectural representation:

...an extra-architectural solution was already proposed and we broke deliberately broke [sic] with the neo-plastic law.¹³⁵

Immediately following this passage is a collection of abstract technical elements for painting that reveals the same language as the Bauhaus. These include, “pure composition”, “positive negative”, “plastic unity”. But his claim that “Form and Colour are one” is where Vasarely makes his contribution to painting and theory: colour is brought back into the unity of *modern space*.¹³⁶ For Vasarely, this is a return of colour under the “laws” in which pictorial space is codified for representation, where pictorial space must now represent *concepts*.

For Vasarely, the return of colour under laws is a response to an inner purpose that is similar to Mondrian’s claim for a spiritual purpose in painting. Piet Mondrian (1872-1944) writes, almost as a precursor to Vasarely:

In this landscape, the horizontal—with regard to ourselves—is determinately expressed only in the horizontal of the skyline. Thus, only one position is expressed determinately: its *opposition*, however, whether as *vertical* or any other position, is not here determinately expressed, as a line.¹³⁷

The line itself is indeterminate but the point is not. It is this point to which the eye gravitates, by necessity, as a point of identification. For Mondrian this was the basis of his inner spiritual purpose or the vertical individual in the horizontal landscape. It is the determination of the point using two lines that creates the “rule”. The perfect signification of this relationship is the perpendicular against the horizontal, which expresses the relationship of two opposites.

¹³⁴ Kristine Stiles and Peter Selz, (eds.), *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: A Sourcebook of Artist's Writings*, University of California Press, USA, 1996, p. 109.

¹³⁵ Kristine Stiles and Peter Selz, (eds.), *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: A Sourcebook of Artist's Writings*, University of California Press, USA, 1996, p. 110.

¹³⁶ Kristine Stiles and Peter Selz, (eds.), *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: A Sourcebook of Artist's Writings*, University of California Press, USA, 1996, USA, p. 110.

¹³⁷ Piet Mondrian, (James S Martin, trans.), *Natural Reality and Abstract Reality, An Essay in Triologue Form*, George Brazillier Press, 1995, p. 22.

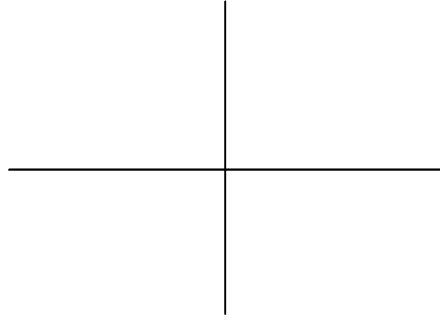


Figure 2.5 Subjective point, defined by lines.

Mondrian proceeds to argue that this position is determined by a relation between vertical and horizontal lines, *even when the line is not present*. Mondrian connects this to a spiritual appreciation of the world as *locations of events*. For Mondrian this is a meta-nature, from which nature derives “repose”, whether these relationships are in archi-nature or in pictorial space. Mondrian’s determinate point from indeterminate lines derives its necessity from its reconciliation between man and the world. This, for Mondrian, is a spiritual necessity that is much like that expressed by Hegel.

Vasarely, however, removes the spiritual aspect from this necessity, replacing it with a technical one. At the same time, the line is replaced with colour. In other words, inner spirit is replaced with the capacity to express that inner spirit through a technological approach to colour. Like Mondrian, Vasarely is driven by the resolution of the geometry of subjective unity, of the figure on the horizon, of the vertical against the horizontal. Consequently, he is driven to architecture as the reinforcement of this reduced spatially unified geometry (rectilinear architecture, X, Y and Z-axes).

For Vasarely, this becomes a blending of archi-natural space with pictorial space, creating discordant hybrids and “realistic illusions”. Grids are laid in two dimensions on a horizontal plane and then expanded into a third, vertical dimension by distorting the initial grid with geometric variation and careful, perspectival gradation of colour.¹³⁸ To do this, Vasarely needs colour to be unified with linear geometry. The precise representational qualities of Renaissance chiaroscuro and atmosphere are necessary for the effects that Vasarely creates. Instead of the fastidious surface blending and layering of colours in Renaissance painting, Vasarely achieves the same

¹³⁸ Vasarely’s technique sometimes also leads to visual *aporia*, which is evident in many of his more cubic works, such as *Keple Gestalt*, 1968 and *Torony-Nage*, 1969.

effect by using grids to isolate colour changes, in effect modularising or digitising these techniques. Vasarely also ties his painting to representation of abstract architectural geometry and its dimensional space, but carefully avoids drifting into Mondrian’s “spiritual”, by claiming that his work is “transcendent”.¹³⁹ As such, Vasarely’s concerns, like those of Gombrich, are in line with 20th century philosophy, especially with the post-WWII positivistic neo-Kantianism, often associated with the emergent discipline of cybernetics and computer technology.¹⁴⁰ It does not take much imagination to see the relationship between computing and Vasarely’s paintings. Many of the images from “computer art” in the 1960s and early 1970s are little more than copies of Op Art. The computer-generated image in Figure 2.6 was made by in c1971.¹⁴¹

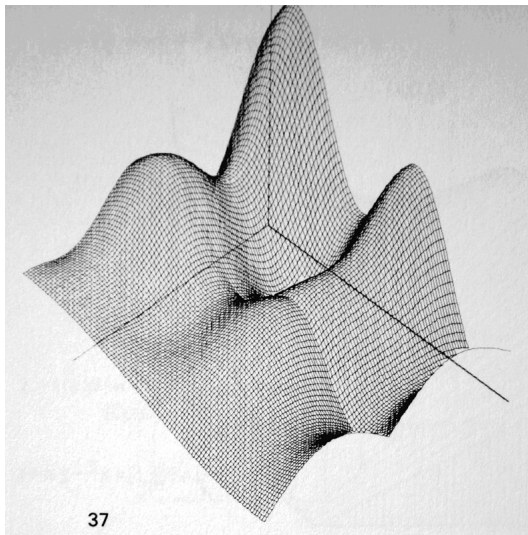


Figure 2.6 Charles Csurik, *Computer Drawings of a Surface, Which Was Based on Four Boundary Curves*, 1971.¹⁴²

With this connection to computer art, it is possible to model this theme in Vasarely’s work as the exploration of dimensional variations of base state grids. In other words, Vasarely is exploring the “architecture” of pictorial space. The grid is used as if it were a “site” for abstractions of “architecture” within pictorial space. As such, the two-dimensional grid is the base, or ground-state, archi-natural space for

¹³⁹ Kristine Stiles and Peter Selz, (eds.), *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: A Sourcebook of Artist’s Writings*, University of California Press, USA, 1996, p. 111.

¹⁴⁰ Evelyn Fox Keller, *Marrying The Premodern to the Postmodern: Computers and Organisms After WWII*, in D Tofts, A Jonson and A Cavallaro, *Prefiguring Cyberculture: An Intellectual History*, MIT Press/Power Institute, USA, 2002, pp. 52-83.

¹⁴¹ Jasia Reichardt, *The Computer in Art*, Studio Vista/Nostrand Reinhold Paperback, NY, USA, 1971.

¹⁴² Jasia Reichardt, *The Computer in Art*, Studio Vista/Nostrand Reinhold Paperback, NY, USA, 1971. p. 38.

Vasarely (see Figure 2.7). A grid is used because it allows both a rational comprehension of “architecture” and a relatively direct manipulation of its representation. It also clarifies vertical movement in relation to horizontal construction because events within the grid are bound to coordinates.

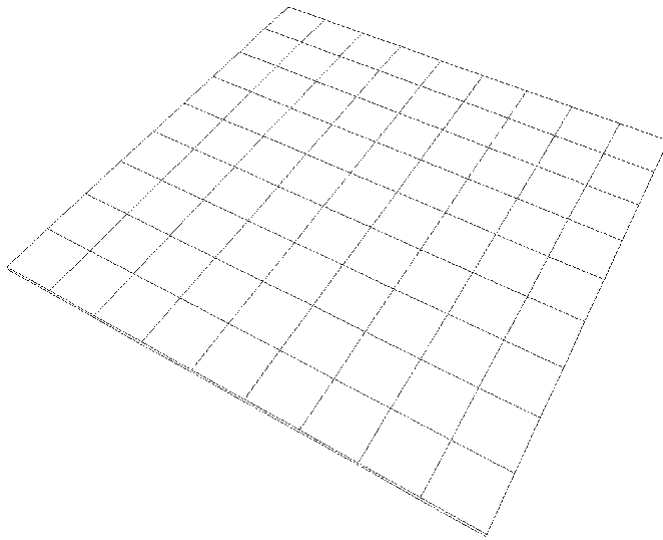


Figure 2.7 Grid of architectural space, Vasarely's spatial base-state.

This base, or ground-state, is then distorted vertically to create a representation of an event in conceptual space by moving the grid intersections in a vertical direction (Figure 2.8). The effect is the appearance of a bulge or hollow formed in the base.

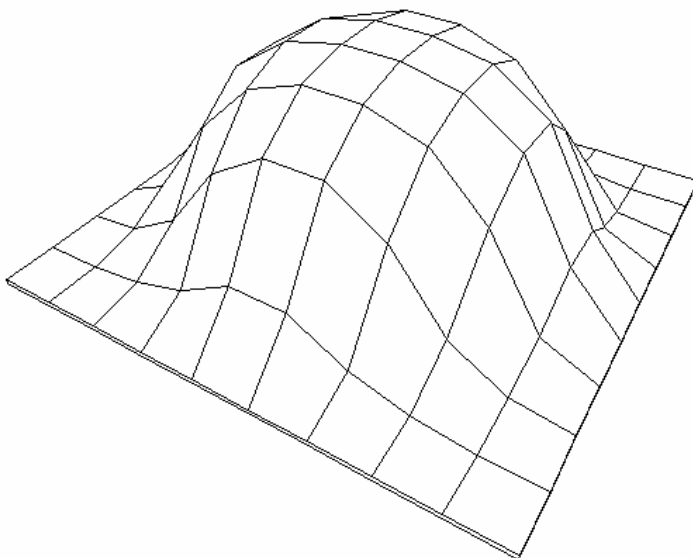


Figure 2.8 Archi-natural event.

Colour can be added to the bulge to emphasise the effect and to add to the precision of the representation (Figure 2.9).

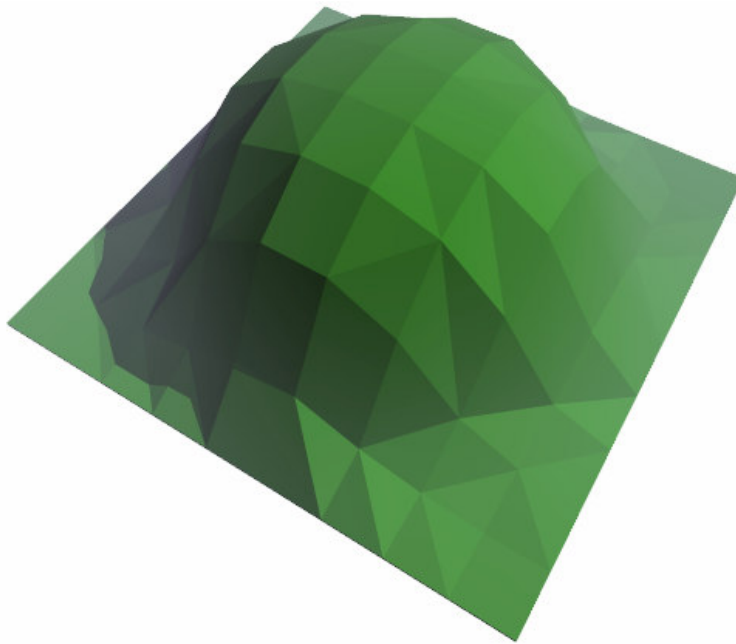


Figure 2.9 Archi-natural event in colour.

Vasarely retains the grid as the basis for the application of colour in a “digital” way. Small systematic changes or gradations between small areas of colour form smooth lines of colour change. The overall colour change is according to systems like those of Renaissance painting, where proximity of the parts of an object, as well as orientation, determine how the colour changes are made. Lines of colour change are contrasted to create shininess or a diffuse reflection.

Vasarely uses neither a landscape nor a portrait orientation. Instead, he chooses a point of view directly above the event, as can be seen for example in *Struck* (Figure 2.4). This aerial point of view of architectural events implies a suspended, floating and therefore disembodied point of view that locates a disembodied “mind” within its own conceptual space. In Vasarely’s painting, the mind is addressed directly, almost as if it were the concept were thought, rather than seen and, although paradoxical, it is the painting’s visual effect that creates this impression.

This floating point of view with its slightly vertiginous effect gives the paintings and prints a static melancholy view of an ideal, timeless world. For Vasarely, representation is abstract. As such, it allows him to present abstract architectural concepts, but in doing so, the physicality of seeing must be denied. In this sense,

Vasarely's work is an example of Gombrich's seeing-as. For abstract painting that retains the physicality of seeing, another type of approach is needed.

Pictorial Space that Doesn't Represent

Bridget Riley's works are made using a different conceptual approach to that of Vasarely. Riley is often discussed in relation to Vasarely, under the assumption that their work is similar. Clearly, this is because both artists use hard-edged, geometric abstraction, visual dissonance and optical effects. They have both been known as central figures in Op Art, despite Riley's denial that this is what her work concerns.¹⁴³ Vasarely's work is tied to the drive to represent, but represents *abstract* architectural space within pictorial depth.

However, Riley's 1983 painting *Bali* (Figure 2.10) does not represent an architectural event in archi-natural space in the way that some work by Vasarely does.

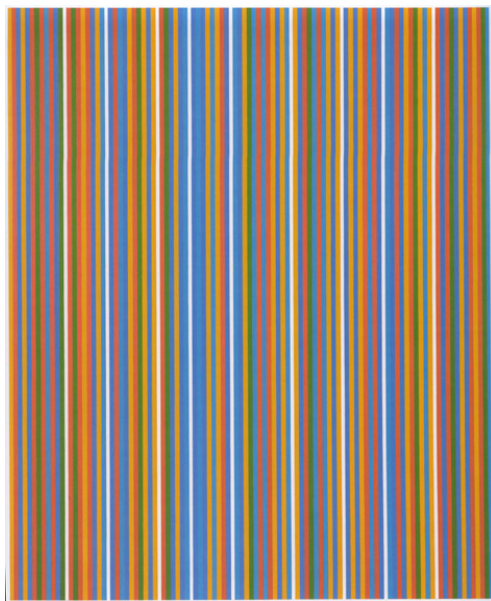


Figure 2.10 Bridget Riley, *Bali*, Oil on Linen, 1983, 237cm x 195.1cm.¹⁴⁴

Instead, colour itself is used to create non-dimensional depth. While Vasarely strives for representation of abstract architectural concepts, Riley operates from an open-ended intuitive approach in which the sensory events of shared life are the beginning of each work. Riley starts with “the means” of making a painting from

¹⁴³ Robert Kudielka (ed.), *The Eye's Mind: The Collected Writings of Bridget Riley*, Thames and Hudson, London, UK, 1999, pp. 61, 79, 125.

¹⁴⁴ Paul Moorhouse, *Bridget Riley*, Tate Publishing, London UK, 2003, p. 165.

which “criteria evolve”.¹⁴⁵ For Riley, to make art is to make an offer to share her vision of events as a visual event. The viewer shares her vision or proposal.

Long before I ever saw a major painting, [I] felt the need to share an experience ...¹⁴⁶

What Riley is sharing is her own personal experience, which, when she begins to paint, is *visual* experience. Painting for Riley begins with visual experiences. These experiences are not, for example, auditory. Riley does not translate other sensory experience into painting. Riley’s is a silent world of pure vision, organised in contrasts and, as it becomes more sophisticated, in colour contrasts. Her painting is therefore solely visual, but for Riley this is a vision through which can be found a “greater reality”.¹⁴⁷

Riley’s statement that “my direction is continually conditioned by my responses to the particular work in progress at any given moment” reveals a concern with *process* in which personal responses to visual experiences are built within each work.¹⁴⁸ Riley is concerned that something be gained during this process, which cannot be “planned”. This implies that judgment is used in some aspects of the work during the process of its realisation and this takes precedence over decisions made in the planning stages.

Riley’s planning stages consist of straight and curved, ruled geometric drawings that are tested graphically in order to gain the right rhythms, variations and individual forms.¹⁴⁹ Copies of these are then painted with gouache to test the basic composition

¹⁴⁵ Riley’s essay in Robert Kudielka, (ed.), *The Eye’s Mind: The Collected Writings of Bridget Riley*, Thames and Hudson, London, UK, 1999, p. 128.

¹⁴⁶ Riley’s interview in Robert Kudielka, (ed.), *The Eye’s Mind: The Collected Writings of Bridget Riley*, Thames and Hudson, London, UK, 1999, p. 30.

¹⁴⁷ Riley’s interview in Robert Kudielka, (ed.), *The Eye’s Mind: The Collected Writings of Bridget Riley*, Thames and Hudson, London, UK, 1999, p. 33.

¹⁴⁸ Bridget Riley, “Untitled Statement” c1968, in Kristine Stiles and Peter Selz, (eds.), *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: A Sourcebook of Artist’s Writings*, University of California Press, USA, 1996, p. 112.

¹⁴⁹ This method is evident in the drawings and paintings presented in a number of texts. The clearest example, among black and white paintings, is in Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney and City Gallery Wellington, *Bridget Riley: Paintings and Drawings 1961-2004*, Ridinghouse, London, UK, 2005, pp. 49-51, which shows *Descending*, 1965, with its preparatory drawings. Among the waves paintings, a clear example is also in Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney and City Gallery Wellington, *Bridget Riley: Paintings and Drawings 1961-2004*, Ridinghouse, London, UK, 2005, p. 87-89, where *Andante 1*, 1980, is shown followed by its preparatory drawing. The use of gouache as a colour tester within drawings, is shown in Paul Moorhouse, *Bridget Riley*, Tate Publishing, London UK, 2003, p. 100, with *Turquoise and Red Curves, Japanese*, 1969. It is clear that this is the basic working method that Riley uses, even though the elaboration of “theoretical” significance often disguises the relative simplicity of the technique. The example elaborated in this section is of later work.

of colours chosen for the work. The title of the work, however, has a special role in the choice of colours and shapes.

For Riley, the title of a work is a “small bridge” by which the viewer has access to the non-figurative sensation of the work. Riley says about her titles:

I try to title my paintings according to their spirit. I think paintings should have titles, they can be a small bridge by which the spectator can enter into the painting.¹⁵⁰

To enter into the paintings is to enter *visually* or to see into the paintings in line with Wollheim’s seeing-in. In other words, the small bridge is a way to suspend the impervious flatness of the surface. To see in, or to enter visually, is to share with Riley the spirit of her work, which is to say the visual experience of nature.¹⁵¹ The small bridge is the means by which that sharing takes place.

Naming is how one gains entry into the work but is not necessarily what will be found there. Riley’s names all come from the experience from which the painting begins, rather than the conceptual mystery that the name of many of Vasarely’s works (such as *Vonal*) implies.

The “spirit” of Riley’s paintings, to which she gives a name in each painting, is the means by which she shares her vision of the world. Her spiritual purpose is one of communion in the sense that one communes with the visual experiences of nature through her work. This is for her the awakening of visual experience, which she wishes to share. For Riley, the naming of the painting does not suggest a figurative motive but gives access to Riley’s visual sources, such as the source of the colour or rhythm used in any particular work. To the viewer is revealed a physical experience of seeing a visual effect translated into painting. Her painting evokes the physical experience of seeing natural effects, not objects, even conceptual or abstract objects. The viewer has to see *with* the painting, rather than looking at it. This means that her spiritual purpose is physical seeing rather than conceptual seeing. In conceptual seeing, the “mind” sees using the eyes as a window, thereby creating an inner representation according to phenomena. In Riley’s work, the experience is of concern.

¹⁵⁰ Robert Kudielka, (ed.), *The Eye’s Mind: The Collected Writings of Bridget Riley*, Thames and Hudson, London, UK, 1999, p. 128.

¹⁵¹ It must be noted that Riley does not mean spirituality connected to religion of any kind. Rather, for Riley, it is as if she were basing spirituality on the engagement possible when one can see the world. This visual spirituality is a kind of secular animism, where the life of the world is infused in all its experiences, including especially the visual. Sharing of those experiences by those that can see them appears to be an expansion of spirituality, for Riley.

In other words there is no separation of seeing and concept. For Riley, the mind *is* the body and so seeing is a bodily function that occurs at the surface of the senses.

Seeing for Riley is a bodily function through which a communion within a visual experience of the world occurs. Her work reproduces this as painting. So the point of view in her paintings remains that of the upright viewer, with feet firmly planted on the ground, quite unlike Vasarely's detached and floating point of view. The terms that Riley uses to describe the creation of her work are, therefore, necessarily about physical motions, such as *movement* and *speed*.

The geometry of Riley's work varies little once it has been resolved in the early sketches. The geometry of each work provides colours with a working base or ground. The colours, however, may change as the work proceeds.¹⁵² This suggests that the connection between the name and sensation of the work is not fixed in relation to the colour, but is instead ambiguous, open-ended or indeterminate, like Mondrian's lines but in terms of colour.

Colour is changed as the work progresses. The development of geometry in sketches and line drawings is quite a different procedure to that of colour, also suggesting that the two have a variable relationship in visual events in the final work. It is clear that Vasarely's work is technically far more complex and diverse than that of Riley, both in colour and in line. Yet there remains stiffness about the absolute representation of concepts in Vasarely's work. This is because of the absolute connection between geometry and colour. In Riley's work, the ambiguity of the relationship between colour and geometry, especially in terms of the representation of depth, produces a kind of looseness that connects her to her own visual experience of nature.

For Riley, painting is the development of a process that leads from the title's colours, as a scene of contrasts, not to an end but into a future. Towards this virtual state, colour-contrasts can be understood in terms of movement, temperature, focus, repetition and a number of other analogies of physical experience. These physical analogies provide methods for examining and testing arrangements of contingencies during the working process.

¹⁵² This account is from images of finished and process work in Paul Moorhouse, *Bridget Riley*, Tate Publishing, London UK, 2003.

In 1968, Riley wrote:

These relationships in visual terms concern such things as fast and slow movements, warm and cold colour, focal and open space, repetition opposed to “event,” repetition as event, increase and decrease, static and active, black opposed to white, greys as sequences harmonising these polarities.¹⁵³

The purpose of this method was to create a correspondence with the indeterminacy of *being* within lived experience, as Riley writes in 1978:

I wanted something which operated on more levels, was capable of more development, had more grey’d quality, like the indeterminate nature of reality.¹⁵⁴

In 1990, in a conversation with Robert Kudielka, Riley describes the space in which this is to take place:

I think of space as another plastic agent grounded in colour. As you know, colours can adopt different planes, similar ones or approximately the same, according to the context in which they are placed.¹⁵⁵

Geometry must be more than a static arrangement for Riley, so that it can respond to colour. Geometry is the basis upon which the movement in colour planes becomes possible. The basic grid is not enough. There must be free variation in geometric systems, such as the grid, to allow colour movement and other physical analogues of vision to be possible. The following image (Figure 2.11) is a simplified way of breaking up a basic black and white grid that will allow movement in colour. Repetitions and emphases create foci at certain locations as one’s vision moves across the surface.

¹⁵³ Bridget Riley, “Untitled Statement” c1968, in Kristine Stiles and Peter Selz, (eds.), *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: A Sourcebook of Artists’ Writings*, University of California Press, USA, 1996, p. 112.

¹⁵⁴ “Into Colour: In Conversation with Robert Kudielka”, in Robert Kudielka, (ed.), *The Eye’s Mind: The Collected Writings of Bridget Riley*, Thames and Hudson, London, UK, 1999, p. 64.

¹⁵⁵ Riley, Bridget (interview with Robert Kudielka), 1990, “According to Sensation”, in Paul Moorhouse, *Bridget Riley*, Tate Publishing, London UK, 2003, p. 215.

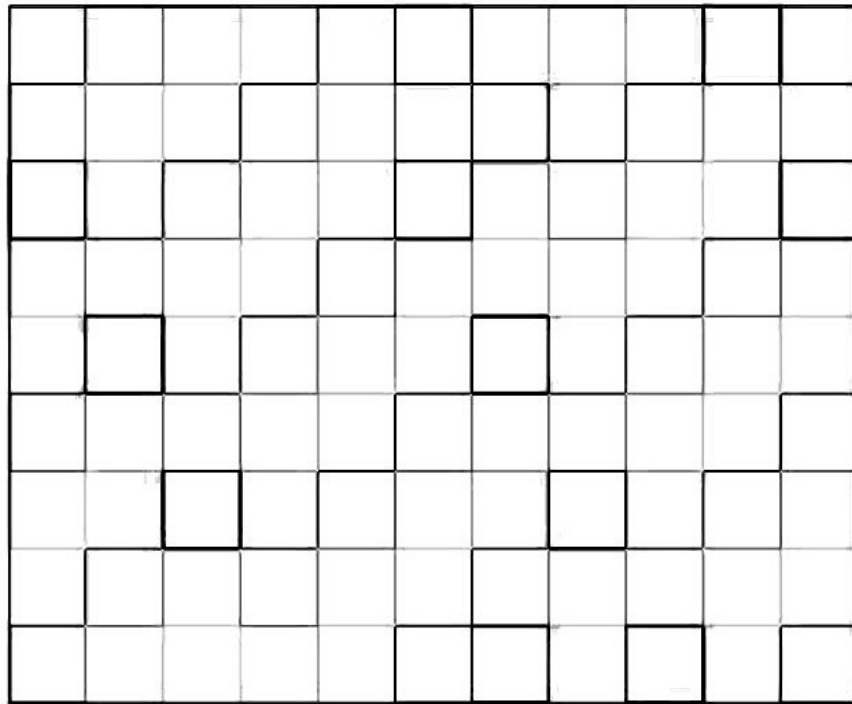


Figure 2.11 Diagrammatic version of the geometric layout in Riley's paintings.¹⁵⁶

Riley works carefully to create complex geometric arrangements. Her geometric arrangements are usually more complex than the plane grid shown above, in that she adds curves and angles in order to allow for subtler colour movements. The relationship between geometry and colour in Riley's work can be represented as a layering of colour planes between which movements in colour occur. The interplay of colours between planes, called "movement", requires seeing depth. In other words, in painting, it is only by a strange seeing—the twofold nature of seeing as surface and depth—that movements between colours are revealed. As such, it is only through strange seeing that the physicality of seeing in Riley's work is accessible.

Riley's paintings are constructed on planes, where each plane is coloured. Each colour has depth within the picture. This is not a determinate depth, as can be found through perspective, but is a dimensionless depth.

¹⁵⁶ This image is a reduced reconstruction to demonstrate the process and not an actual artwork. It should be pointed out that this process, while derived from texts both by Riley and about Riley, was confirmed also by her public lecture at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, in 2004 (text not available).

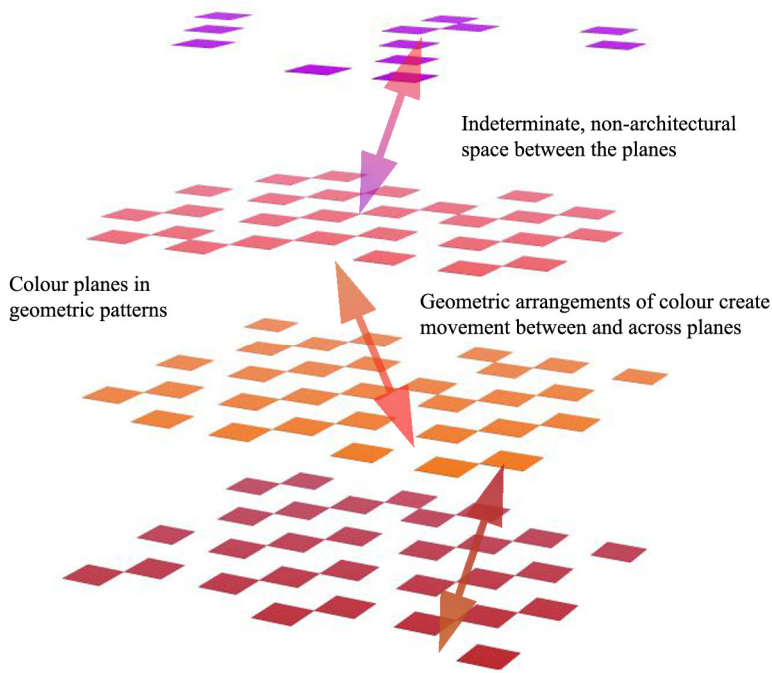


Figure 2.12 Spatial diagram of colour planes in Bridget Riley's paintings.

Between these planes is found pictorial space, forming visual events that are describable using the terms “fast and slow movements, warm and cold colour, focal and open space, repetition opposed to “event,” repetition as event, increase and decrease, static and active, black opposed to white, greys as sequences harmonising these polarities.”¹⁵⁷ The indeterminate non-architectural, non-archi-natural space that exists between planes of colour has no dimensions in the perspectival sense, only as non-perspectival *depth*. This might be called “surface depth”. The finished painting would be viewed from the front, as a surface, into which one sees. The differences between the coloured shapes, as depth, are seen “end on” and so cannot be understood as dimensions.

The painting's depth is not measurable and so is not “architectural”. Yet it remains *natural* and for Riley is a correspondence with her own visual experience of nature, which is a visual nature outside of perspectival space, or in other words, nature that is neither architectural nor archi-natural. As such, Riley removes the perspectival field from the visual field.

¹⁵⁷ Bridget Riley, “Untitled Statement” c1968, in Kristine Stiles and Peter Selz, (eds.), *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: A Sourcebook of Artist's Writings*, University of California Press, USA, 1996, p. 112.

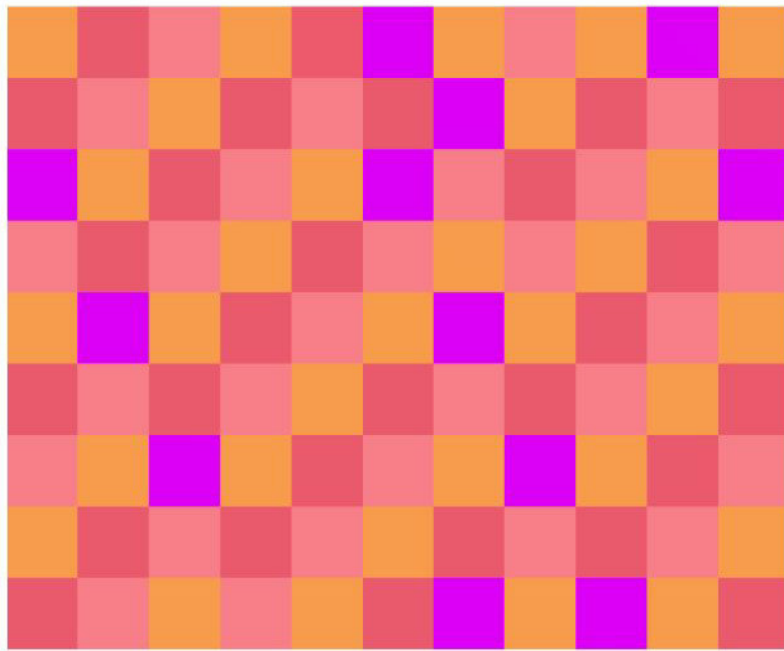


Figure 2.13 Surface depth in colour: A model of Bridget Riley's working method.

For Riley, the workings of pictorial space are not conceived plastically or as a representation of abstract architecture within archi-natural space, but as space of a visual event in nature and an event corresponding to and with the "whole person".¹⁵⁸ As such, a visual nature is not overlaid with the formula of the lens-like model of rationality. Riley's work is no "Mirror of Nature", nor does it express an inner "glassy essence", as Vasarely's does. The work is an assembly of differences that reveal depth within visual difference. "Movement", or "speed", is produced between the strata by movement across surfaces. A "fast" movement is one that has a large movement between one depth and another in relation to a relatively small distance across the painting's surface. In other words, it is a movement of the eye that is subject to a high acceleration *into depth* as it moves across the work.

In the late 1950s to the mid-1960s, Riley worked only in black and white, which, according to curator Paul Moorhouse, was due to a rediscovery of "contrast" learned from Seurat.¹⁵⁹ For Riley, this was return to pure contrast and was the result of a need to rediscover how contrast, tone and line could work. The use of black and white was

¹⁵⁸ Riley, B, c1968, "Untitled Statement" in Stiles, K and Selz P, (eds.), 1996, *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: A Sourcebook of Artist's Writings*, University of California Press, USA, p. 112.

¹⁵⁹ Paul Moorhouse, *Bridget Riley*, Tate Publishing, London, UK, 2003, p. 14.

motivated by the belief that “*there were absolutes*” [italics in original] and that these could be used to make a thing that “put itself into hazard by some aspect of its own nature”, thereby making visible an instability.¹⁶⁰

For Riley, black and white, as a “colour method”, was a process in which the possibilities of *absolute* contrast emerge. Riley learned that when black and white are used alone, they create a fixed and absolute “depth”.

Colour creates ambiguities and differences in depth that black and white alone do not. It is the speed with which depth forms, due to the construction of shape and form in colour that undermines the clarity of repose and movement in black and white. *Kiss*, 1961 (Figure 2.14) shows how simple movement occurs, even in the absolutes of black and white.

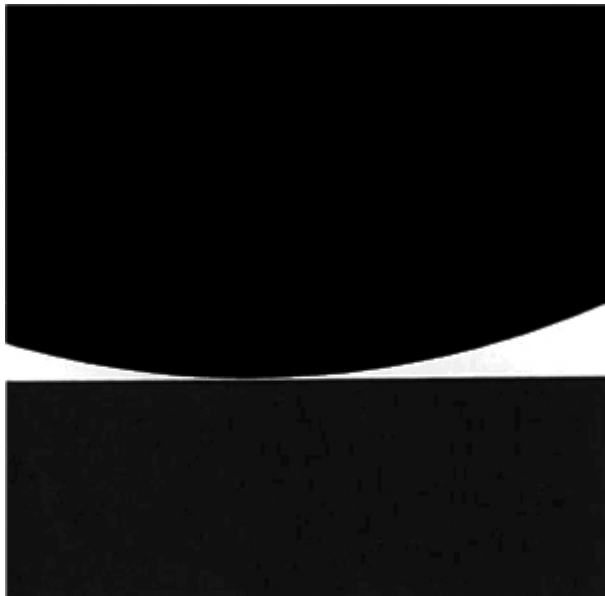


Figure 2.14 Bridget Riley, *Kiss*, 1961.¹⁶¹

Riley then sought to destabilise the clarity of rest and movement found in black and white by using colour. After reintroducing colour in the mid-1960s, Riley explored increasingly complex geometric arrays, creating rhythms and movement in increasingly “painful” or intense visual effects.¹⁶² Early coloured work tentatively used colour to shift the “speed” of the paintings, as in the following work from 1965.

¹⁶⁰ Paul Moorhouse, *Bridget Riley*, Tate Publishing, London UK, 2003, p. 14.

¹⁶¹ Downloaded from http://www.mishabittleston.com/artists/bridget_riley/ on 27.9.2004.

¹⁶² Critics at the time complained of pain when looking at Riley’s work. Richard Shiff explores this as part of his essay “Bridget Riley: The Edge of Animation”, in Paul Moorhouse, *Bridget Riley*, Tate Publishing, London UK, 2003, pp. 81-92.



Figure 2.15 Bridget Riley, *Arrest 1*, 1965.¹⁶³

In many of Riley's works there appears, at times, looseness in the application of geometry. For example, the wave lines in *Arrest 1* (Figure 2.15) seem at first to shift arbitrarily in relation to each other. Yet, if one observes these changes closely, the line that the eye follows is an asymmetrical "V" shape, with the point of the "V" at approximately one third from the left hand side of the canvas. The movements between each wave line not only imply this "V" shape, they also give the "V" shape a sense that it is appearing out of misty space.

