

**Useful Fictions:
Re-enactment as a strategy for locating the contemporary in
painting.**

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Abstract

This practice-led research project constructs the paradoxical claim that painting is at its most contemporary when it is archival. This addresses the problem of how to situate a historical medium within our current digital, globalised age, offering a new approach by synthesising recent accounts of a network aesthetic (David Joselit) with theories of contemporaneity (Peter Osborne/ Terry Smith) and archival practice (Hal Foster/ Craig Staff). I will propose that through archival operations of collecting, organising and conserving past cultural material, painting might express contemporaneity, operating as both installation and as score. This is approached as a response to a 'perceived loss of history', or 'a loss of a futural moment' (Geoff Cox/ Jacob Lund), understood in relation to the legacies of Modernism.

Re-enactment, described by Joan Gibbons as 'relational or participatory forms of memory-work', offers a strategy to think *as if* from a different temporal perspective or alternate subject position, and will be developed over the course of this thesis as a critical methodology. This will encompass acts of re-construction, re-materialisation and recollection, working in the capacity of artist-curator and as an individual practitioner, to explore the ways in which re-enactment engages and constructs public and private memory.

Through a case study tracing the posthumous circulation of elements of Piet Mondrian's studio I will pursue the motivations and implications of re-enactment as it intersects with painting. This develops an argument that re-enactment constitutes a new form of seriality, marked by a relationship to the act of fictioning.

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Useful Fictions: Re-enactment as a strategy for locating the Contemporary in Painting.

Introduction:

Con-temporaneity: The coming together of times of painting.

‘con-temporaneity, a coming together not simply ‘in’ time, but *of times*’ (Peter Osborne)¹

This practice-based research project situates contemporary painting in relation to archival art practice, by employing re-enactment as a methodology to explore the ways in which painting performs its past. Building upon Laura Hoptman’s identification of re-enactment as a contemporary mode of appropriation, described as painting-in-drag or ‘wearing the art of another’², I will develop an understanding of the ways in which painting re-enacts the past. This will encompass re-constructions of the studio, the re-materialisation of conceptual scores, and image-based practices which use historical material as primary content.

Drawing on Hal Foster’s³ articulation of an emerging archival impulse in contemporary fine art practice and Craig Staff’s research into retroactivity⁴, I will question whether artistic strategies of utilising past material express a form of cultural memory loss or a speculative gain. Through this research project I will

¹ Peter Osborne, *Anywhere or not at all: Philosophy of Contemporary Art* (London and New York: Verso: 2013), p. 17.

² Laura Hoptman is quoting David Joselit in, ‘Atemporality’, in *The Forever Now: Contemporary Painting in an Atemporal World*, ed. by Claire Barliant (New York: MOMA: 2014), p. 35.

³ Hal Foster, *Bad New Days: Art, Criticism, Emergency* (London and New York: Verso: 2015).

⁴ Craig Staff, *Retroactivity and Contemporary Art* (London: Bloomsbury Academic: 2018).

construct the paradoxical proposition that painting is at its most contemporary when it is archival.

Broadly speaking my research project can be situated in relation to recent discourse concerning the operations of painting in our current digital, globalised era, affirming an understanding of painting as plural and heterogenous, and medium as aggregative⁵. Specifically, re-enactment offers a means to respond to recent claims that contemporary painting is marked by an anachronistic character, exhibiting a new critical attention to networks of distribution⁶. For instance, curator Laura Hoptman argues that recent abstract painting is characterised by the simultaneous presentation of multiple historical references, expressing ‘a *connoisseurship* of boundless information’⁷, whilst critic David Joselit approaches painting through the performativity of an image over time, proposing that, ‘painting now enacts the dislocation or transfer of populations of images: it is essentially, a broadcast medium’⁸. I aim to contribute to this discourse by pursuing what re-enactment means in relation to contemporary painting, addressing the following questions:

⁵ This follows Rosalind Krauss’s understanding of medium, developed in her publication, *A Voyage on the North Sea: Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition* (New York: Thames and Hudson: 1999). The description of recent painting as plural and heterogenous is frequently encountered in current discourse, for instance, Isabelle Graw and Ewa Lajer-Burcharth’s reference to the “pluralised and heterogenous conception on the medium”, in the preface to, *Painting beyond Itself: The Medium in the Post-medium Condition*, ed. by Isabelle Graw and Ewa Lajer-Burcharth (Berlin: Sternberg Press: 2016), p. 9.

⁶ For example, the perspectives offered by Laura Hoptman and David Joselit in the curation of recent survey exhibitions: ‘*The Forever Now: Contemporary Painting in an Atemporal World*’, (2015, MOMA) and ‘*Painting 2:0, Expression in the Information Age*’, (2016, MUMOK/ Museum Brandhorst).

⁷ Hoptman, ‘Atemporality’, in *The Forever Now*, p. 14.

⁸ David Joselit, ‘Signal Processing: On Abstraction then and now’, *ArtForum*, Vol. 49. No. 10. (Summer 2011) <<http://artarchives.net/texts/2011/joselit2011.html>> [Accessed 03/04/2018].

- In examples of contemporary painting which take historical material as primary content, how does the act of repetition and secondary nature of the composition, problematise a critical approach focused on indexicality, gesture and subjectivity?
- In what sense is an original artwork present in a subsequent re-make, and what conditions frame re-enactment as productive?
- To what extent can strategies of appropriation in recent abstract painting be understood as archival, and what is at stake in this shift in terminology?

Following Peter Osborne, the contemporary is understood as an ‘an *operative fiction*’ which ‘*regulates the division* between the past and the present within the present’⁹. Within the context of my research project the descriptor ‘contemporary’ is intended to refer to our specific historical present, whilst conveying the potential volatility and contradictory nature of contemporaneity entailed in the simultaneous co-existence of multiple temporalities. This is articulated succinctly by Geoff Cox and Jacob Lund in *The Contemporary Condition* as they explain, ‘the contemporary is at once a periodizing category in the sense that it is our era, the time in which we live, and a model or experiential category in the sense that it is a particular relationship to time and to history, or maybe an experience of a loss of history, of a loss of a futural moment’¹⁰. In terms of contemporary painting this potential dislocation from a historical continuum can be associated with Craig Staff’s assertion that Modernism appears to be in a state of ruin, presented by Staff as a

⁹ Peter Osborne, *Anywhere or not at all*, p. 23.

¹⁰ Geoff Cox and Jacob Lund, *The Contemporary Condition: Introductory Thoughts on Contemporaneity and Contemporary Art* (Berlin: Sternberg Press: 2016), p. 9.

rationale for the recent surge in forms of retroactive art practice¹¹. Additionally, this perceived loss of a teleological linear narrative manifests as anxiety regarding the difficulty of acknowledging the history of painting as a discipline whilst locating a point of contemporary relevance. For instance, practitioner Daniel Sturgis writes, 'How can an art form that is indebted to, and informed by, its long and rich history still make a space for itself in today's world? How can this "antique mode"- to use the American artist Robert Morris's summation of painting way back in the mid-1960s – still be credible today?'¹². In our particular historical moment this issue is amplified through the role of technology in establishing new forms of connectivity and instantaneous exchange of information, as Laura Hoptman acknowledges when she states, 'Artists have always looked to art history for inspiration, but the immediate and hugely expanded catalogue of visual information offered by the Internet has radically altered visual artists' relationship to the history of art and caused, as the painter Matt Connors puts it, a "redirection of artistic enquiry from strictly forwards moving into a kind of super-branched out questioning".'¹³.

