Painting, Deleuze and the Art of 'Surface Effects'

by

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Abstract

This thesis focuses on painting at the level of its operation and is therefore a mode of investigation which seeks to learn from painting rather than represent it in terms of external interpretative interests. Taking as a point of departure the notion that what is at stake for painting is the creation of the 'radically new' I have borrowed from the field of biosemiotics in order to examine creativity within formal development. In part this is to counter the notion that painting is an exhausted practice by investigating how the 'end' is obviated when past and present are understood to be syntheses of the work rather than as external determinations.

To the extent that the thesis begins with the primacy and specificity of the work it demonstrates a mode of formalism. However, through an investigation into what is 'at work' in painting, into precisely what cannot be given to representation, certain methodological givens have been brought into question.

Turning away from the Modernist notion of autonomy the first two chapters examine the relation of Juan Usle's abstract paintings to a cultural 'environment'. Taking his own photographs as significant whilst rejecting the notion of causal influence, the discussion focuses on a process of interpretation determined by the materials and processes specific to painting. In the third chapter this is developed in a discussion of the work of Tim Renshaw which considers how what cannot be planned emerges in the work in relation to initial practical parameters. It emerges from that discussion that the mode of analysis at stake here, despite investigating a type of formalism, is forced to

operate at the interface between painting and the outside rather than approach form in its isolation. The final chapter examines the specific materials and processes used by Bernard Frize in relation to two different notions of composition. Replacing the traditional idea of spatial organisation the chapter shows how Frize's paintings demonstrate Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the plane of composition by figuring its 'flattened' space.

Throughout this thesis I have sought to develop a mode of analysis that takes as its object the specificity of painting; that proceeds *with* painting rather than is about painting. In doing so I have drawn from the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze in so far as that philosophy offers a critique of the 'representational image of thought'.

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Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to see a little more clearly the problems that concern painting. The process of writing was simultaneous with the process of painting and, although each is an independent activity, both have been informed by the other. With this in mind and because language is inseparably intertwined with making painting the aim has been not to construct a model for the ideal theory/practice relationship but to experiment a creative relationship between the two.

Having said this, the research has been orientated towards painting and how language can go beyond a ready-made vocabulary and available critical concepts to open up a space for new ways of thinking in the studio and new perceptions in relation to on-going work. I have not, however, written directly about my own work. The reason for this is most probably the difficulty in conceptually isolating what is happening in one's own work when that work is always connected in some way to past work and future aspirations which are often necessarily vague. Furthermore, although a painting 'isolates itself' when it is finished what is interesting is not likely to be fathomable in terms of current conceptual interests and it is often the case that a theoretical connection can be made much later on when the work can be regarded more 'objectively'.

As an alternative I have discussed other contemporary abstract painting but only in so far as those works interest me as a painter. The problems I have identified and the philosophical concepts I have used to explore those problems have emerged only in relation to situations I have faced in the studio. In this respect the 'method' of this thesis

recapitulates some of the ideas I have used to write it (notably in this example Francisco Varela's thesis that perception is not the 'recovery of a pre-given world' and that cognition consists not of representations but perceptually guided 'embodied action'[1]). In other words, the aim of the thesis has not been to provide a general account of contemporary painting within the polemics of its survival; not least because such debates always seem to me to be aimed at problems that animate the sphere of art criticism or art history and not that of the studio. In this respect I wanted to try to write about painting from the point of view of painting itself.

Having said this, the research owes much to the writings of two art historians in particular: Yve-Alain Bois and his mentor Hubert Damisch. In the title essay of his book *Painting as Model* (published in 1991) and in the lengthy introduction Bois discusses the importance of the idea of 'painting as model' which he finds in Damisch's texts. The form of analysis expressed here is aimed 'less at helping us to understand than at helping us to see'[2]; focussing not on questions of representation, according to which discourse must proceed from the a priori principles of an interpretative model, but focussing instead on painting at the level of its 'operation'. This entails replacing a basically representational way of thinking about painting with a mode of analysis that takes the problematic nature of a specific work as its point of departure. This mode of analysis is free to invent or import theoretical models, in part or whole, from other disciplines (what Bois calls a 'right-to-store-up' policy) 'that would strive for a renewed intimacy with the work that is painting's own province'.[3]

[1] Francisco Varela, 'The Reenchantment of the Concrete' in *Incorporations* ed.s Crary and Kwinter, (New York, 1992) p336
[2] Hubert Damisch, *The Origin of Perspective*, (Massachusetts, 1995), p263
[3] Ibid, p263

As the thesis examines abstract painting (and this indirectly includes my own) it would be difficult not to mention Clement Greenberg whose writings were very influential to me when I was a BA student, not least because of the overwhelming sense that he was referring to experience and not to a distant body of theory that painting merely illustrates. In many ways the research project as a whole has been a process of 'working through' that legacy. My interest in art criticism has always been guided by my interest in making paintings and thus in giving primacy to the direct encounter with the work. However, I found that what started off as empirical and open in Greenberg's texts was replaced by the imperative to judge according to an a priori aesthetic within what became a Modernist orthodoxy. As a critical framework within which to make paintings, I felt this increasingly restricted what was acceptable and indeed what was perceivable. My interest in Bois' criticism came out of this ambivalence towards Greenberg's formalism. However, in the lengthy introduction to *Painting as Model* Bois makes a clear distinction between Greenberg's formalism which he terms 'Idealist' and a formalism which the essays in that book demonstrate which he calls 'Materialist'. The distinction rests on form as a set of relations that pre-exist projection (in Greenberg's case) and form as a set of relations that are produced by the work and which are inseparable from its other aspects. This is implied by Bois' mentor Roland Barthes when he wrote:

> The formalism I have in mind does not consist in "forgetting", "neglecting", "reducing" content… but only in *not stopping* at the threshold of content…content is *precisely* what interests formalism, because its endless task is each time to push content back… to displace it according to a play of successive forms.[4]

[4] Roland Barthes, 'Digressions' in *The Grain of the Voice*, (California, 1985), p115

As Bois demonstrates his 'materialist formalism' investigates what counts as form in a specific work; so that form as a set of relations produced by the work (rather than an a priori ideal) can only be established by an enquiry into the problematic nature of the work; an enquiry into precisely what cannot be given at the outset. However, there is a sense in which Bois' 'right-to-store-up' methodology does not go far enough (according to the interests of painting) for two reasons: firstly, because the problematic nature of the work is represented as a question and secondly because the subsequent discourse is limited by the structure of the theoretical models imported to address it. The alternative would be to shift the terms of the enquiry onto the genetic conditions of the question and to approach painting as the actualisation of thought; not the thought of the person who painted it but of thought which belongs to painting itself.

The difficulty of such an approach lies in resisting what Deleuze calls 'the dogmatic image of thought'[5] (a difficulty, however, that has been the source of creative 'points of intervention' between writing and painting). According to this dogmatic image thought represents experience to itself as a ready-made object for the interpretative model used to explicate it. By resisting such an approach the focus of attention necessarily falls onto what is 'at work' in painting; onto precisely what cannot be given to representation and onto what cannot be experienced by virtue of conceptual recognition. Thus, the object of investigation is not painting as an object but its workings or force as, what Deleuze terms, an 'object of a fundamental *encounter*'[6].

Following this line of enquiry has involved an exploration of certain philosophical ideas drawn from Deleuze's writings which I have 'appropriated' according to the demands of the thesis. I have strongly rejected the possibility of using ideas as if they were ready-

[5] Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, (London, 1997), p148
[6] Ibid, p139

made tools for analysis (which would contradict the spirit and aim of the project as well as Deleuze himself) but instead I have tried to use ideas to unlock trains of thought. I felt that this would not be possible if I had referred directly to Deleuze's writing on painting; as if his work of synthesis would have been too much for me to unravel at this stage in my research.

One of the consequences of this shift of attention has been that the familiar critical vocabulary used to talk about painting has been put under considerable strain. I have found that it has been necessary to qualify or re-figure terms such as abstract, figurative, form, space, drawing, composition, line and plane rather than being able to simply use them to name the 'givens' of painting. This is indicative of replacing an enquiry into what a painting is or what it means with an enquiry into what it *does*, consequently the efficacy of terms used to explore this problem is not guaranteed by what they have done in past in the context of a very different mode of enquiry.

The dichotomy 'abstract' and 'figurative' is a case in point. As will become evident, I have found that the strict opposition of those two terms has proved unsustainable in the analysis of paintings that follows. This is not to say that the terms themselves have become irrelevant, rather they have been refigured within the context of a new mode of analysis. Neither has the historical specificity of the terms been ignored so that they become merely stylistic labels, on the contrary it is precisely because of the history of their formation that they remain powerful critical tools. Having said this, the need to re-figure the terms indicates the shifting demands that painting makes of them which raises a question about how painting interprets its past in relation to its present context. In relation to this point it is the nature of the 'radically new' that has endured as a

philosophical problem that I have been unable to grasp to my satisfaction. However, this problem is precisely what is at stake in painting and has been the motivation of this thesis and which I want to introduce as such with reference to Bois' essay 'Painting: The Task of Mourning' (included in the collection of essays *Painting as Model*).

Although written in the early 1990s in the context of the emergence of 'neo-abstract painters' (e.g. Halley and Taaffe whom he refers to as paintings 'official mourners') this essay stands out as a *systematic* attempt to address the impasse constructed by post-modernism's claim that painting, or more specifically abstract painting, is dead. Despite having been written nearly twenty years ago the essay is particularly relevant to this research for two reasons; firstly, for its methodological underpinnings outlined above and, secondly, because its systematicity marks an ambitious attempt to counter a dialectical condition which would render its own methodology redundant. Consequently, the thesis does not exactly position itself in relation to Bois' text (as opposed to those by other commentators) but will pull a thread from his argument in order to figure its own problem.

This thread concerns the theory of games which Bois cites from the work of Damisch[7] and which he uses to re-figure the alternatives which present themselves at the 'end' of the modernist project (and the birth of 'postmodernism'); an end which, because of its essentialism and historicism, was already inscribed at modernism's birth:

> Indeed the whole enterprise of modernism, especially of abstract painting, which can be taken as its emblem, could not have functioned without an apocalyptic myth.[8]

[7] Hubert Damisch, *Fenetre Jaune Cadmium*, (Paris, 1984) which remains without an English translation
[8] Yve Alain Bois, *Painting as Model* (Massachusetts, 1990), p230

Bois suggests the alternatives at this point were either to deny that the end of painting has come by pointing to its obvious continuation (although that is to deny what Bois' understands as the task of modern painting: to work through its end) or to accept that the end has come (although that would be to accept an historicist conception of history as both linear and total, exemplified in the work of those neo-abstractionists mentioned above). Damisch's antihistoricist strategic model annuls this trap by separating the generic game (painting) from the specific performance or match and thereby 'deciphers painting as an agonistic field where nothing is ever terminated, or decided *once and for all*…'. [9] Believing neither in a linear genealogy nor an homogenous time without breaks, for Damisch, it is the 'match' as it becomes apparent in what is seen (i.e. the primacy and specificity of the work) that determines its status not an a priori view of history. For Bois the 'pathological mourners' (Halley, Taaffe, Bleckner et al) demonstrate an historicism in their denial that modernism's historical situation is no longer ours and in their belief of the discontinuity of the post-modern era (characterised by the widespread acceptance of the Baudrillardian simulacrum at the time). For Bois this resurrection of painting as simulation is a denial that the end has to be endlessly worked through and a refusal of the task of mourning which is not about evasion but about believing in 'our ability to act in history'.

Although, the terms of this argument are slightly out of date the essay itself is inconclusive and ends on a speculative note. Thus, it could be read as a challenge to 'act in history' according to a new 'match', even. What is the status of that match? If, as I suggest above, the terms figurative and abstract are no longer on opposing sides (representational or not-representational) then they could be seen to be redistributed in a

[9] Ibid, p241

match that is not determined by the historicism and essentialism that, according to Bois characterised the modernist match, with the teleology that implies. As Damisch says [the question becomes] "one of the status that ought to be assigned to the *match* 'painting', as one *sees* it being played at a given moment in particular circumstances, in its relation to the *game* of the same name"[10] and I am suggesting that I *see* that the terms figurative and abstract are no longer on opposing sides. Consequently, this match would not exactly involve a working through of the end but would 'deconstruct' (to use Bois' terminology) the very notion of the end itself. What I aim to demonstrate is that this 'deconstruction' of 'the end' is really the 'deconstruction' of a projected future based on a fixed idea of the past. Therefore, if what is at stake is 'a belief in our ability to act in history' then this match must be concerned with a different temporality in which the future is based on a present capacity to re-interpret the past. This implies that a different conception of the 'new' is necessary because with no end in sight (and therefore no beginning) the new can no longer be judged according to external teleological arguments or expectations (nor in terms of a 'post-modern' reversal).

In Keith Ansell Pearson's book *Germinal Life: The Difference and Repetition of Deleuze* he describes Bergson's understanding of the new not as a matter of judgment but of a new kind of thinking that 'springs from intuition'. If what can be recognised by the intellect as new (fashion, for example) is satisfying because within the new there is the security of recognising the old, the 'radically new' elicits a new kind of thinking from within an initial incomprehensibility. By incomprehensibility Ansell-

[10] Ibid, p241

Cath's *Manikin* and *In the Back of My Mind*

Pearson does not mean, however, an inability to comprehend because of a lack of understanding or knowledge but in the more affirmative sense of an incomprehensibility that is an encounter with what cannot be grasped from the point of view of recognition and common sense[11]. As he goes on to say;

> …although [the radically new] strikes us initially as obscure we discover, by undergoing a new kind of thinking, that it also 'dissipates' obscurities and problems which seem to us insuperable dissolve either by disappearing or by presenting themselves to us in a different manner. [12]

This conception of the new undermines the primacy of judgement which clearly presents a problem for an aesthetic practice whose genesis results from a series of practical and purposive decisions that must be evaluated along the way. Judgement becomes a problem in so far as those evaluations could pre-empt the creation of something new by simply confirming what is already understood or by satisfying expectations. On a personal note, as the project has progressed through the interrelation of writing and painting, I have become increasingly aware of this as a complex issue; not, however, as the previous remarks might suggest, as a hurdle to be overcome, but transformed or dissipated. In painting this has manifested itself by a shift of focus and by a tendency to make less central and more localised decisions about smaller things. Within the material and processual parameters decided at the outset (acrylic paint and canvas, an arbitrary starting point, an 'open' process of composition) the significance of this more 'molecular' level of activity lies, perhaps, in the desire to endlessly defer the imposition of judgment about the whole painting in order not to limit the life of local technical events. This attempt to evade judgement is also an attempt, perhaps, to invite

[11] Daniel Smith, 'Deleuze's Theory of Sensation: Overcoming the Kantian Dualilty' in *A Deleuze Reader*, ed Paul Patton, p30
[12] Keith Ansell Pearson, *Germinal Life*, (London, 1999), p32

incomprehensibility as if the focus on these local technical events could create the blindness necessary to evade forming a totalising identity and thus elicit 'a new kind of thinking'.

Having said this, how does this conception of the new as 'radically new' also demonstrate the 'current match' in the terms outlined above? In Ansell Pearson's account of the radically new he also describes it as 'the experience of time as it *imposes itself* upon us.' In an article on the relation Deleuze's books on cinema draw with philosophy Christian Kerslake notes that for Deleuze modern cinema;

> Provides the ideal space for the unfolding of what Deleuze calls 'the pure form of time', a form of time in which the temporal syntheses of memory and anticipation are permitted to detach themselves from their ballast in everyday social experience.[13]

In that article Kerslake shows in a detailed argument how 'under certain extreme dramatic conditions…the self shows itself incapable of assuring its own continuity' which I understand to be a condition of the 'incomprehensibility' indicative of the 'radically new'. Thus, by assuming that the radically new (as 'the experience of time as it imposes itself upon us') is also the experience of 'the pure form of time' I want to frame the discussion of painting that happens in the following chapters with reference to Deleuze mediated through Kerslake's account. This is specifically in order to suggest that if what is at stake in paintings' current match is to 'deconstruct' the 'end' then what is also at stake is the 'radically new'. The aim of the following chapters is to explore this idea by considering how painting re-interprets its past under its present conditions.

[13] Christian Kerslake, 'Transcendental Cinema', in *Radical Philosophy*, 130 March/April 2005, p8

According to Kerslake what reveals the 'pure and empty form of time' (which I take to be a condition of the incomprehensibility necessary for the radically new) is 'the paradox of inner sense' which emerges within Kant's theory of time. As he explains experience is made up of temporal syntheses that must be unified by a subject: a transcendental 'I think'. The paradox emerges because time as the form of inner sense cannot include the transcendental 'I think' which is itself a spontaneous and passive condition of thought; the consciousness of unity that cannot be actively represented.[14] If spontaneity grounds understanding and judgement but cannot itself be subject to the same rules then the 'I think' of judgement must be based upon a consciousness which cannot be thought but acts as if it were an Other within thought itself; 'as if it were feeding me thoughts, which appear to me through the medium of time.'[15] This spontaneity indicates the paradox of inner sense because, the Cogito cannot confirm itself through self-reflection; so that time both synthesises and fractures us.

> As a result, the spontaneity of which I am conscious in the 'I think' cannot be understood as the attribute of a substantial and spontaneous being, but only as the affection of a passive self which experiences its own thought – its own intelligence, that by virtue of which it can say *I* - being exercised in it and upon it but not by it…It is as though the *I* were fractured from one end to the other: fractured by the pure and empty form of time. [16]

There are two implications for this discussion; firstly, this 'purely formal, universal and *impersonal* transcendental subject' is engendered from contingent temporal positions so that there is no transcendental standpoint which can organise and link together past and future into a narrative of unchangeable personal identity/history. The synthesis of

[14] 'I do not have yet another self-intuition, which would give the *determining* in me, of the spontaneity of which alone I am conscious even before the act of *determination*, in the same way as time gives that which is to be determined, thus I cannot determine my existence as that of a self-active being, rather I merely represent the spontaneity of my thought, i.e. of the determining, and my existence always remains only sensibly determinable.' Kant, *Crtique of Pure Reason* B158

[15] Christian Kerslake, 'Transcendental Cinema', in *Radical Philosophy*, 130 March/April 2005, p10

[16] Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, (London, 1997), p86

experience will always be from that contingent temporal perspective so that the past is in principle open to future re-codings and the future on a current capacity to interpret the past. Under those dramatic conditions in which 'the self shows itself incapable of assuring its own continuity' the suggestion is that a space is provided 'for the appearance of the Cogito *as* empty, as a pure form, and as Other' or in the terms of this discussion an 'initial incomprehensibility' as a response to the 'radically new'. This lack of narrative position must also render the notion of an end impossible to conceive in the sense that the appearance of the pure and empty form of time is the manifestation of a 'caesura'; an inability to unify experience in time, it 'holds apart a pure 'before' and 'after''[17]. Secondly, if this transcendental self-consciousness 'feeds me thoughts' it cannot be understood as a pure receptivity and so must constitute a synthesis that is not representational but constitutes the genesis of sensibility itself.