From the rigour of stripes to the visually complex and multi-layered geometry of the late 1990s and early 2000s, Riley's works are visual experiences for the each person in nature. For Riley, this is an intuitive seeing rather than a conceptual vision and is always open to the visual world. Riley, however, acknowledges conceptual or inner vision, in which the work of art must be "autonomous". Autonomy opens the way for artwork to reveal visual being in a subliminal way, which is to say directly from the visual experience of a work. The work of art and the viewer have a unique relationship that can be reflected upon as inner thought by the viewer. Each viewing forms this anew, thereby creating a multitude of visual events that occur as autonomous and, paradoxically, non-natural events. This leads to an understanding of artwork (lines, tones and colours) as an effect in which a viewer is opened to those

¹⁶³ Downloaded from http://www.mishabittleston.com/artists/bridget_riley/ on 27.9.2004.

aspects of the world that cannot be identified, and as such is *polynomy* rather than autonomy. Moorhouse indicates this direction, quoting Riley:

The masses, open and closed spaces, the lines, tones and colours can be organised in a parallel way. It is as though the relationships are built up in all their complexity to provide a vehicle for those things which cannot be objectively identified but which can nevertheless be expressed in this way.¹⁶⁴

It is the technical or objective features of Riley's work, from which comes its constructive autonomy, which lead it to this *polynomy*. Riley's work, thereby, begins to operate in a way similar to Kant's natural sublime.¹⁶⁵ Riley's work combines technical and objective features in a unified visual event. The sublime is there to be experienced as *sensation* only and in the case of Riley's work as a *polynomous visual sublime*. Because the sublime cannot be measured (it is an absolute, beyond comparison), it cannot be experienced objectively. As visual sensation, it can only be experienced as informality, or that which does not have form in the philosophically transcendental sense. Kant argues that the sublime in nature is like religion in that it is only judged within faith or "spirituality". As sublime visual sensation, painting requires a faith in seeing, which Riley argues for in her biographical notes.¹⁶⁶

For Riley, seeing is imbued with being, as indicated in the following quote from "Statement" 1970:

My final paintings are the intimate dialogue between my total being and visual agents that constitute the medium. ... I have always tried to realise visual and emotional energies simultaneously from the medium.¹⁶⁷

Riley is also linked to the phenomenological interests of philosophers such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Merleau-Ponty writes of the engaged being of the senses:

It is the body and it alone, because it is a two-dimensional being, that can bring us to the things themselves, not flat beings but beings in depth, inaccessible to the subject

¹⁶⁴ Paul Moorhouse, *Bridget Riley*, Tate Publishing, London UK, 2003, p. 23. Originally from Bridget Riley, *Dialogues on Art*, 1995, pp. 79-80.

¹⁶⁵ Immanuel Kant, (trans. Pluhar, Werner S), *Critique of Judgement*, Hackett Publishing Company, Indianapolis Cambridge, USA, 1987, pp. 119-126.

¹⁶⁶ Bridget Riley, "The Pleasure of Sight", in Robert Kudielka, (ed.), *The Eye's Mind: The Collected Writings of Bridget Riley*, Thames and Hudson, London, UK, 1999, pp. 30-34.

¹⁶⁷ Robert Kudielka, (ed.), *The Eye's Mind: The Collected Writings of Bridget Riley*, Thames and Hudson, London, UK, 1999, p. 79.

that would survey them from above, open to him alone that, if it be possible, would coexist with them in the same world.¹⁶⁸

The in-between spaces, in which the movement of the painting exists and pictorial space exists, are where this intertwining takes place, which is to say where depth occurs not as a representation of archi-natural space, but as *visually* natural space. In other words, to see into the painting's pictorial depth is to experience natural space constituted from vision alone.

Having developed a spatio-visual working method with which to explore pictorial space, Riley began to make self-referential visual events that aim for sublime visual sensation. Not interested in expressing or representing the philosophical relevance of concepts such as “the sublime” or “phenomena”, her work retains a polynomy in which the work actually *is* these events. This is essential to her mode of practice; from this, her work gains its integrity, which is to say, her work is entirely within the visually natural. Visual integrity is founded in the sublime visual sensation and the emotional, non-literal effect of her work. Yet, in stressing indeterminacy and openness within visual events, her work is one of the many forms of general critique of Enlightenment subjectivity in the mid- and late 20th century. Indeed, one can understand Riley's concept of “pictorial space” as the venue for that visual critique. As Riley writes in 1995:

It's the sensation of depth, which I have always been interested in. In perception, depth is the primary spatial dimension, as Merleau-Ponty saw. The idea of a two dimensional 'flatness' in painting is a geometric concept of the same sort as the construction of a perspectival box [,] which gives the 'illusion' of a three-dimensional projection of pictorial space[which] is deep in the sense that there is nothing behind, as it were, no ultimate base or [measurable] distance to which it relates. It is made up of contrasts and the different planes [that] colours adopt on the canvas.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁸ From the essay used as Chapter 4 of *The Visible and the Invisible*, “The Intertwining-The Chiasm”, Maurice Merleau-Ponty (Lingis, A trans.), *The Visible and the Invisible*, Northwestern University Press, USA, 2000, p. 136. A “two-dimensional being”, for Merleau-Ponty, is the surface upon which the world is divided from each individual. It is, in effect, the surface of the senses and can be compared to Deleuze's “plane of presentation” or “plane of consistency”, referred to in *Logic of Sense, A Thousand Plateaus* and *What is Philosophy?* It is on this plane or surface that the world as becoming is revealed. Transcendent concepts are brought to this plane or surface in an attempt to create a stable or unchanging world of representations.

¹⁶⁹ Robert Kudielka, (ed.), *The Eye's Mind: The Collected Writings of Bridget Riley*, Thames and Hudson, London, UK, 1999, p. 132. The reference to Merleau-Ponty is from Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “Eye and Mind” (1961), in *The Primacy of Perception and Other Essays*, ed. James M. Edie,

Richard Shiff notes discrepancies and dissonances between illusionistic consistency and visual depth that occur in Riley's work. For Shiff, these ensure the work's reading as autonomous pictorial space.¹⁷⁰ In his essay, *Bridget Riley: The Edge of Animation*, Shiff writes about Riley's painting *Movement and Square* (1961).¹⁷¹ In this particular section, he argues, in response to art historian Rosalind Krauss that Riley's work does not attempt to form a coherent illusion, but instead creates a movement in seeing. As Shiff writes:

If the perspective in *Movement and Squares* represents an object or situation, no one has ever encountered one. ... We perceive the illusion Riley creates: yet that experience alludes to nothing, not even its own predictable termination, because Riley, applying her judgement, shifts the axis of recession to the right, bringing asymmetry to the symmetrical square format and denying any obvious compositional resolution.¹⁷²

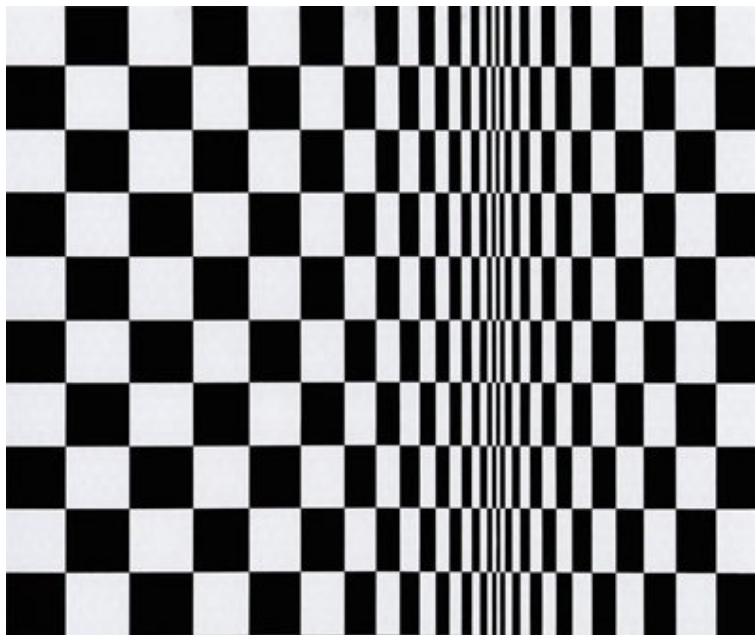


Figure 2.16 Bridget Riley, *Movement and Squares*, 1961, tempera on hardboard.¹⁷³

Some of Riley's paintings, such as *Movement and Squares*, were described as creating visual pain.¹⁷⁴ It is as though the harshness of the contrast and the

Northwestern University Press 1964, pp. 159-190. In this essay Merleau-Ponty distinguishes between Descartes' mathematical concept of space to which depth is added as "a third dimension derived from the other two" (p.172) and the painter's experience of depth as the primary dimension of perception, quoting Giacometti's remark on Cézanne: "I believe Cézanne was seeking depth all his life" (p.179).

¹⁷⁰ Paul Moorhouse, *Bridget Riley*, Tate Publishing, London UK, 2003, p. 83.

¹⁷¹ Paul Moorhouse, *Bridget Riley*, Tate Publishing, London UK, 2003, pp. 81-92.

¹⁷² Paul Moorhouse, *Bridget Riley*, Tate Publishing, London UK, 2003, p. 83.

¹⁷³ Paul Moorhouse, *Bridget Riley*, Tate Publishing, London UK, 2003, p. 83.

representation of architectural depth combine to disrupt vision. This conceptual dissonance creates a nauseating effect when combined with the irritating after-images of intense black and white.

The contrast between non-architectural pictorial depth and the impression that there might be an architectural event creates a tension in that the reading of an architectural effect is not quite possible. This is done by slowly reducing the size of the squares in the grid towards a third point on the painting's surface. In other words, the "illusionistic" representational depth is only in one direction. In the other, vertical direction, there is only the grid, which in a sense contradicts the graded sizes in the horizontal direction. The result is that while the picture might be read like a Vasarely, it is not *actually* representational. The horizontal and, therefore, parallel lines would have to converge and coincide with the curvature of the "surfaces" for this to occur. The following image (Figure 2.17) shows how the painting would look if its representational features were consistent.

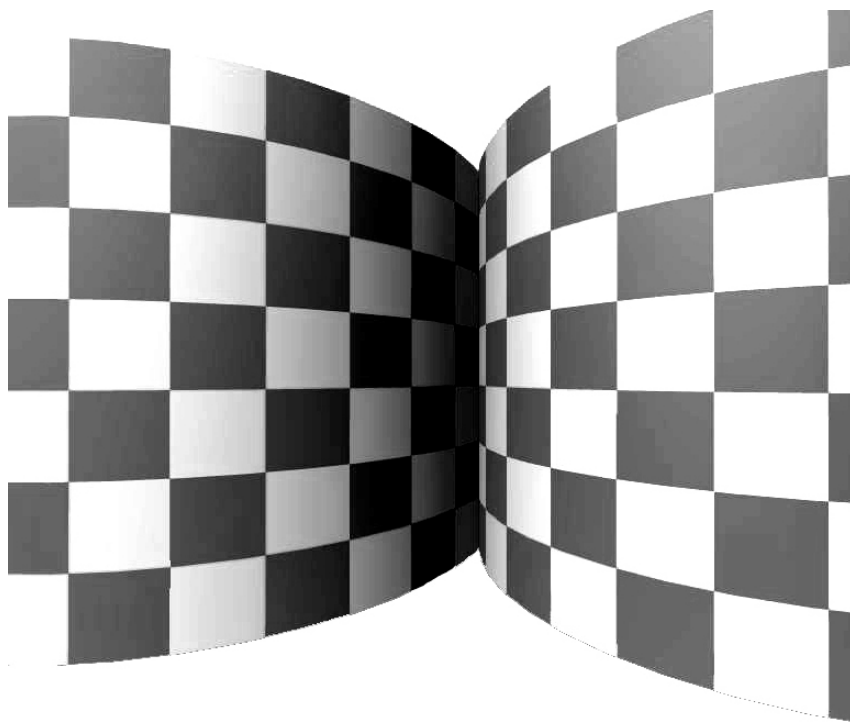


Figure 2.17 Author's representation of architectural space that approximately corresponds to Riley's *Movement and Squares*, 1961.

¹⁷⁴ Interview with David Sylvester [1967], in Robert Kudielka (ed.), *The Eye's Mind: The Collected Writings of Bridget Riley*, Thames and Hudson, London, UK, 1999, pp. 73-74.

It can be seen, from this example, that Riley's work is *not* representational, especially not of *abstract* architectural space. This image (Figure 2.17), while it represents a *conceptual* arrangement that is architecturally similar to the one used by Riley in *Movement and Squares*, is clearly *not* the same. What is curious about this is that this sameness and dissimilarity is possible at all. There are enough "clues" in *Movement and Squares* to create a conceptual "closure" in which the architectural assembly is "read", even though the work is not actually consistent with the representation of that assembly. In effect, there are two distinct spatial concepts operating in Riley's work; one that is not objective and one that is. These two spatial concepts are brought close together (but not too close) within the single painting, thereby bringing about the possibility of a connection or ambiguity between them, or even the possibility of a dissonance. It is a short step to suspend reading of perspective and assume that the dissonant space of Riley's painting (Figure 2.16) is the same as the space of the second image (Figure 2.17). The codes and systems of representation, apparently inherent in seeing, seem to be close to leaping into Riley's painting in much the same way as one leaps to conclusions about what might be represented in such a work. However, the incompleteness of this leap remains and the work never quite looks precisely like archi-natural space. Rather, it retains an uncanny look; neither fish nor fowl. One is forced to look for other ways of seeing besides those of representation.

The proximity of pictorial space (non-dimensional depth) and archi-natural representation (dimensional depth), in Riley's early works, creates the sense of "pain" referred to by some authors.¹⁷⁵ The elements of "illusion" that Riley uses are not assembled into the representational abstractions that Vasarely might use. However, the use of those elements leads to the superficial impression that Riley's painting is similar to those by Vasarely. The harsh contrasts in close flowing lines in works such as *Fall*, (Figure 2.18), create "painful" after images as one's eyes struggle to find a resting place. Every movement of the eyes causes a shifting wriggling after-image and dissonance with the new view of the painting. This almost painful visual effect defies objectivity despite the implication of rigorous linear construction and its intellectual association with objectivity.

¹⁷⁵ Interview with David Sylvester [1967], in Robert Kudielka (ed.), *The Eye's Mind: The Collected Writings of Bridget Riley*, Thames and Hudson, London, UK, 1999, pp. 73-74.

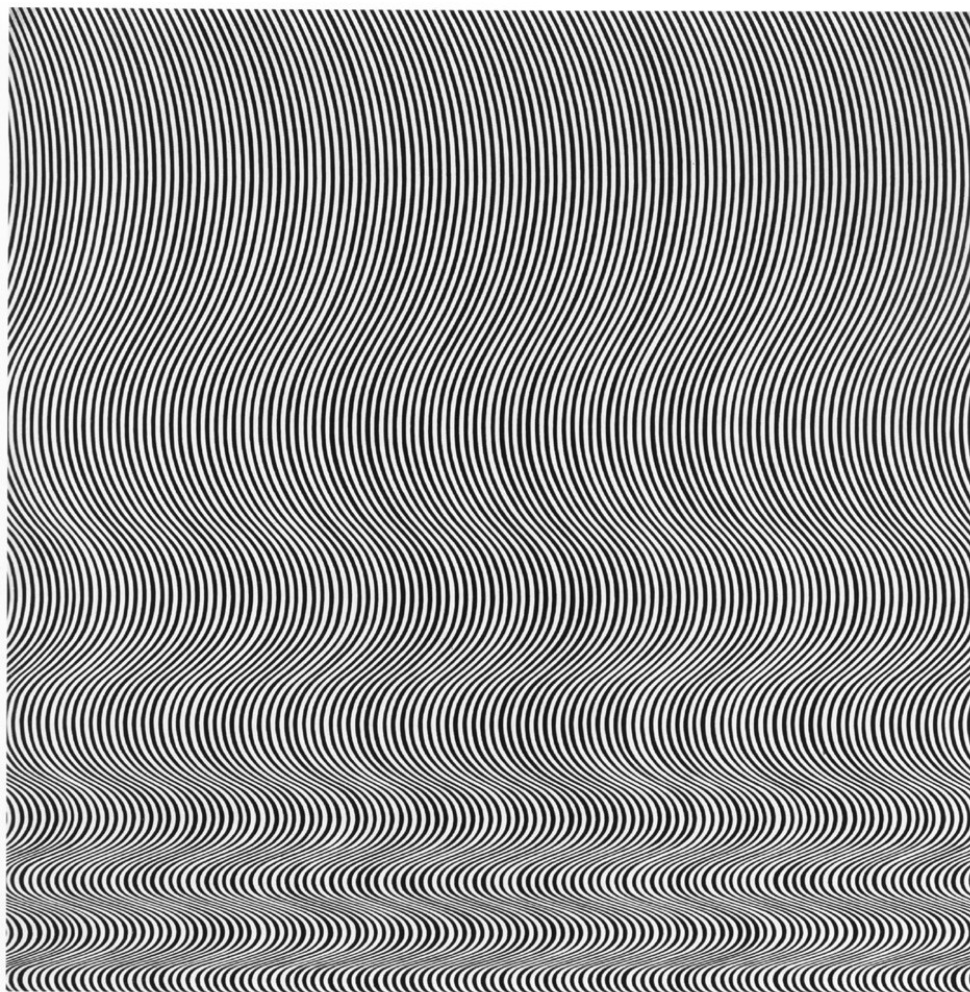


Figure 2.18 Bridget Riley, *Fall*, 1963, emulsion on hardboard.¹⁷⁶

This is the *visual* way in which Riley challenges gestalt subjectivity.¹⁷⁷ To the subjective mind constituted according to visual gestalt, this dissonance between events in pictorial space and representation of events in archi-natural space, is deeply disturbing. It is as if the frisson of visual instability and after-images, from which comes a visual sublime in works such as *Descending* (Figure 2.24), offers no stable subjectivity at the very point when one seems to see a visual event. As such, it is of the same order as Kant refers to when he writes of the fear of the dynamically sublime in nature as a lack of adequate might or a lack of relative self-constituting power.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁶ Paul Moorhouse, *Bridget Riley*, Tate Publishing, London UK, 2003, p. 10.

¹⁷⁷ Riley would resist this interpretation of her work because she asserts that she operates independently of theoretical bases apart from a technical attachment to visual experience. In that sense, Riley is claiming autonomy. However, the work itself speaks through the artist, carrying with it the cultural context within which it is made and seen.

¹⁷⁸ Immanuel Kant, (trans. Pluhar, Werner S), *Critique of Judgement*, Hackett Publishing Company, Indianapolis Cambridge, USA, 1987, p. 119.

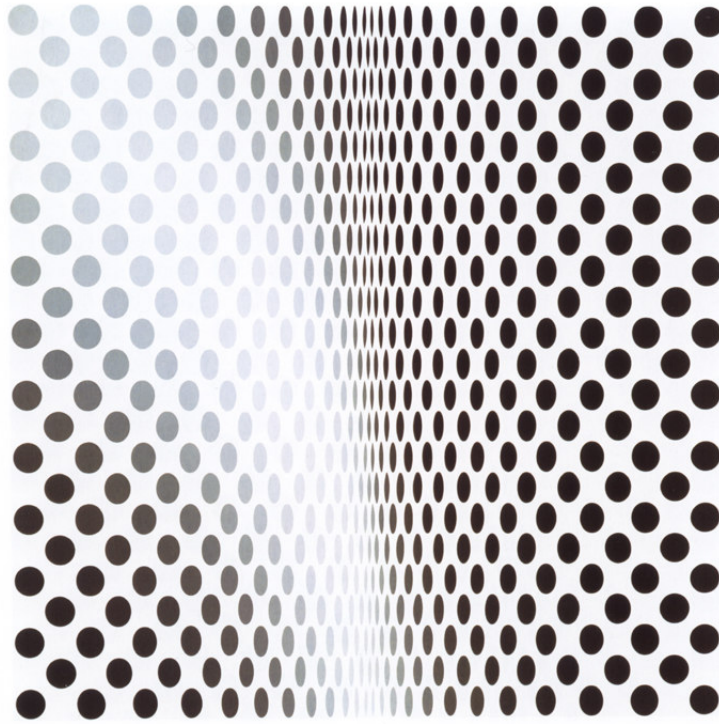


Figure 2.19 Bridget Riley, *Loss*, 1964, emulsion on hardboard.¹⁷⁹

The painting above, *Loss* (Figure 2.19), reintroduces colour. This painting looks at first glance as if it were a spatial event of the kind that Vasarely might have made. The “depth” is coordinated between line and colour in such a way that there is a fading of colour into the central fold, as if using chiaroscuro to show form in nature, which is to say *archi-nature*. Then one realises that it only occurs in one direction, across the painting. Vertically, the shapes are continuous, while the fading only occurs on the left of the painting. The chiaroscuro only conforms to the representation of *archi-nature* in one direction. In the other, it does not. So, at the time that Riley reintroduces colour, paintings move from the visual intensity of contrast, as in *Fall*, to the spatial intensity of *Loss*, without becoming representational. In this way, Riley discovers depth *within* colour and the working method within which colour develops as non-representational depth.

A response to a question in 1990 from Robert Kudielka reveals how Riley sees this in relation to her work:

Kudielka; The undeniable depth of the paintings doesn’t seem to operate on a figure-ground relationship – not even in the sense of ambiguity.

¹⁷⁹ Paul Moorhouse, *Bridget Riley*, Tate Publishing, London UK, 2003, p. 55.

Riley; No, it has to be abstract space. That is to say, if sensation alone is the yardstick, then the painting has to be a place that allows for the relatively independent workings of sensation. Although in the objective world [conceptual archi-nature] sensations are always prompted by something or other, they are not necessarily bound to whatever may trigger them off. They have a life of their own, as every painter knows when he is working: they change, but not in any logical [according to the laws of archi-nature] way; sometimes one may not even notice them, only to find them turning up again with unexpected force; but above all, they are coherent [pictorial contingencies becoming laws]-without being in any way continuous [maintaining contingent approach, maintaining becoming] ...¹⁸⁰

Arrest 2 (Figure 2.20) shows how Riley combines the non-representational “illusion” with optical effect by using the contrasting varying width of waves to give another dimension to the spatiality of the changes in colour. In this painting, subtle colour contrasts, the central compositional division and the shifting after-image of the waved lines create a compound of depth and visual event.



Figure 2.20 Bridget Riley, *Arrest 2*, 1965, acrylic on linen.¹⁸¹

¹⁸⁰ Robert Kudielka, (ed.), *The Eye's Mind: The Collected Writings of Bridget Riley*, Thames and Hudson, London, UK, 1999, p. 120. Italicised comments by the author.

¹⁸¹ Paul Moorhouse, *Bridget Riley*, Tate Publishing, London UK, 2003, p. 63.

Each of the waved lines sits on its own plane, which, in relation to other planes, creates a depth or space in its most elemental form, just depth, with no dimensions. This painting uses darkness as a point to which tonal variations are related against a white background and within which colours are subtly but rhythmically changing from warm to cool. The variation between waves in hue as well as tone creates different “speeds” across the painting. The “V” shape in *Arrest 2* is split or broken across the colour changes in the centre of the painting’s surface, thereby denying even the “V” as a possible object.

In *Deny 2*, (Figure 2.21) Riley uses a formal shape, the small oval, as a textural unit that, through its colour relationship with the “ground”, has a variable speed that is combined with a variable direction due to its shape. Its layout and shape are constant but its orientation changes in a systematic and rhythmic way to create directions of movement. Each shape varies from its neighbours only slightly and in a systematic way, that produces movement of a viewer’s eyes along and around the lines of change. This is overlaid with graduated changes in colour and tone. The changes in tone and colour bring the texture of the ovals in and out of the background so that the texture itself has an emergent or becoming shape, in this work a “V” shape over the whole canvas.

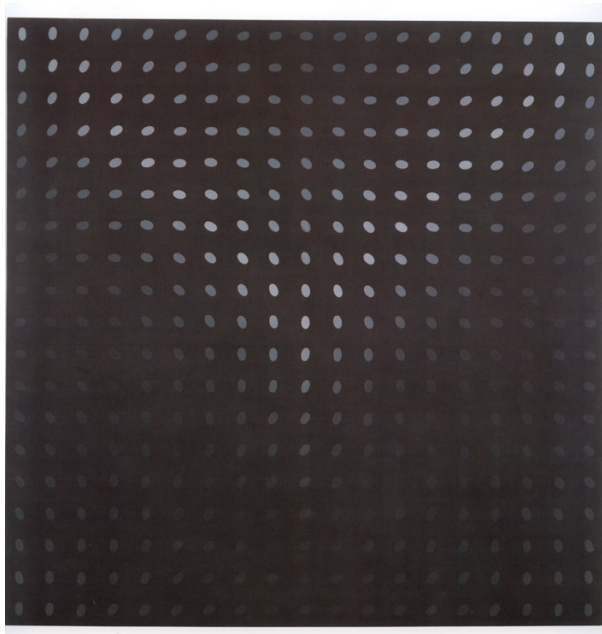


Figure 2.21 Bridget Riley, *Deny 2*, 1967.¹⁸²

¹⁸² Downloaded from http://www.mishabittleston.com/artists/bridget_riley/ on 12/8/2003.

It is in this work that the full power of colour movement begins to appear in Riley's work. However, the dominance of the repeated oval shapes remains.

The stripe series of 1967 marks a shift to using colour itself as elemental space and the period from 1967 to the early 1980s focuses mostly on ways of relating colour and line. It is in these stripe paintings that differences between colours and orientations of shapes in small strict patterns become a movement within space. The "V" shape re-appears because of this movement. The event eludes objectivity by being constituted through the collective effect of small changes, none of which is indicative of the overall result.

In eluding "illusionism" (or what would be called here, representation of architecture), Riley is invoking subliminal vision or access to nature as vision, not as self-constituting but as self-becoming. This suggests a connection to philosophical concepts of the mid- to late 20th century concerned with becoming or immanence. Riley's works may be forms of thinking through which ideas, which are similar to certain philosophical concepts, are developed. The descriptive words that Riley uses are a key to this connection. Such terms as "movement" and "speed" can be understood using the notion of a "vector".¹⁸³ A vector indicates a speed and direction. The combination of speed and direction indicates a "becoming" in the work itself and connects Riley's work to philosophy concerned with immanence. This is because becoming is concerned with the dynamics of being, rather than the being of objects. Terms such as "vector" are used by philosophers such as Deleuze to describe the speed and direction of movement of particular changes. If this link is to be effective, the question for Riley's work is whether or not it can be understood in terms of becoming. A brief connection is needed to these philosophical ideas before proceeding.

To reveal the connection between painting and philosophy means, according to Deleuze and Guattari, to discover the *aesthetic figures* in each work and to discern how they have operated as *conceptual personæ*. For Deleuze and Guattari, merging of the operational strategies of art and philosophy forms a "rich tissue of correspondences" between science, art and philosophy. The "rich tissue of

¹⁸³ The term "vector" is from mathematical geometry. A line with an arrow at one end is used to indicate a vector. A vector has speed and direction and can be applied to arrays, multitudes and unformed spaces as well as objects. A change of vector is called "acceleration". Any curved movement, such as the circular orbits of planets, is a vectorial change and is said to be acceleration.

correspondences” that Deleuze and Guattari describe in *What is Philosophy?* and which has been described in Chapter 1 does not refer to the use of “scientific theory or scientific data” to which Riley refers when refuting the claim that her work is scientific, but instead it refers to the *relevance* of events in one practice to those of another.¹⁸⁴ In other words, what is needed is a questioning approach to the way that visual material from science is created by science, rather than an illustrative adoption of material. The conventions by which new knowledge is created in science do not necessarily apply in painting. For example, making images of DNA chains tells us nothing new about DNA in scientific terms, but can reveal the way that abstract geometric modelling dominates biology or merely shows the æsthetic qualities of scientific representation.

It is through the metaphors and resemblances that the questioning of a discipline’s framing takes place. It is at the level of metaphors that correspondences need to be found. Deleuze and Guattari therefore regard *conceptual personae* as corresponding with *æsthetic figures* in painting.

Æsthetic figures in Riley’s paintings can be understood as acting in a philosophical way, within the terms of painting, or as philosophy of sensation. To pursue this line, a particular instance of Riley’s working process will be examined. Riley works with planes, starting with a plane of geometry. In this first plane the possibility of colour relationships, occur as difference expressed as line within pictorial space. Shapes and colours are assembled and tested. These are what constitute *æsthetic figures*.

It would be a mistake, however, to regard geometry as the “ground” within Riley’s work. Geometry is only the formation of shapes for the movement of colours. For Riley, colours create movement and so they are the ground. As such, the ground of her work is a mobile one.

¹⁸⁴ See Bridget Riley, “Perception as Medium”, in Paul Moorhouse, *Bridget Riley*, Tate Publishing, London UK, 2003, p. 207. Riley strongly denies that these play a role in her artwork because the precise use of geometry leads some people to a false impression that she is “scientific”. Deleuze and Guattari mean that events understood scientifically or philosophically can inform painting, rather than offer it a style.

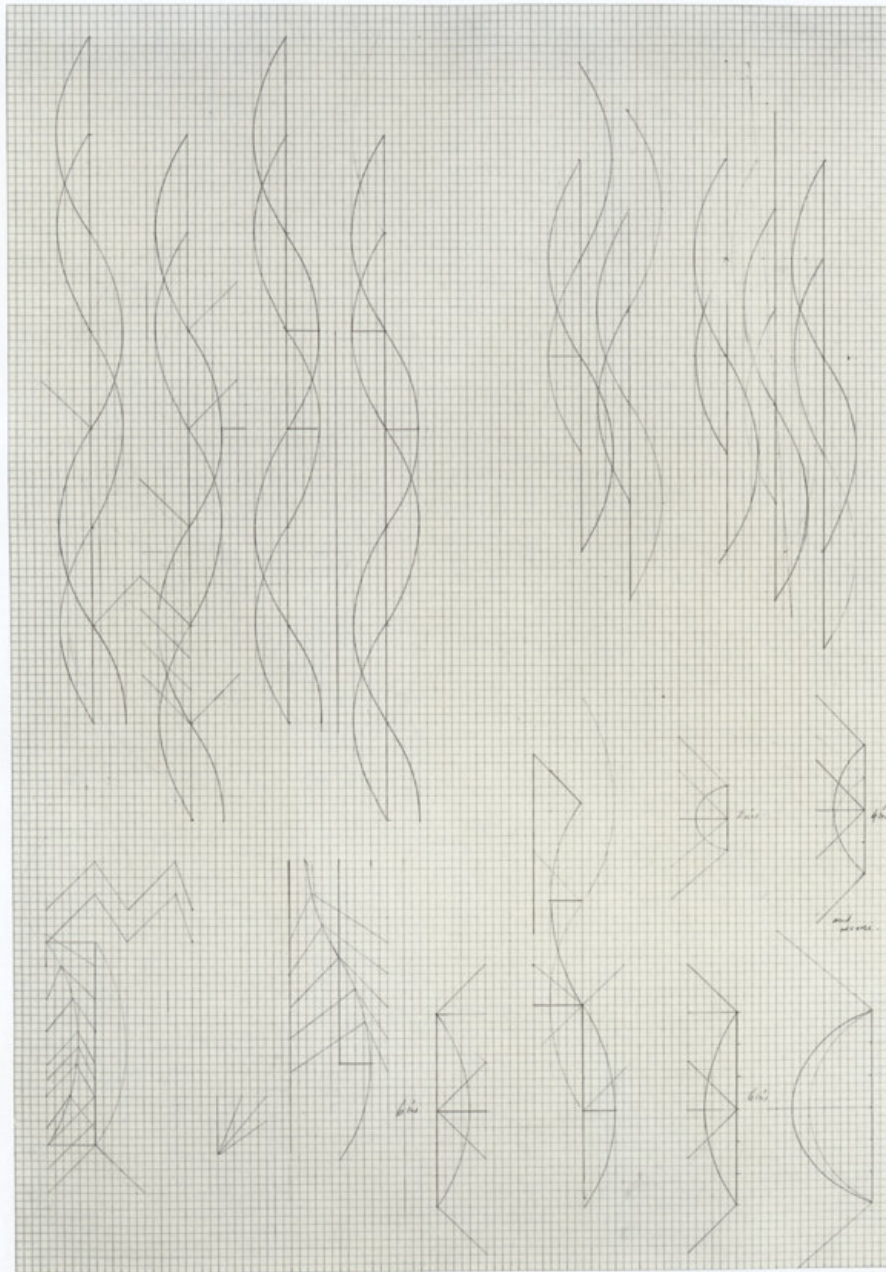


Figure 2.23 Bridget Riley, *Study 2 for Curvilinear Grid*, 1998, Pencil on Paper, 103.8 cm x 71.8 cm.¹⁸⁵

Study 2 for Curvilinear Grid (Figure 2.23) has a number of small sketches of ruled linear geometry. What is interesting about these sketches is that they come from a range of early to later works, used for paintings that are both black and white and coloured. The sketch is exploratory as well as being a record of past geometric ideas. The geometry of *Descending*, for example, is noted perhaps for use in a new way or as a basis for a new geometry. The sketch is intended for a particular painting but the

¹⁸⁵ Paul Moorhouse, *Bridget Riley*, Tate Publishing, London UK, 2003, p. 200.

range of ideas suggests an ongoing development of geometry apart from that in any particular painting.

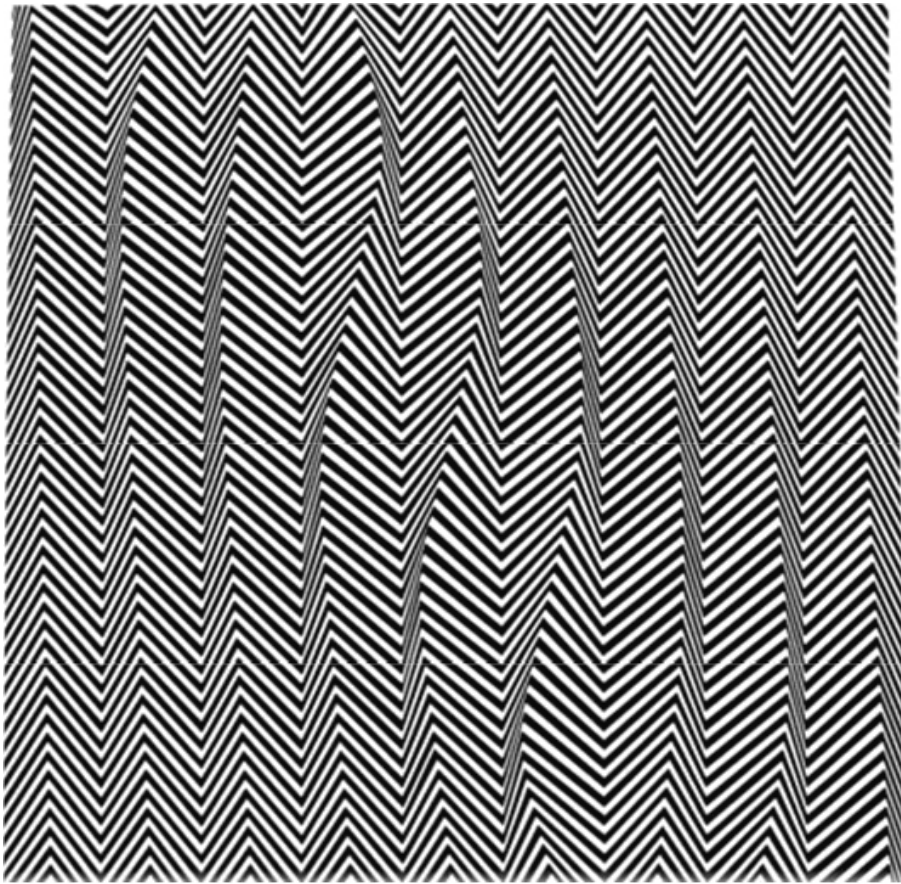


Figure 2.24 Bridget Riley, *Descending*, 1965, Emulsion on Hardboard.

This suggests that geometry has a somewhat different trajectory in her work than the trajectory of the paintings themselves. Geometry is a work in progress for Riley, which runs throughout all her work, and with a set of gestures is constantly re-assembled and explored. Each painting takes only what it needs from this ongoing process, as can be seen in the coloured “ground studies” that Riley prepares to test colour within a geometric assembly.

Once the geometry is satisfactory, “ground studies” are made. These consist of single, coloured panels that give rhythmic patterns within pictorial space, as in the following figure.



Figure 2.25 Bridget Riley, *Ground Study for 28th August '98*, 1998, Gouache on paper, 104.5 cm x 72.2 cm.¹⁸⁶

This gouache painting is a single colour plane that shows how space is both occupied by the plane and simultaneously left for other planes. Although they are called “ground studies”, the figure-ground relationship is ambiguous. This work is not intended so much as a figure-ground study but as a locating plan for movements or speeds of movement between colours, the uncoloured spaces being left for other colours. As such there is no isolated figure and ground relationship, but a continuous movement within pictorial space. The whole surface itself is *both* ground and figure.

Each *aesthetic figure* is an assembly of coloured planes that contributes to a movement towards a painting. It is here that elements of painting as *becoming* are formed within surfaces and depths creating multiple ways of seeing. Ground studies

¹⁸⁶ Paul Moorhouse, *Bridget Riley*, Tate Publishing, London UK, 2003, p. 202.

are then assembled as “rough studies” testing the colour relations, their *speed* or *movement*.