I propose that the historicity of painting and current position within the broader cultural sphere can be negotiated through an attention to the ways in which painting reflects and constructs contemporaneity. Contemporaneity has been defined by Cox and Lund as, 'the temporal complexity that follows from the coming together in the same cultural space of heterogenous clusters generated along

¹¹ Outlined in 'Modernism in Ruins', pp 11-30, in Staff, *Retroactivity and Contemporary Art*.

¹² Daniel Sturgis, 'The Indiscipline of Painting', in *The Indiscipline of Painting: International Abstraction from the 1960s to Now*, ed. by Daniel Sturgis, Sarah Shalgosky and Martin Clark (London: Tate Publishing: 2011), pp. 7-12 (p. 7).

¹³ Hoptman, 'Atemporality', in *The Forever Now*, p. 14.

different historical trajectories, across different scales and in different localities'¹⁴.

Following this definition we might approach interdisciplinary modes of art production, such as painting in the expanded field as it intersects with the histories of installation and performance, and modes of practice which bring together objects and ideas from multiple spatial-temporal sites, for instance, archival and retroactive practice, as expressions of contemporaneity. Additionally, this asserts the need to be sensitive towards different registers of time, scaling up experiential and imagined time, from personal to public and collective to institutional¹⁵.

Whilst observations of the anachronistic character of recent painting tend to emphasize a disengaged and free-associational engagement with past styles, gestures and motifs, encapsulated in Oscar Murillo's statement, 'We have everything available and we can just use what's there and around and not feel concerned about it'¹⁶, my practice is positioned against a casual or indifferent mode of engaging with the past. Re-enactment is employed as a research strategy to move beyond superficial questions of appearance, instead probing the motivations and implications of working with historical material.

Re-enactment constitutes a specific form of archival or retroactive practice, prioritising embodied experience and a physical re-materialisation of the past, with the aim of exploring or producing memory. Approaching painting through re-enactment situates contemporary painting in relation to a broader cultural trend

¹⁴ Cox and Lund, *The Contemporary Condition*, p. 13.

¹⁵ Cox and Lund quote Terry Smith's remarks that contemporary art is marked by a self-reflexive attitude to ways of being in and belonging to time, moving through the categories of intimate, local, nearby, distant and virtual. Cox and Lund, *The Contemporary Condition*, p. 15.

¹⁶ Quoted by Laura Hoptman, 'Atemporality', in *The Forever Now*, p. 14.

towards 'retro-' production. In addition to the emergence of new categorical terms, such as 'archival' or 'retroactive', this tendency towards recycling existing cultural material has been noted in surveys such as, 'Once More... with Feeling: Re-enactment in Contemporary Art', (*Art Journal*, 2007)¹⁷, 'Re-make, Re-model' (*Frieze*, 2012)¹⁸, and 'The Year in Re-' (*ArtForum*, 2013)¹⁹, as well as through a recent series of international exhibitions focused on artistic strategies of re-enactment²⁰. This is described as 'more pervasive and insistent' than postmodernist appropriation, encompassing both the use of past artworks as primary content for new work and the full-scale re-staging of major historical exhibitions²¹. Painting is occasionally referenced, for instance, in 'Re-make, Re-model,' Catherine Wood points to the re-staging of Gutai performances in 1990s, and Spartacus Chetwynd's 2003 re-staging of Yves Klein's *Anthropométries*. However, the specific way in which painting re-enacts the past has received limited critical attention²². As previously mentioned, in the catalogue to the major survey exhibition, 'The Forever Now: Contemporary Painting in an Atemporal World' (MOMA, 2014-15), curator Laura Hoptman lists re-

¹⁷ Robert Blackson, 'Once More...with Feeling: Re-enactment in Contemporary Art and Culture,' *Art Journal*, Vol. 66 No. 1 (Spring 2007), pp. 28-40, <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/20068513>> [Accessed 06/08/2019].

¹⁸ Catherine Wood, 'Re-make, Re-model', *Frieze*, Issue 1 (Oct 2012), <<https://frieze.com/article/re-make-re-model-0>> [Accessed 06/03/2019].

¹⁹ Martha Buskirk, Amelia Jones and Caroline A. Jones, 'The Year in Re-', *ArtForum*, Vol. 52. No. 4. (Dec 2013). <<https://www.artforum.com/print/201310/the-year-in-re-44068>> [Accessed 01/01/2018].

²⁰ For example, Robert Blackson notes the exhibitions; *Now Again the Past: Rewind, Replay, Respond*, (Carnegie Art Centre, 2006), *A Historical Occasion: Artists Making History*, (MOCA, 2006), *Life, Once More: Forms of Re-enactment in Contemporary*, (Witte de With, 2005) and *Experience, Memory, Re-enactment*, (Piet Zwart Institute, 2004). In, 'Once More...with Feeling', pp. 28-40.

²¹ Buskirk, Jones and Jones, 'The Year in Re-'.

²² The tendency of recent painting to use historical material as primary content has been highlighted by Andrew Bracey, which he terms 'Parasitical Painting', drawing on the theories of Michel Serres rather than making reference to re-enactment. Andrew Bracey, 'Parasitical Paintings', *Journal of Contemporary Painting*, Vol. 4. No. 2. (Oct 2018), pp. 325-344.

enactment as one of several terms to extend the Vitalism metaphor²³, situating ‘re-enactment’ next to ‘re-animation’, ‘Frankenstein’s monster’ and ‘cannibalism’. Re-enactment is depicted here as a form of role-playing, exploring subjectivity by mimicking the *look* of historical painting, or working *as if* from an alternate temporal perspective. Whilst Hoptman emphasises the body and identity, the tropes she highlights in recent painting²⁴, for instance, the layering of past motifs, strategies of juxtaposition and metonymic devices, intersects with David Joselit’s claim that contemporary painting has come to incorporate within its image the field of image transmission. Joselit points to pictorial strategies which appropriate modes of painterly expression as ‘received’ images, for example, the recent paintings of Thomas Eggerer, as well as offering a platform to expanded forms of painting practice which incorporate a live element, such as, the performance-lectures of Jutta Koether. He argues that through repetition of existing cultural material and recontextualization there is a gain rather than a loss, as he writes, ‘Significance is accumulated through the re-enactment and relocation of the “same” image in different places and times’²⁵. Additionally, David Joselit has used the term re-enactment in reference to the conceptual abstraction of Stephen Prina,

²³ I refer here to the idea that painting appears to express the subjectivity of the painter. This is historically attributed to art historian Hubert Damisch and circulates within current discourse through the theories of Isabelle Graw. For example, ‘The Value of Liveliness: Painting as an Index of Agency in the New Economy’, in *Painting beyond Itself: The Medium in the Post-medium Condition*, ed. by Isabelle Graw and Ewa Lajer-Burchath (Berlin: Sternberg Press: 2016), pp. 79-101.