> The passive self is not defined simply by receptivity – that is, by means of the capacity to experience sensations – but by virtue of the contractile contemplation which constitutes the organism itself before it constitutes sensations…Selves are larval subjects; the world of passive syntheses constitutes the system of the self, under conditions yet to be determined, but it is the system of a dissolved self.[18]

This implies that art creates sensibility by virtue of 'larval subjects' (distinct from the self-contained subject with its fixed vantage point) rather than participating in what Daniel Smith calls the 'Kantian Duality'[19] whereby the art object, presented through a priori forms of time and space, is an already formed sensible object (the objective element) received by the faculty of sensibility and judged according to a priori categories of understanding (the subjective element). Indeed, the idea that time can

[17] Christian Kerslake, 'Transcendental Cinema', in *Radical Philosophy*, 130 March/April 2005, p13
[18] Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, (London, 1997), p78
[19] Daniel Smith 'Deleuze's Theory of Sensation: Overcoming the Kantian Duality,' in *Deleuze: A Critical Reader*, ed Paul Patton, pp29-56

'impose itself upon us' contradicts the logic of Kantian aesthetics in which time and space are the a priori forms of sensation.

Kant defines the passive self in terms of simple receptivity, thereby assuming sensations already formed then merely relating these to the *a priori* forms of their representation which are determined as space and time.[20]

Thus, for Deleuze receptivity in not a given; 'Rather, the receptive-ability of receptivity must be accounted for.'[21] With this in mind I have approached the problem of the 'radically new' by understanding the work of art as a form of life. This is not a simple analogy, however, but an attempt to demonstrate art's non-representational ontology through the structure and accessibility of terms and models developed within biological research. Most significant in this respect is the notion of the living organism as an 'autopoietic machine' which has allowed me to approach an analysis of the work of Juan Usle, Tim Renshaw and Bernard Frize from the point of view of painting itself (and not from the 'domain in which the machine is observed[22]'): not as an object given in experience but as a form of life which constructs a relation with the outside through its internal 'organisation'.

[20] Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, (London, 1997), p98
[21] Levi Bryant, 'Sensation and Sensibility: Deleuze's Aesthetic Metaphysics', p4
[22] Maturana and Varela, *Autopoiesis and Cognition*, (Dordrecht, 1972) , p81

Chapter 1: Painting and Photography: A Contrapuntal Harmony

1.1 The Biosemiotic Model of Evolution

If the evolution of a new species is also the evolution of a new form of sensibility and a new way of sensing the world then the environment which is differentiated is species-specific. This implies that organisms live in a network of, what the 19th Century ethologist Jakob von Uexkull referred to as Umwelten or species-specific objective worlds. In other words the genesis of a species is not an adaptation to a given environment but a new environment is created at the same time as a new species is created. For example, a wasp and an orchid may inhabit the same spatial region but for biosemiotics the environment of that region is filtered or transformed by the living system according to what is important or significant to it. Thus, the form of a living organism develops through its 'contrapuntal relations' with other organisms and its physical habitat. In an essay on the work of Uexkull and its philosophical relevance Paul Bains[23] recites his example of the octopus:

> Uexkull…gives the example of the *octopus*, designated *as the subject* in its relation to *sea-water as the meaning carrier*. In this scenario the fact that water cannot be compressed is the precondition for the construction of the octopus' muscular swim-bag. The pumping movement of the swim bag on the noncompressible water propels the animal backwards, Uexkull claims that the rules that govern the properties of sea-water act on the protoplasm of the octopus thereby shaping the melody of the development of the octopus form to express the properties of sea-water. *The rule of meaning that joins point and counterpoint is expressed in the action of swimming – an energetic interpretant!*[24]

[23] Paul Bains, '*Umwelten'*, in *Semiotica* 134 - ¼ (2001), pp137-167
[24] Paul Bains, '*Umwelten'*, in *Semiotica* 134 - ¼ (2001), p141

As Bains emphasises, this model of formal development depends upon the idea that organisms interpret their environment through ‘significant sign relationships’ rather than evolve as passive objects subject to a given environment and the forces of natural selection.

The aim of this Chapter is to consider the possibility of a ‘significant sign relationship’ between the paintings of the Spanish, New York-based artist Juan Usle and his photographs with reference to biological evolutionary processes as developed in the field of biosemiotics. The reason for this is two-fold; firstly to explore the implications for interpretation of the idea of a ‘contrapuntal harmony’ between two distinct practices as an alternative to the assumption of causal relations; secondly to explore the implications of such a model for how the ‘future’ of painting is construed as a practice that simultaneously differentiates a new environment in the present and re-interprets its past. I have chosen to examine Usle’s work not least because his paintings exemplify a certain freedom and inventiveness in the way they have been made, unburdened by the historicism that troubles much contemporary abstract painting. The photographs are considerably less interesting but, in a significant way, illuminate something about how the paintings work if considered within a relation of contrapuntal harmony. I want to emphasise that this does not mean that the paintings re-present recognisable aspects of his photographs or that they have been ‘influenced’ in a causal way by the photographs (there is little actual similarity in appearance). The contrapuntal relation is not between static and generalised objects but is a process of ‘semiosis’ that I will discuss as the repetition in the paintings of a relation of difference created in the photographs. This may seem fanciful as paintings and photographs are, according to one image of thought static objects, however, according to another art becomes a sort of ‘machine’ for

thinking. Thus, to speak of a repetition in painting of relations created in photographs is not an act of comparison but an 'unfolding' of the repetition of that relation in the encounter with the work. Given that for biosemiotics organisms evolve in a relation of mutual interpretation rather than as determinations of natural selection, this is a useful model to consider the creation of formal diversity. It is also a useful way to think about the encountered experience as a process of formation and deformation; likened to the process through which an organism lives in relation to its environment, described as a 'functional cycle'. Bains describes this process with reference to Uexkull's notorious example of the tick as a functional cycle in which the mammal is the connecting link between the tick's effectors and receptors 'which metaphorically 'grasp' the object like the two jaws of a pair of pincers…the 'perceptual jaw' gives perceptual meaning to the object [mammal] and the 'operational jaw' an effector meaning'.[25] This cycle is not one in which the organism responds to causal impulses but is one in which it responds to perceptual signs. This distinction is crucial because the organism formed through semiosis is not reduced to an effect of a cause but rather is a life affirmed by the interpretation it enacts.

According to this biosemiotic model biological evolution is not understood to be a purely mechanical process that involves the transfer of energy (between sensory receptors and effector muscles) as in Darwinian natural selection which is both mechanistic and teleonomic. Rather than energy biosemiotics is interested in information (interestingly a shift which brings into question the distinction of nature and culture on the basis of different economies of change). As the biologist Jesper Hoffmeyer discusses in his essay 'The Changing Concept of Information in the Study of

[25] Ibid, p141

Life' (1993) information in biosemiotics is not conceived of as substance, as DNA; a measurable physical entity that exists objectively and independently of its destination. For biosemiotics information is always connected to the process of being informed. In their papers on the semiotic metaphor in biology Emmeche and Hoffmeyer[26] argue that this alternative concept of information contradicts the commonplace assumption that the *substance* of genetic material and its programme or potential *form* are one and the same. In order to account for the creativity within formal diversity they argue that the relation between genetic material and its 'programme' must be a sign-relation not one of physical cause (represented by DNA).

As the authors explain, to regard genetic material as both substance and (eventual) form is to see it as information in its common mathematical usage; as a 'quantitative measure of improbability'. As with gossip, the higher the probability of a given event the less information it conveys. Thus the quantitative concept of information depends upon a closed possibility space because if the set of possibilities is open there is no measure of probability and consequently no information value. As this sort of information, genetic material can only give rise to forms from within a prescribed set of possibilities. The survival of the fittest chooses those best able to survive from the range of probabilities according to how well the organism's form functions in a given environment, advantageous form being passed on in reproduction by those that survive long enough to reproduce. The authors argue that formal diversity cannot be produced by this incremental process based on the gradual improvement of function because it can only modify patterns already given and only account for forms that are not viable. The model cannot account for totally unpredictable forms of life, the really new, because all

[26] Hoffmeyer and Emmeche, 'Code-Duality and the Semiotics of Nature' in *On Semiotic Modelling*, (New York, 1991)

possibilities, including those that are highly improbable, depend on being known as possibilities at the outset. According to this logic diversity is simply a degree of statistical probability. Within the alternative concept of information genetic material is dependent upon the context in which it is expressed. As Hoffmeyer says:

> A given molecular message does not automatically release a certain cellular response, rather the cellular response will depend on the particular history of that cell many cell generations back in time as well as on its actual cell-sociological context, i.e. its relation to the surrounding system of cells[27].

Thus there are two aspects to the molecular message: inherited 'memories' that have evolved in time ("vertical" semiosis) and environmental context from which it finds meaning ("horizontal" semiosis). Thus, genetic material is not a blue-print for formal development but must be interpreted in new and complex ways as 'genetic instructions are continuously changed and recombined in new functional patterns'. (For example, Hoffmeyer makes the point that the co-ordination of genetic instructions in new combinations and contexts cannot itself be genetically coded.) Emmeche and Hoffmeyer identify this as genetic *code-duality*; the phase of the code that is termed digital harbours instructions necessary for the construction of the organism itself, it re-describes the system as a set of structural relations in space and time as the 'memory' of the system. In the analogue phase of the code this memory is expressed by the selection of actual differences from the environment by which the organism develops. The number of potential differences that surround the system is infinite, however, so that for differences to become information they must first be selected by some kind of 'mind'; the recipient system. For example, reading is a response by the sensory organ of the eye to multiple differences in ink and paper, not to ink itself. Information is conceived of as

[27] Jesper Hoffmeyer, 'The Changing Concept of Information in the Study of Life' (1993), accessed at http://www.molbio.ku.dk 22/09/06 p10

difference that makes a difference to the recipient. In this case information is not substance or energy but 'news of difference' or a sign. Hoffmeyer refers to research which demonstrates that, because of the specifically digital character of the genetic system, DNA is not directly translated but is interpreted by the organism in its selection of difference. An evolving species is formed dynamically by such an interpretation of its hereditary past in relation to its present ecological conditions which creates a future, modified gene pool.

The usefulness of this model of evolution is to conceive of the contrapuntal relation as one structured by difference that makes a difference; a difference produced by Usle's photographs that makes a difference to the way his paintings are formed so that they become new ways of sensing the world by differentiating a new environment. Because paintings are made with different materials and processes from photographs it must be a relation of difference that makes a difference (and is repeated) because the terms of that relation cannot be given in advance; a relation that can be thought and given a transcendental account but is not describable or verifiable in terms of empirical experience.

1.2 What Difference Does Photography Make?

According to CS Pierce signs work in (at least) three different ways: as index, as icon, as symbol, all of which can be said to operate in the photographic image to a greater or lesser extent. As if to repeat the metonymic nature of the index the relation of Usle's painting to his photography rests on how the photographs exemplify the indexical nature of photography over and above its iconic or symbolic potentiality.

This indexical aspect is a function of the mechanical basis of photography; a process of capturing light using an apparatus that operates according to a number of variables: precise location in time and place, a lens modified by aperture, shutter speed and focal length. Light that affects a chemical change to photosensitive paper (or digital screen) and provides contiguity between what was in front of the lens, the objects whose surfaces reflect and refract light, and the manipulation of that light by the photographic apparatus to form an image. Usle's photographs emphasise this indexical action with their concern for the act of capturing the image rather than the image itself as 'subject matter'.

Typically, the viewpoint is close to the objects photographed and parallel to the picture plane which has the effect of eliminating depth and, therefore, a dualism of object and space. This has the effect of diminishing any symbolic or iconic value the motifs may have as objects. Attention is drawn to the surface plane of the photograph and to the surfaces of what is photographed. These object surfaces effectively become a means of manipulating light before it reaches the lens, by reflection, refraction, effacement or by blocking light, for example. It is important to note that for this reason the interest in the photographs is sensible and not intellectual; there is little satisfaction to be gained in puzzling out the identity of objects as if they had been purposefully disguised with a minimum of clues. Instead of the negation or absence of what is recognisable the photographs capture a particular play of light orchestrated by surfaces in relation to apparatus and picture plane. Surfaces become functional by

Blue Grid, New York (1999) *Vacio, Dusseldorf (*2002) and *Whitney, New York* (1997)

being detached from the object they ‘belong’ to. The trick is not to reveal what we don’t usually notice (although this does happen) but to create another sort of interest that is not identical with the subject matter of the photographs.

Many motifs record industrial lighting, patterned fabrics, shadows, blinds etc but it is not because these objects are inherently interesting that makes the photographs interesting but how those objects become apparatus; how they become functions and not identities. These examples depend in part on repetition. *Blue Grid, New York* (1999) is a photograph of industrial lighting; the object is taken for granted as a familiar and unremarkable structure. Although it is clear that this is a picture of a repeated unit that disperses ceiling light the *image* is not a uniform grid. Horizontal and vertical elements are distinguished relative to distance from the aperture. Light from the bulb behind the shallow grid structure does not fall uniformly across its surface; each unit is lit in relation to light that both shines through and across its structure. The viewpoint is not quite parallel to the flat plane of the ceiling but its planarity in relation to the picture plane disappears in the shadows at the top and sides of the image. If this appears to make too much of a relatively simple image it is to make a basic point about the use of repetition in Usle’s photographs which becomes a significant structural element of his paintings. The plane of the surface photographed is defined by a repeated element which fills the photographic image. The viewpoint takes a position in relation to which those repeated elements are no longer ‘equal’. In all photographs it is true that surfaces are positioned relative to the aperture but when the object and space duality dominates and organises all relations this relativity is

Tunnel, New York (1995). *Passage, Koln* (1995) *Lunas, Saro* (2002)

subsumed by a descriptive or narrative function. In photos such as *Blue Grid, New York* (1999), *Vacio, Dusseldorf (*2002) and *Whitney, New York* (1997) the apparatus creates visual interest, not by virtue of the scene itself, but by *inserting itself into the scene*; difference is drawn out of repetition which remains as an idea but not an image; its 'givenness' a function of the indexical nature of photography. Furthermore, as photographs of lighting the light source does not illuminate objects at a distance (which would imply a spatial context) but, instead of describing volume, light becomes an object shaped by surfaces which contain it, reflect it, and disperse it. This manipulation of light is also a significant structural element of Usle's paintings but, as we will see, in very different terms. In photographic terms it can be seen in a more explicit way in images such as *Tunnel, New York* (1995). The slow exposure time and the moving viewpoint map the series of positions of street lights relative to the camera to create a pattern that, in the darkness of the tunnel, lacks spatial context. Again in *Passage, Koln* (1995) a slow shutter speed and a moving camera create a visual 'object' from recording the track of ceiling light. The intensity of the light is recorded but the movement is not enough to blur the image of the corridor which seems to stand still and symmetrically frame this 'object'. The photograph records the viewpoint moving through space rather than a moving object.

Other photographs use surfaces close to the lens to create 'light objects'. In *Lunas, Saro* (2002) a black screen punctured by a regular pattern of holes obscures what is beyond. Light shines through each hole and the logic of the image (given "without prejudice") suggests that a coherent space is hidden from view. However, the space cannot be reconstructed; too much has been obliterated and what can be seen too various to cohere in the imagination. Each 'hole' becomes an independent 'object' of

Red Trees, Berlin 2003 *Summer, Saro* (1997) and *St. Colosia.*

different luminosity. The same logic applies to other images in which the close up view creates screens or silhouettes. These partially seen structures parallel to the picture plane lose their status as objects in space; they efface a coherent view and its spatial depth to become surfaces that capture light to create patterns that re-enforce the picture plane by repeating its horizontal and vertical axes. Such an unhinging of image and space is clear in *Red Trees, Berlin* 2003; a photograph of the distorted reflection of trees in a red car bonnet; an image captured on a surface without spatial depth (because of photography's "without prejudice" it would be more correct to say that space becomes 'symbolic' rather than absent). The photograph demonstrates that surfaces become part of the apparatus itself drawing our attention to light as the very means of forming an image; reflected by external surfaces, passing through a lens marking photo-sensitive paper to form an image.

Light as the indexical condition of photography (rather than as a visual phenomenon in itself) has structural significance in examples such as *Summer, Saro* (1997) and *St. Colosia.* In both images the shot was taken parallel to the horizontal plane, excluding contextual information with little space or symbolic interest but what grabs our attention in both is the pattern of light/dark that forms across the surface. This continuity, however, has been formed in different ways: in both examples by the absence of light on top caused by the screen or mat that blocks light and on the bottom by the presence of light as it falls onto the paving stones or sand. The pattern becomes an 'object' but only on condition that the causal link between its appearance (image) and how it was formed has been broken. This depends upon a lack of spatial depth so that luminosity is no longer bound to an originating light source which functions only to illuminate or obscure objects. The light spots or bands are, of course, the trace of light that has passed

through the lens and fallen on the photosensitive paper, the absence or presence of light is the only difference that makes a difference because the surface does not discriminate between whatever may have caused various intensities of light. As photosensitive paper is indifferent to the object before the lens this is a mechanical and corporeal relation of chemical change. Light captured by the photographic apparatus is a relation between terms, between object and image. Usually the interests and selectivity of perception obscure this but in Usle's photographs 'light' as a relation is seen to be external to its terms; a point at which what is in front of the lens becomes part of the apparatus and the action of light is freed from a narrative, spatial function. For example, the "*pattern*" of light spots in *St. Colosia* is not formed in a consistent way despite the fact that as a visual 'object' it has consistency. It cannot be said, therefore, that the pattern (as an 'object') has been caused by objects or identities before the lens rather its causality lies in light as the only form of difference that makes a difference to the photosensitive surface. This *indexical formation is a corporeal formation* because it is the action of one body (light) on another (photosensitive material), however, its visibility as such a formation depends on, not the fact of indexical formation (all photographs have this in common) but on its separation from the objects that caused it; objects that are not allowed to function as spatial volumes. The objects in the photograph become surfaces (the screen and the paving stones) and it is light rather than space that is, not an a priori form, but the means by which these surfaces become functions. The absence of an overarching space is the condition of possibility for light to lose its identity forming function and to be split into an indexical (corporeal) function and a signifying, narrative, descriptive (incorporeal) function.