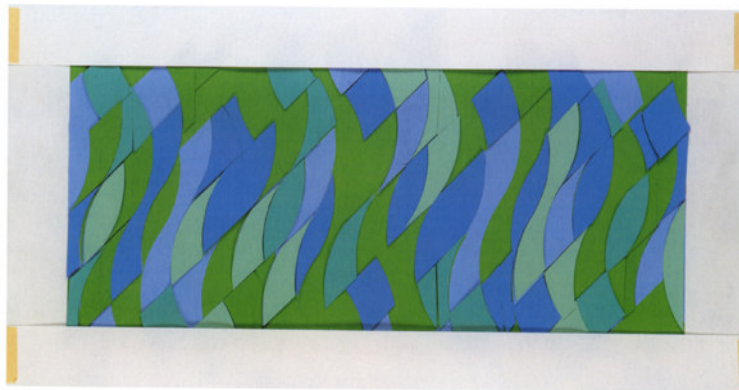


Figure 2.26 Bridget Riley, *Rough Study for Blues and Greens*, 2001, Gouache on paper collage, 47.5 cm x 91.5 cm.¹⁸⁷

The final painting, made in oils on canvas, sometimes varies from the original rough, as Riley discovers slight variations in what might be satisfactory relationships between the shapes within each of the “ground planes”.

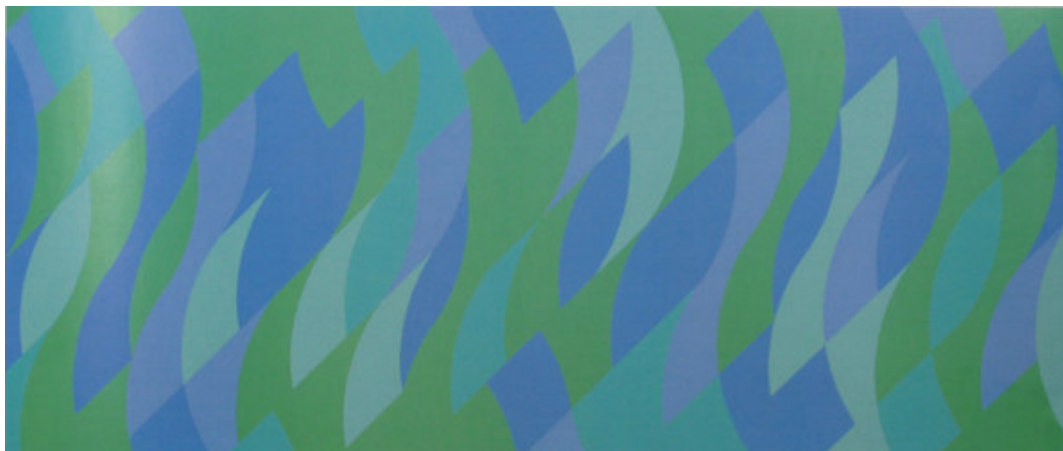


Figure 2.27 Bridget Riley, 2001, *Blues and Greens*, Oil on linen, 118.8 cm x 280 cm.¹⁸⁸

The realised work resolves the colour balances, creating what for Riley is a careful balance of movements that evoke the visual experience from which the event was drawn. The geometry changes very little between the sketches and the final work. The result is Riley’s offering of visual sensation. Richard Shiff quotes Riley about viewing her work:

¹⁸⁷ Paul Moorhouse, *Bridget Riley*, Tate Publishing, London UK, 2003, p. 203.

¹⁸⁸ Paul Moorhouse, *Bridget Riley*, Tate Publishing, London UK, 2003, p. 197.

‘Don’t look at it’ Riley would exclaim. She might have added, ‘look with it,’ that is, take the light in, move with it, let it show you what it is and how you see, become aware.¹⁸⁹

To “look with” is to *act* with, to use, to need to use or, in other words, to “look with” is to “let” an *aesthetic figure* act as if were a conceptual assembly, not to produce truth in relation to falsehood before a subject, or knowledge in relation to ignorance, but rather being in relation to seeing. At the point when one gives one’s vision over to pictorial space, one opens oneself to a *conceptual persona* and to *aesthetic figures*. Look in and one sees the discrepancies with archi-nature, the space and events within the particular pictorial space made by Riley. Riley’s paintings are purely visual, but visual as becoming-visual, proposing visual events across non-perspectival spaces. Riley’s works are *propositions*, in the same way that propositions in philosophy are assembled with *conceptual personæ*. As Deleuze writes concerning language as “orality” in *Logic of Sense*:

The surface and that which takes place at the surface is what “renders possible”—in other words, the event as that which is expressed. The expressed makes possible the expression...

It is a question of dynamic genesis which leads directly from a state of affairs, from mixtures to pure lines, *from depth to the production of surfaces ...*¹⁹⁰

This can also be applied to Riley’s painting—they are propositions on surfaces that have been assembled from depths.¹⁹¹

One striking aspect of Riley’s work is the degree to which a spatial concept is built into the technique of making the painting. Like Vasarely, Riley operates within a spatial concept from the start of the technique. However, unlike Vasarely, she operates within pictorial space as if it were a place for visual events in colour. These are taken up from visual events “in life” and so have names that reflect or evoke visual experiences, whereas Vasarely works within a conceptual inner realm, a realm of visually conceptualised events.

¹⁸⁹ Paul Moorhouse, *Bridget Riley*, Tate Publishing, London UK, 2003, p. 84.

¹⁹⁰ Gilles Deleuze, (ed. C. Boundas, trans M, Lester) *Logic of Sense*, Columbia University Press, USA, 1990, p. 186.

¹⁹¹ This concept is taken up in more detail in Chapter 5.

Riley's paintings are sites for visual events or experiences that Moorhouse describes as "paradoxically" from nature.¹⁹² To express it this way, that is as "paradoxical", is to start from a point of view that abstraction *is not* from nature. Furthermore, it is to indicate that some other form of making paintings, perhaps figurative or representational painting, *is* from nature. Implied in this position is the idea that natural, figurative representation has a non-paradoxical relationship with nature. Moorhouse's essay starts with the common preconception that abstraction is *opposed* to representation, one being "from nature" and the other not. To connect nature with abstraction is to act paradoxically.

This however, is a rhetorical confrontation used as a device by Moorhouse to set us on a path towards a different understanding of Riley's work, one that can only occur by relinquishing this opposition. Moorhouse also points out in the general introductory statements of his essay that Riley is concerned to provide visual pleasure, the pleasure of looking and the pleasure of seeing-in, as a shared pleasure made available by making paintings.¹⁹³ As Riley herself writes in her essay of 1984, "The Pleasure of Sight":

More than anything else I want my paintings to exist in their own terms. That is to say they must stealthily engage and disarm you. There the paintings hang, deceptively simple – telling no tales as it were [not as literature] – resisting, in a well behaved way, all attempts to be questioned, probed or stared at and then, for those with open eyes, serenely disclosing some intimations of the splendours to which pure sight alone has the key.¹⁹⁴

Riley, Moorhouse argues, makes works that do not represent, in order to avoid the absence of the represented past.¹⁹⁵ The pleasure of looking in Riley's paintings, according to Moorhouse, is in the present. So Moorhouse pursues the non-representational character of Riley's work as an essential aspect of a "...[p]arallel relationship between Riley's art and nature – based not on depiction or resemblance, but on equivalence, metaphor and recognition".¹⁹⁶

¹⁹² Paul Moorhouse, *Bridget Riley*, Tate Publishing, London UK, 2003, p. 11.

¹⁹³ Paul Moorhouse, *Bridget Riley*, Tate Publishing, London UK, 2003, pp. 213-4.

¹⁹⁴ Paul Moorhouse, *Bridget Riley*, Tate Publishing, London UK, 2003, p. 214.

¹⁹⁵ In Paul Moorhouse's essay, "A Dialogue with Sensation, The Art of Bridget Riley", in Paul Moorhouse, *Bridget Riley*, Tate Publishing, London UK, 2003, pp. 11-27.

¹⁹⁶ Paul Moorhouse, *Bridget Riley*, Tate Publishing, London UK, 2003, p. 11

Metaphor is usually associated with text or spoken language, which is something that Riley asserts is not what her work is concerned with. As Riley wrote in 1965, in an essay called “Perception is the Medium”:

It is absolutely untrue that my work depends on literary impulse or has illustrative intention.¹⁹⁷

Moorhouse is using the term *metaphor* in a broader way, as if painting were acting in its own particular linguistic way, perhaps quite alien to text as language and more like *linguistic gesture*. This would be more in line with Riley’s statement of her purpose in making paintings as a visual gesture or “dance”. Indeed, abstract figures seem to dance before one’s eyes when looking at the work. The dance of figures is one in which there is often close proximity between pleasure and pain. With the titles of her paintings, such as *Cataract*, *Loss* and *Deny*, Riley reinforces that the work is something *within* and connected to the world of people and events, rather than *of* something from that world. So while her paintings are not representational in the natural or figurative sense, they are made as visual events within nature. Riley’s paintings are constructed offerings of ways of seeing the world. When the works are made, they are shared and take part in the general field of experiencing the world. In a broad sense then, her work is philosophical. The role of Riley’s paintings is within philosophy that is concerned with, and expresses itself within, visual sensation and as such contributes to philosophy of sensation.

Moorhouse also describes Riley’s work as exploratory, in the style of musical variations and “in more complex ways [than linear development]”.¹⁹⁸ This structural aspect of Riley’s work connects it to a construction of actualised events (the painting as object) in the same way as architecture constructs actualised events in architectural, or more precisely archi-natural, space. Instead of representing conceptual architectural events as Vasarely does, Riley creates a new quasi-architecture by structuring pictorial space on its own visual terms within a space that can only be *looked* into as opposed to solely “seen-as”.

In summary, Vasarely’s work unifies colour, line and form to make consistent representation of “plastic” events in archi-natural space, as if geometric concepts were architecture. By contrast, Riley’s work makes dissonance and harmony between

¹⁹⁷ Paul Moorhouse, *Bridget Riley*, Tate Publishing, London UK, 2003, p. 207

¹⁹⁸ Paul Moorhouse, *Bridget Riley*, Tate Publishing, London UK, 2003, p. 12

colour changes within linear geometric composition. This opens the surface to pictorial space according to the “movement” of colours between colour layers. Their respective work offers a clear view of quite different but not opposed approaches, each of which has a focus on a particular kind of space, one on archi-natural space and the other on pictorial space.

Riley’s work offers an opening to physical visual events in colour that can be compared to Deleuzian *immanence*. For painters, *immanence* is a strange way of seeing that can be the “image of thought” described by Deleuze and Guattari. However, the image of thought cannot be the idealism of representation alone.¹⁹⁹ It must also be a sense–nonsense of surface and depth. Riley’s painting proposes strange visions of surface and depth to physical seeing and, as such, takes part in a kind of philosophy, not of words, it must be stressed, but of sensations.

¹⁹⁹Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, (Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell trans.), *What Is Philosophy?* Columbia University Press, NY, USA, 1994, p. 37.

Chapter 3. The Image of Thought and Abstraction

In this chapter, the image of thought is explained as an impure mixture of surface and depth, which, in painting, can be assembled using abstraction. An impure mixture is one in which an assembly of elements changes to another assembly, but simultaneously retains a trace of the original assembly. In painting, this is the re-assembling surface elements, such as colour texture and shape, within pictorial space.

However, the impure mixture of surface and depth requires a two-part abstraction. Abstract painting can be comprehended in terms other than surfaces assemblies, in which surfaces are reduced forms of spatial arrangements. In order to move to an understanding of depth in abstract painting requires a comprehension of how elements are constructively assembled within pictorial space when they are taken into depth. At the same time, this comprehension must also recall the surface from which the elements have come. This matches a similar problem in moving from transcendent to immanent thinking, of the kind that Deleuze and Guattari describe.

According to Deleuze and Guattari, the “plane of immanence” is the “image of thought”.²⁰⁰ It is not thought, as such; nor is it a “concept that is”.²⁰¹ For Deleuze and Guattari, the plane of immanence always yields to what is not yet known, rather than what is known, thereby undoing the known. Thought makes an image of itself upon the plane of immanence and thereby constitutes that plane.²⁰² The plane of immanence provides the means by which thought about the world can be experienced. It is, in effect, the constitution of thought itself. The plane of immanence is a folding of both an image of the world and an image of that thinking of an image of the world.

²⁰⁰Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell trans.), *What Is Philosophy?* Columbia University Press, NY, USA, 1994, p. 37.

²⁰¹Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell trans.), *What Is Philosophy?* Columbia University Press, NY, USA, 1994, p. 37. Deleuze and Guattari are primarily concerned with immanence. Their procedure is to question being and to transform being into becoming by transforming concepts that *are* into concepts that *become*. A “concept that is”, in their language, would mean a concept conceived as an object of thought. Deleuze and Guattari transform this object of thought into an abstract mechanism for examining a becoming by locating and questioning immanence within the concept. For example, appearances replace appearances in Kantian thinking under their questioning.

²⁰² Deleuze and Guattari use the term “plane” as if it means space. To say “upon the plane of immanence” is in a sense to say that something is within a space of immanence. This is an interesting point for philosophy because, like physicists, Deleuze and Guattari use reduced models to make clearer explanations of their concepts. Reductive abstraction is a part of their strategy at the same time that they have argued against it because reductive abstraction is associated with transcendence.

The plane of immanence is a place where the world can be thought. It is neither a method, a state of knowledge, nor opinions about thought. The plane of immanence or image of thought is the claim by thought for what constitutes thought. That is, the plane of immanence is thought's self-claim. By relinquishing the known and opening up the unknown, the plane of immanence, or image of thought, is movement into the infinite. Deleuze and Guattari finish this section in *What is Philosophy?* with:

Thought demands “only” movement that can be carried to infinity. What thought claims by right, what it selects, is infinite movement of the movement of the infinite. It is this that constitutes the image of thought.²⁰³

But this movement is not of the kind that implies objects, subjects and other determined things.

Movement of the infinite does not refer to spatiotemporal coordinates that define successive positions of a moving object and the fixed reference points in relation to which these positions vary.²⁰⁴

Thought must find a scene or location upon the plane of immanence within which it can claim its “infinite movement”. Painting is one of these scenes or locations. In painting, thought claims its movement by looking into, or seeing into, *depth*. In philosophy, Deleuze and Guattari move into depth by moving away from the “house”. In their work, the house is used as a metaphorical figure, or what Deleuze and Guattari call a *conceptual persona*.²⁰⁵ This is a movement *from* the domesticated, close and safe room, *to* the “cosmos”, where nature is distant and strange. They use the German terms to describe the movement from the “*Heimlich*” to the “*Unheimlich*” to indicate the sense of comfortable familiarity that homeliness implies.²⁰⁶ This movement to where nature is strange and distant corresponds to the strange seeing of depth within the surface of a painting. This movement from comfortable and familiar

²⁰³ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell trans.), *What Is Philosophy?* Columbia University Press, NY, USA, 1994, p. 37.

²⁰⁴ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell trans.), *What Is Philosophy?* Columbia University Press, NY, USA, 1994, p. 37. The next few paragraphs describe the horizon as within infinite movement because as the point of view advances, so does the horizon. A moving or becoming subject always implies infinite movement. Infinite movement is not movement towards anything. It is, rather, merely movement into the plane of immanence.

²⁰⁵ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell trans.), *What Is Philosophy?* Columbia University Press, NY, USA, 1994, p. 184.

²⁰⁶ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell trans.), *What Is Philosophy?* Columbia University Press, NY, USA, 1994, p. 186. The use of German terms also indicates the sources of their ideas, such as Nietzsche.

homeliness to that which is unhomely can be compared to a concept that they call “deterritorialisation” in which “lines of flight”²⁰⁷ form from an event towards virtualities subtended from that event.

The scene or location of painting is, in Deleuzo-Guattarian terms, a scene or location of deterritorialisation. It is the strange way of seeing, in particular of “seeing-in” in order to see the unhomely, outlandish, strange or uncanny, that is necessary for the seeing of paintings as philosophy of sensation. It is also necessary in the making of paintings to have this strange seeing-in. Since it is a seeing-into a surface at the same time as seeing the surface, it is a dual or multiple seeing. The image of thought for philosophy is also a multiple seeing of both plane of immanence and fog-like depth. It is the fog-like nature of that depth that leads to a desire for order and for determining the depth and “violence” of transcendence. Likewise, in painting, it is the desire to determine the depth of painting at the same time as seeing-in, which introduces transcendence to painting.

Pictorial surfaces, or surfaces with “depth”,²⁰⁸ as Bridget Riley calls them, are resistant to being seen as flat surfaces. It is the attraction between contrasts, such as colour contrasts, which draws seeing-in away from a surface, yet the surface is simultaneously where the attraction is created, as affect. Affect moves into depth as re-assembly *and* a trace of surface. The depth of a painting is intimately bound to the surface, when it becomes depth and so painting is an impure assembly of surface *and* depth. Thus, the *Heimlich* and the *Unheimlich* are folded into each other in a strange and nonsensical way that finds sense through being called “painting”.²⁰⁹ The term painting, like the small bridge that Riley refers to, always includes the term painting, even if it not spelled put.²¹⁰

²⁰⁷ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (Brian Massumi trans.), *A Thousand Plateaus*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis and London, UK, 1987, p. 501-514. In this last section of *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari set out some of the terms and methods used. There are many examples throughout this text of all the terms described in this section. Their terms are names given to dynamic diagrammatic entities, as if they were both abstract geometry and real “persona”.

²⁰⁸ Robert Kudielka (ed.), *The Eye's Mind, The Collected Writings of Bridget Riley*, Thames and Hudson, London, UK, 1999, p. 132.

²⁰⁹ The terms “sense” and “nonsense” are introduced to connect the argument to Deleuze’s *Logic of Sense*.

²¹⁰ A painting that has the title “untitled” is always actually an “untitled painting”.

It is the impure mixture of surface and depth, which is strangely seen, as if at a distance, that allows access to the movement of thought on a plane of immanence, and makes painting a way of thinking and, indeed, an image of thought.

Painting is, in this way of thinking, the production of the image of thought as movement towards the infinite, through surface and depth. In order to paint, an approach is needed to create an impure mixture that can be called a “painting”. This approach is one of thought that examines, experiments and moves towards its horizon. Instead of the fixed location of representation, the plane of immanence moves its images nomadically, abstractly.

The Impure Mixture of Surface and Depth

Depth that is not perspectival, or in other words, depth that is towards an infinite horizon or depth in *pictorial* space, leads to another kind of abstraction than the one that reduces seeing for the purposes of representation. In this other kind of abstraction, the image of thought is *constructive* rather than *reductive*, and can be compared to the necessary and self-constituting modern approach that David Lachterman describes in *The Ethics of Geometry: A Genealogy of Modernity*.²¹¹

The “idea” giving shape to the “constellation” of themes ingredient in modernity, in both its revolutionary and projective modes, is the “idea” of construction ...²¹²

In other words, the “idea” is an inner self-image as a constructive assembly of dynamic states.

Painting, as a practice, can be compared to Lachterman’s view that the central theme of philosophical modernism is the mind as not only self-constructive, but also, according to the traditions of visual metaphor, *visually* self-constructive. But if the visual mind is moving to the infinite, how can it remain a single image of thought to itself? In other words, why is subjectivity not destroyed in seeing paintings? Modern subjectivity must be a immanent subjectivity, or a becoming.

For painting to be seen as constructive, in the same way as Lachterman’s constructivity is necessary for philosophy, another way of thinking is needed, such as

²¹¹David R Lachterman, *The Ethics of Geometry: A Genealogy of Modernity*, Routledge, London, UK, 1989.

²¹² David R Lachterman, *The Ethics of Geometry: A Genealogy of Modernity*, Routledge, London, UK, 1989, p. 4.

that provided by Deleuze and Guattari. Deleuze's "image of thought", "movement to infinity" and "plane of immanence" can show how abstract painting can be seen as *constructive*. This concept appears in the Deleuzian distinction between two forms of abstraction. John Rajchman provides a useful summary of Deleuze's distinction.²¹³

Two Kinds of Abstraction

Philosopher and art theorist, John Rajchman writes about two forms of abstraction that he derives from the work of Deleuze and Guattari.²¹⁴ Primarily, his essay is about philosophical abstraction. The resonances for painting, however, become clear as the text proceeds. Rajchman, like Deleuze, deliberately hints at practices, such as architecture and art, in order to lead his work to usefulness and relevance in these disciplines.²¹⁵ For art in general and painting in particular, however, the relevance is largely indirect. The two kinds of abstraction need to be explained in terms specific to painting. To do this Rajchman's explanation will be expanded at key points. Reductive abstraction is to strip away the particularity of an image to find a simpler assembly. Constructive abstraction is to build assemblies from abstract parts. The two forms are not necessarily opposites, despite that way that they are presented by Rajchman.

1. Reductive Abstraction

In Rajchman's explanation, within which a geometric tree is the main metaphor,²¹⁶ the first kind of abstraction is one that is based on vertical movement within hierarchies of classification or categorisation. In ascending a hierarchy, one comes to more generalised levels of classification and less particularity; in descending a hierarchy, one comes to less general levels of classification and greater levels of

²¹³ There is a problem with Rajchman's approach in that two forms of abstraction are presented as opposites. While this can be one interpretation of his text, it is useful to think also of this distinction as a mutually constitutive one.

²¹⁴ John Rajchman, *Constructions*, MIT Press, Mass, USA, 1998, pp. 55-76.

²¹⁵ A comparison with comments about the avant-garde and abstraction from Kandinsky's *Point and Line to Plane* and *Concerning the Spiritual In Art* would also be of interest here, but since this does not contribute to the thread, it has been excluded. I would delete this footnote. Only include things that are necessary for the reader to follow your text. It's complex enough without adding asides that don't go anywhere.

²¹⁶ The arborescent form is the tree-like image that recurs through philosophy that has come to dominate western ways of thinking. This way of thinking is genealogical and operates by creating centres of exclusion. Much of Deleuze and Guattari's work attacks this way of thinking, which they regard as one of the great restrictive conceptual personae of thought, and uses a range of other forms such as the "rhizome".

particularity. Abstraction is increased as one ascends and decreased as one descends. Pure “disinterested” ideals are at the top and “interested” particulars are at the bottom. Platonic philosophy, for example, moves upward within the hierarchy to more general and pure levels of classification in pursuit of the most general level or *ideal* abstraction. Ascending movement is achieved by finding similarities between particulars and consigning what is not similar to the outside, away from the centre of movement. At the top, where abstraction reaches an ideal, all particularity is excluded. Axioms or rules are made from the upward lines of movement, along which cutting and exclusion is carried out, which lead to the ideal similarities found in the upper regions of the tree. From these similarities within the hierarchy of similarities, so are axioms and rules constructed.

Similarities are rules by which things are kept or consigned to the outside. To find similarities of this kind, that which is *not similar* is excised leaving the “most similar” as a “thing” alone and clearly identifiable. Ultimately, at the apex of the tree, there is only one universal similarity. This is the similarity of the thing with itself. The line that leads to this is the law or axiom of identity, which is the basis of rational thought.

To descend the hierarchy, one pollutes, dilutes or corrupts similarities with particularity, thereby confusing axioms and laws. The further down one moves, the more laws or axioms one needs. Downward movement is further away from the clarity of the law of identity, and so is further away from truth. Downward movement is not constructive, but diffusive. Upward movement in this system of resemblance is reductive and is carried out in pursuit of purity, ideals and the exercise of determining singularities from multiplicities and truth from falsehood.

This kind of abstraction, whether moving upward or downward, is a system of *reductive* abstraction. It remains tied to representation, as a *system*, in painting. Under this system, to make a painting is to make a model of a position within the hierarchy of categorisation at the broad base of the particular. Paintings can show that, by careful and precise representation, one can reveal directions of vertical movement within the model. Painting can indicate the direction in which one can move upward within the hierarchy of categorisation towards the ideal by representing its *form*.

These movements upwards towards ideals are representations that correspond with the forms of nature. For example, evolution is rationally explained with laws about

survival, adaptation and capacity. A scene in nature is an example of the actions of these laws. Paintings provide a representation of the appearance of the scene, but not the mechanisms from which the laws are derived. So, paintings are not nature as such and so can only tell us about the appearance of nature, not its reality. They reflect the ideal of nature as formal beauty. The role of painting, on this way of thinking, is to reflect movement towards ideals. This model of painting replaces truth with beauty because, as a particular material object, a painting remains at the lowest level of the hierarchy of being, or at the level of the particular within nature. Representational painting replaces rational judgment of objects with the tasteful discernment of lineages of beauty and so replaces the search for lineages of truth with the making of the beautiful. It excludes the ugly as if it were falsehood. The ascent within the categorisations, from the more particular to the more general, necessarily must exclude that which is not similar, or that which is ugly. But what is not similar must remain in order for the representation to work, otherwise the beautiful cannot be recognised. Painting is caught in a paradox where ugliness must remain but must also be excluded. Ugliness must remain, *but as an absence* that is pushed to the outside and excluded from the painting. The *dissimilar*, or the ugliness which stands for falsehood in the painting, is that which is consigned to the exterior of the arboreal model and is an *absence*.

The consigned absent-ugliness of nature remains in both reductive thinking and representational painting in a special form. This form consists of what Deleuze, according to Rajchman, calls “monstrosities”.²¹⁷ Monstrosities are deviant forms that emerge through natural necessity and contradict the arboreal system. They emerge because representational space, within the arboreal model, has a certain violence or tension. This is due to the exclusion of dissimilarities or the ugliness of nature, within the arboreal model. Monstrosities emerge from the tension within the artificial or arbitrary privileging needed to maintain an “arborescent” form. The creation of an absent-ugliness in arborescent models requires a certain force or violence. Deleuze and Guattari indicate this in the following series of statements.

The tree and root inspire a sad image of thought that is forever imitating the multiple based on a centred or segmented higher unity. ...

²¹⁷ This term can be found in a number of places in *A Thousand Plateaus* to describe the inevitable deviation from arborescent thinking when confronted with becoming or immanence.

Arborescent systems are hierarchical systems with centres of significance and subjectification, central automata like organised memories. In the corresponding models, an element only receives information from a higher unit ...

It is odd how the tree has dominated Western reality and all of Western thought ... The West has a special relation to the forest, and deforestation; the fields carved from the forest. ...²¹⁸

Rajchman, too, refers to this arborescence when he adopts and follows the Deleuzian metaphor of the tree to describe movement within the reductive form of abstraction.²¹⁹

The arborescent model of abstraction provides a spatial arrangement in which there are upward and downward movements within a hierarchy of horizontal divisions, or a “tree”. The arborescent model is concerned with the *divisions* of abstraction, *not* the manifestation of abstraction. This kind of abstraction is driven by representation of objects *to subjects*, by assuming the pre-existence of the system, in this case the form of the tree. This is achieved through contours and planes that mark the boundaries of form. The beautiful presence in painting is a beauty of form. As such, it is also one of composition, which is to say one of line, plane and colour, in which a process of refinement through judgment of the beautiful against the ugly becomes one of judging beautiful against ugly geometric assemblies. Reductive abstraction in painting inevitably leads to the reduction of representational images to a more formal geometry. This can be seen in the notion of intuition in abstract compositions, as well as in the use of geometric composition for representational painting. Reductive abstraction crosses the conventional division between “abstract painting” and “figurative painting” by its use of geometry.

Reductive abstraction as a method in painting also requires a rationale or logic, which is to say a purpose independent of its method, just as philosophical logic is always in need of an external cause for its arboreal form. Abstraction, as a reductive system, requires a purpose *outside* its system.

Representational pictures, as a purpose in figurative painting, take the place of the “tree” shape as the external cause in philosophy.

²¹⁸ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (Brian Massumi trans.), *A Thousand Plateaus*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis and London, UK, 1987, p. 18

²¹⁹ John Rajchman, *Constructions*, MIT Press, Mass, USA, 1998, pp. 62-3.

In painting, reductive abstraction can be used to assemble visual objects within representational surface composition. The organisation and planning of representational paintings is commonly achieved using reductive abstraction, especially of human figures, but also of many other complex natural objects. Reductive approaches use representations of geometric objects such as cylinders, pyramids, cubes and other simple formal objects to approximate complex and often curved natural objects. In representational painting, the convenience of working with reduced abstracted forms makes reductive abstraction attractive. This approach can range from models made of geometric shapes to reduced pixelated images made from colours to textures. Each reduction, however, is towards a functional end, a “picture”. This picture is the external purpose to which reductive abstraction is directed and which gives reductive abstraction its movements. The reduction of human figures to geometric solids, such as cubes, spheres and cylinders, has a practical purpose within which the beautiful presence of natural appearances is sought, even if the picture is entirely fantastic. This purpose can also be theoretical when the cubes, spheres, pixels and other techniques used for reductive abstraction in painting take the place of the appearance of natural beauty within the picture.

The reduction of figures for the purpose of representation is the method used by Albrecht Dürer to determine precisely the composition of figures.²²⁰ The work of Dürer shows figures reduced to blocks and other geometric shapes.

In the below (Figure 3.1), Dürer uses reductive abstraction to minimise the diversity of details of objects in order to focus on coordinating the composition within the object’s representational, pictorial. Space is converted from indeterminate depth to archi-natural space by the appearance of the figure. The scale of the space, its perspective and form can be comprehended because the figure is geometric and yet is formally a body. The figure inherently gives the impression that it is intended as a guide to a more detailed figure, one that is a representation of a natural person. However, this is only an assumption and one that, in our eyes accustomed to seeing abstractions, can easily be revealed as such. This makes this assumption easy to displace, thereby leaving the drawing exposed as something else.

²²⁰ See, Walter L Strauss (ed.), *The Human Figure by Albrecht Dürer: The Complete Dresden Sketchbook*, Dover Publications, NY, USA, 1972.

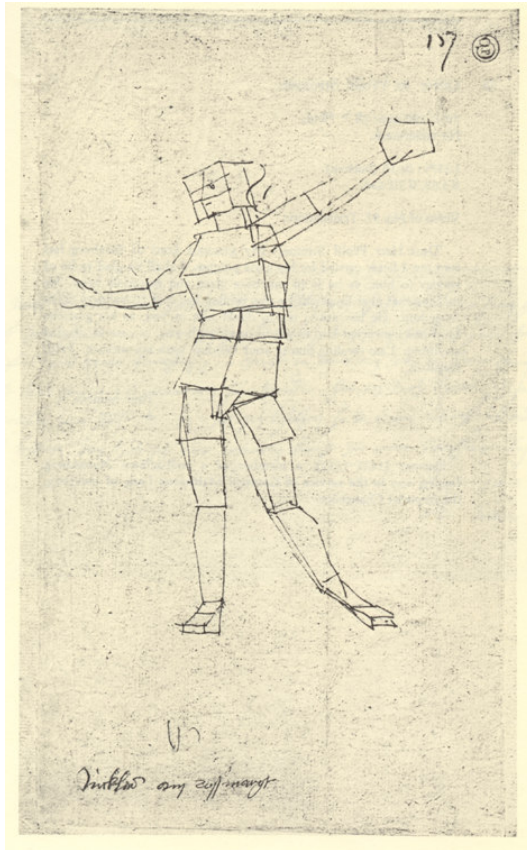


Figure 3.1 Albrecht Dürer, *Stereometric Man*, Pen drawing, 1519 or 1523.²²¹

This displacement of purpose (intended or otherwise), due to shifts in context, produces Deleuzian “monstrosities”.

The complexities of a particular body must be excluded in order to find the beautiful composition for the cause of representation. However, if the connection between excluded complexity and the reduced figure is weakened, the reduced figure becomes a monstrous person made of boxes. In other words, the movement towards finding a beautiful form requires the creation of potential monstrosities, in this case a human apparently made of boxes. Presence and absence, and the formation of a monstrosity can only be tolerated because both are seen as the product of reductive abstraction that is directed to the exterior purpose, or *cause*, of representation. If this cause is relinquished, the reduced figure takes on an entirely different appearance, something like the automaton or robotic style of modern images of the early 20th century.

²²¹ Walter L Strauss (ed.), *The Human Figure by Albrecht Dürer: The Complete Dresden Sketchbook*, Dover Publications, NY, USA, 1972, p. 195.

The figure in the Dürer drawings shown here (Figures 3.1 and 3.2) can seem monstrous under certain conditions precisely because it has been reduced to cube-like mechanical shapes.

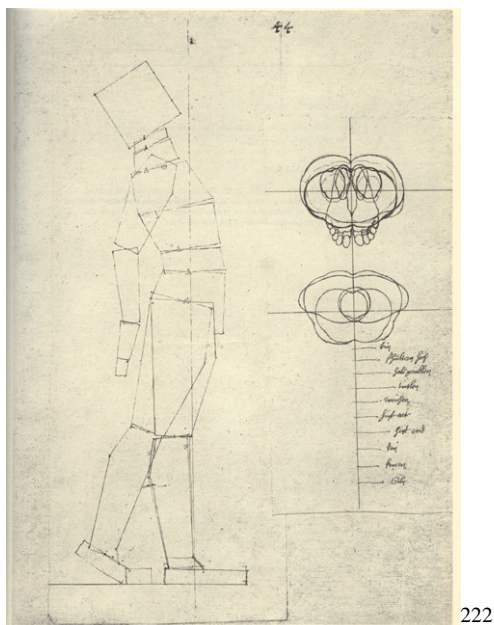


Figure 3.2 Albrecht Dürer, *Stereometric Man; Two Body Sections*, Pen drawing, before 1519.

What has been *excluded*, such as details of a curve or a texture, is what indicates that the figure can seem monstrous. Instead of seeing the figure as the location for adding particulars, the figure is comprehended as complete, a robotic figure. But it is the way that what remains is understood. Monstrosities appear when this understanding shifts from reductive abstraction as a method to reductive abstraction as the outside purpose. This is parallel to the shift in understanding in which reductive abstraction shifts from logic as method to logic as a formal purpose, as in belief that ideal essences are “real”. Monstrosities reflect the necessity of the consigned outside of reduction. As such, they are the key to seeing where the confusion between form and purpose occurs.

The monstrosity that is revealed in shifting our way of seeing Dürer’s mechanical figures show us that we have merged our method, reductive abstraction, with our purpose, representation.

²²² Walter L Strauss (ed.), *The Human Figure by Albrecht Dürer: The Complete Dresden Sketchbook*, Dover Publications, NY, USA, 1972, p. 203.

The representational purpose of reductive abstraction is always shifted to the outside of the abstracting process itself, but must be acknowledged to avoid the conversion of the image into a human made of boxes. Representation becomes a necessary absence within each representational work. To deny representation is to deny the revealing of beautiful form. If the surface is to disappear, as is urged in representation, representation must be shifted to the outside of appearances; it must not be revealed.

But Rajchman doesn't take his explanation of reductive abstraction into painting in this much detail. Instead, he remains theoretical. Rajchman attributes the shift to the outside of representation to the potential of the space of the abstract model. Assemblies of these forces or potentials, which are created in the search for beautiful and ideal forms, are variable and can lead to quite different types of work.²²³ These variations, which Rajchman, following Deleuze, calls "series",²²⁴ offer opportunities to develop the form of the model. For instance, it could be used to explore the surface composition that results from a reductive representation of light falling on surfaces.

In painting, the movement in thought towards the features of the surface occurs as the return of the unknown dissimilar particularity that has been consigned to the outside. Particularity of this kind, of course, is not visible in the final painting. It has been discarded in the reductive process. Features of sense such as texture, sound and smell are excluded because they cannot take part in the visibility of the painting. Senses such as these cannot be geometrically reduced to vision. As such, they are consigned to the outside and, like the return of the unknown dissimilar, return to the work's surface in new forms. However, this is not so much a return as a replacement.

²²³ To posit a particular assembly as the only form of beauty is to create orthodox beauty of form. The connection to Classicism is of interest here but diverges from the discussion.

²²⁴ The term "series" is used in Gilles Deleuze (Lester, M, Trans, Boundas, C, ed), *Logic of Sense*, Columbia University Press, USA, 1990. It is used to denote a topology or terrain of "figures" or what Deleuze has called "conceptual personæ" or "aesthetic figures". Each series is a plane of action.

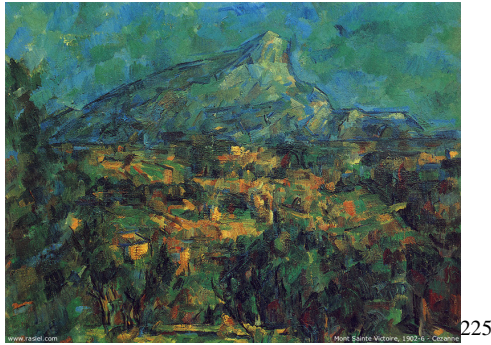


Figure 3.1 Paul Cézanne (1839-1906), *Mont Saint Victoire*, 1902-1906, oil on canvas.

In *Mont Saint Victoire*, 1902-1906, by Paul Cézanne (1839-1906), the picture, a landscape, is reduced to certain basic shapes and arranged in a way that looks like the reduced formal composition of the scene from which the painting was made.

It is reasonable to assume that this painting is essentially a geometric reduction, using cubic shapes, of the visual experience it denotes. The painting's surface then becomes the return of the ugly-absent that has been excluded in the abstract process. This return is in the form of surface features of the canvas. However, the surface textures and colours *take the place* of the excluded features that, for the sake of painting, must be absent. The smell of the grass and the touch of the dirt and so on have been replaced with the colour, tone and texture of paint on canvas. This does not mean, as was thought within the concept of "synaesthesia", that there is correspondence between the features of the surface and the senses they replace. What it means is that a new sensory experience, not necessarily related to the actual experience, has been created from the necessary return of the painting's surface features.