²⁴ For example, Laura Owens, Charlene von Heyl or Rashid Johnson.

²⁵ Joselit, ‘Signal Processing’.

describing his cataloguing project, *Exquisite Corpse: The Complete Paintings of Manet*, (1988-ongoing)²⁶, as ‘a non-objective style of re-enactment on paper’²⁷.

As Joselit’s supplementary detail ‘on paper’ suggests, the general omission of painting from surveys of re-enactment can be accounted for on the basis that the umbrella term ‘representation’ lends itself more naturally to visual art practices, whereas ‘re-enactment’ is usually applied to durational artforms, such as performance. This is highlighted in the article, ‘The Year in Re-’, which defines 21 terms beginning with the prefix re- which have entered art terminology, concluding that each can be understood as a nuanced form of representation. Re-enactment has a particular orientation towards experiential, time-based forms, and can be differentiated from related terms such as ‘re-stage’ on the basis that it implies an actual experience of the past rather than an interpretation or documentation of a previous event. For this reason re-enactment is particularly applicable to process-based approaches to painting and hybrid forms of presentation which may incorporate a narrative, durational element, for instance, live action or video documentation. The differentiation between re-staging and re-enactment emphasizes the immersive and speculative nature of re-enactment, expressing ‘a fantasy of full-scale reconstitution’ of the past or the possibility of imaginatively

²⁶ The project is based on the 556 paintings included in Manet’s Catalogue Raisonné. Each time the project is presented Prina selects three original Manet paintings and partially reproduces them, making drawings the same size and shape as the original, but replacing the original pictorial context with a monochromatic colour wash. To the right of these images is a smaller work which indexes all 556 paintings. Pedro de Llano, ‘Displacement and Translation in the work of Stephen Prina’, *AfterAll Online*, (07.09.2009).

<<https://www.afterall.org/online/displacement.and.translation.in.the.work.of.stephen.prina#.XU7F9uhKjIU>> [Accessed 10/08/2019].

²⁷ David Joselit, ‘Painting Beside Itself’, *October*, No. 130 (Fall 2009), pp. 125-134, P. 128.

<<https://www.mitpressjournals.org/doi/10.1162/octo.2009.130.1.125>> [Accessed 01/06/2016].

entering a subject position other than one's own²⁸. Returning to Hoptman's articulation of re-enactment as 'painting-in-drag', a possible motivation for this practice emerges as she writes, 'what first might appear as a mining of the past in order to go back in time is actually a will to experience historical form as if for the first time- that is, without the burden of chronology'²⁹. The dependence of contemporary painting on past material can perhaps be understood then as a form of personalised, non-linear historicization, reflecting on 'what the medium was *before modernism*'³⁰.

Rather than approaching this as an indicator of atemporality³¹, which might orientate the discussion within the past contemporary of the 1980s, I propose that the dependence of current abstraction on historical forms of painting can be critically engaged with through the category of archival practice, as it has been formulated by critic Hal Foster. This offers a means to trace how the past is collected, organised and conserved in painting, to form 'new orders of affective association'³², operating within the apparent discrepancy between a contemporary experience of time and the remnants of Modernist traditions. This disjuncture is articulated by artist John Chilver as he writes, 'the rhythms of current techno-capitalism bear little or no resemblance to the poetics of the modernists' flow of consciousness, and instead imply a consciousness or data processor that is

²⁸ Buskirk, Jones and Jones, 'The Year in Re-'.

²⁹ Hoptman, 'Atemporality', in, *The Forever Now*, p. 45.

³⁰ Graw and Lajer-Burcharth, *Painting beyond Itself*, p. 7.

³¹ Hoptman explains in the foreword to '*The Forever Now*' catalogue how the term 'atemporality' was first introduced by science-fiction author William Gibson in 1980s. Claire Barliant (ed.), *The Forever Now: Contemporary Painting in an Atemporal World* (New York: MOMA: 2014).

³² Foster, *Bad New Days*, p. 60.

machinic, artificial and posthuman'³³. For Chilver, this shift in our relationship to time means that a phenomenological approach to painting is no longer viable. He suggests that progressive contemporary painting is marked by a conceptual character, adopting reflexive techniques and exploiting the capacity of painting to assert and displace notions of site, so that painting, 'others itself and oversteps its formal, stylistic and discursive boundaries'³⁴.

The emphasis in re-enactment on embodied experience might similarly prompt a new self-consciousness to the action, or deferral, of perception, whilst the archival nature of re-enactment positions the painter as a collector, or perhaps curator, moving away from the technological connotations of 'network painting'³⁵. To further develop an understanding of the ways in which re-enactment is distinct from the related concepts of Post-Modernist appropriation and the simulacra I will briefly outline the intended meaning of the key terms 'archival' and 'retroactive' as they will be taken forward in this thesis.

Outlined initially by Hal Foster in the article 'An Archival Impulse' (2004)³⁶, and developed into a chapter for his 2015 publication *Bad New Days: Art, Criticism, Emergency*, the 'Archival' is one of five terms which Foster introduces to identify points of commonality in recent forms of art practice³⁷. In basic terms the archival

³³ John Chilver, 'The Discursive Array: Towards a Politics of Painting as Time-Space Production', *Journal of Contemporary Painting*, Vol 4. No. 1. (2018) pp. 81-101. (p. 83).

³⁴ Ibid. p. 99.

³⁵ This term has emerged in painting discourse as shorthand to refer to David Joselit's arguments concerning the distribution networks of painting. Developed in his publications, *After Art* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press: 2012), and articles such as 'Painting Beside Itself', *October*, No. 130 (Fall 2009), pp. 125-134, <<https://www.mitpressjournals.org/doi/10.1162/octo.2009.130.1.125>> [Accessed 01/02/2016]. Joselit's theories will be addressed in more detail in Chapter Two.

³⁶ Hal Foster, 'An Archival Impulse,' *OCTOBER 110* (Fall 2004), 3-22.

³⁷ Foster specifies that his focus will be on art practices from 1989 to present, situating his criticism in relation to the rise of neo-liberal politics.

impulse Foster identifies involves an act of searching through past ideas and forms and re-materialising that which has been lost, subverted or never realised, producing fragmentary, idiosyncratic and often indeterminate aesthetic outcomes. Extending the Foucauldian understanding of the archive, positioned as 'neither affirmative nor critical per se'³⁸, Foster argues that current strategies of archival art do not appear to be engaged in institutional critique or a rejection of totalising representational strategies, and instead seem to operate with an acceptance of the archive as 'partial and provisional'³⁹, 'fundamentally heterogenous and always incomplete'⁴⁰.



[Thomas Hirschorn, *Mondrian Altar*, 2012, Mixed media installation]

³⁸ Hal Foster, 'Archives of Modern Art', *OCTOBER 99* (Winter 2002), 81-95 (p. 81).