1.3 Paintings' Interpretation of Photography's 'News of Difference'

If the two practices are to be thought of as formations in contrapuntal harmony it is this 'disjuncture' of corporeal formations and incorporeal functions that becomes a 'sign' interpreted by Usle's paintings. However, painting cannot repeat the same disjuncture of the corporeal and incorporeal because the relations described in photography depend on its indexical nature and painting structures a different relation of image to index in its materials and processes. *The relation is complicated in painting because the indexical is not a mechanical formation but always on some level gestural* (and therefore not given). For photography to differentiate the corporeal (indexical) and incorporeal (narrative, signifying) light has to lose its identity forming function; what must happen to 'gesture' for it to become the same in painting, in order that it lose its 'identity forming function' as the trace or narrative of *the* subject who painted the picture? It is not enough to put paint on in a mechanical way, however, for 'the subject' is not simply the body whose hands transferred paint as an undetermined quantity, from the pot, onto the brush as a determined amount, to the surface, clearly there is a mechanical aspect to this. *The* subject is the self-conscious subject with an a priori ideal form in mind; a 'memory' of painting that belongs to someone and which provides a blue-print for the painting's development against which successive acts of painting build towards and are measured; whose synthesis has already been regulated by an object of empirical memory ('the desire to see in the new something of the old'[28]). This memory becomes incarnate in painting through a representation of pictorial space (remembered empirical instances rather than relations that 'can only be sensed') which operates as an overarching identity that seeks confirmation by what emerges on the canvas. In this case pictorial space is a

[28] Keith Ansell-Pearson, *Germinal Life*, (London, 1999), p32

metaphor for a subjectivity that recognises in the object the correlate of itself; the identity of the subject that functions as the foundation of our faculties, or Kantian common sense. In order to lose its identity forming function as the trace or narrative of *the* subject who painted it the work (which is tied to that subject through the incremental construction of its surface) must stage a different, non-narrative, distribution of the past, present and future.

This brings us back to the discussion in the introduction and the idea that the 'radically new' as the 'experience of time that imposes itself upon us' is created in conditions in which 'the self shows itself incapable of assuring it own continuity'. This state implies an incomprehensibility which could be put in terms of what Deleuze refers to as an 'object of a fundamental encounter'. In relation to aesthetics and in both the contemporaneous books *The Logic of Sense* and *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze draws attention to Plato's distinction between two kinds of object; those of recognition and those that 'force us to think'. Whereas recognition measures and limits contrary qualities (light/dark, large/small, straight/curved etc) by relating them to an object what Deleuze refers to in *Difference and Repetition* as an object of a fundamental encounter is not really an object but sensible qualities or relations not measured or limited by a concept.

> [*The Republic*] distinguishes two kinds of things: those which do not disturb thought and (as Plato will later say) those which *force* us to think…This something is an object not of recognition but of a fundamental *encounter*…its primary characteristic is that it can only be sensed. In this sense it is opposed to recognition. In recognition, the sensible is not at all that which can only be sensed, but that which bears directly upon the senses in an object which can be recalled, imagined or conceived.[29]

[29] Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, (London, 1997), pp 138-139

In *The Logic of Sense* the dimension of this object of a fundamental encounter is described as that of 'pure becoming'…

…without measure, a veritable becoming-mad, which never rests. It moves in both directions at once. It always eludes the present, causing future and past, more and less, too much and not enough to coincide in the simultaneity of a rebellious matter. [30]

Thus, the object of a fundamental encounter cannot be predicated by the transcendental subject as an actual, permanent standpoint in relation to which qualities would be measured – more or less red, more or less luminous etc. or in relation to which past memories and future hopes could be linked together to form a continuous narrative. This would be to ignore the lesson of the 'paradox of inner sense' and to fall into the trap of a representational image of thought. However, from the point of view of an analysis of painting this presents some significant problems because any reference to the work as a description, a fixing of qualities implies that the object is one of recognition. This is a methodological problem that does point to the need for what Deleuze calls a 'transcendental empiricism'; a method of analysis that can go beyond experience as conceptual recognition and investigate its genetic conditions[31]. In terms of the interests of an artist this is interesting because it dissipates the problem of how theory and practice stand in relation to one another as a general problem. Instead it suggests that 'theory' or philosophical ideas could be productive on a more 'molecular' level orientated towards the problems of practice as they appear at

[30] Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, (London, 1990), p2

[31] 'Aesthetics suffers from a wrenching duality. On one hand, it designates the theory of sensibility as the form of possible experience; in the other hand, it designates the theory of art as the reflection of real experience. For these two meanings to be tied together, the conditions of experience in general must become conditions of real experience; in this case, the work of art would really appear as experimentation' Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, (London, 1990) p260 also discussed in Daniel Smith, 'Deleuze's Theory of Sensation: Overcoming the Kantian Duality' in ed. Paul Patton *Deleuze: A Critical Reader*, (Oxford, 1996), p29

A spare Juan Usle

specific moments or involved in building ‘methodologies-on-demand’ rather than towards developing a critical position fixed for all occasions.

It is in this context that biosemiotics and the model of code-duality are useful analytical tools in relation to what is at stake in this discussion because they provide a way to approach the problem of how formal invention emerges from what appears to be the repetition of formal similarity. In relation to this problem Usle’s painting could be thought to repeat, not a formal category, but a painting-system that dramatises the reciprocal relation between mixtures of corporeal bodies (paint and surface) and incorporeal effects (which are implicated in a notion of pictorial space which is not necessarily depth but a space in which meaning happens). However, how does the repetition of these structural relations produce difference? This can only be accounted for if painting is understood to be an ‘open system’ so that difference is not a matter of comparison within a closed set of alternatives measured as more or less different by an external concept of ‘painting’ but the expression of difference itself. Although this cannot be pointed to in the work the technical aspects of the work can be examined as if they capture the thought that is at work in the painting.

In front of Usle’s work it is still possible to detect the initial surface carefully-prepared with layers of gesso sanded to create a smooth texture that is slightly absorbent. This absorbency ensures that every nuance of hesitantly applied paint is clearly registered. The marks are prevented from being wholly gestural by this very material process and yet they are neither purely formal as they retain an evidently graphic quality. This is reinforced by a picture plane established by bands of paint repeated across the surface. Hence, the explicit facture of paint and its application is given a structural role.

However, despite being ostensibly abstract these pictures are concerned, not with flatness, but with space; although not a pictorial space inhabited by figures. Instead of these two alternatives the paintings investigate the idea of pictorial space as *a problem that constitutes the work of painting itself*. For example, the spatial metaphor cannot unfold these paintings; here is no gestural tension across the surface that would sustain the optical space described by Greenberg nor does the surface allow a semi-figurative space to accommodate semi-figurative form. The insistence on the surface plane by repeating marks or zones across the surface robs the graphic elements of a spatial foundation that would mediate difference. This absence of a representational ground which would determine the limits of what we see as a 'brushstroke' (that being the unit from which the paintings are constructed) means that the brushstroke can function in different ways. It is split into an indexical (corporeal) function which insists on the planarity of the surface and a graphic (incorporeal) function which speaks of its facture. The spatial discontinuity in Usle's painting is not a signified discontinuity as in Fiona Rae's paintings in which there is no effective rupture between the corporeal and the incorporeal: the discontinuous space characteristic of her work bears no vital relation to the corporeal surface which becomes a mere support for signifying 'discontinuity'. On the contrary in Usle's work the discontinuity is not purely signified but it is at the level of its very facture. Thus, it is not really a discontinuity but a disjuncture in which the terms that can be used to describe the 'literal' paint marks and potential illusions or meanings become 'un-grounded' and, rather than being able to fix our experience of the work, these 'terms' become more like differences that can only frequent the surface as incorporeal effects without foundation.

Is this creation of what could be described as 'surface effects' also an incomprehensibility indicative of the 'radically new'? If this disjuncture creates a heterogeneity that makes it impossible to unify our experience of the work then our response could be described as one of incomprehensibility. Thus, in an effort to recognise something in what we see we are forced to reinterpret the past; although as an experience of the 'radically new' this would not be to re-interpret the past as if it were fixed and could be 'read' in different ways ('the clarity of the 'radically new'…is more than a mere reassembling existing elements'[32]). Instead of classifying paintings as different from other paintings by comparing past and present according to a (transcendent) representational concept this involuntary re-interpretation of the past as the experience of the 'radically new' and being 'forced to think') is a transcendental repetition or 're-interpretation' of the past according to the demands of the present.

Following the logic of the biosemiotic model, the actuality of painting is the creation of a 'new form of sensibility' according to its specific materials and processes, not the representation of the artist's intentions as if those materials and processes were simply instrumental. According to the temporal conundrum of code-duality, the future is not determined by a plan or aim or by the environment but is necessarily unpredictable. In this case any supposed plan or aim informed by conceptions and memories of what painting is are external to the work and must bear an indirect relation to it. As a form of life these aspects; memory/'past' and environment/'present', are not identities that precede the work but become actualised in the genesis of the work. It might seem contradictory to suggest that 'memory'/'past is formed in the present but this difficulty demonstrates the simultaneity of "vertical" and "horizontal" semiosis. The "vertical" or

[32] Keith Ansell-Pearson, *Germinal Life*, (London, 1999), p32

digital ‘memory’ is not a memory of instances that could be reproduced (the memory of various encounters with paintings from the past, for example, stored in the form of DNA, waiting to be unravelled) but synthesises/is the synthesis of existential moments in a “horizontal” semiosis. Thus, it is the form in which the ‘past’ is formed alongside the present and by which that past also accompanies every present as a synthesis of those past presents, so that the present becomes a reservoir of future interpretations. The ‘memory of painting’ is thus not fixed and representable but a past repeated differently in the present; interpreted at the same time as it interprets its environment.

In making a related point in his discussion on Cinema Christian Kerslake puts it in the following terms:

> Because the content of each present cannot simply be delimited as soon as the moment has passed, and because it therefore remains open for future reinterpretation, we must assume that the past is somehow formed ‘alongside’ the present: for otherwise we are left without a measure for determining how the past remains *that* past. Bergson’s paradoxical resolution, according to Deleuze, is that ‘no present would ever pass were it not past “at the same time” as it is present…The past is contemporaneous with the present that it *was*. In other words, each actual present is somehow doubled by a virtual ‘shadow’ of itself, which enables it to be re-actualised as the past it will have been.[33]

As Kerslake goes on to point out this ‘double inscription’ of past and present is not experienced as such in normal circumstances when our attention is directed towards the future. Could it be said that we encounter this double inscription as an encounter with the work, as a form of life, whose attention is not directed towards the future but towards self-formation or towards life itself? Could this encounter also be described as the experience of time that ‘imposes itself upon us’; as if what we encounter is the experience of time as the ‘pure and empty form’ which synthesises past empirical

[33] Christian Kerslake, ‘Transcendental Cinema’ in *Radical Philosophy* 130 (March/April 2005), p14

moments but whose synthesis we cannot recognise as our own (the transcendental self-consciousness of the fractured I).

It is important to note that this is not the experience of a universal transcendent realm but is 'local' to the encountered experience of the specific painting. It is as if what we experience is the action of, what Keith Faulkner describes as, the 'third element' which internalises the difference between existential moments that differ in time;

> In every involuntary memory, in every resonance, there are always three terms: the two real terms differing in time and the third element that internalises the difference between the two… *an internalised difference* makes the two real elements coexist in time'[34].

This third term is a complicated or local essence which Faulkner distinguishes from Platonic essence. The aim of the next is to explore the idea that Usle's paintings think an anti-Platonism.

[34] Keith Faulkner, 'Deleuze and Essence' in *Pli* 16 (2005), p135

Chapter 2: The Simulacral Surface

2.1 The 'Concrete' Surface

As the final chapter will discuss in more detail, according to Deleuze and Guattari the technical plane of organisation ascends into the aesthetic plane of composition in modern painting[35]. Where does this technical plane begin? In practical terms a painting begins with a surface. The surface is both a field limited by its edges (size, proportion, orientation), and a flat plane of a certain texture which will, to a large extent, dictate how paint behaves when applied to it and so its preparation reveals something of what is intended for the painting. Even when the priority is to create a spatial illusion (a van Eyck self-portrait, for example) and the role of the surface is to support the illusion, its physicality has the potential to be highly significant as it sets up initial parameters for the process that follows, in its luminosity or hue for example. (This is very unlike that of the photograph whose surface is purely receptive and does not accrue physically; its thickness always remains the same.) For modern painting the role of the physical surface has sometimes become an explicit concern. Morris Louis, for example, made the most of the absorbency of raw canvas by soaking and staining to leave very little body of paint and maximise its luminosity as an experimentation into the limits of painting when paint becomes coextensive with the picture surface.

[35] Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*,(London, 1994), p193

Sone Que Revelabas (1997-2002) (*Pictured Dreams*).

Usle's paintings begin with layers of gesso that fill in the weave of the canvas and when sanded down this produces a slightly absorbent smooth surface. Such a surface can go one of two ways: it can be simply covered over and become an invisible

support for an image or it can intervene in the painting's development. The surface becomes effective in Usle's paintings because the slight absorbency registers every nuance of consistency and handling. This can be seen most clearly in a series of paintings called *Sone Que Revelabas* (1997-2002) (*Pictured Dreams*). These paintings demonstrate something of the structure of Usle's paintings which depends upon the repetition of horizontal and/or vertical bands which reinforce the planarity of the surface and also fracture that plane. As the brush is drawn horizontally across the surface each hesitation is registered as a feint line when paint is reabsorbed by the fibres of the brush rather than drawn down by the absorbency of the surface and this hesitancy produces a vertical axis of sorts (i.e. a quasi-grid results). The absorbency is just enough to register such a slight change in pressure but not so much that the resolution of the brush disappears as it would if the canvas were raw and the paint were drawn into the surface down to the edges of the stain. Why are these technical characteristics significant?

> It is a mistake to think that the painter works on a white surface…everything he has in his head or around him is already in the canvas…before he begins work…He does not paint in order to reproduce on the canvas an object functioning as a model; he paints on images that are already there, in order to produce a canvas whose functioning will reverse the relation between model and copy.[36]

This is a quotation from Deleuze's book on Bacon and it points to a sort of reversal of the orthodoxy that thinks the direction of the works' genesis from nothing (the white

[36] Deleuze, *Logic of Sensation*, (London, 2003), p86

canvas) to something (the finished work). Bergson would argue[37] that this is founded on the false assumption that the 'nothing' of the white surface is less than the 'something' the finished painting; whereas the reality is of two orders that are different in kind.

> The idea of nonbeing appears when, instead of grasping the different realities that are indefinitely substituted for one another, we muddle them together in the homogeneity of a Being in general, which can only be opposed to nothingness, be related to nothingness. The idea of the possible appears when, instead of grasping each existent in its novelty, the whole of existence is related to a preformed element, from which everything is supposed to emerge by simple "realization".[38]

The first quotation implies that the ground which begins the painting is one that must allow the painter to empty the canvas of its clichés but this cannot be done without first meeting those things '[the artist] has in his head or around him'. The second quotation implies that what is at stake in this process is the creation of a different order; not the realisation of possibilities according to a 'preformed element' but a painting that could function in order to 'reverse the relation between model and copy'. Together the implication is that the reversal is not something that could happen in an abstract way but that it must be an embodied process. It is within the context of this proposal that the technical aspects of Usle's work take on its significance.

In his essay 'The Re-enchantment of the Concrete' the neuroscientist Francisco Varela makes the case that 'cognition consists not of representations but of *embodied action.'*[39] Varela points to a paradigm shift emerging from within the cognitive sciences which amounts to a reversal of the belief that understanding is a logical progression upwards from the particular and concrete to the general and abstract. From within this research there is a growing belief that 'the proper units of knowledge are primarily *concrete*,

[37] Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, (New York, 1991), p17
[38] Ibid, p19-20
[39] Varela, 'The Re-enchantment of the Concrete' in *Incorporations* eds. Crary and Kwinter, (New York, 1992), p336

embodied, incorporated, lived'[40]. This research suggests that the mind is not a unified and homogenous system but a society of agencies, of abstract processes or functions; a '*disunified, heterogeneous collection of processes.*' Varela is interested in the moment of reciprocity; when one sub-process takes the lead and when something concrete appears, a moment that he calls the 'present-centredness of the concrete'. This creative act of cognition happens in response to what Varela describes as 'a breakdown' where we have to move from one "microworld" to the next. A "microworld" is a situation for which we develop a "microidentity" or readiness-for-action; when we experience the immediate present and what it demands of us. The example he gives is of walking down the street with nothing in mind when suddenly the realisation of a lost wallet directs attention to finding it as quickly as possible; all perception is directed toward that end. Such situations force the living system to find a way to get to the next moment drawing on its own resources; in other words an (autonomous) creative moment that happens only in relation to the concrete world. These transitions from one microworld/microidentity to the next which we encounter constantly are clearly embodied and consist of the perceiver and her/his local situation which changes according to the perceiver's activity. Accordingly, Varela understands that there is no pre-given world which the perceiver 'recovers', instead perception is guided by the perceiver's actions in the same way that for biosemiotics an organism develops, not in a pre-given world but in a world it constructs for itself according to what is of relevance to it.