The particulars of the landscape such as the smell of the dirt, and the details of flowers and complex forms of trees cannot be included in a visual image or painting. Instead, the surface qualities of paint and canvas must take the place that these other sense events have left. The scene is transformed so that it now exists within a new world or, more precisely, a new space. The reduction of the scene has been broken from its connection to sense events by the qualities of paint and canvas, which allows a monstrosity to appear.

The surface features of the painting take the place of the non-visual sensory *becoming* of the scene. The movement of the eye over the surface takes the place of the movement of the whole body within the scene that cannot be included on a flat canvas surface. However, the eye is also part of the body, so visual experience remains embodied. A return of the surface of painting produces a visual monstrosity that replaces the body in nature at the very moment that one looks into a picture. Cézanne makes visible what painters had been using to achieve representation but had always tried to make invisible, *the surface*. For Cézanne, replacement of particularity with the expressive qualities of the paint and the canvas was important. Because of this, the painting is, in Deleuzian thinking, monstrous, but in terms of the reductive abstract approach to painting instead of philosophy. Yet, in terms of the surface, it forms another kind of beauty not subject to judgment of taste. It is, rather, the realm of subliminal affective response, or a kind of *monstrous beauty*. For Cézanne, it was the qualities of colour, that are drawn from nature, which as Cézanne writes is a matter of *self-expression*, or the expression of an artist's inner being.

[W]e must render the image of what we see, forgetting everything that existed before us. Which, I believe, must permit the artist to give his entire personality ...²²⁶

Reductive abstraction, which reveals the surface and eschews representation in favour of monstrous beauty, opens up new uses for assemblies such as atmospheric colour, linear perspective and form through line at the same time as it allows the return of self-expression in the painter's *surface*. The pursuit of monstrous beauty as self-expression is carried out within assemblies of paint and canvas that replace excluded sense experiences of nature with thought or an "inner nature". So abstraction that is pursued reductively would no longer lead to objective formal representation but instead subjective presentation. Surface is no longer invisible and depth is no longer perspectival but is depth of inner thought made visible. Together surface and depth pursued in this way have made possible beautiful monstrosities. It is within the impure mixtures of surfaces and depths that beautiful monstrosities produce the image of thought. This productivity requires, however, another type of abstraction folded into reduction.

²²⁶ Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, (eds.), *Art In Theory, 1900-1990: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, Blackwell, USA, 1992, p. 39.

2. *Constructive Abstraction*

The second kind of abstraction is “constructive abstraction”. Constructive abstraction is found within an impure mixture of depth and surface. Constructive abstraction can be thought of as the assembly of *aesthetic figures*. For abstract painting, this means the assembly of abstract elements on a painting’s surface or within pictorial space.

Deleuze and Guattari use terms simultaneously as both metaphors and literal expressions. They use the term *conceptual personæ* for this type of concept. Strange seeing is how the movement from the house to the cosmos can occur. Strange seeing concerns *conceptual personæ* not within conceptual assemblies but as figures assembled for seeing, or *aesthetic figures*. In painting, *aesthetic figures* are the basic ingredients of constructive abstraction.

According to Rajchman’s description, constructive abstraction is “complicated and apart” from “pure lineages” and leaves difficult spaces and problems of “subjectivity” and “subjection” within images.²²⁷ Rajchman, following Deleuze’s argument, writes that the lines of these impure mixtures are prior to “sense, reference or elocution”.²²⁸ It is as a consequence of the need to address the impure mixtures that this other kind of abstraction occurs. It is here, however, that Rajchman stops without developing his discussion. After picking up the thread from Rajchman, Deleuze and Guattari’s texts need to be addressed directly in order to more explicitly reveal their meaning for painting.

The first or reductive kind of abstraction has its purpose outside its own process. Deleuze and Guattari write of this kind of abstraction that it “does not explain, but must itself be explained”.²²⁹ By contrast, the second kind of abstraction does explain *by* abstracting, or by assembling a multiplicity of abstracted elements in a question, or proposition, that “ask[s] how they [the abstract elements] are realized in the world or extracted from it”.²³⁰ In so doing, according to Rajchman, one undoes the prefiguring

²²⁷ John Rajchman, *Constructions*, MIT Press, Mass, USA, 1998, p. 64.

²²⁸ John Rajchman, *Constructions*, MIT Press, Mass, USA, 1998, p. 64.

²²⁹ John Rajchman, *Constructions*, MIT Press, Mass, USA, 1998, p. 64, from Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet (Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Haberjam trans.), *Dialogues II*, Athlone Press London UK, 2002, p. vii.

²³⁰ John Rajchman, *Constructions*, MIT Press, Mass, USA, 1998, p. 64.

of what Deleuze and Guattari call “arborial forms” of abstract space in the reductive, hierarchical kind of abstraction.

In Rajchman’s description of constructive abstraction, he claims that these assemblies or “abstract machines”, as Deleuze and Guattari call them,²³¹ are the opposite or negative of reductive abstraction.²³²

Abstract machines are *question-affirmation* machines rather than the conventional “*abs-tractus*”²³³ in which a connection with the world is broken and “objectivity” established. An abstract machine begins to form in response to a question that is presented as a “problem”. In response to the problem, lines of thought are gathered. The lines of thought form a dynamic intersection or actuality. The event gives rise to possibilities or “virtualities” that provide directions for resolution of the problem. Each actuality has its own specific virtualities. The movement towards solving the problem shifts the event and so creates new virtualities. Like the horizon’s relationship with a point of view, virtualities are in a constant relationship with a certain event. If an abstract machine moves, so does the horizon. If the horizon does not move in a consistent way, or does not move at all, events are forced to change.

Here we have shifted away from Rajchman and will now draw directly from Deleuze and Guattari. This is because the oppositional approach implied in Rajchman’s model, while clear in distinguishing reductive from constructive abstraction, does not provide for their mutual constitution. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari use a diagram to describe becoming in an abstract way.²³⁴

²³¹ See Mark Bonta and John Protevi, *Deleuze and Geophilosophy, A Guide and Glossary*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, UK, 2004, pp. 47-8, for a comprehensive coverage of “abstract machine” and other Deleuzo-Guattarian terminology giving sources and meaning. (You could perhaps put this note much earlier in the thesis, near the beginning of the first discussion of Deleuze and Guattari.) The main text in which this term is used is *A Thousand Plateaus*.

²³² It should be pointed out here that, while Rajchman describes these two abstractions as opposites (John Rajchman, *Constructions*, MIT Press, Mass, USA, 1998, p. 64-5.), it is unlikely that Deleuze or Deleuze and Guattari would see them as reversible opposites like black and white, positive and negative, or left and right. It is more likely that they would see the two kinds of abstraction as constitutive of each other. See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (Brian Massumi trans.), *A Thousand Plateaus*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis and London, UK, 1987, pp. 474-500.

²³³ John Rajchman, *Constructions*, MIT Press, Mass, USA, 1998, p. 65.

²³⁴ The schema described here comes from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis and London, UK, 1987, pp. 291-298. This section is called “Memories and Becomings, Points and Blocks”. A number of authors have described Deleuzo-Guattarian becoming. These include: Paul Patton, in Paul Patton (ed.), *Deleuze: A Critical Reader*, Blackwell, Oxford (DCR), UK, 1996, p. 4, describes becomings as routes of transformation for philosophical concepts.

Deleuze and Guattari stress that their approach to abstraction is constructive through their use of diagrammatic and abstract dynamic explanations. But for Deleuze and Guattari, this kind of abstraction is concerned with actualities as well as abstractions.

For Deleuze and Guattari, actualities and virtualities are assembled as “abstract machines”. It should be noted here that virtualities, for Deleuze and Guattari, are not ideals. Virtualities are potentialities subtended from specific actualities. In this sense, virtualities are specific to any particular instant or event. Each actual event, or instant, is surrounded by assemblies of virtualities. These assemblies, or abstract machines, vary in intensity. Abstract machines are constructed dynamic assemblies of actuality and virtuality. An actuality is an intersection of lines of flight from other actualities. Virtuality is attractive to dynamic lines of flight at their intersection. Each actuality creates attractions or lines of flight, along which there is movement. This movement is called “deterritorialisation”. Virtualities attract actualities, thereby inducing new lines of movement, as well as also being the result of actualities. In each actuality, there is an array of virtualities surrounding the actuality, which potentially lead it into a *becoming* space, called a “block of becoming”.²³⁵ The “block of becoming” that Deleuze and Guattari describe in *A Thousand Plateaus* relies on the appearing of “virtualities” that are subtended from “actualities”. Between a particular virtuality and actuality is subtended “becoming reality” or a “block of becoming”, which constitutes an expanded intensity that Deleuze and Guattari suggest is the experience of *the real*. Neither actualities nor virtualities can exist on their own, nor is either more real than the other. Their role is to subtend a block of becoming.²³⁶ It is the block of becoming that is “real”. “Sense” presents a block of becoming on the “plane of presentation”, as what is expressive in an event. It is the sense of an event, or the presentation of a

Brian Massumi, in Brian Massumi, *A User's Guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia: Deviations from Deleuze and Guattari*, MIT Press, USA, 1992, p. 37, where he notes that becoming replaces being in order to emphasise the dynamics of actuality. Massumi also states on the same page, “The virtual is real and is in reciprocal presupposition with the actual, but does not exist even to the extent that the actual could be said to exist. It [the virtual] *subsists* in the actual or is immanent to it”. Mark Bonta and John Protevi, in Mark Bonta and John Protevi, *Deleuze and Geophilosophy: A Guide and Glossary*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, UK, 2004, pp. 59-60, describe becoming as not something through which another thing passes, but as a thing's tendency towards other things. Also, becoming is not a goal or end state, but a passing state in regard to conditions and states within that passing. Manuel Delanda, in Manuel Delanda, *Intensive Science and Virtual Philosophy*, Continuum Press, UK, 2002, p. 84, describes becoming as “characterising a universe of *becoming without being*”. Emphasis in original.

²³⁵ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (Brian Massumi trans.), *A Thousand Plateaus*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis and London, UK, 1987, p. 293.

²³⁶ The use of the term “subtend” is drawn from the diagrammatic explanation of Deleuzian becoming. Readers are asked to recall the emphasis that Deleuze places on diagrammatic thinking in his work.

“block of becoming” between virtualities and actualities, that makes the abstract event a “reality”. Sense is what gives the block of becoming or reality its texture and is that which is expressed within the *space* of the actual and virtual. Propositions express virtualities using sense. Propositions are the “what if...” of reality. According to Paul Patton,

[I]n the course of outlining a Meinongian conception of sense as that which is expressed in propositions, Deleuze argues for the identity of sense and what he calls ‘pure events’: incorporeal identities which subsist over and above their spatio-temporal manifestations, and which are expressed in language.²³⁷

Abstraction of this kind is a necessity for the real as becoming. One cannot move in the world or, as such, *be* in that world without actualities and virtualities. Virtualities are always in relation to actualities and always constituted as abstract assemblies that make sense of the block of becoming. It could be argued that this is Deleuzo-Guattarian “appearing”. The world revealed as appearing, by this necessary assembly, is not the linear world found according to a consistency with axioms located within reductive abstraction. Instead, it is “disunified, incongruous and composed of multiple divergent paths”.²³⁸ Within these paths, the virtual subsists with (and within) the actual; likewise the actual subsists with (and within) the virtual as a mutually subtended pair at the ends of lines of flight, the only dimension of which, depth, has the attribute of space-time.²³⁹

This entire schema is constructed abstractly, but, for Deleuze and Guattari, is also a systematic explanation of reality, or, to put it bluntly, an explanation of what can be known as real upon the plane of the senses. Abstraction of this kind *reveals* the actual–virtual as real sense events or becomings. Painting abstracted in this way, which is to say as an abstract machine, might seem also to reveal the actual-virtual.

²³⁷ Paul Patton, (ed.), *Deleuze: A Critical Reader*, Blackwell, Oxford (DCR), UK, 1996, p. 13.

²³⁸ John Rajchman, *Constructions*, MIT Press, Mass, USA, 1998, p. 65.

²³⁹ For example, seeing is an event consisting of an actuality that reaches towards a virtuality or “depth”. To see something is to see the possibility of experiencing that something. The experience of a thing is evoked by a “seeing”. This is a calling up of a memory or a thought, and creates a conceptual assembly of the thing as visible. When the evocation and the seeing are equated, one says that one experienced that something, when one actually *saw* it. The experience of the something, then, is a reality that subsists in the seeing of the thing (actuality) and the thought of the thing (virtuality). Reality relies on both the actuality of seeing and the virtuality of knowing. Of course, this example can be applied to any sense event, but in this case seeing is used because it pertains directly to painting.

The actual and the virtual are a dynamic state, so how can an apparently static painting present a dynamic state? The virtual alone cannot be represented because to do so is to sever it from that which provides its virtuality, the becoming-actual relationship. Instead, to attempt to represent the virtual is to produce ideals. This contradiction occurs in the production of the electronic computer representations, known as “virtual images”, used in the computerised representation of architecture. These images are created from models within organisations of electronically stored and manipulated data, in which the final representation is isolated from the “surface” of the data by the computer “software”. In effect, there is no block of becoming because the actual is the virtual in these images. The impression one gets from computer images is one of the ideal geometric purity of the objects within a pure perspectival field. This geometric purity, however, is isolated not only from the data from which the representation is made, but also from the object to which it refers. In computer representation of architecture, the word “virtual” is used simplistically, in a Platonic or Classical sense, at the cost of its Deleuzian or becoming sense. The actual is masked by the virtual and appears as an ideal.

It is through the un-masking of the actual and the virtual, or the return of the displaced actual, through the qualities of the surface, that becoming can be presented (not *represented*) in painting. The features of the surface of a painting, such as the colours, tones, lines, textures and other features *replace* the displaced features of being, thereby presenting a new becoming: the surface. The features of the surface are assembled within a world that is entirely different to what is represented in the representational “picture” of objects. These are expressive qualities that are present and assembled according to the consistency (internal logic) of their world. For example, the redness of the red paint is a quality of an object in the world and so is, as part of the world, deteriorating. The redness to which and from which this redness is becoming is its virtuality. Redness though, is also *signifying* (heat, fire, blood) and so it is a presentation of the virtual.

The surface, though, is immediately also part of the pictorial space of the painting. The surface and depth form an impure mixture of surface as the presentation of the virtual and depth as pictorial space. Through the impure mixture of expressive qualities (redness for example) and depth in the painting (pictorial space), the actual and the virtual are assembled in a space of becoming in the mixture of *surface and*

depth of the painting. To see both the surface and depth is to enter spaces of visual becoming.²⁴⁰ Strange seeing therefore opens new becomings within the surface-depth of the painting.

Constructivity, in this way of seeing paintings (as strange seeing), is the assembly of an impure mixture of surface and depth in the sense of painting. For this to occur, abstraction cannot be assembled in terms of reduction alone. Instead, it must also be constructive in the same way that Lachterman calls modernism constructive, because its constructivity is a self-constituting critical engagement with practice within “machinic assemblages”. A way for painting to become constructive can be found in Deleuze and Guattari’s explanation of constructivism in *What Is Philosophy?*

Deleuze and Guattari describe the necessary constructive act for philosophy, which is the construction of concepts:

Constructivism requires every creation to be construction on a plane that gives it an autonomous existence.²⁴¹

At first, the autonomy of a surface might appear to be a contradictory concept given the Deleuzo-Guattarian themes of *becoming* and *immanence*. But autonomy must be conceived in terms of Deleuzo-Guattarian becoming, which means that it is in relation to other becomings and therefore is simultaneously not autonomous. Deleuzo-Guattarian autonomy is a moment of actuality. As such it can only be confused with becoming, which makes it seem contradictory from a Classical point of view. Their statement about the autonomy of constructivism is subject to the following qualification made later in the text:

Conceptual becoming is heterogeneity grasped in an absolute form; sensory becoming is otherness caught in a matter of expression. The monument does not actualize the virtual event but incorporates or even embodies it: it gives it a body, a life, a universe. This was how Proust defined the art-monument by that life higher than the “lived,” by its “qualitative differences,” its “universes” that construct their own limits, their

²⁴⁰ Possibility within proposition is moved from a possibility of the present to a possibility from the future, which will be expanded upon later.

²⁴¹ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell trans.), *What Is Philosophy?*, Columbia University Press, NY, USA, 1994, p. 7.

distances and proximities, their constellations and the blocs of sensations they put into motion—Rembrandt-universe or Debussy-universe.²⁴²

Each actualisation and virtuality is, on the one hand, autonomous because it occurs abstractly and, on the other, *heteronomous* because it is becoming. How can the actual and the virtual be both a singularity and two distinct things at the same time? Can becoming be a consistent and absolute denial of the logical law of identity in which a thing is always equal to itself? This paradox can be understood in the light of an even earlier sentence, in which Deleuze and Guattari are describing *conceptual personæ* (philosophical concepts) and *aesthetic figures* (artistic figures):

It may be that they pass into one another, in either direction, like Igitur and Zarathustra, but this is insofar as there are sensations of concepts and concepts of sensations.²⁴³

In a philosophy of immanence, there is no law of identity,²⁴⁴ only a law of becoming. This means that to say something is two things at the same time, is to say that its becoming is the result of two directions of becoming that happen to intersect, which is an entirely consistent point of view when thinking in terms of becoming. It is this view of philosophy that corresponds to strange seeing for paintings. In paintings, therefore, the sensory is that which embodies conceptual becoming through impure mixtures of expressive surface and pictorial depth, the two things that a painting can be. This suggests that philosophy's concepts and painting's percepts are in some way mutually constituted as sensations and concepts when actually experienced as depth *and* surface, or strange seeing. In other words, *aesthetic figures* can operate as *conceptual personæ*. This means that painting can be understood as philosophy of sensation if one sees with strange seeing. Art thinks no less than philosophy, but it thinks through affects and percepts. Philosophy of sensation, for painting, is philosophy of seeing painting *as becoming*. To summarise this position, a quote from Deleuze and Guattari:

This means that the concept as such can be the concept of the affect, just as the affect can be the affect of the concept. The plane of composition of art and the plane of

²⁴²Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell trans.), *What Is Philosophy?*, Columbia University Press, NY, USA, 1994, p. 177.

²⁴³Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell trans.), *What Is Philosophy?*, Columbia University Press, NY, USA, 1994, p. 177.

²⁴⁴ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (Brian Massumi trans.), *A Thousand Plateaus*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis and London, UK, 1987, p. 511.

immanence of philosophy can slip into each other to the degree that parts of one may be occupied by entities of the other.²⁴⁵

According to Deleuze, constructive abstraction in painting, as the assembly of percepts, can be regarded as the making of philosophy *as* sensation and, as such, is *philosophy of sensation*. Correspondingly, philosophy can be thought of as the constructive art of the concept. Abstraction in its two forms, reductive and constructive, exists in both painting and philosophy. The two forms of abstraction exhibit a tension in which new ways of thinking are curtailed in reductive abstraction and produced in constructive abstraction. As such, painting is more than an analogy for thinking; it *is* thinking in which exclusion and inclusion of impure mixtures of surface and depth make thinking present.

Painting as Philosophy of Sensation

Abstraction in painting can be thought of not only as *like* the issue of immanence versus transcendence in philosophy, but also as *taking part* in the discussion.²⁴⁶ Deleuze argues that immanence, the inherent becoming of all being (engagement with events, at the surface of events), is under constant attack by transcendence, the knowing of things as determined by objects of thought (as appearances rather than as appearings) that are apart from the world (assemblies of knowledge without experience, or *a priori synthesis*, within one's interior space).

Deleuze and Guattari reiterate this discussion in one of their last works, *What Is Philosophy?* as well as throughout their other work. For Deleuze, this is a theme to which his work returns persistently. In a single paragraph in *What Is Philosophy?* Deleuze and Guattari set out an argument about immanence and transcendence. For Deleuze (and Guattari), immanence is a “good” and transcendence is a “bad”, which can be compared with the argument that abstraction is a good and representation is a bad. They conclude this section by connecting it to one the key instances of immanent thinking, that of Philosopher Baruch Spinoza. As Deleuze and Guattari write,

²⁴⁵ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell trans.), *What Is Philosophy?*, Columbia University Press, NY, USA, 1994, p. 66.

²⁴⁶ Gilles Deleuze, (Trans. Murphy, T) *Lectures, 1978, 1980, 1981, Seminar Sessions on Spinoza* The discourse of immanence and transcendence is discussed in Deleuze's lectures on Spinoza, given at Vincennes in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

Spinoza, the infinite becoming-philosopher: he showed, drew up, and thought the “best” plane of immanence—that is, the purest, the one that does not hand itself over to the transcendent or restore any transcendent, the one that inspires the fewest illusions, bad feelings, and erroneous perceptions.²⁴⁷

There is an implied correspondence with painting appearing here with the use of the terms “illusion” and “erroneous perceptions”, which echo the modernist denigration of perspective as illusion. An argument about painting can be drawn from this in which immanence is found within a state of becoming, endless change, and known through direct experience, sensory events, and intensities or otherwise, of the sensible. To be folding together, as an impure mixture, is to be in an immanent state. For Deleuze and Guattari, transcendence is an incision in the plane of immanence, a reductive act of violence, which destroys immanence according to an illusion in order to create the laws of the real, for example, the “laws of nature”. This destruction of immanence is the result of mirages of thought that lead to illusions. For Deleuze and Guattari, the plane of immanence is surrounded by a fog of these illusions. These are not abstract misinterpretations, nor are they merely external pressures, but rather thought's mirages.²⁴⁸ According to Deleuze:

We must draw up a list of illusions and take their measure, just as Nietzsche, following Spinoza, listed the “four great errors.” But the list is infinite. First of all, there is the *illusion of transcendence*, which, perhaps comes before all the others (in its double aspect of making immanence immanent to something and of rediscovering a transcendence within immanence itself).²⁴⁹

The main mirage is an *illusion of transcendence* and it leads to other mirages such as the “illusions of universals”²⁵⁰ where concepts are confused with the plane of immanence. Another important illusion is found within “contemplation, reflection and communication”²⁵¹ through which universals are thought to provide explanations. Deleuze and Guattari insist that universals, because they are a reductive form of

²⁴⁷ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell trans.), *What Is Philosophy?*, Columbia University Press, NY, USA, 1994, p. 60.

²⁴⁸ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell trans.), *What Is Philosophy?*, Columbia University Press, NY, USA, 1994, p49.

²⁴⁹ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell trans.), *What Is Philosophy?*, Columbia University Press, NY, USA, 1994, pp. 49-50.

²⁵⁰ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell trans.), *What Is Philosophy?*, Columbia University Press, NY, USA, 1994, pp. 49-50

²⁵¹ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell trans.), *What Is Philosophy?*, Columbia University Press, NY, USA, 1994, pp. 49-50

abstraction, must be explained, rather than used to provide explanations. Illusion creates the impression that universals can provide explanations. Other illusions include “the eternal” and “discursiveness”. In the claim that they form a “thick fog” around the plane of immanence, Deleuze and Guattari intend a fog of mirages that obscures the clarity of immanence upon its plane. Immanence is something that must be worked for amid this mirage-laden fog, something that can only be found by questioning illusions. Philosophy of sensation is a questioning of illusions, a questioning of mirages such as representation. For painting, this is a questioning of representation within painting practice.

Foucault’s Third Resemblance

There is a Deleuzian explanation of the connection between representation and ideals. This connection is related to the way in which philosopher Michel Foucault (1926-1984) describes representation in *The Order of Things*.²⁵² Foucault distinguishes resemblance from representation in order to explain resemblance as far more than unthinking mimicry. Foucault argues that there should not be confusion between *resemblance* and *representation* because this confusion leads to an unnecessary rejection of *resemblance* through a rejection of *representation*. Foucault uses the following example in which the necessity of *resemblance* is asserted within thought:

Let the philosopher pride himself on his precision as much as he will ... I will nevertheless dare defy him to make a single step in his progress without the aid of resemblance. Throw but one glance upon the metaphysical aspect of the sciences, even the least abstract of them, and tell me whether the general inductions that are derived from particular facts, or rather the kinds themselves, the species and all abstract notions, can be formed otherwise than by means of resemblance.²⁵³

Foucault assumes a connection between *representation* and *resemblance* where *resemblance* makes the connection by *analogy*, the “third” kind of resemblance according to Foucault’s four kinds of resemblance. *Analogy* is found in both *proximity*

²⁵² Michel Foucault (Tavistock/Routledge trans.), *The Order of Things*, Routledge, London and New York, USA, 1970.

²⁵³ Michel Foucault (Tavistock/Routledge trans.), *The Order of Things*, Routledge, London and New York, USA, 1970, p. 85.

(proximity is the characteristic of the first resemblance, *convenientia*.²⁵⁴) and *distance* (distance is the characteristic of the second resemblance *aemulatio*.²⁵⁵) which are combined in a single likeness. *Analogy* connects the truth of the mass of the body under gravity with that of the most visually and lightly distant, the *cosmos*, thereby establishing the field of resemblance as simultaneously both visual and massive.²⁵⁶

The task of philosophy, in this way of thinking, is to use resemblance to determine truth from falsehood. To do so requires that it becomes representation. To do this a system of precision is needed. Foucault attributes this systematic precision to a merging of vision and touch within *analogy*. *Analogy* becomes truth determining, through the various systems of precision in representation. In other words, it is the necessity of determining truth that merges vision and touch that also merges resemblance with representation, according to Foucault. Representation emerges when the acuity of discernment is applied to resemblance. In other words, precise judgment drives a need for precise resemblance, which is found in representation. In this model, to find truth, philosophers create and examine representations.

Truth is determined by comparison, within representation, of the “weight” of things under visual metaphors. Geometry, as a metaphor, becomes rationality, where “weight” is taken to mean quantity, kind or number. In short, judgment is applied to visual experience as if that experience were about *weight*, indeed a “weighing up” of points. The process requires a constant “flip-flopping”, or blurring of boundaries, between the *visual* and the *haptic* (the massiveness of materiality to touch) by a constant state of negotiation within *analogy*. This is an impure mixture of *representation* and *resemblance* in which, apparently, incompatible ways of thinking are made to coexist.

Analogy becomes representation when the systems of negotiation and judgment are final or closed. At this point, grammar becomes final and the blurring between representation and resemblance is invisible. This is because analogy, in its persistent negotiation of visual and haptic, motivates the desire for finality. When finality occurs, analogy *re-presents* truth. The channels of negotiation are then fixed

²⁵⁴ Michel Foucault (Tavistock/Routledge trans.), *The Order of Things*, Routledge, London and New York, USA, 1970, p. 20.

²⁵⁵ Michel Foucault (Tavistock/Routledge trans.), *The Order of Things*, Routledge, London and New York, USA, 1970, p. 21.

²⁵⁶ For Foucault, massivity seems to be a form of tactility, in which massivity is what is felt by the pressure of one body upon another.

according to straight lines, rather than the bent and meandering “line of flight” that Deleuze and Guattari write about. Analogy, however, need not be bound to representation. Analogy, within a painting, can be what adds the impurity to the mixture of surface and depth.

For painting, *analogy* performs this role when what is twofold, which is to say touch and vision, appears as surface and depth. In other words, becoming appears in *analogy* when *analogy* moves away from representation and towards a more expressive *presentation of a surface*. By moving from representation to expressive presentation, *analogy* moves away from a representation of an absence towards an affirming construction upon a surface. Instead of an invisible surface through which to see representation, analogy allows the presence of the surface within a mixture of surface and depth as a mixture of touch and vision. For example, formal composition, drawing, colour and perspective techniques are constructively abstract and lead to literal presentation of figures or representation. Within this system of grammatical assembly, if it is to be constructive, what is needed is a way to loosen the grammatical assembly that closes off the dynamic relationship between surface (touch) and depth (vision) but also keeps the elements or, in Deleuzo-Guattarian terms, the “functionives” of painting. In other words, to grasp constructive abstraction requires, not the grammatical veracity of representation, but the *expressive facility of presentation*.

Painting, as philosophy of sensation, must therefore include a practice of constructive surface abstraction using techniques of “depth”. This can mean the most basic differences on a surface as well as the most complex representational techniques. The important thing is to consider the interplay of surface and depth. This does not deny resemblance, nor does it assert the disappearance of the surface or the absolute existence of the surface. A painting can then be a non-truth-determining analogy for vision and touch, or in short a cosmos of touch and vision.

Constructive approaches to abstraction have also referred to the specificity of the image and its reconstruction as painting, as Juan Gris wrote in *A Reply to a Questionnaire*:

I create a bottle from a cylinder, a certain bottle, Cézanne heads towards architecture, whereas I depart from it. It's for this reason that I compose with abstractions (colours) and I determine when these colours have become objects; for example, I compose with

black and white and I determine when the white has become a paper and the black a shadow.

If in the system, I distance myself from all idealist and naturalist art, in method I do not want to escape from the Louvre. My method is the perennial method, that which the masters used; these are the means, they are the constant.²⁵⁷

Gris saw his work as part of the tradition that, apart from leading to representation, also led to abstraction. In his work, abstraction is not opposed to representation but instead is part of the same synthetic assembly of a method by which the work is constructed. Gris is making the surface *equivocal* by the creation of a picture. The “closure”²⁵⁸ of “architectonic” truth is undone in Gris’s work. He is comfortable with painting as a productive paradox, in which what is presented in the painting is not “determined”. This is primarily an approach in which the acceptance of the impure mixtures of paint-surface and depth-illusion is the main concern of painting. Painting concerned with resemblance will always be close to representation, especially if the grammar of painting can be comprehended as closed. For example, Mondrian’s *Broadway Boogie Woogie* (Figure 3.2) could become a view of Manhattan, from above. This is simply because a resemblance can be found and from there a representation closed.

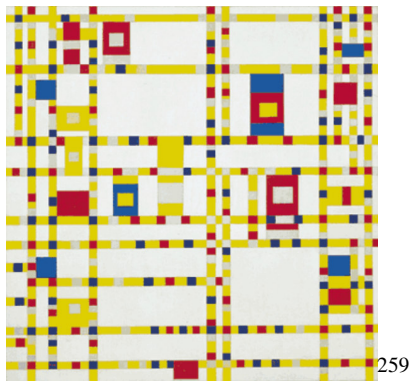


Figure 3.2 Piet Mondrian. *Broadway Boogie Woogie*. 1942–43, Oil on canvas, 127cm x 127 cm.

²⁵⁷Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, (eds.), *Art In Theory, 1900-1990, An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, Blackwell, USA, 1992, p. 245, Juan Gris, "Reply to a Questionnaire", 1921.

²⁵⁸ The term closed is used in its philosophical sense here to indicate the closed system in which all causality, conditions and processes are always and already present, knowable and consistent.

²⁵⁹ Downloaded from http://www.moma.org/collection/depts/paint_sculpt/blowups/paint_sculpt_018.html on 13.12.2004.

What is important here is to understand that this assertion, that the painting *is* something, is to see the painting in a Classical way. Any painting can look like something as well as look like something else, or not like anything at all. In short, any painting can resemble *without* representing. For example, the following painting by Mark Rothko, *No. 14, 1960*, (Figure 3.3), can be seen as abstract at the same time as being seen as resembling an horizon.

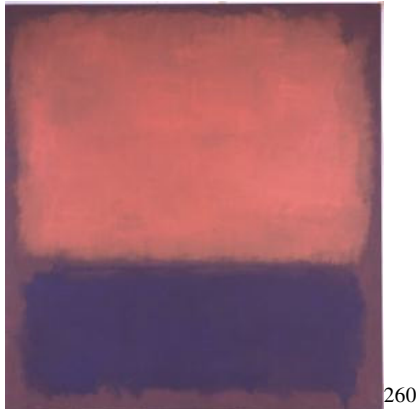


Figure 3.3 Mark Rothko, *No. 14, 1960*, 1960, 290.83 cm x 268.29 cm oil on canvas.

Multiple seeing (or interpretation) of Rothko's painting shows the viewer that the relationships between these ways of seeing create a space for thought, or a conceptual space, or more precisely a block of conceptual becoming. Within this block of becoming, concepts can be assembled and opened up to questioning. Many painters who would not see themselves as philosophers at all, even though they have read many philosophical texts, can be seen as taking part in philosophy this way. In the painting *White on White* (Figure 3.4), Kasimir Malevich has brought two, almost white, rectangular and almost square shapes together at an angle. The larger is the rectangular canvas and the smaller, other rectangle is placed, at a seemingly arbitrary angle, touching two inner sides of the larger rectangle.

²⁶⁰ Down loaded from [http://collections.sfmoma.org/Obj22031\\$2064](http://collections.sfmoma.org/Obj22031$2064) on 19 October 2004.

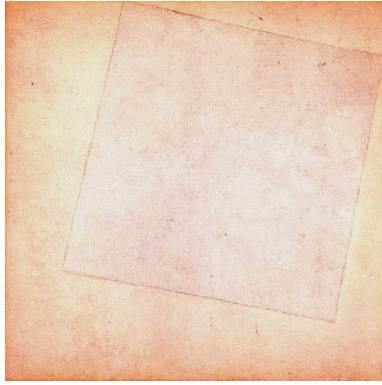


Figure 3.4 Kasimir Malevich, *Suprematist Composition: White on White*, 1918, oil on canvas.²⁶¹

The painting can be read as if it is an attempt to erase differences between pictorial space and the “real” space of architecture or archi-nature. The result is the suspicion that the painting doesn’t actually show anything. And yet Malevich deeply believed that this painting *was* nature, but a nature of a different kind to what has been called here “archi-nature”. This *different* nature is one of pure constructive thought-acts. These thought-acts are free from the details of earthly existence, such as gravity, and form what he calls “Suprema”, from which the movement “Supremetism” is derived. Malevich wrote in 1915-6:

Supremetist forms, as an abstraction, have achieved utilitarian perfection. They are no longer in contact with the earth and may be examined and studied like any planet of an entire system. I say they are no longer anything to do with the earth, but not in the sense of a rift, leaving it abandoned: I am merely indicating the construction of prototypes for the technical organisms of future Suprema, which are conditioned by purely utilitarian necessity — the necessity remains the link between them.²⁶²

Malevich writes in regard to his “suprema”, which he called “squares”:

The three squares of Supremetism represent the establishment of definite types of *Weltanschauung* [world-view] and world-building. The white square is a purely economic movement of the form, which embodies the whole new white world-building. It also evokes the establishment of world building as “pure action”, as self-

²⁶¹ Downloaded from <http://www.usc.edu/schools/annenberg/asc/projects/comm544/library/images/308.html> on 24.8.2004.

²⁶² Catherine Cooke, “Malevich: From Theory into Teaching”, in Andreas C Papadakis, (ed.), *Art and Design*, Academy Editions; *Malevich: An Art and Design Profile*, London/St Mary’s Press, New York, USA, 1989, p. 17.

knowledge in purely utilitarian perfection of “all man”... it emphasises the sign of purity in human creative life.²⁶³

Paintings such as *White on White*, although they exist as symbolic architecture, also exist as impure mixtures of surface and depth. Malevich chose white as the colour that presents depth as infinity and, in *White on White*, gave it the name “square”.²⁶⁴ With this infinite square, a new world or space opens before the painter, along with all other “creative” acts possible in that new space. Supremetism was the discovery of a new cosmos, at the same time as realising that this new cosmos is a creation within each mind. As such, it was a break with both the division of painting between representation and nature, and the orthodoxy of architectural materialism as a way of comprehending space. For Malevich, this is a sublime moment in painting, like the Kantian sublime of scale and number in nature, where one experiences scale and number to which one senses a relationship and yet cannot relate to a concept.

Similarly, Malevich’s black square, in both its versions, one of 1915, called *Quadrangle*²⁶⁵ and one of the late 1920s called *Black Square*, is the revealing of depth in a non-dimensional and therefore non-objective way.



Figure 3.5 Kasimir Malevich, *Quadrangle* (Commonly referred to as *The Black Square*), 1915.

²⁶³ Catherine Cooke, “Malevich: From Theory into Teaching”, in Andreas C Papadakis, (ed.), *Art and Design*, Academy Editions; *Malevich: An Art and Design Profile*, London/St Mary’s Press, New York, USA, 1989, p. 17.

²⁶⁴ Catherine Cooke, “Malevich: From Theory into Teaching”, in Andreas C Papadakis, (ed.), *Art and Design*, Academy Editions; *Malevich: An Art and Design Profile*, London/St Mary’s Press, New York, USA, 1989, p. 17.

²⁶⁵ One reference for this gives the title as *Black Supremetist Rectangle*, arguing that Malevich painted what is in fact a rectangle. See Jules Néret, *Malevich and Supremetism*, Taschen, London, 2003, p. 48 and p. 50, where the oldest known version is called *Quadrangle*.

²⁶⁶ Jules Néret, *Malevich and Supremetism*, Taschen, London UK, 2003, p. 48.