³⁹ Foster, 'An Archival Impulse', p. 21.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* p. 16.

Foster proposes that archival practice emerges from earlier avant-garde strategies which involve collecting (for example, the use of montage in John Heartfield, or collage in Hannah Hoch), and neo-avant-garde strategies of assemblage (such as, Robert Rauschenberg's *Combine Paintings*)⁴¹. Whilst he spans a range of international artists and different forms of art practices (including Pierre Huyghe, Tacita Dean, Joachim Koester, and Sam Durant) it is possible to make the general observation that archival practice often expresses a bias towards the use of found imagery and installation⁴². Archival art involves both the use and production of archives, resulting in highly particular or personalised narratives or sets of data which require human interpretation⁴³. Whilst Foster identifies the internet as an example of a 'mega-archive'⁴⁴, the art projects he presents as characteristic of archival practice employ modes of production which result in a tangible art object rather than an immaterial act of exchange.

Foster likens the figure of artist-as-archivist to the hybrid professional role of artist-as-curator⁴⁵. For example, Thomas Hirschorn's, *Mondrian Altar*⁴⁶, which consists of a make-shift display of Mondrian memorabilia and primary coloured objects, curates a collection of found material to express a pedagogical agenda. This extends the concept of how painting might re-enact its past, so that in addition to reflecting on how an artwork brings together multiple historical signs within an image we might consider the act of exhibition as an archival gesture in itself.

⁴¹ Foster, *Bad New Days, Art*, p. 32.

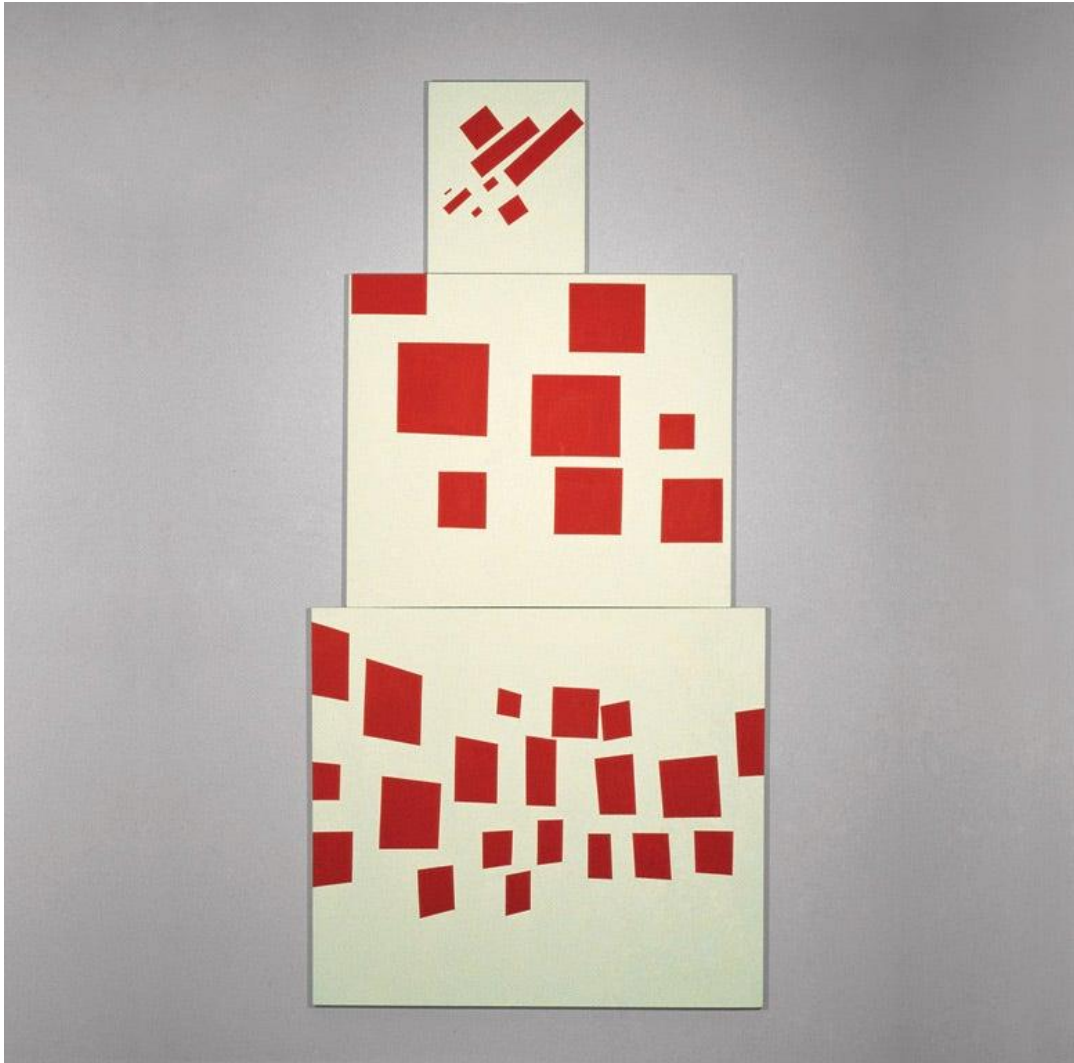
⁴² Foster, 'An Archival Impulse', p. 4.

⁴³ Ibid. p. 5.

⁴⁴ Foster, *Bad New Days*, p. 34.

⁴⁵ Foster, 'An Archival Impulse', p. 5.

⁴⁶ Installed most recently in New York to coincide with MOMA PS1's 'September 11', exhibition curated by Peter Eleey, 11 September 2011 – 9 January 2012.



[David Diao, *3rd International/ Tatlin*, 1985. Acrylic paint on canvas, overall size: 269.24 x 132.08cm]

For instance, David Diao's paintings from the 1980s/90s display the strategy of using history 'as a template for painting'⁴⁷, resulting in an idiosyncratic mode of collecting historical references and encoded manner of presentation. To offer a specific example, his painting, *Third International Tatlin* (1985), uses multiple existing artworks as primary content, a strategy Diao has described as working with the 'existing residue' of art history⁴⁸.

⁴⁷ Diao quoted by Michal Corris in, 'Medals of Honour and Flags on Convenience: The Paintings of David Diao', *David Diao: Works 1969-2000* (Hong Kong: Timezone 8 Limited: 2005), pp. 7-20 (p. 12).

⁴⁸ Sturgis, Shalgosky and Clark, *The Indiscipline of Painting*, p. 58.