> Reality is not cast as a given: it is perceiver dependent, not because the perceiver "constructs" it at whim, but because what counts as a relevant world is inseparable from the structure of the perceiver".[41]

[40] Ibid, p320
[41] Ibid, p330

Studies of brain activity have shown that during such 'breakdowns' there is a rich dynamics involving the society of agents which is not accessible to consciousness but out of this chaotic activity specific patterns of activity emerge when the living being is exposed to the stimulus several times; dynamic oscillations selectively bind a set of neurons that constitute the basis for perception.

'[Perception] appears in this light not as some kind of mapping of external features, but as a creative form of enacting significance on the basis of the animal's embodied history. Most pertinent of all, this enaction happens at the hinge between one behavioural moment and the next, via fast oscillation between neuronal populations capable of giving rise to coherent patterns.'[42]

Varela makes the point that oscillations do not happen simply in response to an external stimulus but appear and disappear spontaneously in different places in the brain involving 'sensory interpretation, motor action, cognitive expectations, emotional tonality…' in other words the distinct agents are involved in competitive yet co-operative activity in response to the situation until one 'cognitive subnetwork' becomes more prevalent and '*becomes the behavioural mode for the next cognitive moment'*. What is significant is that this dynamic activity is never accessible to empirical experience once perception is formed and yet it underpins all processes of perception and cognition.

'…the world we know is not pregiven; it is, rather, *enacted* through our history of structural coupling. The temporal hinges that articulate enaction are rooted in the fast noncognitive dynamics wherein a number of alternative microworlds are activated; these hinges are the source of both common sense and creativity in cognition.'[43]

[42] Ibid, p333
[43] Ibid, p336

Fisuras con Vertigo (2001-2002)

This suggests that if creativity depends upon ‘breakdowns’ (the moment when ‘something concrete and specific appears’) then, rather than emerging through an abstract understanding, to ‘meet and to empty the canvas of its cliches’ (as a creative act) cannot be a negation of something but a response to a ‘breakdown’ during which something concrete and specific appears. It is according to this logic that the ground becomes significant in Usle’s paintings. In its sensitivity to the handling and consistency of paint it might be imagined that the surface has been prepared in order to offer itself up as the ground for a play of forms characteristic of the modernist idiom: a sensitised flat surface which accommodates a communion of forms but whose integrity as a flat plane is always under threat from the illusion of depth. As an a priori condition of unity, the modernist surface can only support certain kinds of forms: geometric divisions consistent with the essential flatness of the surface and forms that communicate within a dynamic equilibrium of formal values; hence the importance of ‘touch’ in lyrical abstract painting as the means of generating variety and expressive sensitivity. All local effects created by material and technical aspects of paint are subject to the overall or ‘all-over’ effect. Rather than sustaining local interest, such effects only register if they produce a difference within the repertoire of constitutive forms; forms generated and organised only as parts in relation to a whole (presented through the ideal form of flatness). According to this condition, any reference or association with what is not purely formal undermines the painting by introducing depth.

It is clear in front of the work (if not in reproduction) that the surface of a painting such as *Fisuras con Vertigo* (2001-2002) operates very differently. Like the *Sone Que Revelabas* series the surface registers variations in consistency and handling but not as

a unifying plane that mediates the connectivity of forms. Although the application of paint is explicit, and certain marks look as though they have been executed with speed and spontaneity, the structure of the painting does not depend on the dynamic equilibrium sustained by gesture. The collection of marks adds up to something, not exactly a form (because there is no mediating ground that would relate it to another form as being in some way different) but a localised 'singularity' created by the specific combination of material and technical aspects of paint on the surface. Connectivity happens, however, but not across the surface. Paradoxically, it is as though everything happens in the same plane despite the over-painting, for example, which could create the illusion of depth in a different context. Rather than articulating spatial relativity (or figurative negation), the over-painting in *Fisuras con Vertigo* participates in a different system in which thickness of paint; its transparency, opaqueness and effacement has structural importance. Not within a representational system of illusion, however, whereby this thickness can only signify relative qualities or in which it forms an expressive vocabulary of formal differences, but as material which blocks light in one place or allows light to pass in another or which is the saturation of colour (in the red lines, for example). (In this respect the material acts like the surfaces in Usle's photographs; as an apparatus of capture rather than as image.)

Light is everywhere but as intensity, as luminosity, not as a matter of tonality. Reference to luminosity rather than the creation of luminosity can be seen to structure less materially complex paintings such as Fiona Rae's *Night Vision*[44], for example. The title seems to allude to the darkness of the ground interrupted by slits of light with gestural marks floating in front as possibly partially visible forms. Whatever the

[44] At the time of writing this painting is on display at Tate Modern in the same room as Usle's *Bilingual.*

references the significant point is that light is signified (as an artificial source or as an absence) and the material surface is an inert support for a play of images and references. To the contrary, the material surface of Usle's painting seems to be registered in local material and technical events not literally as a continuous physical texture but as a plane that unifies (but not totalises) what is happening. In other words, this becomes a 'concrete' surface rather than an a priori ideal of flatness as guarantor of value, or ignored as a mere support for imagery. It is as if the process of "meeting and emptying the canvas of its clichés" depends upon, in Varela's terms, *the appearance of the surface as a 'concrete' surface.* A process that, because leaving clichés behind necessitates meeting them, cannot be one of negation, transformation, deformation or mutilation which are 'still too intellectual', must involve 'the kinds of experience that come from having a body with various sensorimotor capacities…' it has to be carried out in the materiality of painting. In other words, if we follow Varela's argument in more detail; the concrete as a creative act of cognition (not re-cognition) emerges during a 'breakdown' that marks the transition from one microworld/microidentity to the next (brought about by perceiver-guided action) which could be compared to the philosophical terms of Ansell Pearson's discussion of the 'radically new' as a 'new way of thinking' which emerges from an 'initial incomprehensibility'.

How is this appearance of the surface as 'concrete' implicated in paintings' repetition of photography's difference (the break of the causal link between corporeal formations and incorporeal effects)? Deleuze draws attention to the contemporary environment in which

[w]e are besieged by photographs that are illustrations, by newspapers that are narrations, by cinema-images, by television-images. There are psychic clichés just as there are physical clichés –ready-made perceptions, memories, phantasms.[45]

To a certain extent this is a discussion about how Usle's painting creates a new way of sensing a world that 'besieges us with photographs'. The model of the contrapuntal relation suggests the possibility that Usle has met the cliché of the photograph that 'impose(s) [itself] upon sight and rule(s) over the eye completely'[46] and he has rejected this cliché through the creativity of materials and processes specific to painting; specifically the appearance of the surface as 'concrete'. The 'concrete' must not be mistaken for a supposedly literal physical surface and materials because for Varela there is no pre-given, perceiver-independent world (of painting substances as much as anything else). 'Reality is not cast as a given; it is perceiver dependent, not because the perceiver "constructs" it at whim, but because what counts as a relevant world is inseparable from the structure of the perceiver.'[47] The specificity of painting's materials comes into play in Usle's work, not because of technical aspects per se, but because of an 'assemblage' through which the surface appears as 'concrete' (which is a very different conception of the surface as a de-materialised a priori ideal of flatness as guarantor of value or ignored as a mere support for imagery).

However, how does the appearance of the surface as 'concrete' participate in the idea that the paintings repeat a disjuncture of corporeal formations and incorporeal effects? This can only be argued by taking into account the process by which cognitive structures emerge as being constituted historically. During a "breakdown", which actualizes the birth of the concrete and acts as a hinge between one micro-

[45] Deleuze, *The Logic of Sensation*, (London,2003) p87
[46] Ibid, p91
[47] Varela, 'The Re-enchantment of the Concrete' in *Incorporations* eds. Crary and Kwinter, (New York, 1992), p330

identity/micro-world and the next, there is a process of 'selective binding' as a result of a history of repeated stimulations. Rather than activity being a simple mechanical motor response to an external stimulus it is created by the animal based on its embodied history.

> …knowledge appears more and more as built from small domains, that is, microworlds and microidentites…such microworlds are not coherent or integrated into some enormous totality regulating the veracity of the smaller parts. It is more like an unruly conversational interaction: the very presence of this unruliness allows a cognitive moment to come into being according to the systems' constitution and history. The very heart of this autonomy, the rapidity of the agent's behaviour selection, is forever lost to the cognitive system.[48]

According to the biosemiotic model, this is a response to perceptual signs not to causal impulses. As Paul Bains discusses in his article on the work of Uexkull, this 'semiosis' is understood differently in the species-specific human 'Umwelt' because the human animal 'understands, the incorporeal sign relation as distinct from its terms'[49] (an important idea that I will return to in the final chapter). Thus, the emergence of the surface as 'concrete' could also bring with it an awareness of the incorporeal sign relation as distinct from the terms (of cognition). It may be argued, though, that the 'presentcentredness of the concrete'[50] contradicts the idea of the 'radically new' as the experience of time that 'imposes itself upon us' (if that is also 'pure becoming, with its capacity to elude the present'[51]). However, if the emergence of the concrete is cognition and not re-cognition in an important way the new cognition implies a 'local temporal perspective' (from which the self re-codes the past) rather than a 'transcendental

[48] Ibid, p336
[49] Paul Bains, 'Umwelten', in *Semiotica*,134 – ¼ (2001), p148
[50] Varela, 'The Re-enchantment of the Concrete' in *Incorporations* eds. Crary and Kwinter, (New York, 1992), p325
[51] Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, (London, 1990), p2

standpoint that I can take on my own past or future…to form the story of one life'. [52] This lack of position (of enunciation) within a fixed narrative means that if language is implicated in that event of cognition (as a 'mobile' incorporeal sign relation) the embodied history of that event, as a process of semiosis, is also open to re-coding and thus detached from the immediate terms by which it was given.

> It is language which fixes the limits…but it is language as well which transcends the limits and restores them to the infinite equivalence of an unlimited becoming.[53]

In the next section my aim is to explore the implications of this 'disjuncture' by making the paradoxical claim that the 'concrete' surface is also a surface which is 'simulacral'.

2.2 The Simulacral Surface

The life of a painting begins with a surface and, heeding Deleuze's warning that '[it] is a mistake to think that the painter works on a white surface…', it is the ground upon which clichés are projected and (potentially) 'whose functioning will reverse the relations between model and copy'. If not, then the surface operates as no more than the plane upon which an image is projected in figurative-type painting or, in the case of abstract painting, it becomes idealised as the a priori condition of unity and therefore necessarily an explicit concern. In the case of the latter, when the development of a painting is conditioned by maintaining "flatness" against the threat of illusion, the surface operates as a ground through which qualities of colour and line and touch and so on can form relations; it provides an a priori foundation that unifies difference in the pursuit of purely aesthetic effects. In other words the flat picture plane acts as the

[52] Christian Kerslake, 'Transcendental Cinema', in *Radical Philosophy*, 130 March/April 2005, p12
[53] Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, (London, 1990), p2-3

guarantor of a space claimed to be 'optical' as an a priori form. How might such an a priori condition prevent the reversal of relations between model and copy? Implicit in Deleuze's remarks is an anti-Platonism which he sees exemplified in Bacon's paintings (and in relation to which the quotation was taken). The idea that an insistence on the planarity of the canvas could express a Platonic hierarchy is sustainable if the opticality which it preconditions is understood to be a 'copy' of an original 'model'; the quality of unity[54]. Put in terms of Deleuze's exposition of the Platonic hierarchy a purely optical space is the 'pretender' as it participates in the quality of being unified which is 'given out' by the intelligible Form or Idea of unity.

> One could express it in the following manner as well: the foundation, the object aspired to, and the pretender; the father, the daughter, and the fiancé. The foundation is that which possesses something in a primary way; it relinquishes it to be participated in, giving it to the suitor, who possess only secondarily and insofar as he has been able to pass the test of the foundation. The participated is what the unparticipated possesses primarily. The unparticipated gives it out for participation, it offers the participated to the participants…[55]

This a priori model of unity stands in the way of leaving clichés behind precisely because, if we accept Varela's insights, the creativity he associates with the 'appearance of the concrete' (a creativity necessary to overcome the insistence of the cliché) as embodied action contradicts this Platonic hierarchy according to which sensible appearances only have value it terms of how good they are at copying the model of an original essence that is their necessary foundation. Just as Varela argued that there is within the cognitive sciences a growing conviction that cognitive ability is created in concrete, embodied situations rather than, according to the dominant tradition of European thought (the application of abstract and general concepts to concrete

[54] Yve-Alain Bois makes a similar point in his introduction to *Formless: A User's Guide* where he argues that the verticality of the modernist picture plane which addresses the viewer in a "purely visual" way conceives of art that 'gathers the perceiver together around the core of its ideal unity…', p25
[55] Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, (London, 1990), p255

situations) Deleuze's project of overturning Platonism gives primacy to the encounter with what we are unable to recognise (the object of a fundamental encounter) which necessarily implies a concrete and embodied situation.

In his essay 'Anti-Platonism and Art' Paul Patton gives an account of Deleuze's claim that "the task of modern philosophy has been defined; to overturn Platonism". As Patton explains overturning Platonism is integral to Deleuze's critique of the representational conception of thought undertaken in *Difference and Repetition*; which was, in his own words, his first real attempt 'to do philosophy'. Against the representational image of thought, which involves the application of existing concepts to sense experience, thought is conceived of as an essentially creative activity; 'thought as the creation of concepts, where concepts themselves are understood as existing only in immediate relation with forces and intensities outside thought'.[56]

The conception of thought as creative cannot proceed from an inversion of the metaphysical hierarchy of Platonism, however, because a structural hierarchy would still remain as a representational ground for thought. Over-turning Platonism makes use of Platonism itself by seizing an opportunity within Plato's method of selecting and 'of distinguishing the "thing" itself from its images, the original from the copy, the model from the simulacrum.' In contrast to Aristotle's categorisation of objects according to genus and species Plato's method is to select lineages, what Deleuze calls 'a dialectic of rivalry' and not of contradiction. Whereas Aristotelian categories specify difference within a conceptual order from the largest (genera) to the smallest (species) within the less systematic organisation of Platonism there is difference in kind (pure difference)

[56] Paul Patton, 'Anti-Platonism and Art' in *Gilles Deleuze and the Theatre of Philosophy*, Eds Boundas & Olkowski, p145

between founded and unfounded claimants 'or between things themselves and their simulacra'. Over-turning Platonism seizes upon this crack within Platonism which threatens to undermine its representational foundation. The simulacrum, as the unfounded claimant appears to be the same as the well-founded claimant, undermines the representational structure of model and copy by making it impossible to distinguish between the two. The simulacrum cannot fall within a category because it is not a degraded copy of something else, rather it challenges the structure of a fixed and regulated world. Patton details Plato's distinction in the *Sophist* between "likenesses" (copies) and "semblances" (simulacra):

> The former truly resemble the original, as in the example of life-size portraiture…The latter only appear to be likenesses to the unfavourably placed spectator…The class of such semblances would include, for example, sculptures of colossal size, which involve distortions of the true proportions so that the figure appears correct to the observer…Copies represent the Forms because they resemble them…By contrast, the simulacrum "is built upon a disparity or upon a difference, it internalizes a dissimilarity (Deleuze 1990, p258)…In sum, simulacra produce an effect of resemblance, but only on the basis of internal differences between themselves and the object resembled. With simulacra, the priority of identity and sameness over difference, which characterizes the world of representation, is reversed.[57]

As an example of the simulacrum (a 'semblance' in Plato's terms) the colossal sculpture becomes the image of the original figure but only from a certain *embodied* perspective, and it can only achieve this because its internal relations are different from those of the figure. As Deleuze says: 'This simulacrum includes the differential point of view; and the observer becomes a part of the simulacrum itself, which is transformed and deformed by his point of view.'[58] The appearance of the same is an impression dependent upon an embodied position which replaces a universal and fixed point of reference. The world of representational thought, in which difference is defined in

[57] Ibid,p145
[58] Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, (London, 1990), p258

relation to the same (the presence of internal, essential relations of resemblance between model and copy) is replaced by a world in which there is no ultimate foundation or original identity. In this world of simulacra things are produced dynamically, not by demonstrating sameness as a copy of essential internal relations based on an original model, but through the differential relations entered into.

> By rising to the surface, the simulacrum makes the Same and the Similar, the model and the copy, fall under the power of the false (phantasm). It renders the order of participation, the fixity of distribution, the determination of the hierarchy impossible. It establishes the world of nomadic distributions and crowned anarchies. Far from being a new foundation, it engulfs all foundations, it assures a universal breakdown…but as a joyful and positive event, as an unfounding…'[59]

How can this idea of the surface as simulacral be demonstrated when by definition the simulacrum cannot be contained by representation? Perhaps all that can be done is to point to certain effects of the simulacrum. How, for example, does the idea of a simulacral surface relate to the logic of a disjuncture of corporeal formations and incorporeal effects? In order to answer this question I want to develop the idea that I introduced at the end of the previous section where I suggested that the emergence of the surface as 'concrete' brought with it an awareness of the incorporeal sign relation as distinct from the terms of cognition that that emergence implies. I also suggested that, as an event of the 'radically new' the history of 'structural coupling' (as a 'past') inscribed in the event becomes involved in the play of mobile incorporeal sign relations which implies the disconnection of 'gesture' from the narrativised subject as cause.

In an essay on Deleuze and cinema Thomas Wall discusses the time-image in terms that might apply to the argument.

[59] Ibid, p263

Cinema 2 describes the recovery of cinema's lost 'secret', the direct presentation of that to which only language, not perception, is adequate: time…As the image is not the presentation of an action 'what happens next' no longer matters, and what which is directly presented is not even, 'stricto sensu', seen. The sensory–motor link is broken and action becomes irrelevant. Movement no longer 'measures' time but is folded into time. The difficulty is this: the time-image is as much read as it is seen/heard. That which is presented is the metamorphosis of the perceptible into the legible. More precisely, that which is presented is the metamorphosis of the perceived into a pure 'given-to-be-read.'[60]

Rather than breaking a sensory-motor link my argument is that the appearance of the 'concrete surface' (as a moment of cognition) in local technical events undermines the spatial continuity that would ground a narrative position from which incorporeal signs could limit corporeal formations in relation to itself.