As Geoffrey Broadbent points out, however, in his essay published in 1989, Malevich owes something to Claude Bragdon and his concept of being, called “Man the Square”. *Man the Square* or *hypercube*, is a concept where being is described, using a geometric metaphor, as a movement of a plane through a cube. In Broadbent’s essay, Bragdon’s diagrams are also shown. These diagrams reveal a connection with Malevich’s Supremetism. This connection is in the idea of “sectional” presentations of the cube that are not square but instead have a varying number of angled sides, much like a shadow of a rotating cube that is suspended over a flat surface.²⁶⁷ Bragdon’s idea is about a multiple dynamic state, seen “end-on”, within which a single image shows the dynamics of the state, much like Malevich’s squares.

Whether or not Malevich derived his ideas from Bragdon, there remains a sense that the dark space within the square is a “pure depth”, revealed by a particular orientation of the picture plane to the “Hypercube”. In this particular orientation (dimension-less or end-on), dimensionality is not available as a way of seeing the cube. The cube can only be *intuited* from the flat black square. This intuition depends upon a strange way of seeing the square, as if one sees it as a stage in the progress of a plane of presentation through the cube, as in Bragdon’s hypercube.

The difference between Malevich and Bragdon’s concepts is that in Malevich’s *Suprema*, one is not able to distinguish *depth as a dimension* within the black square and yet at the same time one still *knows* its depth. It is absolutely flat and, at the same time, absolutely deep. It is this double seeing that is necessary for seeing the impure mixture of Malevich’s squares. The *Black Square* can be said to be sublime, in that it exists beyond conceptual or rational measure and only in relation to itself.

The painting relies on geometry to exist beyond conceptual or rational measure. However, the fact that it is a hard-edged rectangle seems also to undo this existence. Instead of an un-measurable visual object, the square is measurable, but only in the “X” and the “Y” directions (length and breadth). One can only experience the sublimity of *Black Square* if one is prepared to look into the picture. For Malevich, then, the work requires the extra, or supplementary, function of “seeing-in”. At the same time, the surface must also be seen. The most reduced possible arrangement of

²⁶⁷ Andreas C Papadakis, (ed.), *Art and Design*, Academy Editions; *Malevich: An Art and Design Profile*, London/St Mary’s Press, New York, USA, 1989, pp. 48-49.

black and white, which is to say arranged in a square of black surrounded by a white border, offers the simplest form of this arrangement.

Malevich's painting can be regarded as an attempt to find a pure visual "sensation"²⁶⁸ in which the perception of infinity stands for infinity. As such, it is an attempt to find the pure expression of the sublime, *without* an associated signification. In other words, the colours and shapes (squares) themselves create a dissonance within impure mixtures of depth and surface. This tells us that painting, even when it achieves the seemingly perfect moment that Malevich presents, remains firmly fixed within a discourse. Even when it claims expressive autonomy, painting cannot be autonomous, cannot "stand alone" even as pure abstraction simply because multiple ways of seeing require thought. Painting becomes polynomous when it is seen as philosophy of sensation.

Abstraction as a Propositional Approach to Painting

Implicit in Malevich's black square is a spatial proposition that rests on a particular way of seeing. With that way of seeing, propositions are expressible within painting. Painting becomes an experimental setting for locating and expressing propositions.

But what is a proposition for painting? A proposition describes a possibility.²⁶⁹ Constructive abstraction in painting might be thought of as the creation of propositions about seeing a productive paradox in order to present possibilities, spaces, events or worlds. Resemblance becomes a proposal to see both a surface and a depth at the same time, rather than the privileging of depth over surface that is found under representation. The propositional approach to painting is the rethinking of resemblance within constructive abstraction. The propositional approach to painting is the presentation, as an impure mixture of spaces, of virtuality, which is a *proposition of becoming*.

In Deleuzian terms, this would make painting a proposition about the plane of presentation itself, where the proposition proposes an event in space that consists of a

²⁶⁸ Robert Kudielka (ed.), *The Eye's Mind: The Collected Writings of Bridget Riley*, Thames and Hudson, London, UK, 1999, p128.

²⁶⁹ Propositions are used in a general language way rather than in the way that they are used in formal logic. To propose is to suggest a possible condition or state of affairs, rather than to argue for a conclusion using premises.

mode of seeing a surface at the same time as a mode of seeing a depth. In short, a painting proposes that one see simultaneously both its surface and its depth.

In the work of painter Peter Halley, such as *Pulse Generator 2000* (Figure 3.6), a picture or metaphorical image is constructed from abstract elements such as the “cell” and the “conduit”.²⁷⁰ Halley takes a literary approach to abstract visual elements. For instance, the cell, an abstract geometric element derived from a critical understanding, takes on features and qualities according to the other elements with which it is assembled. The arrangement constitutes an open-ended dynamic functioning assemblage within which elements, such as the cell, develop according to abstract possibilities. The conduit, another element, also functions in relation to the other elements such as the cell.

The cell and the conduit “function” together within the painting while at the same time reflecting or resembling events in the world. Depth and surface are, together, the location for this twofold assembly.

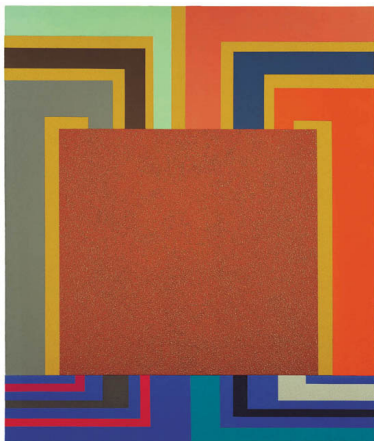


Figure 3.6 Peter Halley, *Pulse Generator 2000*, Acrylic, Day-Glo, pearlescent and metallic acrylic, and Roll-a-Text on canvas, 221 cm x 188 cms.²⁷¹

Halley experiments with the elements within the work. He claims that there isn't a particular result he is seeking. Rather it is the functioning of the elements that he seeks happening within each work. The elements create movements of their own that reveal new possibilities under the title of the work. The cell is “fed” by the conduits.

²⁷⁰ Brian Wallis (ed.), *Blasted Allegories: An Anthology of Writings by Contemporary Artists*, MIT Press, Mass, USA, 1987, pp. 329-361. In this collection, see Peter Halley, *On Line*, 1985, in which Halley outlines his concepts of the “cell” and the “conduit”.

²⁷¹ Downloaded from <http://www.waddington-galleries.com/ARTIST/HALL/SHALL02.HTM> on 28.01.2004.

Something is also taken out of the cell by the conduits. These are functions of the abstract assembly of the work, whether or not they resemble another world. The work has this autonomy at the very same time that it resembles the functioning of cells and conduits in other worlds.

There has developed a formal pattern to this system [parallel systems of communication within cities]. It is the formalism of the cell and the conduit, the formalism of plugging in. The 747 pulls up at the gate and immediately technicians appear with hoses, electric lines, and ramps connecting the plane to conduits from which flow fuel, electricity, baggage, and passengers...

The cell. Its ubiquity reflects the atrophy of the social and the rise of the interconnective...²⁷²

Halley's observations provide ways for the cells in his work to interact, as abstract constructions. These constructions are primarily conceptual in that they are created as abstract forms, which then "function" according to the rules of production derived from observations of the world. Halley seeks new ways of seeing cells and conduits and new functions that perhaps, for him, provide an answer to the dysfunctional aspects of cells and conduits in "the world". However, one needs to *understand* the "idea", in order to *see* the work. The idea is that the painting *both* actually *is* the society to which it refers, and at the same time *is* the shapes and colours from which it is made. In order to understand Halley's work as propositional, the work needs to be seen as assemblages of painting elements that correspond with the social landscape. This way of seeing his work is enhanced by the sculptural or architectural qualities, which he adds to the surface. Once assembled, these elements have a "life of their own". What is revealed is not so much a depiction of a social or cultural condition as the re-creation of the *forces within a society* as pictorial events within the world of the canvas. The processes and functions then proceed from there, independently of the source of that correspondence.

Peter Halley is concerned with the forces of politics, control and being, just as philosophy of the late 20th and early 21st century is. His painting is a location for that concern to be addressed. Halley's work exhibits *aesthetic figures* (cell and conduit) that act as *conceptual personae* rather than the *conceptual personae* that Deleuze and

²⁷² Brian Wallis (ed.), *Blasted Allegories: An Anthology of Writings by Contemporary Artists*, MIT Press, Mass, USA, 1987, p. 330.

Guattari ascribe to philosophy. Like *conceptual personae*, Halley's cell and conduit are part of his *aestheticisation of concepts*. His work proposes new ways of seeing cells and conduits that offer new ways of seeing the world outside his work. Halley's works, then, is a political version of philosophy of sensation consisting of propositions that reveal new ways of understanding other worlds, external to those worlds.

What is loosely held within these works is the sensational qualities of the works. The elements also function in metaphysical ways that can contradict the cultural reading that Halley derives his "cell" and "conduit". This can be revealed by the use of another narrative about the elements of his works. For example, the terms, "pivot" and "line" could be used instead of cell and conduit, to form an equally meaningful theory using a completely new context for thinking. The surfaces then function in different ways and the impure mixture of surfaces and depth are particular to the new theory. The elements of the surface however remain as a trace within this seeing-in and the success or otherwise of any painting depends on not a theoretical position alone, but also the affectivity of its surface.

Chapter 4. Abstract Space

Abstraction and Representation

The abstract does not explain, but must itself be explained; and the aim is not to rediscover the eternal or the universal, but to find the conditions under which something new is produced.²⁷³

As such, abstraction must be explained as a space for production. Representation provides this explanation because it makes the strange seem familiar by making it correspond with familiar objects within familiar spaces. Within representation, natural bodies do the things that they do within natural spaces. The person made of boxes²⁷⁴ becomes a method for working out how to represent a natural body in a natural space. This is how the box process is explained. The world of represented things is the naturally tactile and familiar world to which representation aspires. But in aspiring to a tactile and familiar world, representation uses reductions, such as boxes, to do so. But within representation, abstraction conceals its need to be explained. This is because abstraction, especially in its constructive mode, is the method by which new things are found and new bodies constructed within new space. The series of variations possible, by using reduced simplified abstract boxes, reveals new positions and compositions for the body and space that might not necessarily be possible in nature. The nature of pictorial space is not the same as the nature of natural space. In pictorial space, bodies can float above the ground, unsupported. In nature, they cannot. Things become strange within abstraction and so within representation there is concealed a strange seeing or visual unhomeliness made of indeterminate depths within a homely, familiar surface.

For Deleuze (and Guattari), abstract thinking is how we can comprehend the world as appearings rather than appearances of objects. However, a painting remains an object within (and upon) which this takes place. The making of a painting is the making of an object using material. For Deleuze and Guattari, the importance of material, as becoming, is its expressivity. Expressivity is found within affective qualities such as colour, texture, scale, shape. The central condition for becoming

²⁷³ Gilles Deleuze with Claire Parnet (Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Haberjam trans.), *Dialogues II*, Continuum, Athlone Press, UK, 1977, p. vii.

²⁷⁴ See Chapter 2. In particular Dürer's reductive abstract images of human figures, Figures 2.3-4.

expressivity is space, but the condition of space that is unified with time, rather than a timeless Classical space of objects before subjects. The colour, textures, scale and shape must be an expressivity that is changing. The box-like figures of Dürer consist of surfaces upon which lines divide shapes from one another upon paper of a certain colour and texture. These are abstract, expressive qualities of the surface that take the place of the excluded actual features of a body. These qualities are changing because they are the actual qualities of materials, such as the deteriorating paper. They evoke the monstrous beauty of the human made of boxes. Abstraction explains and is explained by this monstrous beauty, in a way that is no longer dependent upon being concealed within representation. Abstraction is explained as a movement from the home or room to the cosmos and the creation of becoming monstrous beauty. Each abstraction is explained when seeing depth within a surface that follows the expressivity of that surface.

Abstraction is a world on its own presented before other worlds. As such, abstraction constitutes a multitudinous or a polynomial constellation of worlds. It need not rely upon representation for this explanation. The polynomial spatial worlds of abstraction need not be unified under representation or any other axiomatic approach, such as “surface”.

Axiomatic Abstraction

It is important to see how axiomatic approaches appear in abstraction so that abstraction can elude the enclosure of worlds that they entail. Typical of the axiomatic approach is expressionism. With Expressionism, it is subjectivity of the surface that is important and clarity of the artist’s self-expression.

With Jackson Pollock’s paintings, one is expected to receive the work, passively and for itself, rather than within and for a context. The context of seeing for Pollock, is a kind of interior world. Each of us has one and through Pollock, they can be joined together. He does this by presenting us with images of his own inner nature that we must recognise as our own. In this way of thinking, painting becomes an autonomous reflection of the intuitive universality of an artist’s subjectivity. The intention is to broadcast natural forces, expressed visually, to a “receiver”. The result of this is, for the receiver, a reflection, in the sense of an interior speculation, by appeal to the universal interiority of all people. Pollock attempts to present universal subjectivity

by presenting his own expressive nature. It is as unchanging or eternal works, that Pollock's paintings take on their naturalistic qualities and show the essence of nature, his nature. Pollock's paintings present silent, infinite and natural inner space, as in *Blue Poles* (Figure 4.1).



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Figure 4.1 Jackson Pollock, *Blue Poles* (originally titled "Number 11") 1952, 210.4 cm x 486.8 cm, oil, enamel and aluminium paint on canvas.

While this kind of painting is regarded as revolutionary, there is finality in its demand for a silent audience. Each viewer must approach the painting as an individual, without discussion or argument and not as a member of a group. The painting must be seen alone so that Pollock's inner nature is directly accessible. This is a revolutionary painting and, like all revolution, it seeks to rebel against that which is "old" and thereby take its place. Writer and philosopher Albert Camus (1913-1960) explains revolution and rebellion in the following terms:

Freedom, 'that terrible word inscribed on the chariot of the storm', is the motivating principle of all revolutions. Without it, justice seems inconceivable to the rebel's mind.²⁷⁶

Then:

There comes a time, however, when justice demands the suspension of freedom. The terror, on a grand or small scale, makes its appearance to consummate the revolution.

²⁷⁵ Downloaded from <http://digilander.libero.it/webpainter4/pollock/Blue.jpg> on 27.3.2004.

²⁷⁶ Albert Camus (Anthony Bower trans.), *The Rebel*, Penguin Books, London, UK, 1971 (first published 1951, first English translation 1953), p. 76.

Every act of rebellion expresses a nostalgia for innocence and an appeal to the essence of being.²⁷⁷

This, Camus concludes, leads to the paradoxically *innocent* guilt of armed violence by the rebel. Camus argues that this formulation generates an equal guilt from an equal freedom, which leads to the true meaning of revolution: a cyclic reversion to states of control and oppression masked by the rhetoric of freedom and supported on a redistribution of hope.

According to this pattern, abstract painting becomes academic orthodoxy. In 1951, Camus also wrote, in line with the concept of the autonomy of the work and specifically about revolution in art:

In art, rebellion is consummated and perpetuated in the art of real creation, not in criticism or commentary.²⁷⁸

Criticism and commentary are the contextualisation of painting and the elaboration of the point about which painting becomes painting. Criticism and commentary are what happens when the silence of seeing is broken in communal experience. However, rebellion silences critique and commentary in order to clarify and assert its point. Rebellious contrariness is based on the idea that abstraction is deeply embedded in the intuitive application of a natural form of rationality, from an artist's subjectivity, to a practice that is a reflection of that subjectivity. Each modern painting rebels against interpretation and any discursive context, in order to retain its autonomy. Interpretation and discourse filters and blurs the pure expression of the artist's inner nature. In effect, modern painting protects its autonomy with a silent rebelliousness.

Subjectivity itself becomes the pivot about which this rebellion turns. Displacement of this pivot threatens both the power *of* silence and the power *to* silence. To avoid this, a theoretical position is even more tightly bound to subjectivity. In effect, an artist then totally identifies with their work, thereby becoming a silencing force within the work and an expression of autonomous natural

²⁷⁷ Albert Camus (Anthony Bower trans.), *The Rebel*, Penguin Books, London, UK, 1971 (first published 1951, first English translation 1953), p. 76.

²⁷⁸ Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, (eds.), *Art In Theory, 1900-1990: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, Blackwell, USA, 1992, p. 615.

subjectivity. In short, each artist becomes a world of their own in which criticism and commentary are taken to be the undoing of the true or “creative” in practices.

If abstraction can be re-thought without Camus’ “nihilistic revolution”, it will be through the undoing of the autonomy of artistic subjectivity as the pivot of painting. It might well be asked whether abstract painting that does not pivot about its artistic subjectivity can actually be revolutionary or, as it is more often called, “avant-garde”.

The avant-garde tradition might seem to be continuing, in recent paintings, such as those by Robert Owen (1937-). Owen’s latest paintings are recordings of choices of colours corresponding to moods of the artist. The large-scale painting by Owen, *Cadence #1* (Figure 4.2), consists of about eighty vertical stripes, each of which is made up of a number of variously coloured squares. Each vertical stripe marks a day and each day’s colours are chosen at a certain time during the day according the mood of the artist.²⁷⁹ This method was conceived as something like the idea of meteorology’s attempt to predict the weather using images and tables of past records. Rather than recording the weather, Owen recorded the passage of his moods as if they *were* the weather.²⁸⁰



Figure 4.2 Robert Owen, *Cadence #1*. 259 cm x 838 cm, oil on canvas, 2003.
Photograph by Diana Panuccio, courtesy of the Art Gallery of New South Wales, 2004.

Owen is mapping his own inner nature in a painting. In other words, the painting is, apparently like Pollock’s work, a *self-expression*.²⁸¹ Unlike Pollock’s work, however, instead of the physical, gestural lines of Pollock, the presentation of inner nature becomes one of science-like assembly or a diaristic science. Owen has applied

²⁷⁹ As described in the exhibition catalogue, Wayne Tunnecliffe (Curator), *Robert Owen: Different Lights Cast Different Shadows*, exhibition catalogue, Art Gallery of New South Wales, 2004, p. 10.

²⁸⁰ Wayne Tunnecliffe (Curator), *Robert Owen: Different Lights Cast Different Shadows*, exhibition catalogue, Art Gallery of New South Wales, 2004, p. 10.

²⁸¹ This is a popular approach to painting among a small number of artists in the early 2000s, including artists such as Debra Dawes.

a scientific approach to inner nature, much like meteorology. For Owen, this is his own inner nature and yet, in a world conscious of subjectivity and its pivotal role in modern painting, it is also a comment on that role.

For painting to be recognised, as such, and perhaps because there is a consciousness of the subjectivity of seeing, there is a discourse surrounding Owen's work, rather than the silence surrounding that of Pollock.²⁸² This discourse forms a pre-configuring theory for how the painting is to be seen. As Deleuze argues, "abstraction is what must be explained". In Owen's case, and unlike the autonomy of Pollock, the work itself does not explain; it needs a theory, in this case in the form of discourse. The discourse begins with a name out of which grows a self-expressive theory. The text associated with the painting supports the work in the sense that it establishes the direction for the seeing-in of depth. It is a prefiguring account of how to see the work and, as such, it is a theory of how to see the work. This is because the text replaces the silent visual clarity sought in earlier modern painting, which had been lost in the displacement of the subjective pivot. The painting's name is *Cadence #1*²⁸³ and it fills the role of modal pivot or turning point about which the painting makes sense or "folds".²⁸⁴ Owen sees the painting as a cadence, or dynamic procedure, marked by the fixed and generative position described in text. To make the work is to make a folding of the mode of self-expression into the mode of painting. The name of the work and the discourse that develops both within and from it provide a (sometimes) noisy and complex theoretical voice that surrounds the work. Curator Wayne Tunnecliffe, quoting Owen, describes this as a science of consciousness:

While artworks in this exhibition are abstract, and at times seem minimal. They are never formal in the sense of being self-sufficient objects without further reference to their own material presence. Owen's sculptures and paintings are designed to communicate directly with the viewer through an experiential encounter with colour

²⁸² This should not be read as Owen in opposition to Pollock, but rather a demonstration of the different theoretical context within which each artist is working. Theoretical context, here, is not only theory expressed by the artist but also the influences upon and consequences of their respective approaches.

²⁸³ "Cadence" means a rhythm, a change in pitch, or an ending or summary at an end. The notion of cadence fills the role of modal pivot or turning point about which the painting makes sense or "folds".

²⁸⁴ The term "fold" is a highly popular but complicated idea from Gilles Deleuze, (Trans & foreword: Conley, T), *The Fold, Leibniz and the Baroque*, The Athlone Press, London, UK, 2001 (first edition 1993). It is not intended to expand on this concept here. Put simply, "fold" is a way of understanding the title of the painting. Theorising is the expansion of the pivot about which the fold occurs. Theorising, then, depends on the effectiveness of the pivot as a turning point for the work.

and light within specific spatial coordinates rather than through representation or narrative. The physics of this exploration are always paired with a metaphysics through which Owen desires to make connections between what may, at first, seem rationally incommensurate. Always underlying the geometry and mathematics is what the artist himself has named a ‘science of consciousness’²⁸⁵

Without a name and without discourse, Owen’s paintings can be seen as merely marks on canvas that remain colourful but mute, and open to that most damning of modern criticisms, “decorative”. By contrast, to open up the work with a theoretical elaboration, as Owen has, limits the possibilities of the painting as sensation for the terms of his theory, which for Owen is his “science of consciousness”. A “science of consciousness” is only possible with a theoretical voice. This prefiguring or *theory* requires terms and discursive assembly of those terms. Because abstract painting uses the question of painting as its content, this prefiguring becomes a matter of the content of the work. Discourse and discussion become the work of the painting, contrary to the silent presentation of the rebellious avant-garde of 1950s painting, such as that of Pollock.

Space is often the main topic for abstract painting precisely because there are no “things” to discuss. In the absence of things, the space that remains becomes the central theme of the work. Theoretical discourse deals with what remains after things are left behind, or the *thing-less* space of abstract painting. As such, theoretical discourse has to take up metaphysical themes such as *becoming*. However, there is more to space than merely the absence of things. Space must be discussed not in terms of containers, but in terms of locations and functions, interactions and trajectories.

The Space of Abstract Painting

In his essay “The Flatbed Picture Plane”,²⁸⁶ Leo Steinberg locates a major shift in the “picture plane” from horizontal (within the *picture*) to vertical (upon the *surface*).

²⁸⁵ Jennifer Blunden (ed.), Wayne Tunnecliffe (Curator), *Robert Owen: Different Lights Cast Different Shadows*, Published by The Art Gallery of New South Wales, Australia, 2004, p. 7. The quote ‘science of consciousness’, is referenced to George Alexander, *Transits*, Wagga Wagga City Art Gallery, 1988, p. 17.

²⁸⁶ Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, (eds.), *Art In Theory, 1900-1990: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, Blackwell, USA, 1992, pp. 948-953. Steinberg’s theory, as this discussion shows, is limited to a metaphysical interpretation of geometric models in painting. However, there are many other interpretations not addressed in this theory, such as the politics of space in which seeing takes place.

Steinberg locates this shift in the 1950s, as seen in the work of artists such as “Robert Rauschenberg and Dubuffet”²⁸⁷ but points to Marcel Duchamp as its inaugurator. Two major issues follow from this.

First, the space of the painting is flattened and brought onto the surface of the canvas. This flattening separates the point of view from conventional physical being, which is an assembly of gravity, body, ground and horizon, and which is implied in the prefiguring of a painting as if it were seen (and made) through a “window”, looking at an “horizon”. In other words, the representational “landscape” format gives the viewer the feeling of seeing the painting from a position that is also on the Earth and subject to the earthly, physical conditions of being, such as massiveness, thereby giving the viewer an empathy with those things within a representation. In relation to such paintings, the viewer is in a vertical position against an horizon, seeing the world, as a space, through a “window”. This “window” has to be presented by representational painting in order to reveal the representational space of the picture. For it to work, the edge of the painting needs to be elaborated. This is to indicate, create and maintain a clear distinction between the natural (archi-natural) space of the gallery and the pictorial space beyond the surface of the canvas. The viewer is held at a fixed distance with fixed relations to events and things within the picture. The consistency that perspective creates provides a kind of conceptual trap that holds one within a pictorial space. Indeed, as one moves in relation to a painting made with accurate perspective, one seems to see the scene as if from the *same point of view*. (This effect results in the familiar feeling that the eyes, in a portrait, follow one around the room.) Thus, the effect of the space of the gallery is reduced in perspectival representation, a feature reinforced by framing. The perspectival picture addresses the mind directly through seeing-into the picture and fixes the viewer’s position. The space of the picture is entirely on the “other side” of the canvas surface. The hold that this kind of image has can be broken by the introduction of anamorphic images or elements that reveal new consistencies or inconsistent spaces within the picture upon the picture’s surface. Steinberg’s contention is that abstract painting has necessarily brought the pictorial space of the picture onto the surface of the canvas. In

This thesis addresses only the image of thought as a metaphysical production and so it is appropriate not to discuss the features absent in Steinberg’s theory.

²⁸⁷ Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, (eds.), *Art In Theory, 1900-1990: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, Blackwell, USA, 1992, p. 949.

other words, the space in which the painter constructs lines, textures, colours and shapes, the *surface*, is now also pictorial space.

By bringing the pictorial space of the painting to the flat canvas surface, the viewer is now suspended “over” a flat landscape at an ambiguous distance instead of the constructed distance of perspective. The orientation for seeing-in is no longer tied to the physical orientation of the canvas in relation to the viewer’s physical body. In other words, the inner, mind’s eye has been dislocated from the physical eyes of the viewer. The viewing now occurs within a disembodied mind. This mind is no longer seeing-in with a horizontal direction associated with perspectival representation and is no longer tied to the window or landscape point of view. The viewer is now conceptually suspended over the surface of the canvas, at an *unknown* and therefore *dimensionless* distance.²⁸⁸ As such, this point of view frees the viewer from perspective, gravity and the vertical position against the horizon, yet the viewer is (presumably) *still actually standing upright* to see the work. In other words, the viewing mind is freed from singular embodiment, so that viewing abstract space within painting disrupts naturalistic subjectivity.²⁸⁹

The second issue, for Steinberg, is that the pictorial space of the painting is not only brought to the front of the canvas surface but is frequently brought out of the canvas into the gallery space. Through the window-on-a-landscape, representational view of painting, the space of the work is beyond the plane on which it is painted, as emphasised by the frame. In Steinberg’s theory, the conflation of pictorial space and surface means that the only spatial relationship for the painting is between the viewer and the surface, in effect, within the gallery. The relocation of the painting’s space means that the gallery’s architectural space must give way to the painting’s pictorial space, rather than maintain a separation.²⁹⁰ Likewise, frames begin to disappear in

²⁸⁸ This is similar to the conceptual position of the viewer of an architectural orthographic projection such as a plan. A plan is not a perspective “from above”. If a plan were a perspective from above, the viewer would see the inside of the walls “in perspective”. This is not the case in orthographic plans. Instead, only planes that are presented perpendicularly to the viewer are seen. The viewer’s eye is effectively spread into an infinite viewing plane at an infinite distance from the picture.

²⁸⁹ This is essentially the Supremetist position that Kasimir Malevich argued and strove for in painting, as outlined in Chapter 3.

²⁹⁰ The role of the frame becomes different in that the modal change becomes a modal coexistence as well as the change itself.

abstract paintings and the gallery becomes a masked or white space, ready to be “filled” by the painting itself.²⁹¹

The first issue raised by Steinberg’s theory is especially important because it breaks or fragments the ontological subjectivity implied in the presentation of images as if seen vertically in nature. The viewing mind and the position of the body are no longer necessarily the same, thereby breaking the hold that Enlightenment metaphysics has on seeing paintings. The “Mirror of Nature” is no longer a model for painting.

The second issue, when added to the first, creates a vertiginous effect in painting because the viewer is now within the space of the work, even when looking from a standing position. Scale, in this new way of seeing painting, becomes much more important. A large mark indicates a large space. Large-scale abstract expressive paintings take on a new significance, because of their scale. Perspectival paintings are presented to a single point of view, which, when added to scale, creates a subliminal effect. Large mountains and vast valleys can be understood as Kantian sublime of scale because they can be seen as very large within the scale of their pictorial space. In abstract works, such as those of Robert Owen, scale becomes absolute and dimensionless *outside* the work, in the space of the gallery, and as such is sublime in a different way to that of Kant’s sublime within natural representations. Owen’s paintings free the sublime from the representation of the nature as a shifting sublimity to the scale of the work itself. In this shift, the surface elements of the painting take sublimity into pictorial space in constructive re-assemblies. This occurs when pictorial space and the surface are merged. What is important here is the movement from representational space to flat space in which this merging takes place. The reason that it is important is that this reveals a new kind of pictorial space.

Grid Space: Towards Flatness

The grid in painting has been the subject of both surface composition and composition of natural events within pictorial spaces of representation. In abstract painting, the compositional technique becomes part of the visual content of the work,

²⁹¹ Brian O’Dougherty’s “Inside the White Cube”, also summarises this position. However, the multiplicity of spaces is not part of O’Dougherty’s discussion. See, Brian O’Dougherty, (Intro; McEvelley, T) *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space*, Expanded Edition, University of California Press, Berkeley, USA, 1986.

instead of being the invisible compositional grid of representation. This is especially clear in Owen's paintings, where a regular grid is used to lay out a self-expressive system of colour. Vertical bands are each divided into squares, but the actual geometry, when considered without colour, is a perfectly square grid laid upon differently proportioned canvases. Seen in this way, the grid is a geometric compositional base-state or ground, as in the work of Bridget Riley and Victor Vasarely.²⁹² In terms of abstract space, the grid is a defining feature, as has been pointed out by a number of theorists, including Rosalind Krauss.²⁹³ The grid is not merely the silencing barrier that Krauss ascribes to avant-grade painting.²⁹⁴ Rather, it can also be understood as a spatial organiser within which non-dimensional, non-perspectival spaces can be created.

A philosophical notion that resonates with the above use of grids in painting is “striation”, a concept from Deleuze and Guattari.²⁹⁵ Space is striated in order that it can be determined, regulated and subject to rules and methods. In contrast to striated space, Deleuze and Guattari describe, with an echo of Foucault's “analogy”, “smooth space”.

It seems to us that the Smooth is both the object of close vision par excellence and the element of haptic space (which may be as much visual or auditory as tactile).²⁹⁶

Against this, Deleuze and Guattari say of striated space:

The Striated, on the other hand, relates more to distant vision, and more optical space—although the eye in turn is not the only organ to have this capacity.²⁹⁷

Foucault's third resemblance, or “analogy”, as discussed in Chapter 3, is, for Deleuze and Guattari, the interplay or folding of smooth space and striated space. For Foucault, analogy consists of metaphorical relations of closeness or touch, and

²⁹² See Chapter 2.

²⁹³ Rosalind Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*, MIT Press, USA, 2002 (first published 1986), Chapter 1, “Grids”.

²⁹⁴ Rosalind Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*, MIT Press, USA, 2002 (first published 1986), pp. 8-22.

²⁹⁵ This section is drawn from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis and London, UK, 1987, pp. 474-500, Chapter (or “Plateau”) 14, *1440: The Smooth and the Striated*. Especially relevant is the sub-section, *The Aesthetic Model: Nomad Art*, pp. 492-500.

²⁹⁶ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (Brian Massumi trans.), *A Thousand Plateaus*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis and London, UK, 1987, p. 493.

²⁹⁷ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (Brian Massumi trans.), *A Thousand Plateaus*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis and London, UK, 1987, p. 493.

distance or vision within a single form of resemblance. In Deleuzian terms, the folding of smooth and striated space is also the folding of tactile and visual space. For Foucault, danger arises when the tactile is confused with the visual within analogy. For Deleuze, the danger with analogy is the confusion of resemblance with representation. Taken together, these dangers would mean the folding could turn into a closure, as in the creation of “objects”, or visual representations of what can be touched. Taking out the metaphors, the danger is that an object might be thought of as a representation because it can be conceived. A cube, for example, can be conceived as having six faces, but only three of those faces are ever visible. Representations become monstrously transparent or unfolded in order to fulfil this conflation of conceptions and experiences.²⁹⁸

According to Deleuze and Guattari, to avoid masking resemblance with representation, one requires a *question-affirmation* or *abstract machine*. An abstract machine is for creating concepts and for creating “percepts” in art, as thought.²⁹⁹ In one of their abstract machines, striated space is applied to smooth space and smooth space emerges from striated space; they do not “map” onto one another precisely. The moment they appear, their relationship is complex. The abstract machine of space, according to Deleuze and Guattari, is one in which the movement between smooth and striated space is not, in the scientific sense, reversible.³⁰⁰ Smooth and striated spaces are, therefore, not an opposition in the strict sense, but rather they are a close attraction between localised states. Between these states, movement is like a bifurcation, or sublimation, in the same way that carbon dioxide gas “sublimates” from a solid directly to a gas, with no intervening liquid state. For Deleuze and Guattari, the movement of the smooth-and-the-striated is interpreted as an approach from a distance or a territory that passes into a dynamic space of becoming. The grid, as a visible striated space, is always tending towards that to which it is attracted: the

²⁹⁸ An example of this is orthographic drawing in which multiple projections of a single concept of an object are related by a geometric layout on a single sheet.

²⁹⁹ The interplay of percepts and concepts is the “rich tissue of correspondences” that Deleuze and Guattari argue for in *What is Philosophy?* This is discussed in Chapter 3.

³⁰⁰ This positions their argument within “complexity theory” rather than within traditional pre-1950s models of science (especially physics) within which physical events are argued, like logic, to be reversible. In complexity theory, an event is not reversible because it is the result of a confluence of processes, each of which is also the result of confluences. To reverse a confluence would not lead back to the same intersection because to reverse each progression is a different reversal process or the institution of a range of different states of the world *at the same time*, which is regarded as impossible in complex theory.

close tactile smooth space of the non-grid. Likewise, the tactile smooth is always attracted to the visible striated. However, to move from smooth to striation, in one set of conditions, does not reproduce the same set of conditions when reversed, even though the reverse movement can be achieved. These tendencies to movements always lead to new conditions.

The surface grid is used to compose surface events on the flat canvas surface and to locate images transferred to that surface. The smooth depth and tactile fluidity of the space between the viewer and the horizon is set against a perspectival striation with a grid.³⁰¹ The surface grid provides a static relation between space and the viewer as well as the artist, at the surface of the work. Effectively, it stops the viewer disappearing into the horizon.

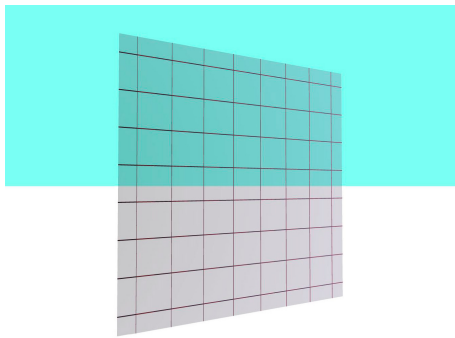


Figure 4.3 The surface or compositional grid.

Abstract composition within a surface grid is a process of transfer and placing of flat shapes and colours on a surface according to principles of proportion applied to the grid. No question of meaning or signification need enter a compositional process at this stage.³⁰² The striated surface offers itself as an arrangement within which to choose colours and shapes arranged in or over the grid. This form of the grid addresses conceptual space as if it were on the same plane as archi-natural space. This provides guides or rules by which visually satisfying assemblies can be made. It is the field where such concepts as the geometric ratio of $1:1+\sqrt{2}/5$ or “Golden Section” are applied to a surface.

³⁰¹ Many artists use and have used grids to compose their surfaces and to precisely represent nature. Albrecht Dürer for instance is well known for his drawing of a design for various apparatuses for making representational drawings. These apparatuses use grids.

³⁰² This is what associates composition with design and what provides a basis for the subjective responses or “feelings” associated with *aesthetics*.

The pictorial grid, on the other hand, is a conceptual technique used to prevent depth being dimensionally indeterminate. The pictorial grid sets out an architectural framework within pictorial space within which to create a representation of architectural space. This replaces indeterminate depth, such as that of Malevich's black square, with dimensional depth *within pictorial space*. This form of the grid is not applied to perceptual experience but, through a particular system of arranging perceptual experience, to the conceptual inner world of thought, as if it were visible Cartesian space. Objects are positioned, using the pictorial grid, within a representation of space, using perspective. As such, paintings that use perspective address an inner mind as a *subject* with objects.

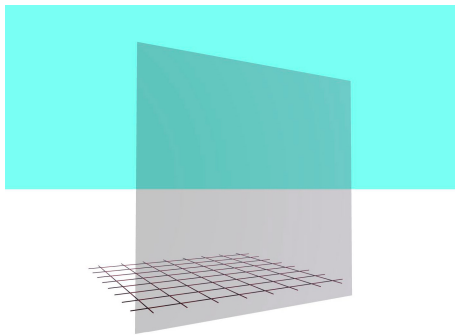


Figure 4.4 The grid represented in pictorial space, or pictorial grid.