The composition consists of 3 canvases stacked on top of each, descending in size from bottom to top to form an approximate outline of a tower. The title prompts an association with Vladimir Tatlin's architectural model, *Monument to the Third International* (1919-20), which was never realised as a building. Each canvas consists of a constellation of red geometric shapes on a white ground, painted with acrylic. The top canvas is a copy of Kazimir Malevich's *Suprematism (Eight Red Rectangles)* (1915), the middle canvas a copy of Blinky Palermo's appropriation of Malevich's work, *Composition with 8 Rectangles* (1964), and the bottom canvas is based on the iconic photograph documenting, '0.10, The Last Futurist exhibition' (1915-16). This photograph of the corner view of the installation, recognisable through the high position of Malevich's iconic *Black Square* at the intersection of the walls, (*Suprematism, Eight Red Rectangles* would be visible in the bottom left of this photograph), has been translated into an abstract painting, so that each exhibited artwork is represented by a red, geometric shape and the spatial plane of the room is flattened into a white ground. By giving the source artwork, the appropriation and the documentation of the original exhibition equal treatment, the original Malevich painting is positioned within a trajectory which comes to include subsequent repetitions, and Diao's own 'free-associational' re-invention⁴⁹. This indicates how historical artworks might come to accumulate content, a condition Diao has described as the 'porous' nature of paintings⁵⁰. This illustrates Hal Foster's observation that archival forms of art practice are closely related to

⁴⁹ This phrase is used by painter John Zinsser in reference to a trait in geometric abstraction in 1990s, which used multiple art historical references in an open and inventive way. Published in, Zinsser, J. 'Geometry and its Discontents,' *Tema Celeste*, Special Issue, International Edition No 32-33 (Aug 1991), 72-76 (p. 76).

⁵⁰ Sturgis, Shalgosky and Clark, *The Indiscipline of Painting*, p. 58.

principles of assemblage, and consequently require a human interpreter (in this specific example, one with a reasonable knowledge of art history). Presenting the original Malevich painting and the later appropriation by Palermo side by side reveals a process of reduction, as the identity of the original is located in the colour scheme and spatial arrangement of geometric shapes. The multiplicity of references offered in Diao's painting indicates that historical appropriation here is not directed towards questions of authorship, instead amplifying the act of repetition involved in appropriation, registering as, 'a sort of performative signature code'⁵¹.

The impulse towards working with past cultural material extends beyond individual paintings towards the broader contextual framework of exhibition, emphasizing how the act of public presentation generates an opportunity to historicise. For example, in the context of the 2012 exhibition, 'Conceptual Abstraction'⁵², which was a re-staging of a 1991 exhibition of the same name, Diao produced several paintings which explicitly comment on chronology and constitute a form of self-archiving. For instance, *Plus and Minus*, begun as a geometric composition in the 1970s, documents his career by silk-screen printing reviews of his exhibitions over the top of the original painting. In the 2012 iteration of the exhibition 'Conceptual Abstraction', this was exhibited alongside an updated version of his painting *Barnett Newman, Chronology of Work*, which had been exhibited originally in 1991. This work adapts a historical chart from the catalogue raisonne of Newman's work, so

⁵¹ Jan Bäcklund, 'The Paradox of Style as a Concept of Art', in *The Aesthetics and Ethics of Copying*, ed. by Darren Hudson Hick and Reinhold Schmücker (London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic: 2016), pp. 211- 224 (p. 221).

⁵² Originally presented in 1991 at Sydney Janis Gallery, and re-staged in 2012 for Hunter College/Times Square Gallery, (October 5- November 10, 2012). Curated by Pepe Karmel and Joachim Pissaro.

that the bands of dates come to mimic the vertical bands of colour in Newman's 1950-51 painting *Vir Heroicus Sublimis*. In terms which echo those used by Foster in relation to the archival, the exhibition catalogue notes how the participating artists employ historical material without a nostalgia for Modernist logic, instead 'making pictures whose meaning derived from relationships between fragments of previously existing units (historical idioms originally conceived as complete in themselves).'

Whilst this example illustrates many traits of Foster's concept of an 'archival impulse' it could similarly be approached as 'retroactive'. A tendency towards retroactive practice has been observed in Craig Staff's recent publication, *Retroactivity and Contemporary Art*⁵³, defined by Staff as an act which, 'entails utilizing in some way, shape or form, that which has previously occurred, happened or existed'⁵⁴. As in Foster's articulation of archival practice, retroactive art encompasses a broad range of artforms although there is an overall trend towards documentary modes of production, such as, lens-based media. As in Foster's identification of the category of archival practice, retroactivity encompasses a wide span of different artistic agendas and affective possibility, ranging from the contemplative tone of Sophie Ristelhueber's aerial photographs of the post-war landscape of Kuwait, to the playful critique of conceptual art in the work of filmmakers Iain Forsyth and Jane Pollard.

⁵³ For the purpose of Staff's research the contemporary is defined as the last 20 years. Staff, *Retroactivity and Contemporary Art*.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* p. 3.

Staff presents retroactive practice as a fluid motion of exchange, both acting upon the past and re-configuring our capacity to read the present and speculate on future forms. He argues ‘retroactivity requires us to consider and reflect upon how that which inhabits the past tense can become re-imagined within the present tense and material effects of what is, in this case, the work of contemporary art’⁵⁵. Staff’s notion of retroactive art relies on establishing a distinction between the past and history, where history is understood as subjective and plural, one of many possible accounts of the past, and the past is seen as irrecoverable because virtually without limit⁵⁶. He suggests that the appeal of the past to contemporary artists is not motivated by nostalgia or melancholy, but instead driven by the appeal of the, ‘radical otherness of the “before now”’⁵⁷. In terms of painting, this indicates that retroactive forms of practice might constitute a new means for the medium to self-differ by identifying with the past as radically ‘other’.

The concepts of archival and retroactive practice as formulated by Foster and Staff will be referred to throughout this thesis to explore the particular manner in which painting re-enacts its past and articulates a memory-form. Whilst re-enactment tends to resist categorisation as a specific mode of practice, the primary meaning emerges through performance theory, articulating a form of ‘lived historicity’⁵⁸ that prioritises bodily experience, affect and collective action. Joan Gibbons offers a broad definition of re-enactment as ‘relational or participatory forms of memory-

⁵⁵ Ibid. p. 3.

⁵⁶ Staff cites Keith Jenkin’s publication ‘*Rethinking History*’ (1991). p. 3.

⁵⁷ Ibid. Staff is quoting Keith Jenkins here, p. 7.

⁵⁸ Jerome de Groot, ‘Affect and Empathy: re-enactment and performance as/in history’, *Rethinking History*, 15: 4 (Nov 2011), pp. 587- 599 (p. 592), DOI: 10.1080/13642529.2011.603926.

work'⁵⁹, specifying that this form of practice pursues episodic memory. Gibbons suggests this is related to earlier forms of psychogeography (such as, Surrealist explorations of the city, or Situationist *dérive* and *détournement*), only here foregrounding a temporal rather than geographical site⁶⁰. Whilst this might intersect with certain expanded forms of painting, specifically spatial forms, such as installation, or durational, participatory forms, I anticipate a more limited applicability to conventional forms of image production and presentation. In order to include conventional modes of painting within this discussion I will additionally draw on the conceptual framework offered by Tom McCarthy's novel *Remainder*⁶¹. This imagines a more introspective form of re-enactment and introduces the phenomena of *déjà vu*.