Instead of a seen/said there will be presented strange, not-yet-actual entities born of familiarity but now autonomous signs of themselves: doubles and simulacra….Movement subordinated to time does not move into depths but instead flattens perception into a milieu.[61]

In other words 'surface effects' (as the play of incorporeal sign *relations*) are produced as 'flattened' appearances or simulacra. Usle's paintings certainly appear to be abstract paintings; they are seemingly 'flat', there is no attempt to disguise the painted surface, there is the appearance of gesture and an approximately geometric division of the surface. But on the other hand, it is as if Usle has managed the problem of composition as if he were painting figurative paintings where 'objects' are positioned according to the virtual order of a perspectival grid and where to place things is, to a certain extent, given with no pressure to invent on the spot, which is to say invention takes place away

[60] T C Wall, 'The Time-Image: Deleuze, Cinema and Perhaps Language' in *Film-Philosophy* Vol 8 No. 23, July 2004, p2
[61] Ibid, p4

from the surface as an extension. As I will discuss in chapter 4 composition presents a problem for modernist abstract painting because it brings with it the threat of spatial illusion. The point I want to make is that as well as appearing to be abstract Usle's work also mimics figurative painting in that the 'objects' which frequent the surface are seemingly combined with the freedom of objects arranged in a still-life, as if the relations are given by a context which 'contains' them and in which their individuality has the independence of real and specific things. It could be that this independence is due to the surface which 'intervenes' in the local, technical events (as real and concrete) rather than unifying pictorial events as an a priori condition of flatness to mediate difference. Instead every pictorial event seems to happen in the same plane, by which I mean that every pictorial event happens through the surface or it could be said that the surface happens through the events that bring it into being; surface as threshold; a *relation* with the outside. So, in a sense Usle's painting simulate moments of both abstract and figurative painting by destroying the representational ground of the external fixed vantage point (which applies equally to abstraction's ideal unity of the purely visual as to perspective's external eye) that would determine the causal relation between corporeal bodies and incorporeal effects. The aim of the final section is to explore in more detail how these 'appearances' of the 'abstract' and 'figurative' are produced by a mechanism that allows this 'ungrounding' to come about.

2.3 A Simulacral 'Machine'

One of the most intriguing and delightful aspects of Usle's paintings is this sense of compositional freedom described above, although this is also not signified as expressive freedom in terms of spontaneity and the negation of available codes and conventions. The lesson of code-duality offers a very different distribution of 'conventions' and chance so far as the organism interprets its environment in the formation of self, rather than the possibility of the expression of a self already formed. However, where does the artist stand in relation to such a self-forming system or 'autopoietic machine'? This sense of freedom is the sense that Usle is trying to do something else rather than create an image; something that involves losing himself (not in the sense of losing conscious control in order to find the more 'authentic' self of his unconscious for that would be to replace one ground with another, as the ground of spontaneity, for example), but in the sense of losing a position fixed within the horizontal line of time (and experiencing time as it 'imposes itself upon us'?). This involves moving from point to point in the painting process but not organised into a narrative sequence. Rather the points are a series of synthetic moments, so to speak, so that each point includes within it the previous point only to begin again. The suggestion is that this happens when the materials lose associations with 'abstract' ideas and emerge as 'concrete' in the embodied action of painting; a process that involves, according to Varela, "breakdown" (chaos) as well as the system's constitution and *history*. In the sense that this happens in the context of the painting, painting operates to create cognition as an 'autopoietic machine'.[62] Because cognition

[62] A point that will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter. Also see Maturana and Varela, *Autopoiesis and Cognition*, (Dortrecht, 1980), p77-78

Welcome to the Eye

Is there an image of *Bilongo?Odo-Oda?*

cannot pre-cede itself (in which case it becomes the act of recognition) it is as if Usle were pursuing something that is not an 'output' (i.e. the image) but something that works to produce the image. It is as if this were paradoxically an incorporeal aim; not an aim that would represent an exterior world but to 'overturn' the representational (the 'verbalisable') so that the incorporeal inserts itself into the corporeal in terms of effectivity rather than representation; so that the painted lines in, for example, *Welcome to the Eye* do not mark a spatial position or represent a spatial form but *say* thickness, luminosity, gesture (rather than just being thick, luminous or gestural). So it is there seems to be a contradiction: material must lose its associations and emerge as 'concrete' but must be sought indirectly as an 'incorporeal aim'.

However, recalling the discussion at the end of chapter 1, if we think of the emergence of the concrete from the process of 'structural coupling' as the action of, what Keith Faulkner describes as, the 'third element' which internalises the difference between existential moments that differ in time; then we can also think of the incorporeal 'aim' in the same way; i.e. not spoken from a fixed point in time and space but as an infinitive in which difference is internalised ("becoming green" rather than it is green).[63] As such this 'aim' cannot be a re-description of a memory; it is not attached to a representation but it must be 'felt' (as the internalised difference in the material; as bodily sensation?). One of the aspects of the 'freedom' with which the paintings are made is that the corporeality of the material is given a structural role. For example, Usle uses the drip in many of his paintings; it mutates a gestural line, or a contour or it forms an image as in *Bilongo*. The boundary of the drip is formed by a natural meniscus and the angle of the surface as it dried; it forms indirectly not as a result of a direct and wilful act. The drip

[63] I am alluding to Deleuze' discussion in *The Logic of Sense*,pp4-7);' " incorporeal" entities…are not living presents, but infinitives…', p5

is a corporeal formation in the sense that it is the action of bodies on one another; the liquid paint picked up by the brush touches the surface which draws it down; the liquid flows according to surface tension, its own viscosity and the force of gravity. Or, in *Oda-Oda* the black 'drip-formations' are like gatherings on a surface, sedimentations, falling or sliding things on a window pane etc. However, this is to describe and compare the painted image with something remembered or imagined and in doing so we are selecting certain aspects of the image and representing but not *attributing.*

In expressing the noncorporeal attribute, and by that token attributing it to the body, one is not representing or referring but *intervening* in a way; it is a speech act. [64]

It is important to note that the painting is not what is corporeal and what we say about it incorporeal rather the reciprocal presupposition of corporeal and incorporeal are structured by the work; encountered as mode of thought.

What we must determine is not an origin but points of intervention or insertion in the framework of the reciprocal presupposition of the two forms. Both form of content and form of expression are inseparable from a movement of deterritorialisation that carries them away. Both expression and content are more or less deterritorialised, relatively deterritorialised, according to the particular state of their form.[65]

It is as if the painting process is one in which the mixtures of corporeal bodies lose their literal incorporeal representations in a synthetic rather than narrative process. This does not happen because literal marks begin to look like something figurative but

[64] Deleuze, *A Thousand Plateaus,* (London, 1992), p86
[65] Ibid, p87

Une Etoile caresse le sein d'une negresse

because the process of painting actualises the virtual past differently at each point of synthesis.

To explore this further a connection between Usle's painting and the work of Miro could be made (this might seem obvious, not least because they are both Spanish but also because both painters work could be characterised as 'figural' abstraction). Rejecting the general, causal idea of 'influence' the connection could be thought of in the terms of discussion introduced so far so that Usle's work repeats an 'essence' of Miro's work (whilst also differentiating photography and the empirical memory of Miro's paintings as significant 'environments'). In an MA research paper I discussed Miro's painting *Une Etoile caresse le sein d'une negresse* in terms of Barthes essay on Bataille's novel *The Story of the Eye*. I spoke about the painting in terms of different functions articulated by different forms of inscription through the texture of the surface: borrowing Barthes' idea of a structure in which two metaphoric chains are crossed over and meaning from one transferred to the other metonymically; to 'drain the metaphor and produce the sense of the novel', the argument substituted the fluid and spherical eye for the line and surface of inscription which, I argued, created two heterogeneous series of functions which determined each other reciprocally (writing, diagrammatic, formal) to create a play of difference 'linear/planar', literal/metaphorical, writing/painting, black/white, open/closed form/, contintuous/discontinuous, intelligible/experiential, conceptual/perceptual'[66] and the sense of the painting. From the twenties Miro had written in paint on the surface of his canvases which, as my essay argued, was a problematising structural component of the paintings rather than an inscription that privileged reading and comprehension

[66] C Ferguson, Unpublished seminar paper, Chelsea College are Art and Design, 1995

Mecanismo Gramatical (1995-1996)

(which has no dynamic relation to its necessary, corporeal surface). The relations between the two heterogeneous series of line and surface were understood to cross-over and change in relation to one another so that the play of difference created the sense of the painting in the destruction of the binary opposition of line and surface.

Although there is no writing as such in Usle's work this analysis is relevant because it tries to demonstrate a non-narrative construction that says something about how it is dynamic relations and not the terms themselves which create the sense of the work; relations that must be effectuated by the corporeal bodies in which they subsist. For example, *Mecanismo Gramatical* (1995-1996) is constructed from a play of different functions. The white 'figure' is also a white ground for it is distinguished from a grey surround; not drawn as a positive shape but left over as a negative space. It is incomplete on both sides at the edges and becomes a surface that is 'scribbled' on in black. The scribbling is not exactly drawing, not exactly aimless; it is not exactly spatial but it is graphic and so signifies meaning without meaning. The blue shape also functions ambiguously; the colour implies a spatial form (in comparison to the black inscription) but the ground that registers in the brushstroke flattens it out.

The white figure/ground is, however, a sort of pseudo figure because it masquerades as the centre of attention; as a figure in a figurative painting, but there is no depth to support it. Equally the pseudo figure allows the painting to become free of a modernist all-overness, not ironically in the way Fiona Rae's paintings do by representing discontinuity, but through a multiplicity of functionings. The pseudo figure is not sustained within a spatial hierarchy, however, not least because the inscription/surface of inscription relation is reversed towards the bottom of the painting. The repeated

squares re-enforce the planarity of the surface. Each is different but this is a signified, not a spatial difference; a sort of key which codifies a hidden meaning according to a pattern of horizontal and vertical lines of different colours rather than a graphic exposition. The white lines that connect each square to the white figure/ground aren't scribbled or graphic but diagrammatic. Importantly the play of different functions gives the painting its sense of (compositional) freedom because the role of different elements is not determined by a purely spatial function which means, for example, that an element can function graphically and be placed arbitrarily. In other words the structure of the painting allows different elements to participate in different functions simultaneously; not in a structure of either/or but as multiplicities. Therefore, it would be a mistake to think that the discontinuity implied by combining different visual codes removes a representational ground because the act of coding or communication in its different forms would remain as a ground (and distributes its relations of difference). Rather it is heterogeneous relations that differentiate functions to destroy any foundation. It is as if Usle understands the surface as a multiplicity of functions: the photographic surface of immobilisation, the mobilising surface of inscription, the surface that captures illusion: mirror, window, picture. Usle's paintings problematise what can be seen so that the action that took place opens up connections not closes them down. This amounts to a methodological reversal in so far as what we can see is where we begin, not where we end up.

Chapter 3: The Figural

3.1 Individuation and the Autopoietic 'Machine'

Towards the being of chapter 2 I quoted from Deleuze's book on Bergson to make the point that the finished painting is not simply the endpoint of a gradual process of development which moves in the direction of less to more as if the finished work is the realisation of 'a preformed element'. Instead what I tried to show in that chapter was that the work is the creation of a different order; in the same way that the life of the living organism cannot be a matter of degree. In so far as the work of art is experienced as a form of life it is an 'individual' that has unity and a specific mode of functioning and, as an autopoietic system, an internal system of organisation.

> Thus ontogeny is both an expression of the individuality of living systems and the way through which this individuality is realized. As a process, ontogeny, then, is the expression of the becoming of a system that at each moment is the unity in its fullness, and does not constitute a transit from an incomplete (embryonic) state to a more complete or final one (adult).[67]

In the Introduction to his book translated as 'The Genesis of the Individual'[68] Gilbert Simondon draws attention to two very different approaches to the problem of individuation; on the one hand attention is focussed on the 'successfully individuated being' (for example, the painting identified as having 'quality') and on the other attention is focussed on the process of individuation itself. The former paradigm proceeds chronologically by firstly establishing a principle of individuation at work in a '…process that results in individuation; and finally, the emergence of the constituted

[67] Maturana and Varela, *Autopoiesis and Cognition*, (Dortrecht, 1980), p87
[68] Simondon, 'The Genesis of the Individual' in *Incorporations* eds. Crary and Kwinter, (New York, 1992)

individual' (for example, the idea of aesthetic quality as a guiding principle that is evident in the 'good' painting). The latter tries to '… grasp the entire unfolding of ontogenesis in all its variety, and *understand the individual from the perspective of the process of individuation rather that the process of individuation by means of the individual.'*[69] Simondon's model of individuation accounts for both being and the becoming that makes being develop. Becoming is a dimension of being 'a mode of resolving an initial incompatibility that was rife with potentials.' Thus, the painting is not approached as if it were a 'state of equilibrium' but as if it were the manifestation of '…a system that contains latent potentials and harbours a certain incompatibility with itself, an incompatibility due at once to forces in tension as well as to the impossibility of interaction between terms of extremely disparate dimensions.'[70]

The aim of this Chapter is to underpin an analysis of paintings by Tim Renshaw with this idea of individuation by understanding the work as an 'autopoietic machine' which produces a type of 'spatial' composition which will be called 'figural'.

This approach to individuation is particularly interesting from a personal perspective because the process of making a painting has become less concerned with producing a finished painting and more to do with painting as a "machine" for thinking. This is not to deny the importance of finishing a painting but it seems more accurate to say that to finish a painting is what is at stake rather than being something that *could* be aimed at. Having said this, it is not always easy to say when a painting is finished (some are finished with more certainty than others) but it is as if when finished a painting generates its own interest; it becomes self-creating and the painter is no longer

[69] Simondon, 'The Genesis of the Individual' in *Incorporations* eds. Crary and Kwinter, (New York, 1992), p298
[70] Ibid, p300

Hotel

necessary. In terms of the above could it be said that what is at stake is whether or not the canvas becomes an 'individuating' autopoietic machine? Instinct alone tells us that a finished work cannot be projected as an outcome but if we look at Maturana & Varela's theory of autopoiesis it becomes clear that 'purposelessness' is a key feature of the autopoietic entity; '[purpose or aims] belong to the domain of descriptions…',[71] so that for the canvas to be individuating (defined in terms of its two dimensions of being and becoming) realising a priori purposes is beside the point.

This becomes an interesting problem if we consider paintings that seem to have more parameters in place at the outset than is evident in Usle's paintings. For example, *Hotel* by Tim Renshaw (John Moores 23 exhibition, Liverpool, 2004) appears to have been planned in advance of being made leaving little room for visual invention along the way. Yet I find that the painting produces something very opposite as if, paradoxically, prescriptive guidelines create something that can not be prescribed. It is as if there is a 'principle of formation' internal to the work so that decisions about materials and process are not immediately ends in themselves but establish the conditions of possibility for sensible happenings to emerge in an indirect way outside of the artist's control. Renshaw's accompanying statement in the John Moores catalogue suggests this possibility:

> Hotel began as two adjacent surfaces, symmetrically composed and, so to speak, doubling one another. One half of the whole became a kind of black, the other a type of pink. Together the two parts formed the ground and the boundary within which to organise a series of inscriptions. As in starting a piece of writing on a blank page, the markings spread, somewhat slowly, from the top left corner, across to the right and downwards. Whilst the end was anticipated in the beginning, somewhere along the line other combinations opened up that were simultaneously a product of the paintings own internal momentum but were extrinsic to its originating plan.

[71] Maturana and Varela, *Autopoiesis and Cognition*,(Dortrecht, 1980), p85

An eternal traveller in Borges's 'Library of Babel' eventually happens upon the point where the library's infinite disorder begins to repeat itself. This may suggest, inversely, that repetition possesses the potential for infinity.[72]

The statement implies a process that rests on relatively simple decisions which produce something about which decisions cannot be made. This suggests a plan, not to express self or 'meaning', but to construct the conditions of possibility for the opposite: for what cannot pre-exist the work, which we could call the 'life' of the painting.

Maturana & Varela developed the concept of autopoiesis ('self-creation') in order to distinguish between living and non-living entities, not on the basis of observable, formal aspects which would, in Simondon's terms, be to start with the 'successfully individuated being' but by looking at the autonomous nature that is 'so obviously an essential feature of living systems'[73]. Contrary to expectation they understand living systems as machines. However, whereas human made machines only exist in order to have some purpose Maturana & Varela define the autopoietic system in terms of its dynamic unity which they call its *organisation*. Organisation is the 'defining network of relations' that produces the components of the system; an essentially dynamic process *that alone defines the entity as autopoietic*. The observable structure is not enough to define the system as autopoietic because structure is defined as the static relations between components (components generated by the entities' organisation). At any one time the autopoietic entity can be described abstractly as the production of a set of relations between its components. There are two important points to draw from this: firstly, that what constitutes organisation are (virtual) dynamic processes that actualise the machine itself. Secondly, what is actualised is not a product which inevitably has a purpose (for example, raw materials as inputs which are transformed into an output) but

[72] Tim Renshaw, '*Hotel* Artist's Statement' (2004), accessed at http://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/walker/johnmoores/23/tim_renshaw.asp 29/03/05
[73] Ibid, p73

a structure (actual relations among physical components) which determines the system's *relation to the outside*.

To analyse Renshaw's painting as a form of life, as an autopoietic entity, it is necessary to be able to think about its 'organisation' rather than to start with observable, formal aspects, or components; those aspects that the painting presents to empirical experience. To begin this enquiry it is worth returning briefly to Varela's text 'The re-enchantment of the concrete' with the idea that if painting is a form of life then it also can be said to demonstrate/enact the creative process of cognition; a process that 'consists not of representations but of *embodied action'*[74] so that the painting is encountered as a theatre of creative 'cognition' or individuation, rather than as an object to be judged according to how it measures up to an a priori ideal of painting. Following Varela this cognition *emerges out of a number of possible alternatives* which are activated in the 'fast noncognitive dynamics' of moments of breakdown which, although lost to the cognitive system continues 'like an unruly conversational interaction' from which further cognitions arise. Renshaw's painting looks to have been planned in advance but Varela's argument gives us the opportunity to think of the work's appearance as, not a representation of a causal relation (of stimulus to response; plan and execution), but as a far more complex actualisation of a structure through a process of 'structural coupling' brought about, in Maturana and Varela's terms, by its virtual organisation. This process is one whereby the organism creates its own environment in so far as the organisation of the autopoietic system determines 'a domain of interactions in which it can act with relevance to the maintenance of itself, and the process of cognition is the actual (inductive) acting or behaving in this domain.'[75] i.e. in biosemiotic terms its Umwelt. It

[74] Varela, 'The Re-enchantment of the Concrete', in *Incorporations* eds. Crary and Kwinter, (New York, 1992), p336
[75] Maturana and Varela, *Autopoiesis and Cognition*,(Dortrecht, 1980), p13

is also a process in which the history of that embodied, perceptually guided action is inseparable from the cognition that emerges; having a *virtual* 'non-existence' as that which *can only be* a possible alternative not (yet) actualised 'always provisional and subject to metamorphosis'[76]. Thus it is only possible to think about this individuating process and this 'history' in an abstract sense; not as the history of the painting in its development or as the history of the artist's thought processes but as a history or past constituted in the encounter (i.e. not a pre-existent and fixed past).