The image, above, of the pictorial grid is understood as if it were seen *through* a transparent screen. Its image can be “traced” onto the screen so that it is effectively transferred from an imaginative representation of nature onto a surface. The surface then corresponds precisely to nature, thereby giving rise to a pictorial space that is representational. As can be seen from the diagram, the marking of a grid on the painting surface exists under different conditions to those of the natural space “beyond” the surface that this marking represents. The merging of these different spaces on a surface constitutes the “illusion” in painting.

The movement between smoothness and striation operates between the architectural surface and the pictorial depth of the representation, thereby changing space from smooth dimensionless depth to striated dimensional space.

For representation, the compositional grid on the surface is part of the means of production and, therefore, is disguised or made invisible in the finished work, while the pictorial grid within the picture is visibly revealed as a representation. Typical of

this approach is Renaissance painting where tiled surfaces and repetitive architectural details are used to reinforce the representation of natural space with the conceptual arrangement of the grid.³⁰³

In Steinberg's theory, modern painting brings the conceptual grid and the compositional grid onto the same surface, thereby tilting the represented horizontal plane into the vertical surface of the canvas. Modern space tilts the grid from its horizontal position in the representation of archi-natural depth, in order to unite it with the surface of the canvas thereby creating, it seems, a universal twofold surface space.

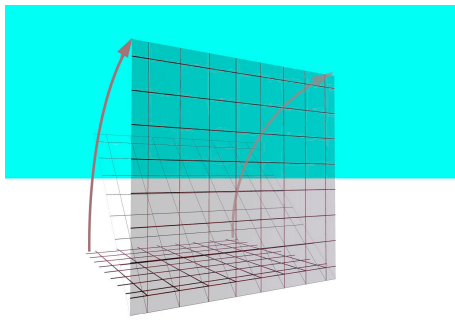


Figure 4.5 The grid is tilted up from pictorial space onto the picture plane.

This merged form of two striated spaces is in a state of conflict between the revealing of the grid and the disguising of the grid; the in-between striated space is now a scene of tension. Each striated space has a tendency towards its own particular smooth space. One smooth space is pictorial and one is surface. This is because no matter how unified these two grids are, the two different tendencies remain and are expressed in two different ways of seeing the canvas. These different directions tend to separate the two grids, even if they are actually both on the surface. As long as there are differences upon a surface, it will be possible to see the depth of pictorial space and the architectural surface of the canvas both as smooth tactile space and as striated visible space.

Clearly, painting cannot remain flat just by tilting the pictorial grid to the canvas surface. By bringing the horizontal representational grid onto the surface and blending it with the compositional grid, there is a vertiginous feeling in looking at the surface, as if it were viewed from above and from a distance. This vertiginous feeling is much

³⁰³ The floor shown in the painting by Hans Holbein, *The Ambassadors*, is a clear example of this.

like the feeling created by photographs of the Earth taken from satellites. In these images, one is looking at a surface at an apparently unknowable distance below (and so sublime).³⁰⁴ Smooth space appears when spatial sensation loses its ability to determine dimensions, as when one first enters a theatre and tries to see how far away the ceiling is. It soon passes, but for that moment, dimensions are lost.

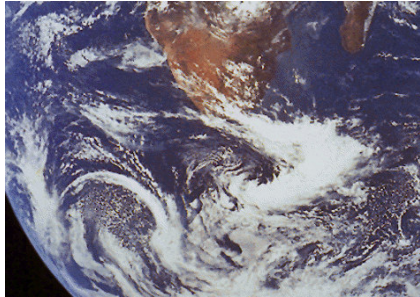


Figure 4.6 Satellite photograph of the Earth in which “down” is an horizontal viewing direction.

The changed and fragmented orientation of the viewer undoes the tension between smoothness and striation, or surface and depth, and opens a path to smooth dimensionless space. In effect, the point of view is de-perspectival. This is in the sense that there is no longer a neatly placed location from which the image is taken and which is under the “rules of nature” such as gravity and position. This de-subjectivised point of view constitutes strange seeing for abstract painting.

This vertiginous effect is one of the ways that abstraction undoes or contradicts the point of view of perspectival representation. In any particular representational image, the point of view is fixed in conceptual space, but not in physical space, by the perspectival organisation of the depth of the painting. Perceptually, one can look at a representation within the painting from any point in relation to the surface and still see into the picture as if from the same point of view.³⁰⁵ This conceptual point of view is determined geometrically and is assembled on the surface of the painting. This assembly provides the depth *in* the picture and is independent of distortion due to one’s actual position in relation to the canvas *until* the forms, themselves, become indiscernible at extreme angles, as in “anamorphic” images.

³⁰⁴ This is the “Kantian” sublime of dimension or effect only in relation to itself.

³⁰⁵ The convention that the “eyes follow one around the room”, mentioned earlier, is due to the intensification of consistent perspective with coordinated rendering of lighting and colour.

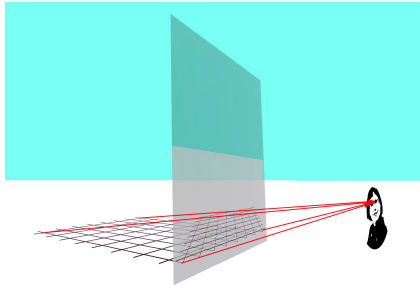


Figure 4.9 The grid in the picture plane is seen from the perspectively generated “point of view”.

The picture arrests the movement of subject, fixing a subjective location by requiring an inner point of view. The point of view stays fixed, even if the body moves. In effect, a “mind”, rather than the eye, is fixed in relation to the picture.

Instead of the anamorphic effect, abstraction brings the entire surface into conjunction with the pictorial grid of representation to create an infinite plane of view. When the two spaces are aligned, there is no “point of view”. The point of view is dispersed smoothly into a *plane of view*.

Abstract painting takes the eye into a fragmented weightless space, ungrounded and mobile: the cosmos.

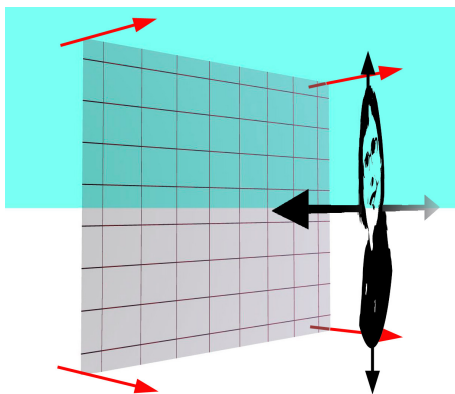


Figure 4.10 The grid on the surface is seen from a “plane of view”.

The point of view in relation to the painting is spread out over an infinite plane because the picture addresses that plane, rather than a point of view that perspectivalism addresses. The mind is no longer separated from the eye when the actual eye moves. Subjective viewing is now a mobile and slippery event rather than one of identification and fixed position. While the eye and mind are now mobile, what gave security to the mind’s view, that is, the landscape orientation, is no longer there.

The vertiginous feeling is one of lightness, suspension and elevation. Disembodiment is now between subjective assembly and space, rather than within subjective viewing.

The disembodied viewer now sees the painting from an elevated view above, but taken from a contradictory horizontal position, as with the image of the Earth (Figure 4.6). The combination of disembodiment and vertigo shift the space of the work to that which is between the viewer and the canvas. The effect, in terms of Deleuze and Guattari's smooth and striated space, is to move the viewer from the visible striations of the grid to tactile smoothness at the surface, for example, in the differences between textures (even if these are "seen"). In effect, the viewer is set loose through a sublime dislocation into a tactile smooth space. However, this space has an attraction due to the surface and its expressive qualities, such as colours, textures, shapes and lines. The surface replaces the absence of nature and speaks for itself as a beautiful monstrosity that prevents the viewer from being completely dispersed over the plane of presentation. The result is a localised, de-subjectivised, embodied visible-tactile space.

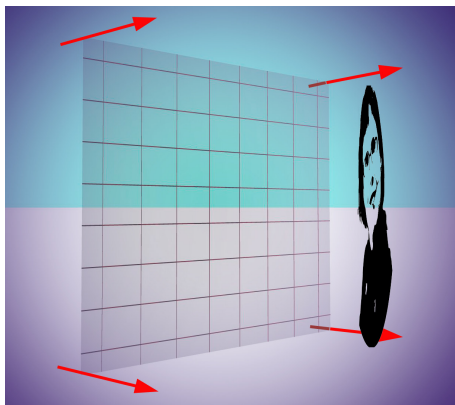


Figure 4.11 The space of the image is moved to that between the eye-plane and the surface plane.

The space within which the viewing takes place is now between the viewer and the painting as well as beyond the surface. This creates a focus in which another space is to some extent veiled or darkened.

The "infinite", irrational or incalculable distance between viewer and painting undoes the determined subjectivity of the "viewer", which provides access to the sublime, where the sublime is understood as that which is not determinable in relation to a subject. However, the physicality of the work draws the viewer in and limits the smoothness to a locality or territory.

Now that the space between the viewer and the work is part of the spatial aspect of the work, the viewer-work relationship enters the space in which the painting is placed. The gallery itself becomes a space that includes and “frames” the artwork. Thus, the 20th century sees the slow denial of framing and the concern to “install” the paintings in relation to the hanging space. The question of gallery space becomes one of *art theory*, not only as a perceptual issue, but also as a political one in which the understanding of the gallery space enters the *meaning* of each painting.

Transferring this process to other elements of twofold modern surfaces, one can immediately see how Steinberg came to an observation of this shift from an horizontal view of events to a vertical one (as if from above on a horizontal plane, but where that horizontal plane is rotated to the vertical for hanging). The painting’s verticality is no longer tied to a relationship with the vertical human body. Instead paintings are, as Steinberg writes, like “maps and architects plans, or ... a horseshoe [nailed to] the wall for good luck”.³⁰⁶

But this happens from the moment one considers painting in terms of the surface, as is the case even with Cézanne’s painting *Still Life with Compotier* (Figure 4.12). The white of the compotier blends with the white of the cloth to make a single visual element on the surface of the painting. The texture and colour of the painting are made in such a way as to emphasise this unification.

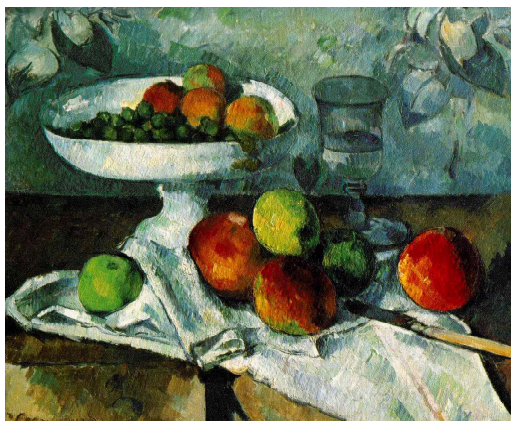


Figure 4.12 Paul Cézanne, *Still Life with Compotier*, 1879-1882.³⁰⁷

³⁰⁶ Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, (eds.), *Art In Theory, 1900-1990: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, Blackwell, USA, 1992, p. 949.

³⁰⁷ Downloaded from <http://www.artchive.com/artchive/C/cezanne/comptier.jpg.html> on 29.8.2004. It should be pointed out that this image does not provide as intense an image of the surface, with its brush strokes and paint textures, compared to the actual painting.

Bringing the representational techniques of the painting to the surface means that compositional techniques become merged within the surface, in the same way that the pictorial grid is tilted to the canvas surface in Steinberg's theory.

The merging of the surface grid and the pictorial grid, or the compositional structure, as a single surface is not, on its own, a stable state. Pictoriality within depth, perspectival or not, is hard to resist for viewers, especially for those with a concern with spatial effects. Where there is difference, there is depth. As a result, the grid slips back into fragmented positions in which multiple spaces can be co-present and the inconsistencies of single spaces can be revealed. While the flattening of space submerges the representation of perspectival space, another non-perspectival space is revealed due to this need to see in. In other words, depth as such, cannot be avoided in pictures, even when they are flat.

Steinberg's theory implies, as has been explained above, that the space of abstract painting must include the issue of depth in pictorial space as well as that of surface. In constructive abstraction, this can be thought of as a blended relationship, mutually constituted, folded together and yet still twofold. This blending must include a consideration of where that blending takes place, such as the space between the body of the viewer (the embodied eye) and the surface of the work. In considering this blending of space, the division between the space of the artwork and the world (or the gallery) becomes an issue and so constructive abstraction takes on a critical role concerning space, especially architectural space.

Robert Owen's work is especially important here because of the relationship between two aspects of his work. While not an opposition, these two aspects of Owen's work are different and even though both deal with structure, surface, space and time, they exhibit different spatial thinking. His paintings are highly coloured hard-edged geometric abstraction, while his sculpture and architectural projects are geometric linear compositions. Each aspect of his work is planar, with paintings that are made of planes of colour, sculptures made of ambiguous folded lines, and architectural projects consisting of curved planes of distorted grids.

The difference that is important here is that between the larger and more highly coloured paintings, such as *Afterglow #2*, *Blind Spot*, and the architectural project *Webb Bridge*.

His paintings are usually constructed using a grid, as with *Cadence #1* (Figure 4.2). In the following paintings, there is little variation in the grids compared to the intensity of colour changes. Despite the careful construction of grids, colour is the main concern in Owen's paintings. The following three works show the range of paintings discussed here.

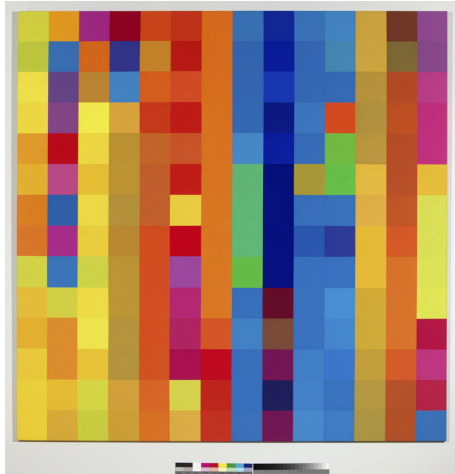


Figure 4.13 Robert Owen, *Afterglow #2, Blind Spot*, from the series *Text of Light*, 2003-4. Photograph courtesy of the Art Gallery of New South Wales.



Figure 4.14 Robert Owen, *Melatonin Shift #1*, from the series *Time-Feeling Time*, 2003-4. Photograph courtesy of the Art Gallery of New South Wales.



Figure 4.15 Robert Owen, *Spectrum Shift #3*, from the series *Text of Light*, 2003-4. Photograph courtesy of the Art Gallery of New South Wales.

In possibly all of Owen's paintings, the simple geometry of the grid is used to stabilise the unstable balance of merged pictorial space and surface. This allows colour to be used more precisely as a "science of consciousness", or as the presentation of Owen's inner space.³⁰⁸ Owen releases his colour as smooth tactility but then immediately striates it with his quasi-scientific explanation. Colour can then be used in the work in systematic ways, as in a selection process over several months, and according to moods, as for instance in *Cadence #1* (Figure 4.2). But Owen cannot release his paintings from geometry, a feature of his work even more revealed by his sculpture and architectural design. Smooth space beckons, but it has to remain striated. Owen cannot bend the geometry of the paintings without losing the science of consciousness.

By contrast, Owen's *Hypercube* drawing and sculpture series explore the spatial consequences of non-perspectival, multidimensional linear spaces.

³⁰⁸ Jennifer Blunden (ed.), Wayne Tunnecliffe (Curator), *Robert Owen: Different Lights Cast Different Shadows*, Published by The Art Gallery of New South Wales, Australia, 2004, p. 7. The quote 'science of consciousness' is referenced to George Alexander, in his essay in the exhibition catalogue *Transits*, Wagga Wagga City Art Gallery, 1988, p. 17.



Figure 4.16 Robert Owen, *Vessel #2, Blue*, from the series *Cubes and Hypercubes*, 2003. Photograph courtesy of the Art Gallery of New South Wales.

In *Cubes and Hypercubes*, the sculptures are monochromatic exercises in the variation of cubic geometry inspired by various theories about spatial folding. Hypercubes are the intuited abstraction of direct experiences, as discussed by Geoffrey Broadbent in his essay about Kasimir Malevich and the possible connections to Claude Bragdon.³⁰⁹ According to Broadbent, for Bragdon, a hypercube is an abstract geometric model of a person that moves through the “Plane of Reality”.³¹⁰ The shape of the intersection between the plane and the cube changes as various parts of the cube move through the plane. The intersection of the plane and the cube changes from a six-sided figure to a three-sided one at various points of movement. The variations in shape also depend on the orientation of the cube to the plane. When the cube is at an oblique angle, more variations in the shape of the intersection occur than when the cube presents a flat surface to the plane.

³⁰⁹ Papadakis, Andreas C, (ed.), *Malevich, An Art and Design Profile*, Art and Design, Academy Editions, London/St Mary’s Press, New York, 1989, pp, 48-49. See also pp, 51-54.

³¹⁰ Papadakis, Andreas C, (ed.), *Malevich, An Art and Design Profile*, Art and Design, Academy Editions, London/St Mary’s Press, New York, 1989, p. 49.

The movement of the cube through the “Plane of Reality” can be traced as lines, which are called “hypercubes”.³¹¹ From hypercubes, cubes in the form of concepts, can be intuited. To make “hypercubes” is to make those lines appear. While the shape is called a “cube”, its actual shape is not an objective cube. Instead, it is *inside* an object cube, in the sense that it is inside an objective way of seeing cubes. As such, it is “hyper”, or “hyper cube”.

Owen is making these intuited abstractions visible as single coloured lines. The three-dimensional works are sometimes juxtaposed with drawings, although the drawings are not necessarily representations of the sculpture to which they are related. The question of colour and depth is largely ignored in these works. They appear to be geometric explorations only.

It is, however, his major architectural design of 2003, *Webb Bridge* (Figure 4.17),³¹² which emphasises the architectural form that characterises one of the two distinct aspects of Owen’s work. Webb Bridge consists of a curved plane of distorted metal lattice grid suspended over a curved footpath and bridge.

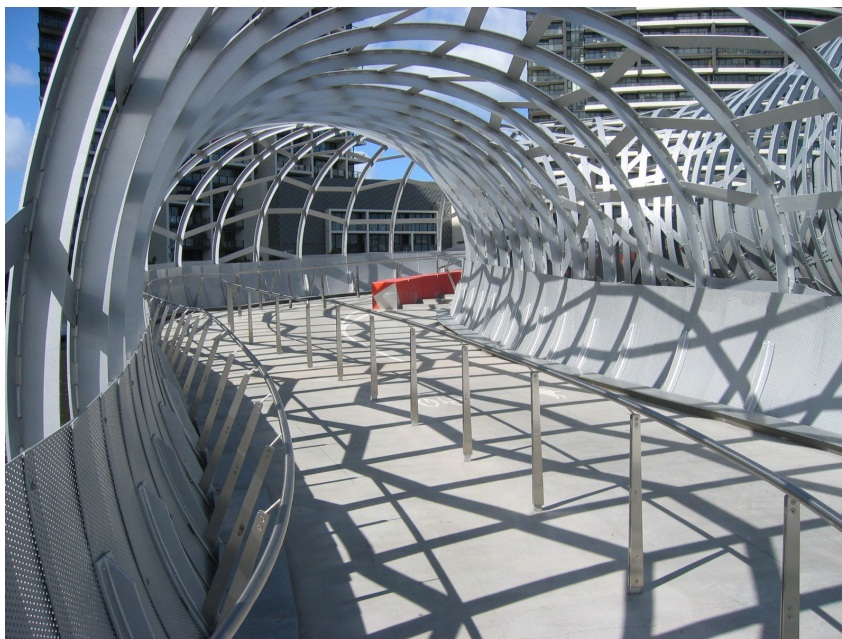


Figure 4.17 Robert Owen with Denton Corker Marshall Architects, *Webb Bridge*, Docklands, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, 2003. Photograph by the author.

³¹¹ Papadakis, Andreas C, (ed.), *Malevich, An Art and Design Profile*, Art and Design, Academy Editions, London/St Mary’s Press, New York, 1989, p. 49.

³¹² Robert Owen with Denton Corker Marshall Architects, *Webb Bridge*, Melbourne Docklands, 2003.

What is surprising about Owen's work is that it does not bring the two aspects of his work together. The regular grids of his highly coloured paintings never interfere with the bent and distorted geometry of his sculptures, or the curvilinear planes of the distorted grid of *Webb Bridge*. Geometry remains an architectural expression, carefully colourless and colour remains a dimensionless self-expressive depth carefully balanced within grids. Only by understanding the finely balanced spatial thinking in each aspect of Owen's work, can the difference between these aspects also be grasped.

Abstract painting remains a dual space, even in the merging of pictorial grids and surface grids. It takes a strange eye to notice that merging and to recognise the fine balances and tensions that this merging creates. The spatial effects of *Webb Bridge* can be unified within vision that creates the carefully constructed colour shifts of *Cadence #1*. However, they can also be seen with the strange double-seeing vision that sees into surface and depth.

The effect of bringing together these two aspects of Owen's practice can be seen in the photograph above (Figure 4.17). The difference between the bridge structure and the shadows that the structure makes on the footpath can be seen as a merging of spaces and of surfaces, one a curved plane and the other a flat surface. Two spaces, one architectural and one pictorial, coexist in the bridge structure and the shadows on the footpath. Both spaces also consist of grades, colours and complex lines that retain a tendency towards geometry while, at the same time, acknowledging the needs of each space respectively. One space needs depth and the other needs surface. Together, they call for and can be seen as, a proposition for coexistence. Coexistence of space allows the subjective point of representation to be launched into a tactile visual interplay of physical becoming space, taking up Deleuzo-Guattarian "lines of flight" in painting:

In effect, the point does not make the line; the line sweeps away the deterritorialised point, carries it off under its influence; the line does not go from one point to another, but runs *between points* in a different direction that renders them indiscernible. The line has become the diagonal, which has broken free from the vertical and the horizontal.

But the diagonal has already become the transversal, the semi-diagonal or free straight line, the broken or angular line, or the curve—always in the midst of themselves.³¹³

In order for painting to have access to this kind of movement, colour must be freed from serving the visible grid, as the marker of the passage of time and the discloser of geometric concepts. Instead, for paintings, the grid can become the fluid and willing accomplice of colour, as if colour were the space of painting just as line is the space of architecture, by loosening its grip on its own geometry.

³¹³ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (Brian Massumi trans.), *A Thousand Plateaus*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis and London, UK, 1987, p. 298.

Chapter 5. The Planets

Chapter 4 showed that, with constructive abstraction, the surface of a painting is a twofold impure mixture of surface and depth. In constructive abstract painting, this impure mixture occupies the space between the viewer and the surface. An investigation of the “image of thought” explains this impure mixture of surface and depth. Impure mixtures are those that are incomplete in the sense that the mixture reveals the two parts at the same time as they are mixed. Within painting, the difference between surface and depth is not erased within the impure mixture. The mixture retains a twofold-ness at the same time as it is merged.

This twofold-ness opens paths of *becoming*, or possible worlds within pictures. To know a world within a picture requires twofold or strange seeing. The task for painting is to find worlds within the ambiguous relationship between surfaces and depth, or within impure mixtures of surface and depth.

Each painting proposes its own space with its own internal system and presents that internal system for viewing. Each painting can only *propose* its world, rather than claim a passive reception from each individual viewer. As a proposition, each painting asks for discourse in relation to seeing. Each painting requires thinking, active seeing, rather than passive, receptive seeing.

From a particular abstract description of propositions, a way of comprehending paintings as propositions is drawn. Since painting has been discussed in Deleuzian terms of becoming, actualities and virtualities, and smooth and striated space, it is appropriate to draw on the Deleuzian propositional model.³¹⁴ Deleuze’s examination of the notion of a “proposition” is primarily literary and uses Charles Dodgson’s *Alice* books to trace propositions.³¹⁵ Deleuze uses “sense” as the main theme in this text. For Deleuze, the play of sense and nonsense has its own particular logic that he explores in literature, with several references to other fields, such as film. However, it is the relationship of sense and nonsense, as surface and depth, which is needed to show how paintings can be propositional.

³¹⁴ The model of propositions is from *Logic of Sense*, a pre-Guattari text of 1969. See, Gilles Deleuze, (Lester, M, trans., Boundas, C, ed.), *Logic of Sense*, Columbia University Press, USA, 1990.

³¹⁵ Lewis Carroll is the pen name of Charles Dodgson. The source for original text used here is Lewis Carroll (Woolcott, Alexander, ed.), *The Complete Illustrated Lewis Carroll*, Wordsworth Editions, Great Britain, 1998.

Deleuze's model is constructively abstract, as discussed in Chapter 3. This means that the model is not justified by an outside cause, such as representation. This also means that it can be used in understanding painting as propositional. The Deleuzian model can be used as a productive assembly in a similar way to Halley's cell and conduit paintings, discussed in Chapter 4. The parts of the assembly, or *functives*, which were also discussed in Chapter 4, resemble those "things" to which they refer, but operate within their own dynamic assembly.

Deleuze's Model of Proposition and Painting

In *Logic of Sense*, Deleuze describes a three-part model of a proposition, to which he adds "sense", as the fourth part.³¹⁶ The first three parts are, respectively, "denotation", "manifestation" and "signification" with "sense", the fourth part, the proposition's expressive qualities, or "that which is expressed".³¹⁷ The three parts of each proposition overlap each other and, in doing so, mark the boundaries of sense. This means that, although sense seems to be the starting point of making a proposition, it is also the consequence of the proposition. From one point of view, sense is the result of a proposition while, at the same time, sense is also the forming of that same proposition.

For painting, it is the sense of a proposition that has special significance. This is because the expressive within a painting is an actual surface, which, in Deleuzian terms, is also the image of thought. Sense is "at the surface of things, a surface event which inheres or subsists in the proposition".³¹⁸ In other words, the painting's actual surface is a plane or an image of thought that is generated by, as well as generates, a proposition. The Deleuzian propositional model not only generates sense, but also excludes that which is nonsense, when the proposition is assembled. Nonsense is that which has to be excluded so that the proposition can be formed. Each proposition generates sense as well as the nonsense that it excludes. Propositions are, however, not finalities. They are changing, dynamic becomings. This means that all

³¹⁶ At each stage of the explanation, Deleuze adds another word to each part of the proposition. This can be confusing, but each added word builds a relationship between the immediately previous explanation and the one to come. Each of the three parts is bound into the rest by the accumulation of these added terms. These added terms provide the "sense" of the explanation.

³¹⁷ Gilles Deleuze, (Lester, M, trans., Boudas, C, ed.) *Logic of Sense*, Columbia University Press, USA, 1990, p. 20.

³¹⁸ Gilles Deleuze, (Lester, M, trans., Boudas, C, ed.) *Logic of Sense*, Columbia University Press, USA, 1990, p. 18.

propositions are shifting “impure mixtures” of sense and nonsense, in the same manner as paintings, as discussed in chapter 4.

The first “part” of a proposition, “denotation”, becomes “denotation or indication” as Deleuze’s argument unfolds.³¹⁹ Denotation is “the relation of the proposition to the external state of affairs (*datum*)”.³²⁰ Deleuze describes denoting as an “intuition” and this intuition is in the form of a question–answer, “is it that or is it not that?”³²¹ It is also a notation of a resemblance or of a naming. Language, under this part of a proposition, is a location for a process in which one makes a connection between a word and a “thing”.³²² There are other factors at work within denotation, such as “derivation”, but the important aspect of this part of the proposition is that “linguistic particles”, as Deleuze calls individual words under denotation, “function in all cases as empty forms for the selection of images, and hence for the denotation of states of affairs”.³²³ Deleuze calls these particles “formal particulars”³²⁴ (*singuliers*) which operate in much the same way as Riley’s “small bridge” or the title of a painting (as discussed in Chapter 2). In this way, a word is filled with the image of that with which a connection has been made.

Denotation is also the venue for determining correctness, in that the words “true” and “false” are within this part of the proposition. Within denotation, the proposition is compared with a state of affairs, to find the correctness, or otherwise, of the proposition. Deleuze writes:

³¹⁹ Gilles Deleuze, (Lester, M, trans., Boundas, C, ed.), *Logic of Sense*, Columbia University Press, USA, 1990, p. 12.

³²⁰ Gilles Deleuze, (Lester, M, trans., Boundas, C, ed.), *Logic of Sense*, Columbia University Press, USA, 1990, p. 12.

³²¹ Gilles Deleuze, (Lester, M, trans., Boundas, C, ed.), *Logic of Sense*, Columbia University Press, USA, 1990, p. 12.

³²² It should be pointed out that in the *Deleuze Abecedarian*, the text of an interview with Claire Parnet from 1996; Deleuze says that he thinks the structural approach in linguistics has disguised many of the functions of language. His use of the term “language” here must be understood under this challenge to structuralism. The full text of this interview can be found at <http://www.langlab.wayne.edu/Cstivale/D-G/ABC1.html#anchor540856>. The central idea that Deleuze uses in his linguistics is that a thing can also be thought of as that which is created to fit a particular word. Indeed, the two meanings, in which each term creates the other, can be understood as coexistent within the linguistic act or the expressivity of language.

³²³ Gilles Deleuze, (Lester, M, trans., Boundas, C, ed.), *Logic of Sense*, Columbia University Press, USA, 1990, p. 12.

³²⁴ Gilles Deleuze, (Lester, M, trans., Boundas, C, ed.), *Logic of Sense*, Columbia University Press, USA, 1990, p. 13.

“True” signifies that a denotation is effectively filled by the state of affairs or that the indexicals are “realized” or that the correct image has been selected.³²⁵

The images that the words make are “filled with veracity”³²⁶ when they are true, in the denotative part of a proposition. Likewise, words are false when the image that they make is not “filled”, by which Deleuze means that selected words are not corroborated by states of affairs and the proposition is not true. This can be for a number of reasons, such as poor selection of words, as in selecting “yesterday” when one should select “today”, or describing the sky as “red” when the word “blue” is a better selection.

Denotation is an image made from various words that establishes a comparison with a state of affairs. The image is the filling up of the words of a proposition with the elements that constitute the state of affairs to which it refers.

The connection with painting is twofold. First, each element of a painting can be a kind of linguistic particle to be filled with a state of affairs; second, a title of a painting can be filled with an image, as if that image were a state of affairs. The question that implies denotation is always first, “Is this a painting?” and second, “What is it about?” This second question is answered with reference to a title.

The second relation or part of a proposition Deleuze calls “manifestation”.³²⁷ Deleuze notes that by making this part “second” he does not mean that it is in some way subordinate to denotation, nor does he mean that it is super-ordinate to signification, the third part of the model.

Manifestation is the relation between the source of the proposition and the proposition itself. As such, it reflects the state of the maker of the proposition, or the “desires and beliefs” that are within the proposition because of their source, which Deleuze argues are “causal inferences”.³²⁸ For Deleuze, “desire is the internal causality of an image with respect to the existence ... of the corresponding state of

³²⁵ Gilles Deleuze, (Lester, M, trans., Boundas, C, ed.), *Logic of Sense*, Columbia University Press, USA, 1990, p. 13. In other words, this type of truth is in the correspondence between words and states of affairs, rather than between states of affairs and other states of affairs.

³²⁶ Gilles Deleuze, (Lester, M, trans., Boundas, C, ed.), *Logic of Sense*, Columbia University Press, USA, 1990, p. 13.

³²⁷ Gilles Deleuze, (Lester, M, trans., Boundas, C, ed.), *Logic of Sense*, Columbia University Press, USA, 1990, p. 13.

³²⁸ Gilles Deleuze, (Lester, M, trans., Boundas, C, ed.) *Logic of Sense*, Columbia University Press, USA, 1990, p. 13.

affairs”.³²⁹ In painting, manifestation reveals this desire as a motivation for making a state of affairs visible that appears in the proposition. Deleuze distinguishes denotation from manifestation:

... [D]enotation subsumes the individual states of affairs, the particular images and the singular designators [particles]; but manifestors, beginning with the “I,” constitute the domain of the *personal*, which functions as the principle of all possible denotation.³³⁰

The relationship between denotation and manifestation involves a “displacement of logical values” that is vested in one’s self as thinking or “cogito”.³³¹ Manifestation presents the judgment of an “I” that makes a proposition. Manifestation stresses the responsibility of the subject for a propositional image. This responsibility replaces “true” with “veracity” and, correlatively, “false” with “illusion”.

Manifestation is given its name because the making of a proposition is to manifest a presence. Within manifestation, the authorship of the proposition is tested. If I say, “the sky is blue today”, under manifestation I am revealing myself as cogito in relation to this proposition. The veracity and other features of authorship are the comparison or measuring of denotation against manifestation. The principal question for manifestation is, “Is what you say the truth?” where the “you” and the “truth” are linked. This question takes the form of “Is it interesting?” or “Is it beautiful?” under different formulations of truth. The words “interesting” and “beautiful” are connected to a cogito as a test of veracity, within the questioning of the proposition.

The third “part” “relation” or “dimension” of a proposition is “signification”.³³² For Deleuze, signification is the conceptual contextualisation of a proposition. Words such as “implies”, “means” and “therefore” are how a proposition becomes a “demonstration” of the relations that a proposition has with other propositions. Signification, as a demonstration, Deleuze writes, “must not be understood [only] in a restricted, syllogistic or mathematical sense, but also in the physical sense of

³²⁹ Gilles Deleuze, (Lester, M, trans., Boundas, C, ed.) *Logic of Sense*, Columbia University Press, USA, 1990, p. 13.

³³⁰ Gilles Deleuze, (Lester, M, trans., Boundas, C, ed.) *Logic of Sense*, Columbia University Press, USA, 1990, p. 13.

³³¹ Gilles Deleuze, (Lester, M, trans., Boundas, C, ed.) *Logic of Sense*, Columbia University Press, USA, 1990, p. 14.

³³² Deleuze adds a third name to the third part of a proposition.

probabilities or in the moral sense of promises and commitments”.³³³ Signification is the recognition of correspondences between ways of thinking, world-views or *cogitum* through the comparison of systems, matching of relations and sets of resemblances. Signification is what the *cogito* contains, which is to say, the images that form the image of thought. Signification, then, is concerned with *logos*, the account of events and locations of the world. In other words, signification is concerned with theory. When I say, “The sky is blue today”, under the third part of a proposition, signification, I am asserting or demonstrating, with a proposition, that the sky may be a colour or that the sky can be thought of in terms of colour. Signification connects colour to the question of sky. To establish truth within signification is also to establish the conditions of testing that truth. For example, to ask, “What is blue?” is a necessary question for the signifying part of the proposition “The sky is blue today”. Deleuze argues:

[That the l]ogical value of signification or demonstration thus understood is no longer the truth [as an assertion] . . . , but rather the *condition of truth*, the aggregate of conditions under which the proposition “would be” true.³³⁴

Within signification, the proposition has shifted from revealed truth or veracity (denotation, manifestation) to a demonstration of truth through an argument. Because signification is concerned with the conditions of truth, it contains the possibility of truth and falsehood and, as such, it is opposed to the “absurd”. The absurd denies the conditions within which the conditions of truth can be questioned at all. To understand signification in this way, provides for both sense (claim as true) and nonsense (claim as false), but *not* absurdity. The internal “logic” of a painting is what gives it signification. For example, Earth and Moon can be signified by the relationship between a large circle and a small circle. If one of the shapes were square instead of round, the relationship would tend to be nonsense because denotation is weak and so signification fails. This leads to a question of manifestation, while signification might still be argued. The image is propositional, despite being a weak one. If the relationship between sense and nonsense has not been demonstrated, then to say it is present is absurd.

³³³ Gilles Deleuze, (Lester, M, trans., Boundas, C, ed.) *Logic of Sense*, Columbia University Press, USA, 1990, p. 13.

³³⁴ Gilles Deleuze, (Lester, M, trans., Boundas, C, ed.) *Logic of Sense*, Columbia University Press, USA, 1990, p. 13.

Deleuze overlaps the three parts of a proposition, viz. denotation, manifestation and signification. Each of the three parts does not subsist in the others so much as constitute sense. At the same time, it is sense that generates the three parts of the proposition. To show this, Deleuze gives examples of the common mistake of thinking of one part of a proposition as the location for sense.

One of the examples that Deleuze uses is that of assuming the “primacy of signification over denotation”, where a proposition is drawn from an appeal to causality, such as is modelled on formal logic. The premises of a logical argument are there to deliver a logical form, with the other parts of the proposition, denotation and manifestation, used as additions to the logical sense of the proposition.³³⁵ In effect, denotation and manifestation become redundant. As such, other connections between premises, such as their “interest” for the proposer, are denied. In this “mistake”, he argues that the conclusion has been “caused” by the form of an argument. However, form is predetermined and so it is outside the proposition. For Deleuze, form is an external “cause”, independent of denotation and manifestation, by which the proposition gains its truth. In effect, form makes the conclusion inevitable and so each conclusion is separated from the premises within the proposition. He writes:

When we say “therefore”, when we consider a proposition as concluded, we make it the object of an assertion. We set aside the premises and affirm it for itself, independently. We relate it to the state of affairs it denotes, independently of the implications which constitute its signification.³³⁶

The conclusion, by being separated from the proposition, can no longer appear as interplay between sense and nonsense. As such, it is absurd. In order to rejoin with the other parts of the proposition, the conclusion requires another premise from which the conclusion is *not* separable. The added term, in turn, becomes part of the form of the proposition, and so is independent of the proposition, and so the conclusion again becomes absurd. The result, a regressive cycle, is due to the logical, abstract structure of the proposition. For Deleuze, this is the result of an in-built reductive approach to abstraction within a proposition. For painting, this reductive appeal to an outside form results in regression. This is a popular subject for a painting, as in the following work

³³⁵ This is why logic becomes “formal” with the substitution of abstract symbols within the premise.