The narrative of my practice over the course of my PhD research will trace a transition from approaching re-enactment as a collaborative strategy intended to offer a shared experience of an existing artwork, to an understanding of re-enactment as a serial mode of production, which entails self-observation and the deferral of a sense of an ending. This marks a transition in my thinking from understanding re-enactment as a means to invent memory, with the intention of facilitating a collective experience of an actual past artwork, to memory as re-invention, or a strategy to access a past of the *possible*. Whilst in the context of art production, re-enactment is directed towards the production of a collective memory of a past performance and usually presented in positive terms as a means

⁵⁹ Joan Gibbons, *Contemporary Art and Memory: Images of Recollection and Remembrance* (London and New York: I.B Tauris and Co Ltd: 2007), p. 8.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* p. 96.

⁶¹ Tom McCarthy, *Remainder* (London: Alma Books: 2016).

to share experience and knowledge, McCarthy's fictionalised account of re-enactment resists such idealisation.

The plot of *Remainder* describes an eccentric project of constructing fantasies based on vague memories or second-hand accounts of events, in order for the central character to feel more authentic. Facilitated by a company called 'Time Control', the construction of sets and employment of actors allows the protagonist, described as 'the imaginative everyman'⁶², to manipulate experiential time, slowing down or re-winding actions and infinitely looping events. This investment in choreographing the present, beginning with mundane domestic scenes and escalating towards dramatic violent events, acts as a device to counter a teleological understanding of time. The memory loss, or rupture in historical continuity which motivates the plan of re-enactments, results then in the deferral of an ending. This is reflected in the final scene of the novel as the protagonist commands an aeroplane to keep looping back on itself rather than progressing in any singular direction. Similarly, artistic re-enactment offers a means to approach past artworks as open propositions, and the outcomes of my practice as part of an ongoing series of possible responses, problematising notions of progress and productivity.

The hypothesis articulated in McCarthy's *Remainder* of re-enactment as a relational system of memory orientated around the personal agenda of an individual rather than seeking to develop a participatory form, offers an appropriate lens to discuss the paintings produced in the later stages of my research project. I will use the

⁶² Sydney Miller, 'Intentional Fallacies: (Re)enacting the Accidental in Tom McCarthy's 'Remainder'', *Contemporary Literature*, Vol. 56. No. 4 (Winter 2015), pp. 634-659 (p. 635).

central ideas of 'second-hand gestures', 'surplus matter' and the 'neutral space' of memory-blanks, to reflect on problems of authenticity encountered through producing in series and re-enacting historical paintings.

Throughout this thesis I will situate examples of my practice in relation to narrative accounts concerning the legacy of Piet Mondrian's last studio, 15 East 59th Street, New York, building upon the research of scholar Nancy J. Troy⁶³. In Chapter One I will use the historical example of Harry Holtzman's reconstruction of Mondrian's studio colour experiments, known retrospectively as his *Wall Works*, to introduce the paradox of style. I will use this example to explore how the act of reconstruction appears to position the studio and the gallery in a non-hierarchical relationship as simultaneous sites of origin, and establish re-enactment as a form of contemporary composition with reference to the theories of Terry Smith and Boris Groys. The *Wall Works* will be discussed in relation to new spatial compositions (*Public Action Painting*, 2015) which sought to document my production processes. In Chapter Two I will use the narrative of a series of copies of Mondrian's last unfinished painting *Victory Boogie-Woogie* to discuss the distinctions between a forensic and interpretative approach to re-making. Here I will present examples from a curatorial project ('Ingredients, Method, Serving Suggestion', 2016) which explicitly sought to remake conceptual scores from the 1960s, questioning the contemporary appeal of this era. Chapter Three will discuss a performance-lecture *Piet Mondrian 63-96*, delivered by a speaker posing as Walter Benjamin, and introduce a new body

⁶³ Primarily referring to her publication, *The Afterlife of Piet Mondrian* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press: 2013) and her article, 'To Be Continued: A Note on Some Recent Mondrians,' *October* 27 (Winter 1983), pp. 75-80.

of work (2017-present) which sought to apply the principles of re-enactment to painting.

Through the case study of the posthumous circulation of Piet Mondrian's work I aim to highlight that whilst painting practice has a high cultural visibility it is still susceptible to ruptures in historical continuity, which arises as a result of an over-reliance on mimetic memory forms at the expense of discursive acts of historicization. Through my practice and relevant contextual examples I aim to outline the particular nature of painting as a personal and public memory-form, and evaluate the value of re-enactment as a means to understand the past and orientate oneself in the particular cultural moment of the contemporary.

Chapter One:**Reconstructing the Studio: The Index and Contemporaneity**

In this chapter I will introduce the paradox that painting appears to express contemporaneity when it enters an archival mode, framing the past through procedures of selection, organisation and conservation. Here I will focus on examples which perform an archival gesture by engaging with the site of the studio, exploring the temporal index of works-in-progress. This will be introduced through the historical example of the reconstruction and public circulation of elements of Piet Mondrian's last studio, situated in relation to contemporary examples of retroactive practice, such as Cornelia Parker's use of J.M.W Turner's canvas liners. I will draw on the theories of Terry Smith and Boris Groys to make the proposition that such archival operations are contemporary in character, and present my 2015 project *Public Action Painting*, to develop an understanding of the liminality of artworks which seek to present the site of production.

Archiving Production:

'big red rectangles sent out rays of light, yellow rectangles spread sunlight and blue ones cool shadows. Ranged around the room were the new pictures, great squares, their powerful forms vibrating in the small space' (Charmion von Wiegand, 1941) ⁶⁴

'like walking around in one of Mondrian's paintings' (Willem de Kooning, 1943-4) ⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Cees W. de Jong (ed.), *Piet Mondrian: The Studios* (New York and London: Thames and Hudson: 2015), p. 175.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* p. 179.

In the 1980s, almost 40 years after the death of Piet Mondrian in 1944, reconstructed elements of his last New York studio, 15 East 59th St, entered public circulation. Furniture made from stretcher bars and packing crates was presented in a series of exhibitions alongside previously unseen geometric compositions made from pieces of coloured cardboard. These squarish-rectangles of red, yellow, blue, grey and white, had been originally installed by Mondrian within the architectural environment of his live/work space to explore colour relationships alongside his easel painting practice. Retroactively labelled as Mondrian's *Wall Works*, the original pieces of cardboard which had been salvaged from the studio were given new physical form by Mondrian's legal heir, the artist Harry Holtzman. Using tracings of the spatial arrangement of the wall composition and photographic documentation of the studio at the point of Mondrian's death, Holtzman secured the cardboard to a plywood support, which had been painted off-white to replicate the surface and colour of the studio walls, before covering the composition with a transparent acrylic sheet held in place by a wooden frame⁶⁶. In this act Mondrian's studio experiments were made portable, enabling a new audience to encounter this material as discrete geometric compositions⁶⁷.

A selection of these *Wall Works* were first shown as part of the 1982 exhibition 'Brancusi + Mondrian' (Sidney Janis Gallery, New York⁶⁸) alongside completed artworks. This preceded a more extensive solo exhibition at MOMA in 1983,

⁶⁶ Nancy J. Troy, *The Afterlife of Piet Mondrian* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press: 2013), p. 105.