All of this seems to point to a problematic relation between painting and discourse because if discourse seeks to contain the experience of painting by fixing it in a stable representational form it cannot do so if 'cognitions' (or individuations) are never permanent but emerge from a chaotic and dynamic pre-individual state; 'individuation does not exhaust in the single act of its appearance all the potentials embedded in the preindividual state.'[77] Michael Goddard comments on this relation in his essay on Deleuzian aesthetics:

> It is true that this virtual network of relations cannot be specified exhaustively and objectively in the same manner as a structure, but the organisation of affect and sensation by the regimes of signs encoded in a particular text are not at all a vague subjective phenomenon either. While all critical engagements with a text will necessarily be a translation that creates a new text, the challenge is to maintain the autopoietic consistency, the life of the text in a new context.[78]

The tendency to fix in a stable representational form is not just a problem for critical discourse but it is woven into the process of making art too. Renshaw describes the formation of *Hotel* in retrospect as if a journey had elicited happenings of a paradoxical

[76] Goddard, 'The Surface, the Fold and the Subversion of Form: Towards a Deleuzian Aesthetic of Sobriety' in *Pli* Volume 16 (2005)
[77] Simondon, 'The Genesis of the Individual' in *Incorporations* eds. Crary and Kwinter, (New York, 1992) p300
[78] Goddard, 'The Surface, the Fold and the Subversion of Form: Towards a Deleuzian Aesthetic of Sobriety' in *Pli* Volume 16 (2005), p19

nature that elude the certainty of representation. Thus there must be a relation between the plan (that belongs to a 'desiring subject') and motivated towards satisfaction and the painting 'machine' which excludes this subject and creates what is arbitrary in relation to his/her point of view. (As if these are really two separate spheres also in a relation of 'contrapuntal harmony'; the autopoietic machine, as I have already pointed out, never less formed that it already is.) Consequently, freedom could not consist in the negation of what is already known, as if that were given the authority to determine a problem. This would also be to accept the problem as already given and representable so that all subsequent actions must work towards finding a solution and be judged accordingly. Rather, true freedom lies in constituting problems which is not to uncover but to invent.

> It is the school teacher who "poses" the problems; the pupil's task is to discover the solutions. In this way we are kept in a kind of slavery. True freedom lies in a power to decide, to constitute problems themselves.[79]

3.2 The Figural

So, it is as if pre-determined parameters must give rise to a situation in which something problematic emerges[80] and that implies a situation that elicits "breakdown" and a cognitive process which consists of 'embodied action'; the 'solution' of a

[79] Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, (New York, 1991), p15
[80] In Chapter IV of *Difference and Repetition* 'Ideas and the Synthesis of Difference' Deleuze discusses problems of this kind as 'problematic Ideas' 'which act as a focus or horizon within perception'[80] rather than as problems that can be determined directly; consistent with an idea of individuation as both being and becoming., p169

Backlit

creative act of cognition. This is difficult to imagine in Renshaw's case as the relatively few decisions concerning formal apparatus give the appearance of design (a plan with a purpose): two colours, two main grounds that repeat each other, a cluster of lines repeated in a more or less regular pattern and a lack of surface texture. However, naming these features (as a set of instructions or as a description of the finished work) does not equate to an account of how they evolve a piece of work, as a comparison to an earlier painting *Backlit*, demonstrates; the same parameters apply but here the expectations of the imaging consciousness are more easily satisfied: the binary relations, rather than structuring what emerges in the painting, are to some extent over-ridden by external rules which approximate to perspectival conventions: the clusters forming slightly volumetric blobs with a curved contour that decrease in scale along converging lines. *Hotel* is more interesting because the binary relations themselves structure what emerges in the painting. Rather than purely formal the parameters are genetic elements that evolve the work as a set of *relations* that become the object of repetition. In *Hotel* these are binary relations: pink or black, this ground or that, and (like the letters on a page) inscription or the ground inscribed. A surface is produced that is not an analogue of these decisions expressed spatially but a surface that could, in its discontinuity, tentatively be called digital. Initially the surface is prepared with layers of gesso, sanded to produce a very smooth texture, onto which oil paint is applied without gestural trace. The surface does not draw attention to itself as a 'painted surface' nor does it act as an un-mediating limit for spatial illusion or decorative pattern. It seems to lose its own coherence as an organising principle that precedes the painting but gain power as a condition of how events unfold as the painting evolves. If the internal structure of *Backlit* satisfies expectations of the

Staircase Living

imaging consciousness then *Hotel* has no purpose other than to express a generative 'code' and operate as an autopoietic system.

Having said this these descriptions do not resolve the problem for discourse which the autopoietic entity presents precisely because what defines the entity as autopoietic can never be experienced as such (because it is a virtual 'organisation' which constructs a relation with the outside but not a permanent outside in which we can stand and from which we can make our observations.) What are the terms of this 'organisation', not as a cause but as dynamic relations that produce 'sensations' (of 'worlds of non-illustratable things')[81]? The organisation of the autopoietic system (as a 'theatre' of individuation) could be understood according to a biosemiotic model of code-duality as dynamic relations formed in the simultaneous repetition of a 'digitally' coded memory of past structural relations (a "vertical semiosis") and an empirical repetition of successive existential moments in the analogue phase (Varela's 'structural coupling' an "horizontal semiosis") according to what is of significance to that system in the environment.

How could a painting such as *Staircase Living* be thought of as an effect of these simultaneous forms of repetition (which amount to the interaction of past and present)? Despite appearing to be an abstract painting the system that is re-described and repeated is not one that negates figuration. However, the term figurative (apart from not making much sense in this example) would contradict the idea of the work as an autopoietic entity because it has a communicative purpose or an 'output'. On the other hand, to describe the work in terms of a negation of figuration in the pursuit of purification would amount to claiming a different output; the realisation of 'an ideality already

[81] John Rajchman, *Constructions*, (Massachusetts, 1998), p131n

existing in an abstract realm.'[82] That said the components of this 'autopoietic entity' are structured by relations of difference that are associated with figurative painting: tonal contrast, line and plane, figure and ground. For example, the inverted T shapes are distinguished as quasi-figures, although it is the difference in surface 'density' that has more to do with creating the sense of figuration than their being delimited shapes. This is a sense of figuration as indirect and momentary, created from the repetition of units that are sometimes absent to leave clear spaces and doubled to 'thicken' the pattern in other places. This 'figuration' is not organised around a viewpoint where line establishes the distances and contours of perspective nor does line animate the surface dynamically; in both of these instances (figurative and abstract) line would distribute spatial identity as a closed system of relative values that would mediate difference; perspectival or optical. In fact the term drawing has little currency in this analysis and 'space' is a provisional effect of 'provisional' figures implied by the distribution of repeated units and a reversal and doubling of binary opposites. By provisional it is not to say that eventually the figures will resolve into something permanent but that what could be called the 'figural' is a processual effect of the work as an individuating autopoietic entity.

The figural, therefore, is an effect of a re-description of painting which, as it is not an 'output' is not a re-description of painting as a meaning-system (which would be 'addressed to the head'[83]) but is a re-description of a system which emits 'signs' that can only be felt or sensed which 'act immediately on the nervous system'[84] (interpreted by this writing, for example, as a significant environmental intensity). Would it be correct to say that the figural is the effect of a "vertical" semiosis re-described and

[82] Nick Millet, 'The Third Eye' in *Abstraction*, JPVA, No 5,1995
[83] Deleuze, *The Logic of Sensation*, (London, 2003), p34
[84] Ibid, p34

repeated by the "horizontal" repetition of codes and conventions (an empirical past) which are translated/produced as relation of difference by the organisation of the system as autopoietic? For example, the distribution of light characteristic of the figurative idiom is relative to a viewpoint and a light source but here becomes the distribution of light by the reciprocal determination of the doubled 'grounds' and the repeated units which fragment by their presence or leave open by their absence; surfaces that would capture light become surfaces of inscription (like a page) and repeated units the act of inscription; writing with no symbolic or iconic meaning. The two inverted 'T' 'figures', rather than depicted in space, 'remember' spatial illusion as a difference in scale; the hue and tone of the brown and yellow remember tonal chiaroscuro and local colour but now speak only of difference as a condition of repetition and reversal. This is an attempt to describe how codes and conventions that were originated in the pursuit of depth become translated into relations of difference that operate on the surface and it is also to suggest that there is no representational ground that could possibly unify these differences (unless it is the very idea of such a 'translation' as an interpretative ground). However, this description can do no more than account for the structure of the autopoietic entity as it alludes to the 'organisation' that actualises it. In other words, this vertical repetition as a 'memory' that could not be empirical (that could not be situated on the horizontal line of chronological time) is a 'transcendental' repetition that, paradoxically as a form of 'structural coupling', is only actualised in embodied action. (As Varela says; 'the rapidity of the agent's behaviour selection [from the unruly conversational interaction of microworlds] is forever lost to the cognitive system'.[85])

What does this imply for understanding the distinction of the figural from the figurative? If the figural is the dynamic effect of autopoietic organisation it cannot be a

[85] Varela, 'The Re-enchantment of the Concrete', in *Incorporations* eds. Crary and Kwinter, (New York, 1992), p336

(figurative) form but 'figures' a formal order (or structure) as the expression of code-duality (the simultaneous repetition of an embodied transcendental past and the repetition of successive moments of environmental existence). 'Painting has to extract the Figure from the figurative.'[86] The figural alludes to the figurative but this is an 'extracted', incomplete figuration. For the autopoietic entity there is never a point at which a permanent representational ground is fixed that would limit relations of difference (intensive forces) as an object of recognition. Thus ungrounded differential relations must give rise to the figural which becomes a process of formation/deformation by virtue of an unconscious, virtual organisation.

'The Figure is the sensible form related to a sensation; it acts immediately upon the nervous system'[87]. This sense of the figural as embodied is consistent with Varela's position and the logic of biosemiotics and is also discussed by Lyotard as the force of the visual in the (necessarily) embodied act of reading/viewing. In a discussion on Lyotard's book *Discours, Figure*[88] Bill Readings explains Lyotard's critique of Saussurrean structuralism: Textual space refers to the space of reading which requires the recognition of signifiers that, according to the structuralist model, are arbitrary and unmotivated. A letter or a word functions purely in relation to its opposition to the rest of the disembodied, virtual system so that meaning is generated by the structuralist grid, which is a *closed* system. Whereas textual space is unmotivated in relation to the body of the reader, the line which forms the letter has a plastic function; it is *seen* rather than read in the act of reading 'it functions by an appeal to corporeal resonance rather than to the code; it is a figure on a ground rather than an arbitrary mark'[89] and is therefore

[86] Deleuze, *The Logic of Sensation*, (London, 2003) p8
[87] Ibid, p34
[88] Lyotard, *Discours, Figure* 1971 discussed in Bill Readings, *Introducing Lyotard: Art and Politics*, (London, 1991)
[89] Ibid, p18

motivated. When the line creates words to which concepts are matched the inscription itself, in the act of seeing, creates a figural space which, by definition, can have no concept, it is purely plastic. Thus the act of mental representation depends upon forgetting the line which, however, remains as a force that cannot be contained as a relation of difference in opposition; 'for Lyotard the line marks a figural space, it has the quality of a trace of the unrecognisable; it evokes an unreadability that is constitutive of the very possibility of recognition'[90].

The significance of this is that the visual is subsumed by recognition and the purposes of rational thought. As Bogue notes the "truth" of the visual is only revealed in "the event": 'the time of the event is one that ignores the order of past, present, and future'[91]. An analogy is also made to the status of the line in the system of perspectival construction in which the plastic force of the line is forgotten or replaced by the act of reading space which operates as the neutral support to which all objects refer; as if the truth of the visual, the evocation of the figural as a force in the embodied act of looking could only be revealed if this 'neutral support' becomes transformed (as the emergence of the concrete, perhaps).

If the figurative is a production of the closed system of the structuralist grid which organises relations of difference to create meaning and implies a state of equilibrium, the figural is an effect of an open system or the autopoietic system as 'both agent and theatre of individuation'[92]; in which the individual is in a constant process of emerging from a pre-individual 'metastable' equilibrium. Within the terms of Lyotard's argument this pre-individual 'metastable' equilibrium is a virtual realm that he understands in

[90]Ibid, p19
[91] Ronald Bogue, *Deleuze on Music, Painting and the Arts*, (London, 2003), p113
[92] Simondon, 'The Genesis of the Individual' in *Incorporations* eds. Crary and Kwinter, (New York, 1992), p307

psychoanalytic terms as the figure of the "matrix" which works, not to produce figurative contents but produces a 'motivated' figural space likened to the spatialisation of language that occurs in dreams.[93] As Krauss explains in dreams we "regress" from the higher orders of cognition to the preverbal world of images but, as the expression of desire must be manifested in the domain of language, the dream forces language into the world of image-objects making it spatial. New spatial forms are produced when pre-selected parts of speech are displaced and make new connections with other parts at the surface or become lost in the work of condensation. In contrast to the structuralist grid which is passive, static and imposes the rule of non-contradiction to produce meaning, the unconscious order of the matrix is active (libidinal) and as 'a function of the repressive work of mutating everything into its opposite' undermines the productive work of structure.

> If the matrix is invisible, it is not because it arises from the intelligible, but because it resides in a space that is beyond the intelligible, is in radical rupture with the rules of *opposition*; we can already see that this property of unconscious space, which is also that of the libidinal body, is to have many places in one place, and to block together what is logically incompatible. This is the secret of the figural: the transgression of the constitutive intervals of discourse and the transgression of the constitutive differences of representation.[94]

This 'blocking together' produces a different spatiality to the (perspectival or 'optical'[95]) spatiality of non-contradiction. The invisible matrix works 'behind' the image but in reality the image is only a relation formed by the work to the outside, which because of the transformational force of the matrix is always in a process of formation and reformation. Figural space is a different mode of connectivity; not that of

[93] See Krauss' discussion in *Formless: A User's Guide,* (New York, 1997), p103-4
[94] Quoted by Krauss in *Formless: A User's Guide,* (New York, 1997), p106
[95] By which I mean the optical space described by Greenberg in which the figurative and flatness are mutually exclusive.

either/or, of figure and ground, but the connectivity of contradictory and incompatible elements which is not only beyond the scope of representation but works to destroy the 'constitutive differences of representation' itself. As John Rajchmann notes:

> [Figurality] involves a "formlessness" that is not itself another content to be shown by slightly distorted or distended forms but rather an operative condition that allows forms or figures to *do* other things, to affect us in other ways.[96]

3.3 Figuring a Contrapuntal Relation

Could this transformational force which transgresses 'the constitutive difference of representation' be seen to be at work in the relation Renshaw's paintings create with the outside? For instance, further to what was said earlier the paintings could be said to interpret a difference inherent in codified forms of visual presentation; forms that present quantifiable data such as plans or charts or even documentary views or photographs of a certain kind. It could be that the titles *Hotel* and *Staircase Living* allude to such an idea; as if the paintings connect in some way to the presentation of data about inhabited spaces; not the sensory experience of a specific time and place but a presentation that tracks (or plans for) space as it has or will be used over time: the density of space traversed or open areas out-of-bounds, passages, divisions, areas, zones of usage. This is not to suggest that the paintings illustrate such codings but that they interpret a difference produced by such modes of communication whose purpose is to show or map out differences (of degree) or quantify variables according to a pre-determined purpose. It is this difference in degree (exemplified by the extremities of the binary opposition of on/off) that makes a difference. The idea that this difference makes a difference to the painting-organism (re-described as a system whose relations

[96] John Rajchman, *Constructions*, (Massachusetts, 1998), p104

block together the heterogeneous spaces of the figural and textual) actualised as a translation of paintings' figurative system into one of binary oppositions has already been discussed. However, how is it possible to discuss the figural, which cannot be causally linked to any of these observable characteristics, in abstract terms?

In *A Thousand Plateaus* Deleuze and Guattari refer to the work of Uexkull and his Umwelt theory; but rather than using the terms 'functional cycle' and semiosis to describe the interrelation of organisms Deleuze and Guattari speak of milieus 'each defined by a component' sliding in relation to one another. ('A milieu does in fact exist by virtue of a periodic repetition, but one whose only effect is to produce a difference by which the milieu passes into another milieu'.[97]) They draw attention to Uexkull's idea that within this transcoding the components are 'melodies in counterpoint, each of which serves as a motif for another'[98]. The example they give is of the spider-fly relation and in particular the spider web which implies 'that there are sequences of the fly's own code in the spider's code; it is as though the spider has a fly in its head, a fly "motif", a fly "refrain"'. Ronald Bogue quotes Uexkull when he explains that functional cycle from perception to action is as "the induction which passes from one sound to another in the unfolding of a melody",[99] so that the contrapuntal harmony is the unfolding of two or more melodies.

It may be a stretch but let us imagine that within Renshaw's painting there is a plan/chart "refrain" that unfolds a 'melody'. However, what distinguishes the plan/chart "refrain" from the idea that Renshaw has simply used a motif? The two are not mutually exclusive for it could be said that the refrain inheres in the motif so that the refrain only becomes a refrain in the act of 'interpretation'; in the morphogenesis of the painting.