³³⁶ Gilles Deleuze, (Lester, M, trans., Boudas, C, ed.) *Logic of Sense*, Columbia University Press, USA, 1990, p. 16.

by Natasha Johns-Messenger, *Infinity Billboard* (Figure 5.1). The logic of reflection results in a spatial monstrosity, as mentioned in Chapter 4.



Figure 5.1 Natasha Johns-Messenger, *Infinity Billboard*, 2004, digital photograph, billboard.³³⁷

The three parts,³³⁸ relations or dimensions form “a circle of the proposition”³³⁹ very much like the circle of art, science and philosophy that Deleuze and Guattari describe in *What Is Philosophy?*³⁴⁰ Within the circle of the proposition, we are “carried along”, as if by the power of movement or force vested in the assembly.³⁴¹ This circle is mediated as well as supplemented by sense. Sense provides the surfaces, in the same way that the construction of a building provides surfaces for internal and external spaces. The sense of a painting is built upon the surface, but, unlike a building, the space is of a different kind, in that it is an imaginary pictorial space.

The central idea of the sense of painting is that, through expressive qualities, painting can always be something other than what it is imagined to be, which is why it is a becoming. Two white disks on a black background can be given the title “Moon and Earth” and they propose that they are, within pictorial space, an imaginary moon and earth. The disks can also be called “Dinner Plates” and then they propose that they are imaginary dinner plates in pictorial space. The denotation of the title and the

³³⁷ Downloaded from artist’s website <http://www.natashajohnsmessenger.com/> on 12.9.2004.

³³⁸ Deleuze was very interested in trinitities. In the Deleuze *Abecedarian* at <http://www.langlab.wayne.edu/Cstivale/D-G/ABC1.html#anchor540856>,

³³⁹ Gilles Deleuze, (Lester, M, trans., Boundas, C, ed.) *Logic of Sense*, Columbia University Press, USA, 1990, p. 17.

³⁴⁰ See Chapter 1, Figure 1.1.

³⁴¹ Gilles Deleuze, (Lester, M, trans., Boundas, C, ed.) *Logic of Sense*, Columbia University Press, USA, 1990, p. 17.

work creates a different sense, depending on the actual words used. The sense of the painting is not causally connected to surface expressivity of a painting alone, but to the dynamics of the whole proposition. What is expressed is only indirectly connected to expressivity through the three parts of the proposition. It can only be concluded that what is expressed has a different sense to expressivity. In other words, for painting to be a becoming proposition, it must have potential for the mixture of different senses, under potential variations in the conditions of the three parts of the proposition.

Painting relies on its expressivity or “that which is expressed” as an overlap between the three parts of the proposition. However, that overlap also has an internal system, as with Deleuze’s model of a proposition.³⁴² Sense and nonsense exist as interplay within the painting, which can be claimed as autonomous, in the same way as the logic of a proposition. However, sense cannot appear when autonomy is insisted upon for a proposition, as has been outlined above.

To claim autonomy is to separate sense from the source of its signification, to take it out of the world and to present it as a form, in itself. As such, it is an end that is offered in the hope of revealing an embodied transcendental ideal, which, through a process of perpetual deferral, remains distinct and autonomous, for example, in the pursuit of ideal natural beauty or the presentation of universal natural forces.

What might a painting propose? So far in this thesis, painting, as a proposition, has been spatial. Space is not, however, an undifferentiated void or a standing reserve of dimensional volume waiting to be filled with interacting objects. Space is a locality for events and is localised inasmuch as events are localised. Each space is a space of events in time³⁴³ and each space exists under the mode of those events. A proposition offers different spaces, or, in a less generalist way, different ways of understanding the relationships between events.

In summary, the expressed in painting, which is say the features of the paint applied to the surface, is always the means by which the painting signifies, even though the sense of the painting may change from viewing to viewing. The colours,

³⁴² Gilles Deleuze, (Lester, M, trans., Boundas, C, ed.) *Logic of Sense*, Columbia University Press, USA, 1990, p. 18.

³⁴³ At this point the Bergsonian concept of “duration” is important because it reconfigures time and space and locations of events. The thesis assumes this position by adopting a Deleuzian position, which is where the metaphysical form of self and world, conformed as time and space in a Kantian style, is overturned in favour of becoming self and becoming world that include, as single “event”, time and space.

textures, lines, their changes and differences within a visual domain, are arranged to signify, denote and manifest. To make a painting is to deal with *how* expressivity simultaneously signifies, denotes and manifests, as well as how signification, denotation and manifestation result in sense.

Paintings as Propositions of Space

The following painting, *Flat 2* (Figure 5.2), proposes a *visual* space. The title, *Flat*, is used because all the paintings are made using flat gouache colour. However, this technical term is also a theoretical position in that the surface is asserted to be a depth without dimension.

The sense of these paintings is “flatness”. The paint and the surface are actually flat. Nevertheless, this flatness reveals non-perspectival depth through the way that line and colours are used. The atmospheric use of gradated colour in this painting has been separated from a general perspectival assembly of objects, but it retains depth through a conventional use of colour. Here the difference between the expressivity of the surface and the expressed is what is seen. The surface has one sense of flatness and the pictorial space has another sense of flatness. The title *Flat* is a small bridge into a dual world of surface and depth.



Figure 5.2 T Loveday, *Flat 2*, 1999, 84.1cm x 59.4 cm, gouache on paper.

The painting expresses colours and shapes arranged in such a way as to signify depth without dimensions, or without perspective. The lines that define the coloured shapes do not conform to perspectival rules about object and ground. There is no

parallel convergence to indicate the occupation of space by an object. This depth is the result of the atmospheric arrangement of colour, but without an object. The sense of the painting is this arrangement of colours, which, as an image of thought, is an expressive assembly.

The organisation of colours and lines is assembled abstractly. Abstraction, as has been argued earlier, is a constructive act in which the expressive elements are arranged according to internally consistent creative systems such as rules about which colours are adjacent and which touch at corners; rules about the length and direction of lines, and other more complex rules and sub-rules. Breakages and bending of these rules occur because the system is challenged throughout the working process. Other signification besides that of space, such as “hot” and “cold”, “far” and “near”, and even assemblies such as “Earth”, are also manifested in the working process. The limit of signification, in the form of oppositions, is through the recognition of the sense within the assemblage, not the assemblage itself. Oppositions intrude in the sense of the painting. This is why there is no “form” in this painting, except for the painting’s shape, a rectangle, and the shapes of surface colour. The techniques of linear perspective are not present, because there are no objects to which they can be applied.

To achieve this, *Flat 2* draws on the conventional comprehension of colours as atmospheric. Colours that are close together are grouped within gradations of colour. The gradations proceed from one to the next, across the corners where each shape meets another. Shapes adjacent are part of other gradations, following the same “rule”. In the above example, there are two lines of gradation, from pale blue to dark purple and from mid red to pale green. Each gradation passes through a number of colours, sometimes including tones of grey. When placed against each other, these gradations produce spatial ambiguities of depth. These abstract progressions of gradated change in colour are both the surface sense and the pictorial sense of the proposition. The painting simultaneously presents both senses.

It is this coloured spatial proposition that reveals space at the same time as it avoids the representation of objects. Through a constructive approach to abstraction, the mutually constitutive relationship between what is expressed and expressivity is combined in this painting, *Flat 2*. The painting is a proposition about space within colour.

The space of the painting is a thought space. It is depth, *into which thought can move*. This depth corresponds to the “block of becoming” to which Deleuze and Guattari refer.³⁴⁴ Deleuze and Guattari’s block of becoming is not formed within a plane of what is actual, nor is it formed within a plane of what is virtual, but rather it is formed *between them*. In a sense, reality is the in-between-ness of the plane of actuality and the plane of virtuality. The block of becoming is a space of attraction between two planes, the actual and the virtual. Movement results from the attraction of the virtual for the actual. According to Deleuze, to move from the actual to the virtual requires an act of forgetting. To forget is to enter a block of becoming or to enter what is real and so to forget one’s self or one’s own space or territory. For paintings, this same movement is required of and results from seeing-in. In Deleuzo-Guattarian thinking, depth or distance that constitutes “reality” and through this constitution, lines of flight emerge. To propose a pictorial depth that requires seeing-in is to propose a becoming, as if it were a Deleuzian forgetting or deterritorialisation.

In painting, this is the *forgetting of the surface*. To make a becoming painting is precisely to propose a forgetting. Without the representation of objects, it is the proposition of pure immanence or pure expression, or sense, itself. The space that these paintings show is virtual space in the sense that one looks into depth both *as* and *to* the sense, or, as has been argued above, as colour. In other words, painting of this kind is, in colour, a proposition of becoming space.

The Title of the Proposition

A painting becomes a particular system of forgetting of the painting, the canvas and the surface. Memory, territory and intersections of lines provide a point from which to depart, but it is the expressivity of the surface, itself, that allows deterritorialisation to occur. A forgetting is also a recalling, made possible through the trace of what has been forgotten. Forgetting is not simply the erasure of what has been known. Any forgetting leaves its trace. The title of a painting is the small bridge along which forgetting proceeds, and by which a trace of the surface is recalled.

³⁴⁴ “Block of becoming” is referred to in several places in Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (Brian Massumi trans.), *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis and London, UK, 1987, in particular pp. 237-239, where “block of becoming” is used to mean the space of exchanges, alliances between the elements of assembly in different spaces.

The surface is forgotten and yet is, at the same time, taken with a Deleuzian “line of flight”³⁴⁵ into a block of becoming. Here, forgetting is to retain, as a trace, the memory of a surface that operates as space for action, or depth. The past is forgone, historically forgotten, but the haze of non-historical space, within which action takes place, always retains its trace of history as a springboard for that action. Textures, forms, colours and other surface features are moved from an actuality into a block of becoming constituted as pictorial space. Each painting appears when its surface features are “forgotten” and those features transform into a plane of presentation within a block of becoming. The painting, in this sense, enters “the real”, but a real within pictorial space or, in other words, a “real picture”.

Seeing-in, discussed in Chapter 2, is a process of forgetting in which is found the *memory of forgetting*, or a trace of the surface. Without this particular memory or trace, looking into the painting would make it seem “real” or mirror-like, rather than like a picture. It is not reality that painting offers, but a presentation of a trail of becoming or a proposal for movement into reality, which is seen as if one had forgotten the surface yet also remembers that one has forgotten it. This is through a constant return to the forgotten memory of the paint, the canvas and the surface.

In the following painting, *The City* (Figure 5.3), its surface features are forgotten and yet, at the same time, are taken into the pictorial space of the painting, reassembling within pictorial depth. Depth, in this painting, is in the seeing-in, but the forgetting in this seeing-in is the forgetting of the surface assembly, not the colours and shapes. The expressivity of the painting is the trace left after the surface assembly is forgotten and depth is entered. The *sense* of the painting, or what is expressed, is always the constituting feature of its becoming, no matter what that becoming is called. The title, *The City*, provides the direction for this reassembly as well as the point from which to forget the surface. However, likewise, if the title were *Robots*, this would condition the movement into pictorial space in a different way. This tells us that the sense of the painting is something that is dependent upon a particular assembly that includes the seeing-in of the work, but which always reflects the expressive features of the work.

³⁴⁵ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (Brian Massumi trans.), *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis and London, UK, 1987, in particular pp. 237-239.



Figure 5.3 T Loveday, *The City*, 2001, 120 cm x 120 cm, oil on canvas.

Colours, shapes and surface are the expressive elements that make sense within the painting, but the title *conditions* the movement into the picture's space. The title, *The City*, conditions the way expressivity leaves its trace. Yet the surface persistently remains as an actual surface assembly. Just because one looks into the painting does not mean that the surface actually disappears. There remains a duality in the painting, which creates ambiguity and tension. Each viewing by actual eyes entails a search for depth against the actual surface of the work. It is here that the boundary defining the painting is ambiguous. As an object, the painting is the actual features of its surface and the materials from which those surfaces are made. The difference between a painting as an object and as a function is what makes it a proposition. As an object, the painting offers a function for vision. This function is proposed as the possibility of depth within pictorial space, assembled according to the title of the work and from its surface features.

The Nomad Science of Painting

In a utilitarian understanding of painting, to use the term “craft” implies a certain “propaganda” in which thinking is alienated. As such, technique in painting is often ignored in theory about painting. Instead, painting theory becomes critical and deals

with the critique of effects and uses to which painting can be put, such as the political and the cultural. To overcome this understanding of theory and technique, as well as to re-engage painting with the image of thought, the Deleuzian concept of “nomad science” is useful.

In *A Thousand Plateaus*,³⁴⁶ Deleuze and Guattari distinguish two kinds of science. They are “royal” or “axiomatic” science and “nomad” or “minor” science. While this model may be debatable within the diverse and sometimes incongruous fields of science, it offers a way to understand how the techniques of a painting practice can be part of the “rich tissue of correspondences” that is possible between the general fields of science, art and philosophy, as outlined by Deleuze and Guattari in *What is Philosophy?*³⁴⁷

The first kind, royal or axiomatic science, is the “legalistic model” in which the laws of science and general ideals are sought. The concern of axiomatic science is the form of relations within a “hylomorphic”³⁴⁸ structure, with gravity as its centre and “ground” state. The focus of effort in this kind of science is on matter and form, thus setting out *logos* (the account of the world) and, under certain institutional influences, the scientific world-view.³⁴⁹ Equations, such as $E=mc^2$, in which abstract variables are related to discovered constants, constitute the laws of axiomatic science. In science, proposals for laws must either fit into the existing system or overturn it, as Einstein’s theories did. Resemblances are sought between variations of particularities and reduced to abstractions. Thus, axiomatic science strives for the single cosmic

³⁴⁶ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (Brian Massumi trans.), *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis and London, UK, 1987, pp. 369-374.

³⁴⁷ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell trans.), *What Is Philosophy?* Columbia University Press, NY, USA, 1994, p. 199. It is not proposed here that the practices of science are somehow neatly divided between the two sides of this opposition; nor is it proposed that science excludes other models and divisions, such as artistic or philosophical practices and theories.

³⁴⁸ Deleuze and Guattari use this term through their writing to describe the tree-like or arborescent model, which has origins and branches and excludes diversity. See Mark Bonta and John Protevi, *Deleuze and Geophilosophy: A Guide and Glossary*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, UK, 2004, pp. 52-53 for a brief description.

³⁴⁹ The “Vienna School” of scientists pursued this in the mid 20th century. The assertion of the scientific world view as the only view is perhaps the main attribute for the heavy critique of science in the so-called “science wars” between the humanities, in particular continental philosophy, and the sciences, particularly the social sciences, within universities of the 1960s and 1970s.

universal “law” by which all the cosmos unfolds in a single homogenous, but not necessarily homogeneous, metric process of “striated” spatialisation.³⁵⁰

Royal or axiomatic science is concerned with the reproduction of examples of universal laws that demonstrate the repeatability and, until recently, the reversibility of the cosmos, its homogeneity and its consistency. Axiomatic science is the representation of nature as laws and conditions under which those laws come together to express the functioning of the cosmos. The final aim of axiomatic or royal science is to find a complete representation of nature in the form of a grand unifying theory, expressed as a single and ultimate, abstract law.

Nomad science, on the other hand, deals with particulars of matter.³⁵¹ Deleuze and Guattari use examples of itinerant or nomad science from fields such as masonry and metallurgy to indicate an interest in solving problems in particular situations in “sensible matter”. Instead of equations, nomad science is concerned to produce “adequations, inequations, differential equations irreducible to the algebraic form”.³⁵² By “seizing singularities in matter”,³⁵³ nomad sciences create and present events rather than the abstract equations used to represent the world by axiomatic science.

Nomad science is concerned with what is at hand, which is the problem of how to make assemblies that function. It is a science of *immanence*, circumstances and skills within particular assemblies. As such, nomad science operates in expedient ways. It would be a mistake, however, to think that nomad science is not theoretical. Theory, for nomad science, is always about the practical and the problem and, as such, is a theory of practice. As a nomad science, painting focuses on technique or craft-theory, the development of skills and the use of those skills in particular situations. In short, this is a craft-theory of painting, in which neither conceptual thinking nor any other aspect of the intellect is denied, but within which the work, as work, is the focus. The solving of problems in painting requires an assembly that can be used to attempt and

³⁵⁰ This is space that has been ordered according to a punctual system. Even if it is homogenous, striated space is metric.

³⁵¹ Deleuze and Guattari are determined throughout their work to emphasise the mobility of becoming and the static nature of representation. The use of terms such as “nomadic” and “itinerant” are also intended to denote a territory within which functions occur. Movement always attaches itself to the presentation and immanence of change. This can be opposed to the tourist for whom mobility turns all experience into a representation.

³⁵² Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (Brian Massumi trans.), *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis and London, UK, 1987, p. 369.

³⁵³ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (Brian Massumi trans.), *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis and London, UK, 1987, p. 369.

approach problems that deal with what is at hand.³⁵⁴ As the solving of problems with techniques and concepts at-hand, painting is a nomad science and is *experimental*.

However, nomad science tends to become axiomatic and axiomatic science tends to become nomadic. Nomad science becomes axiomatic when “laws” are formed from the rules of particular practices. Likewise, the rules, laws and axioms of axiomatic science that need to deal with at-hand problems become nomadic. The relationship between nomad and axiomatic sciences is similar to the relationship between smooth and striated space. Striated space colonises smooth space with striations and in so doing tends to become smooth again, as has already been discussed in Chapter 4.

In paintings, this mutual constitution of and movement between nomadic and axiomatic sciences takes place. It is only in abstract analysis of the two terms that they can be isolated. In a painting both are present, nomadic in the making and axiomatic in the seeing, just as both smooth and striated space coexist in painting, with darkness and light as well as many other pairings. The actual making of a painting, in this sense, overcomes the binary structures of representation replacing them with relations of smooth and striated spaces. This is precisely the constructivist task that Deleuze sets for philosophy in *What Is Philosophy?*³⁵⁵ Deleuze describes the practice of philosophy in the following passage:

... [Y]ou will know nothing through concepts unless you have first created them—that is, constructed them in an intuition specific to them: a field, a plane, and a ground that must not be confused with them but that shelters their seeds and the personæ who cultivate them. Constructivism requires every creation to be a construction on a plane that gives it an autonomous existence. To create concepts is, at the very least, to make something. This alters the question of philosophy’s use or usefulness ...³⁵⁶

³⁵⁴ The fact that the craft of painting, or nomad science of painting, needs to be explained and that the explanation seems strange is testimony to the alienation that it has been subject to in the 20th century.

³⁵⁵ This can be compared to the deconstructivist task of locating and isolating *aporia*. The meanings of *aporia* are developed by various forms of a supplement. Deconstruction seeks the influence of contexts and motive of the source of texts or words. Deconstruction should not, however, be regarded as an opposite to constructivity. Construction assembles productive concepts, while deconstruction reorientates those assemblies to give them different points of view. Both constructive and deconstructive practices are “creative” in the sense that each requires an active practitioner, rather than a passive *flâneur*-like observer.

³⁵⁶ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell trans.), *What Is Philosophy?* Columbia University Press, NY, USA, 1994, p. 7.

Painting is a way of making sensations that behave expressively like concepts—not philosophical concepts, but as philosophy of sensation. In painting, concepts are found in the appearing of a painting, just as in philosophy, they are found in the appearing of the philosophical text. The nomad science of painting is concerned with the problems of making appearings, rather than appearances of objects in representations. Traces of forgotten surfaces present appearings through the actions of nomad sciences, so painting, as a proposition, must take account of its own nomad science.

Paintings as Propositions of Becoming

Paintings are, above all, *present*. To be present is to be an event. As such, painting is always becoming, in the sense that the material of the painting is changing and the way that the painting is experienced, as material, is also always changing. In short, a presented painting is a becoming. The assembly is a becoming assembly of concepts, but with concepts thought of as lines rather than points. To make a painting is to engage with conceptual lines, with the work as the gathering and creation of an intersection of those lines. The making of the work is the construction of an intensity at which conceptual lines intersect. The work then is the trace of those lines as well as their intersection.

To ask how to make painting, raises the question of how this making forms an intensity—in particular, how this intensity is a proposition. As previously discussed, the Deleuzian model of a proposition is the overlapping of denotation, manifestation and signification. For the painting, the overlap of the three parts of the proposition shapes the boundary of the sense, or expressivity, of the proposition. In addition, as previously discussed, denotation, the name of the painting is filled by the image of the work. Manifestation is of the becoming subjectivity of the painting. Signification must now be addressed as the internal logic of the propositional painting by discussing “content”. The interplay of sense and nonsense, within these three parts of the proposition, can be examined in actual works.

In this section, four series of paintings will be discussed. These are *Flat*, *Mannequin*, *Finger Wharf* and *The Planets*.³⁵⁷ The coverage of four separate series is intended to show the shifting resolution of sense within nomadic science. The four

³⁵⁷ See Appendix 2, *The Planets* Painting Series

series of paintings are presented in the order that they were completed and constitute a single movement that, as it is completed, becomes a clear line of development of the gathering and assembly of concepts in painting.

First Series: Flat

This series, with an emphasis on *flatness*, was an attempt to review how the modern insistence of the surface, as asserted by the Bauhaus, could open up new spatial possibilities. The series is based on a study of modern painting and the flattening of perspectival space.

By flattening perspective, other spaces can then appear within pictorial space. In that sense, the paintings were explorative propositions, or a form of experimental visual research.

The first painting of the *Flat* series is one in which the techniques of flat paint are used not only to create a modernist image, but also to re-examine the spatial results of modern techniques.



Figure 5.4 T Loveday, *Flat 1*, 1999, 84.1 cm x 59.4 cm, gouache on paper. For images of the full series, see Appendix 3.

In terms of Deleuze's model of a proposition, these paintings elevate the *denotation* of space in the expressive features of the surface, the colours and shapes. They propose the filling of flatness with the space of colour.

The sense of the paintings is, at first, technical according to the modern precept of asserting the flatness of the surface. However, the assertion of a surface is soon overcome, because the intensity of colour also insists on depth. As such, the works

use colour as an attraction that motivates the forgetting of the surface. There is a line of flight into a visual block of becoming. Into this block of becoming is launched the *detrterritorialised* features of the surface, consisting of colours and shapes. The result was clearly depth, despite the assertion of the coloured surface.

Second Series: Mannequin

The title, *Mannequin*, allows for the surface grading and blocking in of forms, and the suggestion of their completion within pictorial space. The surface is given back its pictorial space in these paintings by the suggestion of figures. The figures are fragmented and mechanical to ensure that they are seen as surfaces of objects and yet without fully forming objects. This series recalls the monstrosities that appear when Dürer's drawings are separated from their external cause of representation. Nevertheless, instead of leading to representation, the box-like figures, as boxes, are themselves almost represented. In this case, it is not the representation of objects in space, but representation of events in space. The objects seem to be coming together or falling apart. Space is represented as the consequence of an event, the becoming mannequin. The lines that form the mannequin extend into space, but can equally be seen as forming an intersection that forms the mannequin. The machinic, box-like figurative "monstrosity" is caught between the realisation of an object and becoming.

In the painting, *Mannequin 1* (Figure 5.5), to see the pictorial space by which archi-nature is undone; one must look at the surface, as a surface. These might be called "schizoid paintings", in that they are both figurative and abstract in two different and contradictory ways.



Figure 5.5 T Loveday, *Mannequin 1*, 2000, 120 cm x 120 cm, oil on canvas. For images of the full series, see Appendix 3.

For these paintings, the grading of the coloured areas is necessary to represent flatness within depth. The figurative features represented within depth contradict the surface as perspective does, and the abstraction of the surface contradicts the depth of the image. Manifestation then is of a contradiction, a figure without form. Here, the manifestation of contradiction is stressed over the denotation of space and the signification of things that are only sufficiently present to support the contradiction. The figure appears and then disappears in an object to non-object cycle.

Since sense is what gives the proposition its wholeness, which is formed within and combines the three parts of the proposition, what remains inherent but masked within the proposition is nonsense. Each viewing creates new sense of a painting, so each painting is a diverse interplay between sense and nonsense. In the case of denotation for example, nonsense could be where the naming fails to fit states of affairs; in the case of manifestation it would be where voice is incompatible with sense; and in the case of signification, it might be where logic fails to separate the conclusion from the premises. In each of these cases, nonsense is a lack of a sensible state of affairs, events and actions. For instance, the expressivity of a nonsense painting, such as colour, texture, mark and line, would not create an event that can be understood as representation, but could still be understood to be a painting. Therefore, within paintings there is always the possibility of the coexistence of sense and nonsense.

To think of the event within the painting is to engage with its becoming within pictorial space, or to “enter a surface”, which is nonsense. To produce a proposition in painting, then, is to be open to the co-presence of sense and nonsense.

Paintings, however, cannot present objects that are impossible *within* painting (such as square circles) because their impossibility is formed within other forms of sense, or the expressivity of other propositions (such as formal logic). A painting of a circle could be titled *Square*, but the picture itself does not present a square *as* a circle. It is only through the title that this particular contradiction can be made. In this instance, the title is a deliberate play on the denotation of the proposition. The misfit between title and picture leads to a loosening of the connection between the title and what is represented. This allows an unexpected connection between the title and the expressivity of the painting, such as its surface, shape or colour. The rectangular canvas tends to denote the title *Square* instead of the represented circle. Through the title, the seeing changes to see an object rather than seeing-into the pictorial space. The painting, as an object, thereby enters the pictorial space of the canvas.

Third Series: Finger Wharf



Figure 5.6 T Loveday, *Finger Wharf 1*, 2002, 185 cm x 210 cm, oil on canvas. For images of the full series, see Appendix 3.

The *Finger Wharf* series concerns spatial identification of place. A particular set of colours and shapes, from a particular place (the Finger Wharf at Walsh Bay), are used in assembling a surface system of painting. The system is one of close colours and gradations of colours. Gradations that are both within and between coloured areas are brought together throughout the painting to make a shimmering effect, like water seen in sunlight, possibly from either below or above the water's surface. The spatial launching of features into the block of becoming is luminous because the changes between areas of colour visually adhere. The effect is dissonant and this dissonance creates a specific kind of space.

The painting does not represent the space from which the system is made but, instead, evokes that space. On the other hand, there is an expressive connection with a multiple set of views: from below the water's surface, at the water's surface and from a high distance above the surface. Because the painting can be seen as multi-layered in several ways, these various orientations can be seen at the same time as seeing the painting as an abstract surface. Like the last series, this means that the painting is a multi-valent "plane" of view. The painting can be understood in a number of different ways, all of which are different arrangements of Deleuze's propositional model.³⁵⁸

The multi-layered and multi-valent spaces of the paintings propose that they fill up the name with the colours and shapes. The various contradictions and affects of the surface, including the shimmering, are seen in the context of the title. It is from this title, *Finger Wharf*, that signification occurs. The internal logic of the work, as a working process, depends on the title being filled according to the processes and events in the picture.

The differences between coloured areas, the linear geometry and the shapes formed by linear geometry cohere to make a closely woven arrangement or composition. This composition is not natural in a representational sense; it is not an attempt to *represent* nature. The question of space is released from the representation of objects, even when those objects are abstractions. Constructive space can now be found in assemblies of reflective appearance without representing archi-nature, even without the title. Instead, multi-valent non-objective appearances are possible. The view is

³⁵⁸ The written discussion can become extremely complex here and because of its complexity seems incongruous with the relative simplicity of the painting. It is here that painting's purpose appears which is to make clear, out of darkness, that which is best expressed as painting, rather than in other ways.

from above, as well as from within and under the water. This means that the subjective viewer is in all places at the same time and, since this is nonsense, is in neither. In other words, the subjective viewer is not part of the construction and is replaced by a becoming viewer.

Fourth Series: The Planets

The Planets is a series of nine canvases of approximately 2.1 metres wide by 1.85 metres high, in oil.³⁵⁹ Like the work of Bridget Riley, the approach is to use a direct experience of nature as the basis for a system of painting. What is significant about this series, and unlike Bridget Riley's work, is that the actual bodily experience of planets is overlaid, very heavily, with a scientific experience. This scientific experience of the planets seems so natural that making paintings of planets using solely the unmediated experiences one can have without science, results in strange images.

Almost all that we know of planets is technically mediated using technology that has been developed using scientific models, theories. The scientific presentation of the actual planets is so convincing that most people take it as true. However, it is here that the difference between nomadic and axiomatic science is also important. The creation of representations is where an axiomatic assembly, the "solar system", needs to be expressed as an image and so becomes nomadic.

However, it is not the purpose of the painting series, *The Planets*, to challenge the truth of the scientific understanding of the planets. Some comments about the scientific approach are necessary, but they cannot provide a full investigation of the science of planets.

Science, especially in terms of axiomatic science, has moved far beyond the "naturalistic" representations of planets as massive billiard balls suspended in a dark void. Yet this æsthetic figure remains and underpins even relatively limited attempts at comprehending what planets are. The cosmos has become an empty room filled with the light of reason to such an extent that there seems little space for obscurity, multi-valence or the questioning of our deeply held beliefs, even if we do not grasp all the results of science. For most people, in everyday life, the planets remain large balls

³⁵⁹ For images of all nine paintings in this series, see Appendix 2.

of matter whirling silently about in circles according to delicately balanced mutual attraction. How much of this understanding is the product of a representational system? Can another system give us an entirely different picture?

In investigating the colours of the planets, it was found that, in general, what are represented as planets are actually heavily manipulated images of relatively low quality photographic images. The colours of planets begin as representations in photographs, but are then changed to suit the purposes of scientific representation but that also seem to be dramatic representations in a more general way.



Figure 5.7 *False Colour Image of Saturn*.³⁶⁰

There are no “actual” colours for planets. The photographic colours are all representations, because no one has yet been to the surface of another planet. Other features of the actual planets are also ambiguous. Science relies on vision and various forms of vision-like senses such as infrared and ultraviolet radiation, existing mechanical and technical knowledge as well as various forms of speculative reason to form representations of planets. The scientific representation of the planets remains a very convincing fiction because it uses already consistent knowledge to create its representations. As such, science, in both axiomatic and nomadic forms, creates unified, extensive knowledge.

The painting series, *The Planets*, is another kind of fiction that is created using principles other than those of axiomatic science but draws, where it needs to, upon science. Science forms questions about the world that it can answer in order to make sense out of nonsense, whereas art asks questions about what is known, revealing it as unknown in an interplay of sense and nonsense. Instead of the belief that

³⁶⁰ Downloaded from http://www.windows.ucar.edu/tourlink=our_solar_systemplanets.html on 19.3.2003. A “false colour image” is a standard scientific term for photographs in which the colours have been accentuated to show features of the planet.

representation produces reflective images of events in space within a single, unified universe, a multi-valent approach is used to create images where space is continuous and not necessarily universal. Painting creates localised and specific spaces using nomadic approaches. In other words, painting shifts to an interplay of sense and nonsense within a proposition as, in this case, of *The Planets* as spaces.

What is tantalising is that most of the planets of the solar system are actually visible to the eye. The “wanderers”,³⁶¹ as their name suggests, wander about the sky. This wandering we can actually see and thereby track without the mediating representations of axiomatic science. Science accounts for these movements with a mechanical model called “solar system”. The planetary paths are not the even arcs of the stars, but are irregularly curved and have sharp bends and loops. The following image (Figure 5.8) is a recording of the straight path of the sun and the meandering paths of some of the planets in 2005 (each year, the paths are different). A return to this direct sensory experience of the planets is essential in creating a new assembly.

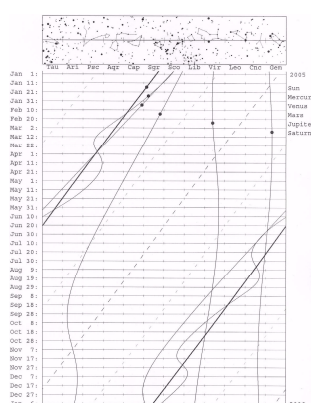


Figure 5.8 Planetary Paths, 2005.³⁶²

From these paths, lines on a painting’s surface can be derived. From these lines, shapes can then be made. However, lines and shapes are not enough to make an image of a planet. A compositional unit is also needed to create a focus within what would otherwise be undifferentiated space. The basic compositional unit for a scientific model of a planet is a disk on a plane. The disk on a plane has to have mass, so it becomes a sphere suspended in a void, much like a billiard ball. This is achieved, within a representation, by “highlighting” the circle to suggest a curved or “bulging”

³⁶¹ *Planêtikos*, from the Greek, tendency to wander, Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon*.

³⁶² Downloaded from <http://www.davidchandler.com/docs/PlanetLocator.htm> on 27.10.2005.

surface. The empty space must then be isolated from the planet by a clear and distinct spherical surface, by making it a depth, or a void. There is something that must be investigated, in this compositional unit, which has been subsumed within the scientific model.

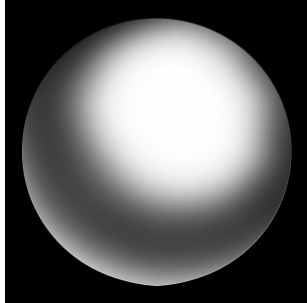


Figure 5.9 Science's basic compositional unit for a planet.

Movements of planets are assumed to be according to the various laws of motion for massive spheres, which are modified according to more detailed observations and theories. Axiomatic science now has a number of theories, such as quantum theory, which threaten this view. It is, however, the naturalistic model of a massive ball of matter moving silently in a void that is the primary representation of planets. The surface of the sphere is imagined as having a surface that is a curved flux or dynamic pattern, which includes geographical and meteorological features.



Figure 5.10 The smooth space of the surface of the Earth.

The “interior” of the sphere is divided from the “exterior” or “space”, by this surface. The surface provides an absolute barrier between one space and another. The interior space is a solid geomorphic flow while the exterior space is a void. The surface reflects the relationship between the interior and the exterior, and is subject to forces from both sides, the most basic of which is due to the mass of the planet:

³⁶³ Downloaded from http://www.windows.ucar.edu/tourlink=our_solar_systemplanets.html on 19.8.2003.

gravity. These forces are measured and martialled using geometric models, such as latitude and longitude, as illustrated in Figure 5.11. Smooth space on the planet's surface becomes ordered or "striated" under rational systems. The curved plane of the horizontal is imagined to be a flat plane that has been bent around the surface of the sphere. The various laws of motion, such as those that relate acceleration to mass and force, operate in combinations of vertical and horizontal directions to create "vectors", thereby extending striation throughout the surface. However, striation always tends towards smoothness, so the complexities of actual experiences soon become incommensurable under science. The sphere becomes a smooth surface with complex behaviour, such as weather and evolution.

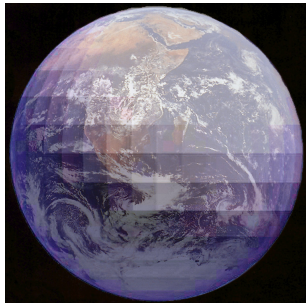


Figure 5.11 The striation of the smooth space of the surface of the Earth.

On the surface itself, the horizon is at an "infinite" distance from a viewer, but from the objective point of view, the horizon is the curved edge of Earth, beyond which the eye can see the curved surface.

Also from the surface itself, the outside, or space, becomes a horizon-less void beyond the earthly horizon. To imagine Earth as a sphere becomes a creative leap beyond its surface into a conceptual image, or a representation of Earth.

Meanwhile, in the axiomatic scientific model of a planet, the inside of Earth is a different kind of space to that outside Earth. Inside Earth is "solid" and not a void. Earth is a filled, solid "inner space" that is arrested at its surface. The surface reinforces the difference between the solidity of Earth and the void of space, so that they seem exclusive and never mixed. This reduces the possibilities of planets to a single-sided compositional assembly, which is to say a solid sphere in an empty void. The result is a representational system for visual images of planets that is identical with a system for representing planets conceptually. Using this model, it is possible to create representations in painting that are entirely consistent with planetary theory.

The following diagram (Figure 5.12) shows the basic representational system that conforms to the single-sided compositional model of the planets.

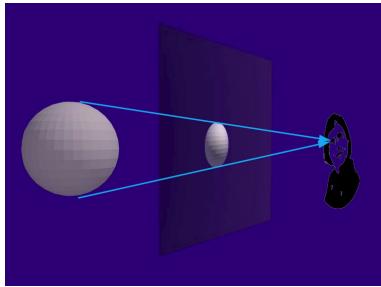


Figure 5.12 The visual and conceptual model of naturalistic planets.