⁶⁷ Troy explains in '*The Afterlife...*' that in addition to Mondrian's immediate contacts a secondary audience gained access to his last New York studio through Holtzman's decision to open the studio to the public for 6 weeks after Mondrian's death. It is estimated that around 300 people visited during this period, mainly students. P. 36.

⁶⁸ *Brancusi + Mondrian*, Sidney Janis Gallery, New York, Dec 2-31 1982.

'Mondrian: The New York Studio Compositions'⁶⁹, which focused on the relationship between the studio experimentation and Mondrian's wider painting practice. Despite a third public presentation in New York, 'Piet Mondrian: The Wall Works 1943-1944,' (Carpenter and Hochmann Gallery, 1984⁷⁰) and a subsequent international presentation in Tokyo 'Mondrian in New York'⁷¹ (Galerei Tokoro, 1993) the *Wall Works* were omitted from art historian Joop Jooster's 1998 Catalogue Raisonné of Mondrian's work and appear to have resisted achieving an independent status as authored artworks⁷².



[Installation view, 'Mondrian: The New York Studio Compositions', MOMA, New York, 1983]

⁶⁹ *Mondrian: The New York Studio Compositions*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, July 14-Sep 23 1983. <<https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/1935>> [Accessed 02/04/2018].

⁷⁰ *Piet Mondrian: The Wall Works 1943-44*, Carpenter and Hochmann Gallery, Oct-Nov 1984.

⁷¹ Nancy J. Troy, 'Piet Mondrian's Last Thoughts,' in *Late Thoughts: Reflections on Artists and Composers at Work*, edited by Karen Painter and Thomas E. Crow (Los Angeles, Getty Publications, 2006), pp. 15-36 (p. 29).

⁷² In '*The Afterlife...*' Troy has noted this fact and commented that the limited scholarship the '*Wall works*' have received may be due to the copyright restrictions which have been imposed by the Holtzman Trust since Mondrian's death. P. 2.

This historical example is presented here to introduce the question of how painting might intersect with archival modes of practice and to point to the complex temporality of reconstructions which seek to literally re-present original material, in this case related to the site of the artist studio. The *Wall Works* are of particular interest as a material artefact which appears to originate in both 1940s (when first made by Mondrian) and the 1980s (when re-made by Holtzman), troubling the notion of the material index as marker of the artists presence and referent to a singular site of origin. For instance, Charles Peirce's description of the index as a physical form of sign, 'The index is physically connected with its object; they make an organic pair.'⁷³, can here be employed to articulate the relationship between the salvaged material and original site of the studio, and to register the intentionality of each artist in regard to the composition. Often associated with the medium of photography rather than painting, indexicality has entered recent painting discourse through the theories of Isabelle Graw⁷⁴. Graw claims that because painting appears to hold the living labour time of the artist it persists as a high-profile mode of art production, particularly well-suited to our current economy and the extension of the commodity-form towards lifestyle⁷⁵. Building upon Graw, in this particular example, the index appears to be pluralised, as the material object evokes both the lifetimes of Mondrian and Holtzman. This is facilitated by the reconstruction of the original material which gives the *Wall Works* a new status as

⁷³ Quoted by Isabelle Graw, in 'The Value of Liveliness: Painting as an Index of Agency in the New Economy, in *Painting Beyond Itself: The Medium in the Post-Medium Condition*, ed. by Isabella Graw and Ewa Lajer-Burcharth (Berlin: Sternberg Press: 2016), pp 79-101 (p. 92).

⁷⁴ Graw's argument is most fully developed in her 2018 publication 'The Love of Painting: The Genealogy of a Success Medium'. In my thesis I will be referring primarily to Graw's text 'The Value of Liveliness'.

⁷⁵ Ibid. p. 81-82.

independent object of study and historicises the personal/professional relationship between Mondrian and Holtzman.

The *Wall Works* are archival in the general sense offered by Jacques Derrida, expressing a will 'to collect, organise and conserve the human record'⁷⁶, in this case the colour experiments that took place within Mondrian's last studio. Whilst Holtzman intended to memorialise an artist rather than produce an artwork, the *Wall Works* express certain qualities which correspond to Foster's definition of archival art practice. For instance, a parallel can be drawn between the fragmentary and provisional nature of 'archival samplings'⁷⁷ and Holtzman's partial reconstruction of Mondrian's wall composition, using only the original cardboard which could be removed in good condition. This means that certain fragile areas of the original composition, such as the coloured cardboard placed on the fireplace and nearby furniture, were not collected and consequently this is not represented as part of the *Wall Works*⁷⁸ series. Similarly, certain of Holtzman's decisions, such as the division of the overall environmental composition into 8 individual arrangements, establishing a new size and discrete boundary limit, can be likened to Foster's description of archival practice as 'idiosyncratic probing'⁷⁹. Most significantly, despite the relative temporal nearness between the original and the reconstruction, Holtzman's action can be understood as establishing, 'new orders of

⁷⁶ The theory put forward by Derrida in his 1995 text 'Archive Fever' is paraphrased here by Marlene Manoff in, 'Theories of the Archive from Across the Disciplines', *Libraries and the Academy*, Vol. 4 No. 1 (2004), pp. 9-25. <doi:10.1353/pla.2004.0015> (p. 3).

⁷⁷ Foster, *Bad New Days*, p. 32.

⁷⁸ Harry Holtzman explains in the catalogue essay for 'Piet Mondrian, The Wall Works, 1943-44', (Carpenter and Hochman, New York) that the cardboard on the fireplace was too fragile to preserve and describes how two pieces of furniture which were central to the East wall composition, and visible in documentation of the studio at the time of death, were lost shortly after Mondrian's death following an exhibition at Valentine Dudensing Gallery (p. 4).

⁷⁹ Foster, *Bad New Days*, p. 32.

affective association⁸⁰, in terms of the subsequent action of the *Wall Works* upon the category of the studio, works-in-progress and Mondrian's broader painting practice.

The changes made by Holtzman in order to make the *Wall Works* portable extend the distortions which arise as a result of the natural aging of materials and the contextual shift from studio to gallery. Photographic documentation of Mondrian's studio at the time of death reveals a close correspondence between the colours of the cardboard rectangles and the palette of his last unfinished painting, *Victory Boogie Woogie*. The catalogue of 'Piet Mondrian: The Wall Works 1943-1944,' reveals that by the 1980s the original cardboard of the studio compositions had degraded, so that whites appear to express peach-orange-brown tones and primary yellow has become a deep ochre⁸¹. In addition to this, the function of these compositions, i.e. the placement of colour within the architectural environment of the studio and the possible use of this process as a composition tool, is suppressed by the presentation of the *Wall Works* as self-contained, stable 2D compositions, which appear to satisfy the conventions of painting.

The pictorial nature of the *Wall Works* confuses an understanding of Mondrian's original wall composition, as both spatial and provisional⁸², translating a continually changing system for placing colour into a series of fixed images. This distortion is amplified by an initial lack of clarity regarding the process of reconstruction by

⁸⁰ Ibid. p. 60.