[97] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, (London, 1987), p315
[98] Ibid, p315
[99] Ronald Bogue, *Deleuze on Music, Painting and the Arts*, (London, 2003), p60

For example, the repeated unit is a plan/chart/graph motif to the extent that it marks a unit of quantity and in the painting it creates density (that might designate heavy use) or is absent (that might designate a fallow space). However, the repeated unit alludes to a code but is unable to measure anything, creating a rhythm instead, as if a representational ground has been destroyed; as if the 'signifying motif' has become autonomous through the force of the visual surface.

In Renshaw's paintings the doubled grounds, which repeat and reverse, figure something else which is not representational: which could be described as the space *between* on/off, inscription/inscribed, empty/full[100]. Another way of approaching this is to say that the motifs have ceased 'to be functional to become expressive'.[101] This is an implicit reference to the idea of territoriality which, as Bogue details[102] Deleuze and Guattari developed first from Lacan's organisation of the body in to erogenous and non-erogenous zones and with reference to the work of Uexkull and others. Significantly, in accordance with biosemiotics, the meaning of territoriality is reversed from the accepted Darwinian view that it is a mechanistic development that enhances the chances of survival. Whereas for the latter the functions and signs of territorialisation are understood to construct a territory (in order to survive) according to Deleuze and Guattari it is the territory that transforms functions (such as aggression, mating, rearing etc.).

> These functions are organised or created only because they are *territorialized*, and not the other way around. The T factor, the territorializing factor must be sought elsewhere: precisely in the becoming-expressive of rhythm or melody, in other words, in the emergence of proper qualities (colour, odor, sound, silhouette…).[103]

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[100] I am alluding to the idea of 'transduction'; see *A Thousand Plateaus*, p313 which is also discussed by Simondon as a process of individuation Simondon, 'The Genesis of the Individual' in *Incorporations* eds. Crary and Kwinter, (New York, 1992), p313
[101] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, (London, 1987), p315
[102] Ronald Bogue, *Deleuze on Music, Painting and the Arts*, (London, 2003), p60
[103] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, (London, 1987), p316

The implications of the biosemiotic model are that the logic of competition and survival are replaced by co-operation and interdependence through which formal diversity develops. Formal qualities (such as colour in birds or fish) are not developed in order to survive but in the rhythm of territorialisation (which is consistent with the autopoietic machine that is not defined in terms of 'outputs'.) Territorialisation is a process of re/deterritorialisation which involves '*a reorganisation of functions and a regrouping of forces'*. From this process emerge expressive qualities that are autonomous and deterritorialised from any function.

…expressive qualities or matters of expression enter shifting relations with one another that "express" the relation of the territory they draw to the interior milieu of impulses and exterior milieu of circumstances.[104]

This quotation implies that the territory is implicated in both vertical and horizontal semiosis. We could compare this to Bogue's synopsis of the work of the biophilosopher Raymond Ruyer[105] from which I want to draw one line of thought. The first point to make is that for Ruyer morphogenesis proceeds, not according to a genetic blue-print but (consistent with the notion of code-duality) according to a vertical trans-spatial and transtemporal theme "an individualised melodic theme" or virtual motif which serves as an internal principle of formation in a "horizontal" temporal sequence. This motif is described as the 'active process of formation', which Ruyer understands as the conquest of space and time "a conquest and also a creation" according to three levels of complexity. Form I: fundamental form ('self-sustaining, auto-conducting') common to all living beings, Form II: the formation of a representational consciousness, 'organs of perception and motor schematisation', upon which the formation of territoriality depends, Form III: particular to humans, (comparable to Bains distinction between zoosemiosis and anthroposemiosis) the formation of a 'utilitarian perception' according

[104] Ibid, p137
[105] Ronald Bogue, *Deleuze on Music, Painting and the Arts*, (London, 2003), pp62-66

to which signals become symbol which are detachable from the demands of the immediate present. As Bogue notes the significant point is that from Form I to Form III there is an increasing autonomy in the organisation of time and space which supports the idea that territory is created through the processes of '*deterritorialisation*, whereby milieu components are detached and given greater autonomy, and *reterritorialisation*, through which these components acquire new functions within the newly created territory.'[106]

The purpose of all this is to argue that although it could be said that the idea of territory is inscribed in the work (in contrapuntal harmony with the plan/chart of inhabited spaces; 'territory' as refrain?) this refrain, (or "individualised melodic theme" in Ruyer's terms) is the internal principle of formation which produces, through a process of de/reterritorialisation, purely expressive qualities. Purely expressive because the 'refrain as territory' ceases to be functional. These are not qualities of anything, of the surface, for example. The lesson of contrapuntal harmony shows us that the expressive qualities are created in the passage from one milieu to another. In this sense it becomes difficult to speak of an inside and an outside (which become representational concepts in relation to an observational point of view and something implied by Maturana and Varela's distinction between the defining feature of autopoiesis as its 'organisation' but inputs and outputs (meaning) pertaining to the domain of observation[107].) Perhaps the implications for interpretation of the idea of 'surface effects' (which in this case have been articulated as the de/reterritorialisation of expressive qualities by the autopoietic machine) are that, to analyse painting from the point of view of painting itself is, paradoxically, to approach it at its interface with other 'forms of life'; its relations of communion and connectivity rather than to assume a formal isolation.

[106] Ibid, p66
[107] Maturana and Varela, *Autopoiesis and Cognition*,(Dortrecht, 1980), p81

A spare Frize

Chapter 4: A Question of Composition

4.1 The Problem of Composition

Bois identifies the abolition of composition in painting with the modernist 'match'[108] and the aim of this chapter is to consider a different concept of composition not tied to 'working through' the end of painting but with thinking the event of the 'radically new'. Here it is worth considering that the implications of the biosemiotic model are the replacement of the competitive terms of the match with the interdependence and mutual interaction of painting in 'contrapuntal harmony' with its environment. Thus, the issue is not paintings' survival as a formal category; 'painting' cannot but continue although its formal evolution will be unpredictable in so far as it will only be constituted in the expression of 'code-duality'.

Consistent with a tendency within modernist abstraction Frize' paintings are not 'composed', if composition is the invention and organisation of forms in relation to a spatial ground. Tristan Tremeau frames his introductory paper for the 2001 Symposium 'As Painting: Division and Displacement' with a direct reference to the work of Yve-Alain Bois:

In a 1992 essay on Christian Bonnefoi, Yve-Alain Bois clearly laid out the terms of a history of modernism which aimed to abolish all composition in order to secure the

[108] In a recent lecture at the Whitechapel Art Gallery, London (02/11/06) Bois presented a thesis to the effect that the gesturality of subjective motivation has been replaced with tropes of non-composition which absent the self in a search for the absolute.

unity of the pictorial surface, and to prevent it from being compromised with effects of depth. The division of the surface has been a major stumbling-block for modernism.[109]

In agreement with Bois' argument put forward in 'Strzemiski and Kobro: In Search of Motivation', Tremeau argues that modernism's problem was not 'merely an operation of ontological reduction – Greenberg's canonical interpretation…' [110] but one of motivation; of motivation of the arbitrary. This problem is inseparable from the practice of composition which *is* the problem of motivating the arbitrary. Modernism's answer was to abolish composition altogether by, either suppressing the division of the surface; demonstrated by the monochrome, or by dividing the surface into surfaces, for example, by using the grid or by filling the field with its figure (eg. Olitski). Frize has adopted neither of these strategies, although, it could be argued that he 'absents himself' (and therefore the problem of composition) by relying instead on installing a set of technical constraints at the outset, over which he has no control once the painting process has begun.

However, the aim here is to explore the idea that the 'non-composition' of Frize's work does not defer the problem of motivation by suppressing composition but rather the choice of materials and 'mechanical' processes internalise motivation so that it is no longer a problem of motivating the arbitrary (according to the interests of the observer) but of creating an autopoietic system in which the arbitrary finds its motivation. Ultimately I want to demonstrate that this is the motivation of repetition (the repetition of the "refrain" in a 'contrapuntal relation') which is 'always disguised, always covered by masks, since it involves the play of simulation and simulacra'[111].

[109] Tristan Tremeau, 'Places of composition', Symposium 'As painting: Division and Displacement', *Journal of Visual Art Practice*, Vol 3, No.1 2004
[110] Bois,'Strzeminski and Kobro: In Search of Motivation' in *Painting as Model*, p126
[111] Keith Ansell-Pearson, *Germinal Life*, (London, 1999), p104

If the suppression of composition became increasingly necessary for modernism it was because the problem of arbitrariness was no longer taken care of by the alibi of establishing objective truth through mimicking the order of forms visible in the real world. The dominant (Greenbergian) account, which, as Bois points out was consistent with an essentialism and historicism already within modernism, replaced an 'objective' motivation with the motivation of objectifying subjective truth by forging purely formal relations between pictorial elements. In both cases 'composition' is motivated by, respectively, the authority of the external world or the authoritarian status of the artist who invents a fictive world. The next step, which Bois argues has been to abolish subjective arbitrariness by introducing tropes of non-composition, articulates the end of painting, as Tremeau suggests:

> There seems to be a certain kind of irony here: the logic of non-composition opens out onto a new form of composition by integrating outlets that were *a priori* exterior to painting (space, the spectator, and the institution being the three most coveted elements, according to this logic), and displaces the subject of painting onto other subjects which act as substitutes, or even abolishes the subject of painting.[112]

However, if the arbitrary is understood to be motivated within a different understanding of composition, then the use of predetermined 'mechanical' processes could be seen to be, not an avoidance but a condition of possibility for the event of composition. For this to be so composition would need to be redefined as a motivation of the work rather than motivated by an external a priori and transcendent foundation. In this case the term 'composition' could remain a useful critical tool by escaping its historicist definition which associates it with a fixed view of the past and the fate of pre-figuring paintings' end. Instead of then establishing objective/subjective truth by the act of organising

[112] Tristan Tremeau, 'Places of composition', Symposium 'As painting: Division and Displacement', *Journal of Visual Art Practice*, Vol 3, No.1 2004

formed *extensities* this re-definition is the composition of unconscious pre-perceptual *intensities*; the dynamic relationships or organisation of the autopoietic machine. [113]

4.2 Motivation and the 'Plane of Composition'

The unity of traditional pictorial composition is ensured by the illusion of spatial depth which distributes relations of difference between individual elements. Both in *A Thousand Plateaus* and in *What is Philosophy?* Deleuze and Guattari discuss the the "technical plane of organisation" which gives rise to the "plane of composition"[114]. Whereas in the traditional understanding of composition the technical is a means to an end for Deleuze-Guattari aesthetic composition, although distinct from the technical, is implicated within it. Hence, there can be no representational foundation which exists prior to the institution of a technical plane of organisation. This would seem to affirm the idea discussed in chapter 3 that the technical parameters must give rise to a situation in which something problematic emerges; that is to say, they are not motivated towards achieving a preformed end. Rather, we would have to say that they are arbitrary; not choices of the best in relation to a set of possibilities, in the context of an either/or situation, but are themselves movements of cognition that are underpinned by a history of 'structural coupling'.

In *What is Philosophy?* it is claimed that the technical plane of organisation '*ascends* into the aesthetic plane of composition' in modern painting.

> *…material…passes into sensation.* Of course, sensation no more exists outside of this passage, and the technical plane of composition has no more autonomy, than in the first case [perspectival painting]: it is never valid for itself. But now it might be said

[113] As Micheal Goddard has noted Deleuze re-figures Maturana and Varela's term 'organisation' for 'composition' and it is a Deleuzian concept of composition that informs this discussion, 'The Surface, the Fold and the Subversion of Form: Towards a Deleuzian Aesthetic of Sobriety' in *Pli*, 16 (2005), p18
[114] Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, p192 and *A Thousand Plateaus*, pp265-272

that it a*scends* into the aesthetic plane of composition and, as Damisch says, gives it a specific thickness independent of any perspective or depth.[115]

Frize' paintings demonstrate what could be termed a pure thickness rather than the relative thickness of a textured surface. In contrast to Renshaw's use of oil paint Frize has designed a process that depends upon the most up-to-date painting materials. A white surface is coated with a viscous resin then painted into; following the line of an initial drawing that marks out the pattern. In an example such as *Unimixte* three continuous brushstrokes are plaited together made possible by involving other hands to paint each line. It's difficult to see in reproduction but, first hand, what is most striking about the paintings is the surface which is perfectly smooth and continuous, almost like that of a photograph, an effect which contradicts the evidently painted patterns. It is technically difficult to create a surface like this because it is not possible to paint wet into wet and lose the texture and thickness of a brushstroke whilst retaining the image unless the different properties of ground and paint are carefully worked out in advance. Unless the viscous ground has a firm consistency it will be displaced by the pressure of a brush. The paint on the brush must be fluid enough so that the brush gives it up and the wet ground must be viscous enough to hold together during the painting process. Here, in the process of drying the pigment sinks *into* the ground which captures the image of action but also removes its texture; the brush strokes have been done quickly and mechanically with no attention to 'touch'; all of which creates an indirect or mediated brushstroke. As with photography, there is an in-built indifference to the 'subject' in relation to the medium and likewise, as if to mimic photography, a strategy has been developed in which inventiveness is separated from the physical process of facture. By isolating technical problems like this it is as if there is a tacit acknowledgement that the mechanics of painting are distinct from the appearance of

[115] Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, (London,1994), p193-4

painting; that they are not a function of the surface as an extension limit but are a problem of 'depth'.

This acknowledgment is consistent with a conception of the work as a living system to the extent that the act of judgement has been suspended; decisions have an indirect relation to the painting being on the level of practicalities not on-going aesthetic judgments[116]. Contradictions abound: the appearance of gesture but the impossibility of direct and informal application of paint, the appearance of direct and informal application of paint but a smooth surface which frustrates the expectation of the texture and substance of a brushstroke. However, this trickery is not ironic as processes and materials are not merely (aesthetically redundant) signifiers. Clearly Frize' painting could not have been made without the technically sophisticated resin that covers the white surface at the outset which gives it a particular visibility. The pictorial depth of Old Master painting depended upon a certain 'invisibility' of the painted surface, Frize turns this around by making the fact of paint and brush explicit but, rather than destroying illusion, the literal participates in an illusion; the illusion of its own lack of substance. This move revolves around the expectation that the paint has been applied onto a surface and that the trace produces both image and a thickening of the surface. *The causal relation which associates what is given in experience to what cannot be given is damaged*.

It's tempting to claim that the motivation behind these technical decisions is to create such contradictions (as an ironic acknowledgment of the end of painting, perhaps). However, the problem is not to attribute personal motivations to Frize but to consider how the technical plane of organisation gives rise to the aesthetic plane of composition.

[116] Although this is not necessarily a function of technical processes but is a strategy for having an indirect relation to the image; constructed differently by Juan Usle as discussed in Chapter 2.

To consider how technical considerations allow the painting to be 'self-motivating,' taking the narrative of the artist, whose memory and projections determine a choice of materials and processes through which the work is produced, to be a fiction. A fiction that, as Maturana and Varela note, with respect to autopoietic machines, 'pertain(s) to the domain in which the machine is observed, but not to its organisation'[117]. Moreover, if the plan and the artwork are said to refer to the plan(e) of organisation and the plane of composition respectively then Deleuze discusses the plan as that which:

> …must necessarily fail for it is impossible to be faithful to it; […] the failures are a part of the plan(e) for the plan(e) expands or shrinks along with the dimensions of that which it deploys in each instance (planitude of *n* dimensions).'[118]

An important reason why the plan must necessarily fail is that, if qualities are to become expressive, they must cease to be functional (as part of a plan with an aim) or 'deterritorialised'.

> All that is needed to produce art is here…on condition that it all opens onto and launches itself on a mad vector as on a witch's broom, a line of the universe or of deterritorialization.[119]

4.3 'Mobile' Signs and 'Surface Effects'

The failure of the plan is the failure of elements to function in representational terms. We could say that the perpetual 'puzzle' of the surface and the image is a figural effect; in so far as the "truth" of the visual is disclosed by our inability to recognise the causal relation which associates what is given in experience to what cannot be given. If the event of composition is not caused by the plan of the artist but is created by the autopoietic machine, it is also the expression of code-duality and contrapuntal harmony.

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[117] Maturana and Varela, *Autopoiesis and Cognition*, (Dortrecht, 1980), p81
[118] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, (London, 1987), p268
[119] Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, (London,1994), p184-185

For example, *Unimixte* according to an historicist view, references art historical/critical practices and discourses such as expressionism, and the anti-formalist practices of the 60s which emphasised process and performance. However, this is a form of 'Darwinism' to the extent that the aim of such claims is to contain the work within interpretative interests established from the start. The biosemiotic perspective, on the other hand, provides the opportunity to '…allow oneself to be educated by…[the work]' as Damisch would say[120] because as we have seen for the model of code-duality the relation of the work to its outsides is not pre-given but becomes a point of enquiry.

Here, the enquiry begins with the sense that an expressionist "refrain" is repeated (and deterritorialised) in Frize' work; the refrain or tension between two divergent tendencies; toward convention or invention. Although associated with different histories of painting it is not the case that 'expressionism' pre-exists the work but in the act of interpretation (as a 'perceptual sign' rather than a causal impulse) it becomes a difference that makes a difference to the 'organisation' of the work. As a general concept expressionism is not a difference but an identity but as an assemblage it is inseparable from the dialectical terms or extremes in which it becomes (de)limited: immediacy/mediation, nature/culture, arbitrary/motivated, spontaneity/premeditation. As differences these terms become significant sign relations: 'immediacy' is well-planned, the 'expressive individual' becomes various studio helpers that execute the drawings, the felt and purposive gesture is upstaged by the arbitrary flow of paint, the loaded (gendered) subject becomes an everyday motif or a pattern.