Before going further, it is important to recall the initial compositional model provided by axiomatic science. In this model, the planet's compositional assembly is a disk on a surface, in which both the circle and the surface are spaces. The naturalistic approach associated with axiomatic science reduces this bi-valence to a solid disk upon a blank ground.

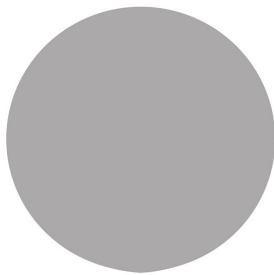


Figure 5.13 Science's compositional abstraction of a planet.

The disk becomes a sphere and the ground becomes a space. The sphere can then have mass and the space can be a void. In naturalistic representation, planets have to be represented as spherical objects, both *visually* and *conceptually*, in order to satisfy the division of filled space from the void and the separation of mass from non-mass. Naturalistic representation does this with geometric models. The surface of the disk becomes a curved plane or distinct boundary that forms a massive sphere. In other words, curved space is the necessary result of the need for objectivity in natural representations of planets. This representational approach also applies to the conceptual representation of planets under scientific principles, but in the form of laws. A naturalistic planet must behave like a massive sphere, under laws of nature, in the same way that, in a painting, a naturalistic planet must behave like the

representation of a massive sphere. In making this a necessity, the space of the planet is necessarily (and completely) filled and the space of the surface, within which the planet sits, is necessarily a void.³⁶⁴ However, only half the compositional possibilities for a basic assembly are visible in this approach.

In the series *The Planets*, the disk is used in such a way that it can be either a hole or a disk. It is with a twofold compositional assembly that the other, invisible side of the compositional assembly is returned, and that sense and nonsense are shown as an interplay.³⁶⁵

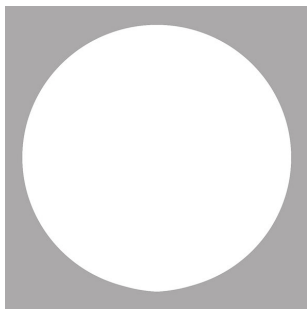


Figure 5.14 Compositional abstraction returned in the painting series *The Planets*.

The image of a planet can now be seen as both filled space *and* empty space. Likewise, the space that is outside the boundary can be seen as both filled *and* empty. The planet now becomes an event in a space that is both filled and empty. As such, it is an in-between space or, in Deleuzian terms, a *becoming* space.

This compositional approach makes the entire rectangular canvas a planet, rather than merely a circle. *The Planets* do not exist as they do in science, as if they were billiard balls floating in a neutral base-state or void. They exist as surfaces with depth, as sense and nonsense, and as two kinds of space, archi-natural and pictorial. They consist of the whole surface because they are made of an in-between arrangement of spaces. There is no precise figure or ground but, instead, a merging or impure mixture in painting that corresponds to the impure mixture of surface and depth, as sense and nonsense, in Deleuzian philosophy.

³⁶⁴ This is strangely, at odds with what is scientifically known about Jupiter, called “the gas giant”. Representations of Jupiter still assert a massive ball despite the fact that Jupiter has no “solid” surface.

³⁶⁵ This effect can be compared to deconstruction in which the suppressed term can be revealed by the addition of supplementary terms.

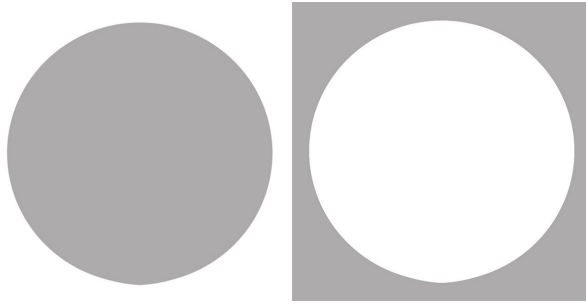


Figure 5.15 Dual composition for a bi-valent compositional model.

The two parts of the compositional assembly need to overlap in order to produce a single painting. In a single image, one disk of precisely the same size as another completely overlaps the other, thereby making one invisible (Figure 5.15). If one takes this as an actual eclipse, an intensity, aura or halo is produced in the image. The bi-valent composition produces an ecliptical halo around the boundary of the disk. The *intensity* of the boundary reveals the bivalence of the image, just as it does in direct experience of an eclipse. However, this is only the case if the eclipsed half of the composition is the white disk. It could equally be that the dark disk is eclipsed by the light disk. It is only in a bivalent seeing-in of depth that both possibilities can be shown.



Figure 5.16 Ecliptical effect of a bi-valent model. It should be noted that the negative of this image is also equally the compositional model for *The Planets* and that this image should be taken to imply both versions.

In order to maintain the bi-valence of the composition, the striation of the space needs to reflect the actual experience of planets. Instead of latitude and longitude applied to the surface of the sphere to reinforce its clear division from the void, the paths, as if marked on the surface of the planets, reflect the experience of the planet from another planet. In other words, the surface of the painting is marked out by the planet's path. The wandering lines of each planet-trace reinforce the dual seeing of the compositional elements of disk and surface as both filled and empty. These lines

are non-representational but systematic, smooth flowing and sharply turning with overlaps, each of which is characteristic of the particular planet.

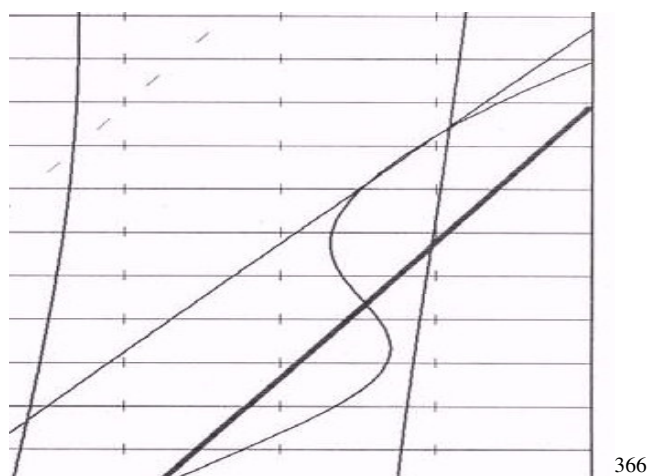


Figure 5.17 Planet path detail.

In terms of the painting's surface, the wandering traces of the planetary paths become a drawing.

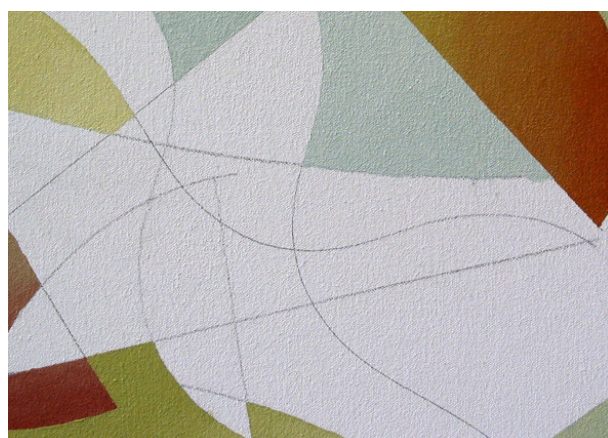


Figure 5.18 T Loveday, *Jupiter*, 2003-4, working detail.

Both the planet and void are the colours, which in turn, create the space. The spaces made between the lines of the planetary paths each form depth. The grading of colours provides a direction for each space, while the colour places it in relation to the spaces around it. The shapes slide either behind or in front of the adjacent shapes. Between these sliding shapes, space emerges as the indeterminate distances between planes. Like Riley's work, differences between areas or spaces are non-dimensional, non-architectural or, more specifically, non-archi-natural. Each painting is a multitude

³⁶⁶ Downloaded from <http://www.davidchandler.com/docs/PlanetLocator.htm> on 27.10.2005, detail.

of non-dimensional spaces that make differences and movements. Taken together, each multitude of non-dimensional spaces is a planet.

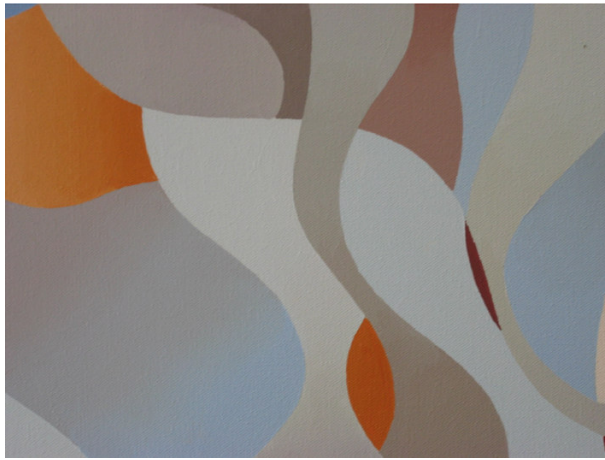


Figure 5.19 T Loveday, *Saturn*, 2003-4, detail.

The lines in these paintings, like the planets observable in the sky, lead the eye on a wandering path. Furthermore, the horizon is not the conflation of a curved edge with a flat surface. Instead, the horizon is the edge of the canvas, which makes the horizon a fixed boundary or spatial limit, thereby presenting an horizon as a spatial limit between different spaces rather than a mechanical division of a single space.

Like the direct experience of the planets, *The Planets* follow divergent paths, including loops and sharp turns, according to complex combinations of movement. Unlike the axiomatic solar system, however, *The Planets* are not representations of spherical objects with smooth, complex surfaces. Instead, the entire rectangular canvas is a planet.

Clarity appears out of obscurity, which for painting is metaphorical darkness. Darkness begins with the darkening of the room in order that the room can seem strange and it is through the strangeness of the darkened room that the cosmos reveals strange worlds, as in this series of strange planets.



Figure 5.20 T Loveday, *Jupiter*, 185 cm x 205 cm, oil on canvas, 2003-4. Photograph by Diana Panuccio. For images of the full series, see Appendix 2.

Vision is a bodily function in seeing these paintings. Movement is a dynamic process of incarnate eyes rather than the static vision of the conceptual, lens-like eye of representation. Incarnate eyes do not stop, do not pause or gaze. The moving eye needs an image with movement to maintain active seeing into depth. The movement *into* the non-dimensional depth, as with Riley's work, is a consequence of the movement of the eye across the colours and shapes on the canvas. The after images of the colours constantly inform the seeing of succeeding colours, which produces startling visual effects.

The Planets as Propositions

According to the Deleuzian model, the parts of a proposition must be revealed within sense. Sense is what makes paintings present. The sense of a painting is what is expressed within a proposition. What is nonsense is that which is not sense, or is not expressed, within the proposition. What is not expressed within the three aspects of a proposition or, as Deleuze has shown, what fails to be denoted, signified or manifested, that constitutes the nonsense of the proposition. However, we have already seen that sense is what makes these three aspects of a proposition possible. This means that the non-expressed, or nonsense, of a proposition is folded into the sense of the proposition. In *The Planets*, their sense is a surface that is covered in coloured shapes. Their nonsense is their depth and, within that depth, their space. In

other words, that which is sense is folded into that which is nonsense in much the same way that, in abstract painting, the pictorial depth of representation is folded into the surface of the painting.

The painting, a planet with a particular name, is a folding of sense (the surface) and nonsense (depth). As such, each painting is a proposition of becoming. Since the spatial effect of depth is multi-valent, the comprehension of representations of objects is not possible. Instead, depth is a location for the interplay of sense and nonsense. The planet is both actually there (the painting) and not there (not a spherical object) within a kind of general, non-determinable space. For example, in scientific terms the paintings cannot possibly be construed as objects called planets. In terms of the painting, however, each work is a *becoming* planet.

The desire to see-in is a part of the “work” of the painting. As a proposition, it is what makes the propositional quality of the painting come to life and, indeed, it is the necessary aspect of painting that it binds oppositions as if they were aspects of a single arrangement. As a proposition, a necessary aspect of painting is that it combines paradoxes, or “undecidabilities”, into a coherent event. This is what makes the propositional quality of a painting come to life. This means that the intensity of a work is necessary for the paintings to act as becoming propositions. Nevertheless, this can only be done if the seeing is desired. In order to be a proposition, the painting must therefore, be desirable to look at.

In the three-part Deleuzian model of a proposition, part one, denotation, is the relation of the proposition to an external state of affairs. This is in the sense that elements within a work “stand for” things within “states of affairs”³⁶⁷ within the painting. Colours, shapes, lines, ambiguous smudges, rough textures and many other things are possible in painting that, under denotation, can form a state (of affairs). This state within the painting can correspond to things that are not in the painting. For example, movement can be denoted, in a painting, by a change in colour combined with a shape or line. Movement can be understood not only within the painting, but also available for correspondence with other states, as we have already seen in the work of Bridget Riley (Chapter 2).

³⁶⁷ Deleuze and Guattari use this term in *A Thousand Plateaus* and other texts to describe interactive assemblies of becomings.

As they are for Bridget Riley, the individual titles of *The Planets* are “small bridges” into the space of the works.³⁶⁸ In this way, the title of the painting brings seeing, as if across a small bridge, into the state of affairs of the painting. *The Planets*, each with its own name, asks that the viewer take that name into the seeing-in of the painting and, in doing so, to fill that name with the visual experience of seeing-in. As such, the painting becomes its name. The decision to cross that “bridge” is, effectively, a measure of the effectiveness of the work as a painting.

Paintings denote, by the attachment and expansion of the title to that which is denotative within the work, their states of affairs. Under denotation, the painting is a key to a metonymic action by its title. The title is expanded within the states of affairs of the painting. For example, *The Blue Planet* is denotative in that the state of affairs within the painting is given to its title.

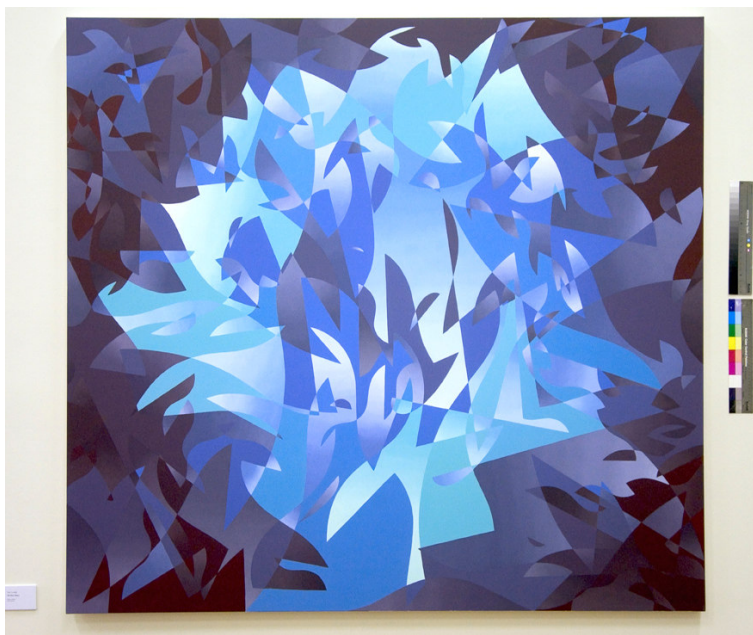


Figure 5.21 T Loveday, *The Blue Planet*, 185 cm x 210 cm , oil on canvas, 2003-4. Photograph by Diana Panuccio. For images of the full series, see Appendix 2.

The title asks to be filled with the affectivity of the painting. *The Blue Planet* is a planet of paint and canvas, a visual experience on a rectangular surface. There are changes in colour within panels, as well as close changes between panels of colour. There are also parts of the painting that have much greater changes than others do. Overall, the dynamic relations within this system of differences, creates a spatial

³⁶⁸ Robert Kudielka, (ed.), *The Eye's Mind: The Collected Writings of Bridget Riley*, Thames and Hudson, London, UK, 1999, p. 128.

event for the title, *The Blue Planet*. The relations between the elements (colour changes, shapes, lines and differences) appear to be of the title when seeing into the space of the painting. Denotation is a process that has sense by its relationship with the other parts of a proposition. Likewise, in a painting, the relationship between denotation, manifestation and signification is held together by the sense of the painting, and is what gives the painting its sense.

Part two of a proposition is manifestation. Manifestation is that part of the proposition that implies, indicates or reveals the proposer. It is all too easy, with a painting, to leap to the conclusion that this means the artist. In Deleuzian terms, however, this need not be the case. Instead, manifestation can be understood as the manifestation of the *elements* of subjectivities, which, in turn, can be understood as a collective vector, “painting”, applied to each monadic unit within a multitude. Painting is the manifestation of an interest in painting, whatever that interest might be associated with. For instance, political interests can be manifest in painting. These interests need not be reconciled other than in the fact of the work. The painting exists, so it is enough that it manifests an interest in seeing its existence. Each viewing interest is then in motion within the painting. The artist has made the work, gives to the work authenticity and a trajectory within that artist’s other work and associated paintings. The critic, historian and theorist set in motion the critical work of the discourse of relations within which the work might move, in other words, they give the painting its critical, historical and theoretical function. The buyer takes the painting into a place, to show, hide or sell it. All of the interests, of all viewers, are launched into their own becomings through the manifestation of the painting.

In order for manifestation take place, denotation must be pursued, thereby giving the painting a sense. Looking at the work, and in looking taking the title into the painting and letting the state of affairs adhere to that title, is essential to the manifestation of the painting.

Part three of a proposition is signification. What does *The Blue Planet* signify? In the *Finger Wharf* series, the signification was of a place, or more specifically a location. *The Planets* indicate a locality as well, but a locality that cannot be confirmed by direct experience of the world, only through mediated experience, but not that of science. It is painting, as sense, which mediates *The Planets*. In that sense, *The Planets* are a pure signification, constructed as propositions with a sense of

locality due to the surface of the canvas. Unlike the *Finger Wharf* series, which could be compared to the state of affairs of the actual Finger Wharfs, *The Planets* cannot be compared with anything except representations and traces of planet paths. There is no doubt that scientific representation argues for truth from the basis of a consistent world-view. However, this consistent and universal world-view is determined through the creation of consistent objects within representations through the interpretation of technologically mediated “data”. As has been shown above, a painting as a proposition of becoming cannot show representations of objects. Therefore, *The Planets*, while they might use many of the features of scientific investigation such as colour, cannot be measured against science. The planets are neither universal nor consistent, but instead, are particular and specific to the earthliness of paint and canvas. Each painting in the *The Planets* series presents interplay of sense and nonsense as surface and depth, and so reveals the possibility of a different way or mode of depth and space, bounded by the horizon of each work itself. By proposing such spaces, *The Planets* raise questions in the same way that other forms of thinking do.

In this sense, which is to say, the sense of paintings as propositions of becoming, the series, *The Planets*, is a demonstration of possible worlds, or virtualities in that they move from the familiar to the unknown, from the homely to the unhomely, from the surface to depth. In effect, they emerge as movement from the darkened room into the cosmos.

Conclusion

This thesis presents an account of painting as philosophy of sensation. This is done by showing how strange seeing opens the visible space of painting to new ways of seeing. Strange seeing is an impure mixture of surface and depth. In this impure mixture of surface and depth, spaces of becoming are revealed. The reason that this is of such interest is that it confirms, and provides for, an understanding of painting that corresponds to philosophy of the late 20th century, especially Deleuzo-Guattarian philosophy. Deleuze and Guattari argue that there is a “rich tissue of correspondences between science, art and philosophy”.³⁶⁹ They also argue that concepts, or *conceptual personæ*, which are created within philosophy, can intersect or correspond with percepts, or *aesthetic figures*, which are produced within art. This thesis (as text and works) shows how this might be the case for the practice of “abstract” painting, and paintings can be seen as becoming.

In the practice of painting, strange seeing includes seeing a surface at the same time as seeing *into* a surface. This constitutes an impure mixture of spaces that corresponds with the Deleuzian (and Deleuzo-Guattarian) image of thought. Because it is made as a visual sensation or event, it is visual immanent thought or philosophy of sensation.

The first chapter lays the ground for a theoretical approach to painting. This theoretical ground focuses on the use of vision, representation and abstraction within the general cultural question of anti-ocularcentrism. In this chapter, darkness is an inherent part of lightness in visual thinking. The chapter ends with the idea of strange seeing, where any visual experience is one of multi-valence. This way of seeing is necessary to see and to make paintings as becomings.

The second chapter, “Surface and Depth” expands the idea of strange seeing. This is done by tracing the concepts of seeing-as and seeing-in. This development is illustrated with examples of hard-edged or geometric abstraction from the work of Victor Vasarely and Bridget Riley. This chapter ends with the idea that philosophy of sensation is made of sensations rather than concepts. This leads to a question about

³⁶⁹Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell trans.), *What Is Philosophy?* Columbia University Press, NY, USA, 1994, p. 199.

the image of thought in a philosophy of sensation and shows how paintings can be seen as becomings.

In the third chapter, the image of thought becomes the impure mixture of surface with depth. This opens the way for an account of painting as philosophy of sensation. Examples from several artists are used to illustrate the correspondences between *aesthetic figures* and *conceptual personae*.

The fourth chapter concerns abstraction, beginning with the opposition between abstraction and representation. Two forms of abstraction are identified. The first is *reductive* abstraction, while the second is *constructive*. Abstraction is then shown to have a central spatial issue in which representational space is flattened.

The fifth chapter uses the painting series *The Planets* to show how a philosophy of sensation can be made as propositions, using a Deleuzian model of a proposition. Thus, abstract painting can be understood to make propositions, primarily about spaces. It is in this chapter that the Deleuzian (and Deleuzo-Guattarian) approach to writing is used. In this approach, the book's importance is not from what it means but what it does. This doing is in relation to other practices, such as painting. Deleuze and Guattari write about books in their introduction to *A Thousand Plateaus*:

We will ask what it [our book] functions with, in connection with what other things it does or does not transmit . . . , in[to] which other multiplicities its own are inserted and metamorphosed, and with[in] what bodies without organs it makes its own converge. A book exists only through the outside and on the outside. A book itself is a little machine; what is the relation (also measurable) of this literary machine to a war machine, love machine, revolutionary machine, etc.—and an *abstract machine* that sweeps them along?³⁷⁰

This thesis, or “book”, is in a relationship with a painting machine. Together, they are swept along as an abstract machine made of terms and figures that make up theory and painting. To discover what is “in” a painting is not a question of chance discovery within playful technique, but is a question of being in tune with the possibilities within a practice. In other words, to have an intuition for what might be done, as it is being done, is the central feature of making a painting. In terms of this thesis, this

³⁷⁰ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (Brian Massumi trans.), *A Thousand Plateaus, Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis and London, UK, 1987, p. 4. Italics in original.

implies sensitivity, by the viewer and the artist, to the virtualities subtended from actualities, or to the *becoming* of painting. This does not necessarily mean the direct physicality of action painting; instead, sensitivity can be seen in the long planning phases of painting practice as found, for example, in the work of Bridget Riley. The fast and slow movements of Riley's work are discovered within the testing processes, even though the strategy for each work has a level of determination as far as movements between colours and shapes are concerned. The relationship between chance and determination is not a simple one of mutual exclusion. Yet this tends to ignore the physicality of seeing and making necessarily involved in actual painting. The experimental aspects of painting are always an experiment that includes the painter as part of the experimental assembly and must include a viewer, even if it is only the maker of the painting.

Aleatory is a term that Andrew Benjamin uses to describe the chance-like nature of experimentation within art, and for him, it is painting that shows this.³⁷¹ But it is not chance that constitutes making a painting. Instead, this thesis concludes that experimentation with technique concerns painting and this requires practice and planning. Painting is a process of seeking, not happenstance or *research*, but searching itself. As such, experimental painting is always a breaking of new ground to reveal new ways of seeing.

Like Nietzsche, who wrote that “all events are surrounded by a non-historical haze”,³⁷² Benjamin recognises the necessity of breaking free of the past in order to act. For Benjamin, as for Nietzsche, one cannot enter the moment and act by creating a representation of that moment. What is required is a moment of forgetting, in particular forgetting the representations that one makes of the past. History, to some extent, must loosen its grip on the image of thought, to allow for action. According to this model, history is constituted as the representations of moments. Through Foucault's fourth model of resemblance called “analogy”, as has been described in Chapter 4, representations can be understood as consisting of analogies and so contains both proximity, through a sense of touch or weight, and distance, through

³⁷¹ Andrew Benjamin, *Disclosing Spaces, on Painting*, Clinamen Press, UK, 2004, p. 20.

³⁷² *L'Abecedariare de Gilles Deleuze, avec Claire Parnet* (Gilles Deleuze's ABC Primer, with Claire Parnet), Directed by Pierre-André Boutang (1996), Overview prepared by Charles Stivale, Dept of Romance Languages and Literatures, Wayne State University, USA.
<http://www.langlab.wayne.edu/Cstivale/D-G/ABC1.html#anchor54085612.08.2005>, page unknown.

vision. In short, representations have made it possible to weigh up our concepts at the same time as keeping a safe distance from them.

The weightiness of history is within the tactile momentum of its images as it moves along its axial and striated lines of vision. By opening new paths and denying what is historical, painting lightly collects these lines, bends them away from their axes and deposits them within smooth movements and styles, each of which desires its own orthodoxy, its own striation. Each painting moves in wayward and wobbly lines like the “free line” of Kandinsky in *Point and Line to Plane*.³⁷³ Each movement is searching for new becomings, new worlds or, as with the final phase of this thesis, new planets.

If one sees historical images as a Deleuzian “territory”, space or plane, then art events, such as paintings, always have the tendency to *de-territorialise*—to break free of the axioms used to make them. The surrounding “un-historical haze”,³⁷⁴ of painting has the expressive intensity of the Deleuzian event. This hazy intensity provides painting with a movement away from its “ground”, territory or space. Movement occurs through self-consciously seeing painting as an impure mixture of surface and depth, a seeing that might only seem to be available to the “creative” painter, but which can be found by any willing viewer. Since this intensity is felt through sense or “that which is expressed”,³⁷⁵ as Deleuze defines it, it is affective and not within critique. Criticism builds a world of signification around each work, but each work is first, a world of sensation, or of affective vision.

If a painting seems to have autonomy, it is only as sense, according to Deleuze. But the moment it has sense it also has nonsense; it is by nonsense that sense is known. Through the folding of sense and nonsense, autonomy is multiplied. The moment a painting is seen, even by the painter during its making, it is seen as surface and depth, and so sense and nonsense are always folded into the one painting. In other

³⁷³ Diagram 16, Line, Free wave-like line with accent – horizontal position. Wassily Kandinsky, *Point and Line to Plane*, Dover Press, UK, 1979.

³⁷⁴ *L'Abecedariare de Gilles Deleuze, avec Claire Parnet* (Gilles Deleuze's ABC Primer, with Claire Parnet), Directed by Pierre-André Boutang (1996), Overview prepared by Charles Stivale, Dept of Romance Languages and Literatures, Wayne State University, USA.
<http://www.langlab.wayne.edu/Cstivale/D-G/ABC1.html#anchor54085612.08.2005>.

³⁷⁵ See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell trans.), *What Is Philosophy?* Columbia University Press, NY, USA, 1994, p. 4, Gilles Deleuze, (Lester, M, Trans, Boundas, C, ed) *Logic of Sense*, Columbia University Press, USA, 1990 (first published in French 1969), p.

words, the work is both autonomous and not autonomous at the same time. As such, painting is always *polynomous*. Philosophy of sensation, which is to say philosophy practiced in painting, is a polynomous way to open new spaces, new planes. As such, it might also be called a nomadic science of propositions. This, however, would be to miss the point. The nomad science of painting is merely one of the planes or spaces that coincide within the intensity of each work. It is in the process of painting that painting's importance can be found. Painting, as a practice, is the practice of opinion in relation to technique. According to Deleuze and Guattari:

Opinion is the rule of the correspondence of one to the other; *it is a function or a proposition whose arguments are perceptions and affections*, and in this sense it is a function of the lived.³⁷⁶

And, as philosophy of sensation—so is painting.

³⁷⁶ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell trans.), *What Is Philosophy?* Columbia University Press, NY, USA, 1994, p. 144.

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Appendix 2. The Planets, 2003-4



The Sun

185 cm x 215 cm, oil on canvas



Mercury

185 cm x 215 cm, oil on canvas



Venus

185 cm x 215 cm, oil on canvas



The Blue Planet

185 cm x 205 cm, oil on canvas



Mars

185 cm x 205 cm, oil on canvas



Jupiter

185 cm x 215 cm, oil on canvas



Saturn

185 cm x 205 cm, oil on canvas



Neptune

185 cm x 205 cm, oil on canvas



Uranus

185 cm x 205 cm, oil on canvas

The following images are from the exhibition “The Planets” in April 2005.

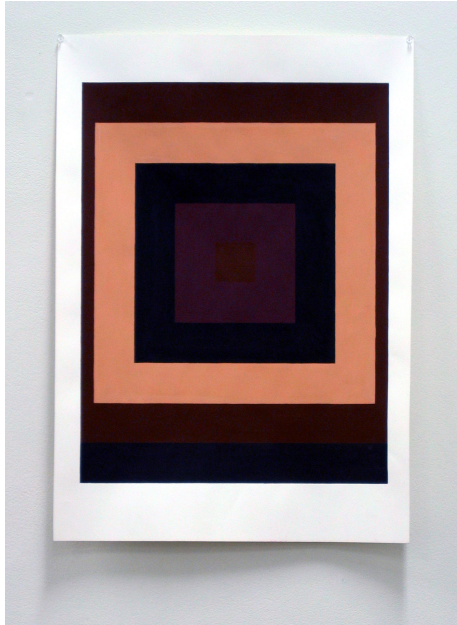






Appendix 3. Previous Painting

Flat, 1997



Flat 1



Flat 2



Flat 3



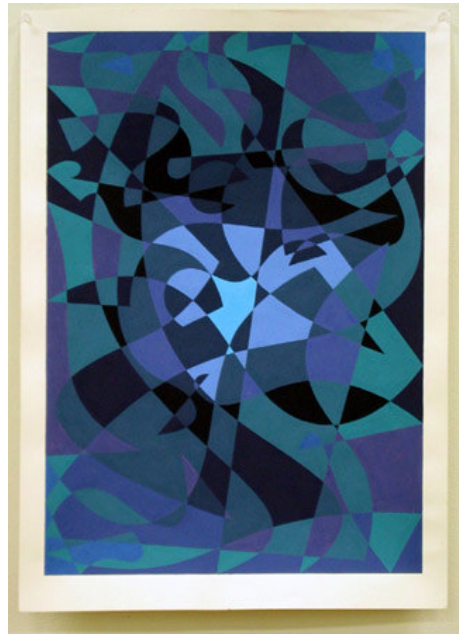
Flat 4



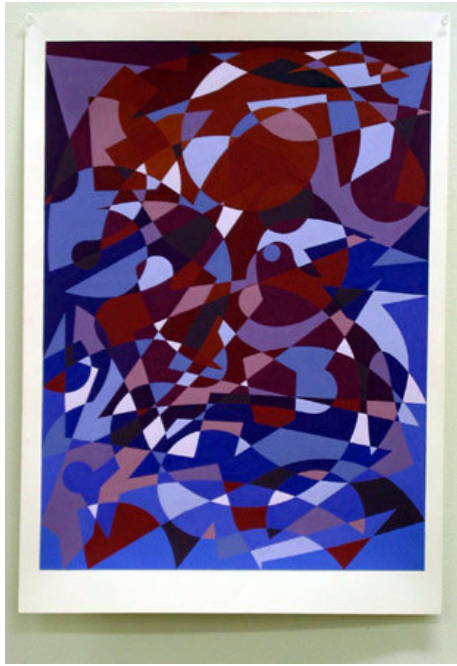
Flat 5



Flat 6



Flat 7



Flat 8



Flat 9



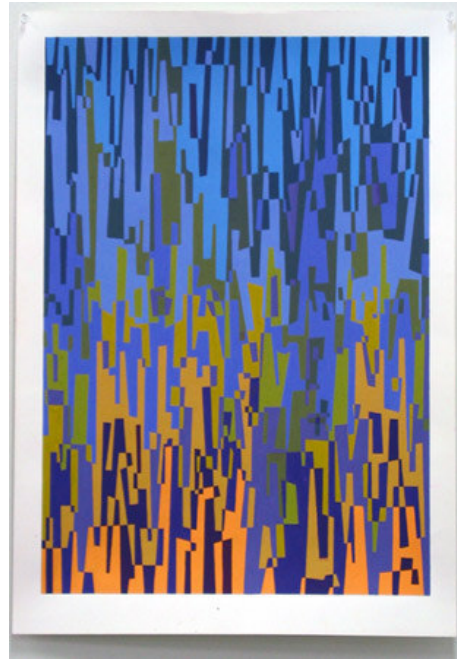
Flat 11



Flat 12



Flat 13



Flat 14



Flat 15



Flat 16



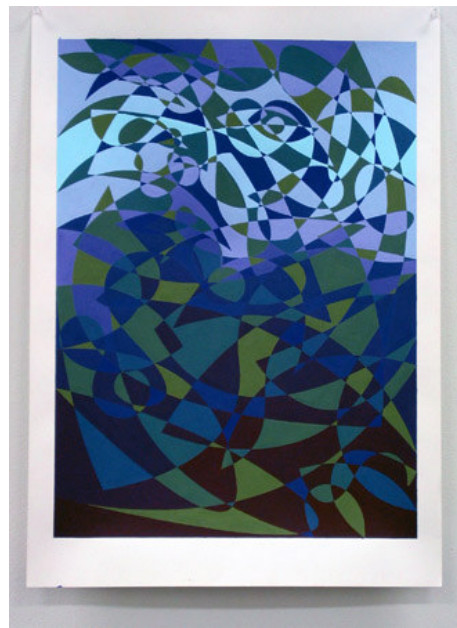
Flat 17



Flat 18



Flat 19



Flat 20

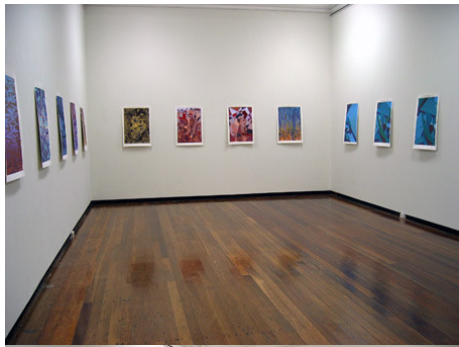


Flat 21



Flat 22

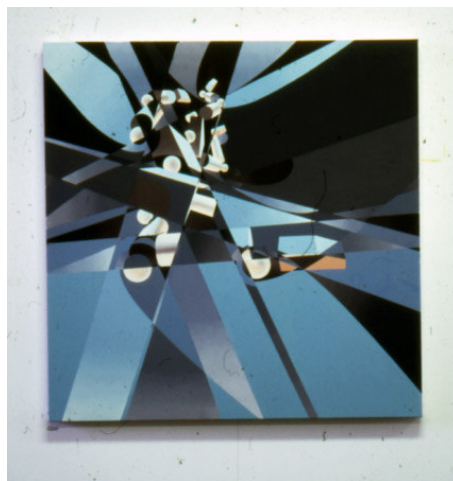
Flat, Installation



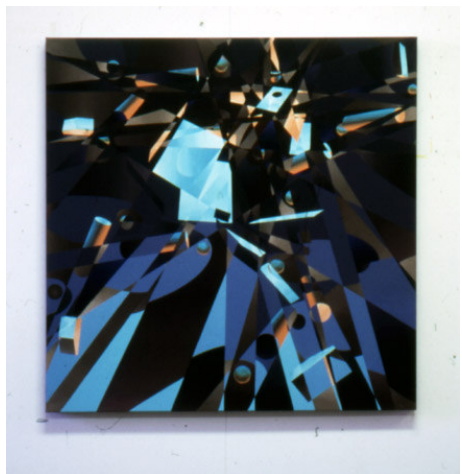
Mannequin, 2000-1



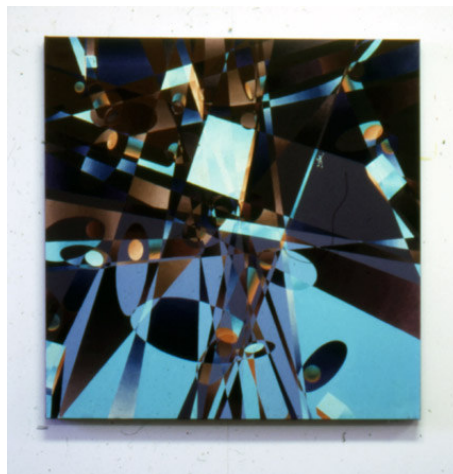
Mannequin 1, 120 cm x 120cm, oil on canvas



Mannequin 2, 120 cm x 120cm, oil on canvas



Mannequin 3, 120 cm x 120cm, oil on canvas



Mannequin 4, 120 cm x 120cm, oil on canvas

Finger Wharf, 2002



Finger Wharf 1, 120 cm x 120 cm, oil on canvas.



Finger Wharf 2, 120 cm x 120 cm, oil on canvas.



Finger Wharf 3, 185 cm x 205 cm, oil on canvas



Finger Wharf 4, 185 cm x 205 cm, oil on canvas