This can be clarified by referring to the essay on the work of von Uexkull referred to earlier in which Paul Bains draws attention to a distinction between human and non-

[120] Hubert Damisch, *The Origin of Perspective*, (Massachusetts, 1995), p262

human sign use[121]. Only humans can grasp the distinction between the sign relation itself and the things it relates; as he points out 'currently we have no knowledge of a non-human *linguistic* animal that *ipso facto* grasps, or rather understands, the incorporeal sign relation as distinct from its terms'. This is significant here because as I have alluded to the interpretation of 'expressionism' as a 'perceptual sign' (amongst others) *becomes separate from its terms*. Expressionism, or even an ironic comment on the end/impossibility of painting, are ideas that could be associated with the work but as an autopoietic unity the painting neither affirms nor negates meanings that are external because as we have seen living systems do not respond to causal impulses. According to Maturana and Varela's thesis 'autopoietic machines do not have inputs or outputs' but are defined only in terms of constant dynamic internal relations or 'organisation'. This means that 'signs' are interpreted according the system in contrapuntal harmony; as a 'meaning-utiliser' or interpretant, in relation to perceptual cues or 'meaning-factors' of the object.'[122] As Bains explains, what characterizes human language is this ability of signs to be transferred from one object to another; they become infinitely 'mobile' rather than 'adherent'. Instead of linguistic communication the idea is that 'signs' are created by the autopoietic entity; so that a perception which belongs outside the work, so to speak, (such as a brushstroke) cannot be formed without the (external) foundation of subjectivity. If the perception 'brushstroke' is 'something *minus* everything that does not interest us'[123] then the creation of signs involves pre-perceptual intensities that 'no longer' adhere to perceptions but are made mobile by the work in the event of composition.

[121] Paul Bains , ' Umwelten', in Semiotica 134- ¼ 2001), p148
[122] In a footnote Bains points to Maturana and Varela's use of the term 'structural coupling' to refer to this contrapuntal relation. ' Umwelten', in Semiotica 134- ¼ 2001), p141
[123] Deleuze, *Bergonsism*, (New York, 1998), p25

The idea of the mobile (or deterritorialised) sign that does not adhere to the thing signified is illustrated by Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus* when they discuss language as indirect discourse so that '…we cannot assign it a non-linguistic point of departure… language does not operate between something seen (or felt) and something said, but always goes from saying to saying'.[124] They cite the linguist Benveniste and his example of the bee which, he argues, has no language because although it can communicate what it has seen it cannot transmit what has been communicated to it. A bee that has seen a food source can communicate the message to bees that did not see it, but a bee that has not seen and yet has received the message cannot transmit that message to others that did not see it.

This has implications for the creativity of cognition. For example, one aspect of Frize's painting is the noticeability of flows of paint, how different hues mix together, the path of a brushstroke that gradually runs out of pigment. However, there is nothing inherently interesting about these processes. Our description struggles to account for what is really interesting and is limited to only those sensible intuitions that can be matched to a priori concepts. In other words in our description incorporeal signs designate an object and subject position and therefore adhere to perceptions. This is an act of *re*-cognition not the creation of cognition described by Varela, and this implies that in the act of cognition (as a processual effect rather than a completed process) the sign becomes mobile.

As we have seen Deleuze and Guattari distinguish between the "technical plane of organisation" that gives rise to the "aesthetic plane of composition". It is worth noting that the relation between the technical plane and the aesthetic plane varies

[124] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, (London, 1987), p76

historically[125]. The idea that Frize avoids composition suggests negation but, to the contrary, the model of code-duality suggests that 'past' conventions or the empirical past is interpreted not as conventions (identities) but as difference. As such the significance of Frize' 'mechanical non-composition' cannot be understood in terms of transgression or the negation of past conventions with reference to past forms, images or knowledge (which could be said to ground the work). As Goddard[126] points out in arguing that Deleuzian aesthetics is one of 'sobriety' not subversion, Deleuze abandons the centre-periphery system characteristic of modern and postmodern aesthetics to claim that the creation of a work of art is not a matter of 'excess, transgression and marginality' but of 'surface effects'.

Is the mobility of signs in the event of composition experienced as 'surface effects'? It cannot be the case that language 'disappears' in the 'fundamental encounter' but, perhaps, that signs become mobile or deterritorialised as relations in our inability to re-cognise the object through measuring and limiting sensible qualities (or by 'adhering' signs). In truth this is an over-simplification. Chapter 4 of *A Thousand Plateaus* is a discussion of Deleuze Guattari which understands language and thought to be implicated in the flows of 'deterritoralisation' and 'reterritorialisation' that characterise the 'assemblage' rather than structuralism's distribution of signifiers and signifieds. Of significance in relation to our train of thought is the section headed "This Is an Abstract Machine of Language That Does Not Appeal to Any 'Extrinsic' Factor" which begins:

> If in a social field we distinguish the set of corporeal modifications and the set of incorporeal transformation, we are presented, despite the variety in each of the sets, with two formalisations, one of *content*, the other of *expression*. For content is not opposed to form but has its own formalisation: the hand-tool pole, or the lesson of things. It is, however, opposed to expression, inasmuch as expression also has its own formalisation: the face-language pole, the lesson of signs. Precisely because content, like expression

[125] Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, (London,1994), p192
[126] Ibid, p192

has a form of its own, one can never assign the form of expression the function of simply representing, describing, or averring a corresponding content: there is neither correspondence nor conformity. The two formalisations are not the same nature; they are independent, heterogeneous.[127]

The final sentence quoted above is significant because the independence of the two formalisations (the 'seen' and the 'said') implies that what is said is not simply a representational function. Rather the "expressed" of statements or incorporeal acts are attributed and *intervene* in corporeal bodies 'not to represent them but to anticipate them or move them back, slow them down or speed them up, separate or combine them, delimit them in a different way' which presupposes that the assemblage can never be a fixed and static object. If the level of expression is determining and that of the visible or content determinable the agent of determination is the order-word[128]. The order-word effects an *incorporeal transformation.* For example, the judge passes the sentence and the accused becomes the convict. What has taken place beforehand (the crime of the accused) and what takes place afterwards (the sentence carried out) involve changes between different bodies – the victim, the property, the convict, the prison etc. However, when the sentence is passed the transformation of the accused into the convict is instantaneous and incorporeal – as they say it is 'the expressed of the judge's sentence.'(p81)

It is as if the painting effectuates an incorporeal transformation that does not intervene to measure the object but is free to 'play only on the surface' becoming an incorporeal event. It could be argued, however, that the process of painting is concerned with corporeal changes; bodies acting on bodies: the body of the paint, the body of the surface, the body of the atmosphere in which the paint dries, the body of the artist. However, the significant transformation is not a change that results from activity per se.

[127] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, (London, 1987), p86
[128] Bruce McClure, 'Between the Seen and the Said: Deleuze-Guattari's Pragmatics of the Order-Word' http://www.smoothspace.co.uk, accessed 12/02/2004

Anyone who has tried to make paintings knows that it is possible to push paint around and make physical changes to the material surface of the painting without changing anything. Change in this sense of an 'event' of change is actually the event of composition.

Of course Frize does not "push paint around" because the processes that he devises prevent this by an act of "non-composition". In effect the paintings dramatise the instantaneous event of the incorporeal transformation: the contradictions (which 'interpret expressionism') are not signified by the material but are 'encoded' at the outset to be a function *of* the material; of the mixing of corporeal bodies. Thus the corporeal object (the painting) is not the form of an incorporeal content (expression); there is no origin or hierarchy within the structure of the incorporeal transformation such that inert substance (literal paint) has been transformed into something else.

> What we must determine is not an origin but points of intervention or insertion in the framework of the reciprocal presupposition of the two forms. Both forms of content and forms of expression are inseparable from a movement of deterritorialisation that carries them away. [129]

Although a painting such as *Unimixte* is obviously dry and is a fixed image the capture by the resin of the brushstrokes holds the paint in a state of suspension. Thus, it becomes difficult to say that, when the paint is applied to the surface, the 'body' of paint/brush/pressure/action produces, upon the 'body' of surface (flat, bounded, fluid), not a new property of *having been* marked or added to, but a new attribute, that of *being* marked or *being* increased – the infinitive of the verb rather than one attached to a subject. The brushstroke is the unit of construction in all these paintings but it is no

[129] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, (London, 1987), p87

longer truly recognisable as such because the texture has disappeared. It is then not possible to measure sensible qualities by relating them to a recognisable object. These qualities are then freed from this limiting identity; the corporeal quality red, for example is not a quality of the red paint applied by the brush but is the "becoming" red of the surface. Likewise the corporeal quality of density is not the amount of pigment that the brush delivered to the surface but is the "becoming" opaque of the surface. The body of paint penetrates the body of the surface and there is a coming together, a co-existence of bodies; each having in themselves different *ways* of being. The painting is full of the sense that certitude is deferred – an uncertainty that is engendered by the contradiction of image and surface.

> These are assemblages or *hecceities* …which are not individuations of an already individuated object or person, but of relational events that can include, for example, a time of day, a season, or anything at all…a text a social body. This is also called *a plane of immanence or of composition* having no supplementary dimension – an *abstract machine.* It is a plane with *n* dimensions growing and contracting with respect to the relations and assemblages being formed and dissolved between relative beings. An event in which both 'subject' and 'objects' are being produced and linked through relations *between the two* (relative being and the relations they are involved in) – Interbeing, always in the middle.[130]

4.4 The Simulacrum and 'Surface Effects'

The aim of this chapter has been to point to the difference between a traditional concept of composition that produces an image by organising extensities in relation to a spatial ground and Deleuze's 'spatial' plane of composition which I have discussed in relation to the autopoietic machine as the advent of a virtual 'organisation' which produces the image as a relation to the outside.

[130] Paul Bains , ' Umwelten', in Semiotica 134- ¼ 2001), p150

Finally, I want to relate this to the operation of the work as simulacral (painting's operation as a non-representational "thinking machine"). The structure of this argument rests upon the narrativisation of the 'contrapuntal relation' so that it is as if the artist's intention (really a desire to repeat the 'radically new' that is beyond description) were a "refrain" that becomes repeated differently in the materiality of the work of art; so that the motivation of a subject becomes the 'motivation' of the self-forming system with materials and processes at the limit between the interiority/exteriority of both. Is it as if the "refrain" of paradox (a desire that cannot be imag(in)ed) were repeated as a dynamic of the pre-individual metastable state with its motivation to 'resolve an initial incompatibility…rife with potentials' within the 'capacity beings possess of falling out of step with themselves, of resolving themselves by the very act of falling out of step.'[131]

Scott Durham argues that Klossowski, in his essay on the myth of Diana and Actaeon,[132] demonstrates the simulacrum as 'the transfiguring event as a moment of becoming-other that undoes the hero's resemblance to himself over time'[133] (i.e. 'falling out of step' with himself).

Durham begins his detailed account with the story's point of departure; the hunter Actaeon's desire to hunt the truth of hunting in response to the sight of a painting which, through the image of Diana (virgin goddess of the hunt), appears to reveal the divine origin of his own powers. On the other side, Diana is portrayed as curious and tempted by 'the transgressions that would give her virtue meaning'. These heterogeneous spaces of the mortal and the divine are mediated by the daemon

[131] Simondon, 'The Genesis of the Individual', pp300-301
[132] Scott Durham, 'From Magritte to Klossowski: The Simulacrum, between Painting and Narrative', in *October* 64, Spring 1993
[133] Ibid, p33

('purveyor of simulacra') who lends Diana its body (and the momentary illusion of mortality) and promises Actaeon the sight of the 'real' Diana whose image it borrows from Actaeon's own fantasies of possession. Thus, Diana will appear to Actaeon but only as her own simulacrum. This is further complicated because in order to see the image of Diana (forbidden to mortal men) Actaeon must become non-human; a stag which is the figure of the hunted but also a figure unable to narrate the act of seeing the forbidden sight.

Without detailing the complex account that follows, the significance of the daemon (as simulacrum) is not as an object but as a figure. Actaeon's daydream is contradictory from the start: Actaeon wants to see the origin of his powers (in the divinised figure of Diana) but also narrate the encounter. However, according to the story he can only do so by disappearing from the space of the narrative (as narrator and narrated) into the (imaginary) tableau (painting) of the encounter. This is figured by Klossowski as a paradoxical event: 'in which the story's protagonist is rendered incapable of telling his story at the precise point of seeing the image that is both that story's origin and its goal – as a displacement from narrative time to pictorial space.[134] Actaeon desires a vision in which he is necessarily excluded; as Durham says; 'his own disappearance into the tableau…marks the origin of his desire *outside* narrative' and now, stag-headed, his identity is suspended between man (narrator) and animal (that sees in the tableau), 'the sayable and the visible'.[135]

It is only the simulacrum that is able to figure such an event which is constructed in Klossowski's narrative as an 'impossible "posthumous gaze" lent to Actaeon…This

[134] Scott Durham, 'From Magritte to Klossowski: The Simulacrum, between Painting and Narrative', in *October* 64, Spring 1993, p27
[135] Ibid, p31

indeterminate and depersonalized gaze is the daemon's gift to Actaeon'[136] which is explained as the figure that can suspend that impossible point at which, when we try to imagine ourselves in the narrative space of the dream (a place always forbidden to us, reserved for an other) by usurping that 'other' the narrative of the dream disappears.

This is an interesting tale because it demonstrates vividly the paradoxical nature of painting; the desire to create a space that is impossible to imagine as ours; we can only occupy this space if we give up the external position that would be able to narrate it. The plan to get there must be 'figured' in order to hold within it that very contradiction.

The contradiction of image and surface created by specific materials and a process of 'non-composition' in Frize' painting is not a puzzle or a trick but such a figure; a space of contradiction through which an 'indeterminate and depersonalised gaze' can pass, perhaps. Unremarkable physical flows of paint and resin coming together create a 'space' in which that coming together becomes significant. It is a sort of dream space with no perspective (so that it is not paint bleeding into the resin or the resin being bled into by the paint, it is not more or less red but "becoming" red etc.) a space therefore that cannot be narrated. It is a 'flattened' space in which 'expressionism's' differential terms immediacy/mediation, nature/culture, arbitrary/motivated, spontaneity/premeditation are held in a relation of non-contradiction; a figural, simulacral spatiality.

[136] Ibid, p31

Conclusion

Written with the interests of someone who paints, the aim of this thesis has been to explore writing from the point of view of painting itself rather than to write *about* painting; to embrace Hubert Damisch's question of whether there could 'be a form of analysis whose aim was not to capture painting in the net of discourse but rather to allow oneself to be educated by it'[137]. This has turned out to be a far more complex question than first thought precisely because that education becomes synthesised within the act of the analysis it performs. Hence there is never a point at which a 'methodology' can be said to have been formed rather there is a process of building 'methodologies-on-demand' according to the specificity of the work in view. Neither does painting precede the analysis that brings certain of its aspects to light, rather analysis cuts across painting to create new perspectives only by avoiding models that would represent painting in other terms.

Hence, the thesis is underpinned by an engagement with the writings of Gilles Deleuze as a philosophy that rejects a representational 'Image of Thought'. This engagement has been a process of investigation both into the paintings I have looked at and into those philosophical ideas used to explicate them (which were at first no more than potentially useful 'outlines'). Rather than instituting a ground at the outset I wanted something creative to pass between writing and painting and to 'discover' connections rather than represent either in terms of the other. Consequently, by allowing instinctive responses and questions encountered along the way to play an important role in the shape of the

[137] Hubert Damisch, *The Origin of Perspective*, (Massachusetts, 1995), p262

final thesis the writing process (as much as the painting process) has been rather ad hoc. I am aware that as I have tried to put philosophical concepts to work in order to explicate the problems of painting (rather than philosophy) the philosophical references are, perhaps, not as systematically realised as they could have been. Furthermore, in order to gain access to the philosophical complexities with which I framed the thesis in the introduction, I have made use of figures developed in the field of evolutionary biology at the risk of being reductive and not abstract enough.

In relation to the idea that paintings' 'current match' is to 'deconstruct' the notion of an 'end' (or work through the end by 'deconstructing' it) the most important model to mention is that of the 'autopoietic machine' which, understood within a biosemiotic model of evolution, I have used in an attempt to figure something of Deleuze's philosopohy of time upon which such a 'deconstruction' would depend. Autopoiesis is particularly important because it distinguishes itself as a model that seeks to account for the life of the organism rather than serve the 'domain of observation'. In terms of Damisch's question this model takes on significance as it approaches analysis from the point of view of the organism/work itself rather than from the point of view of a priori interpretative interests.

Despite the limitations of my philosophical understanding[138] I have found the research project to be a liberating process. As mentioned in the introduction, Modernism has been a significant influence on my values and practice since I was a BA student although, due to the orthodoxy it became, one that I have felt for a long time to be creatively limiting. The problem for discourse of how to begin with the primacy and

[138] I invoke Bois' methodological 'right-to-store-up-policy' mentioned in the introduction as justification for the use of these concepts detached from a fully systematic philosophical context.

specificity of the work (so important to Greenberg's empiricism) as a non-representational model is demonstrated in the criticism of Bois and Damisch. However, it has been through the philosophy of Deleuze that I found that the either/or way of thinking structured by the Modernism/post-Modernism dialectic has been dissipated at the level of my own practice. Writing the thesis has provided the opportunity to re-examine aspects of painting articulated by Modernism in teleological terms; to recuperate them for a different kind of discourse; one that does not set out an a priori ground but which sets out to discover something of the thought that painting is already thinking.

Rather than being faced with the option of discussing painting as either autonomous or not, the first two chapters considered Juan Usle's paintings in terms of constructing a relation with 'the outside' that involves the specificity of materials and processes. The use of the terms abstract and figurative that emerged in that discussion as inter-related rather than opposing terms was continued in a discussion of Tim Renshaw's painting. This chapter concluded by suggesting that the mode of analysis at stake here, despite investigating a type of formalism, is forced to operate at the interface between painting and its outsides rather than approach form in its isolation. In the final chapter the specific materials and processes used by Bernard Frize were understood, not as a trope of 'non-composition', but according to Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the plane of composition, to figure its 'flattened' space and our inability to narrate our place within it.

Unsurprisingly the thesis has proved to be as much about writing as it has been about painting. It has become apparent through a consideration of the idea of 'surface effects'

(appropriated from the ‘Second Series of Paradoxes of Surface Effects’ in *The Logic of Sense* and other secondary essays) that to ‘allow oneself to be educated’ by painting means that painting can never be exhausted in the act of interpretation. It is also apparent that the synthesis within analysis of what it discovers along the way implies a non-representational discourse whose action is not to fix its object in relation to a critical position but to create something else, ‘surface effects’, at the interface between discourse and its object. This is both a realisation of the writing but also a realisation in writing of the thought that belongs to painting when it is encountered, not simply as an object but as ‘an object of a fundamental encounter’.

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