⁸¹ Harry Holtzman, *Piet Mondrian: The Wall Works 1943-44'* (New York: Carpenter and Hochmann: 1984).

⁸² Photographic documentation of the studio walls reveals multiple pinholes in the gallery walls suggesting that the cardboard was moved often. Published in, Nancy J. Troy, *The Afterlife of Piet Mondrian*, p. 36.

Holtzman⁸³, and by certain curatorial decisions regarding the manner of exhibition. In the first public presentation at Sidney Janis Gallery in 1982 the decision to hang the *Wall Works* in the manner of easel paintings created a dialogue between the *Wall Works* and paintings which confused the categories of work-in-progress and resolved artwork. In particular, the use of the original cardboard established a degree of visual similarity with Mondrian's *New York City* series, drawing out a relationship to collage. Further to this, the inclusion of the original photographic documentation of the studio enabled a non-hierarchical exchange between the reconstructed elements of the studio and the photographs, as the *Wall Works* were presented as both authentic material and authenticating document. This retroactive function has been observed by Troy when she asserts, 'The "wall work" objects now functioned as documents, retroactively conferring "wall work" status on isolated areas of Mondrian's studio seen in the photographs'⁸⁴. This was emphasised in the later MOMA exhibition which opted to remove the *Wall Works* from the acrylic frame and embed them into the gallery walls. This replicated the original integration of the compositions into an architectural space, whilst generalising the particular features and scale of the original studio. The layout of the MOMA exhibition further complicated the status given to the *Wall Works* because the visitor reached the reconstruction of the studio by first walking

⁸³ For instance, Nancy J. Troy notes that in the 1982 exhibition '*Brancusi + Mondrian*', the wall works are dated 1943-4 and Holtzman's role in the production process was not declared in the accompanying catalogue (p. 106). Holtzman offers an account of how he made decisions regarding the reconstruction of the wall works in the catalogue of the later 1986 exhibition '*Piet Mondrian: The Wall Works, 1943-4*', (New York: Carpenter and Hochman Gallery: 1984).

⁸⁴ Nancy J. Troy, 'To be Continued: A note on some recent Mondrians', *October 27* (Winter 1983), pp. 75-80 (p. 79).

through a gallery of Mondrian's paintings. This appears to invert the conceptual framework of the studio as originary site, as Troy points to when she argues: In a sense the roles of paintings and studio had been reversed: the paintings were marshalled to create a setting for the studio, establishing a conceptual milieu in which that space could be considered not only a work of art, but also an example of the ultimate environmental goal to which Mondrian aspired. Thus reduced to the status of preliminary projects, the paintings, like the photographs, functioned here to document the position of the studio in Mondrian's oeuvre.⁸⁵

The MOMA exhibition appears then to have exceeded the role of offering an alternate context for encountering the artist's studio, as instead the paintings act *as if* site of origin for the studio. This manner of presentation establishes the absence of the original site and complicates a straightforward presentation of elements of the studio as historical artefacts. The ambiguous status of the *Wall Works* is dependent to a large extent on the fact that they consisted of the physical material from Mondrian's original wall composition, which lends the reconstruction a degree of authenticity, despite the obvious deviations from the original form and context of the studio colour experiments. This allows the *Wall Works* to express a non-hierarchical relationship to Mondrian's paintings, and to act as a self-authenticating historical document, as Troy points to when she argues:

On the one hand, the "Wall works" partook of the aura of authenticity conferred by the authenticity conferred by the original cardboard rectangles of which they were composed. On the other hand, the "Wall works" became part of what was

⁸⁵ Ibid.

obviously only a partial and fragmentary reconstruction, a space that functioned like a document to provide an approximation of what Mondrian's studio had actually been like.⁸⁶

The re-construction of the *Wall Works* translates a studio process to a series of fixed images, with new spatial frames and multiple temporal referents. Yet through this act of reconstruction the original material has been located and categorised, as evidenced in the emergence of the new categorical term "Wall Works". Whilst the reconstruction is conceptually dependent on the original it also expresses a causal relationship to the original which is somewhat paradoxical, in that it appears to determine the original's originality. As a consequence the studio is presented not simply as a past condition, or place from which the artwork precedes, but additionally in a state of becoming, projecting an open system of composition, or relational system for placing colour in architectural space. This projective function aligns the *Wall Works* to the utopian character of Mondrian's broader practice, articulated in curator Michael White's description of the 2014 Tate Liverpool presentation, 'Mondrian and his Studios', when he states, 'Mondrian's studios were actual spaces. But they were also part of an idea that was never realised.'⁸⁷

Material Authenticity

To expand upon the status of the *Wall Works* as self-authenticating historical documents, this example will be situated in relation to the broader phenomenon of

⁸⁶ Troy, *The Afterlife of Piet Mondrian*, p. 112.

⁸⁷ Michael White, 'Piet Mondrian's homeless abstraction comes to Liverpool', <https://theconversation.com/piet-mondrians-homeless-abstraction-comes-to-liverpool-27486> [Accessed 05/05/2019].

retroactive art, specifically materials-based practices which explore temporal registers within physical matter. Retroactive practices are closely related to the category of the archival, stressing the action of the artist upon past material and possibility of transformation, as described by Staff when he writes, ‘retroactivity requires us to consider and reflect upon how that which inhabits the past tense can become re-imagined within the present tense⁸⁸. The example he uses to introduce the topic, Hannah Leighton-Boyce’s installation *East Wing 1939-2011* (2012)⁸⁹, and Cornelia Parker’s project ‘Room for Margins’ (1998)⁹⁰, relate to traditional forms of image-making, such as painting, analogue photography and print, through an attention to surface and the capacity of physical matter to record the passage of time.



[Detail of Hannah Leighton-Boyce, *East Wing 1939-2011* (2012), Found curtains with extended analogue exposure, diptych: each 229 x 130 cm]

⁸⁸ Staff, *Retroactivity and Contemporary Art*, p. 3.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.* p. 1-3.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.* p. 67-70.

Leighton-Boyce's installation *East Wing 1939-2011*, consists of salvaged black-out curtains from Ackworth school, stretched on the wall in the manner of a painting or wall tapestry. The black-out curtains had been hung for a period of 70 years, subjecting the material to long-term light exposure which had caused the material to fade, so that the folds of the curtain were recorded as an image. Ostensibly a found object, this artwork expresses a poetic quality through evoking the site it originally belonged to and the historical context of the threat of war. Operating on a similar register, Cornelia Parker's installation, 'Room for Margins' presents J.M.W Turner's canvas liners⁹¹, which bear the ghostly imprint of his stretcher frames and miscellaneous stains at the edges of the material. This evokes the presence of the original artist and ties the indexicality of the object to its original function as peripheral material within Turner's studio. In both instances the gesture could be described as archival on the grounds that it is restorative, establishing a new form of visibility for historical information that might otherwise be overlooked. However, Parker's withdrawal of the original material from the Tate archive and elevation through public presentation to the status of artwork displays a more complex and assertive form of retroactive action. The historicity of the original material is openly declared, and yet the canvas liners appear to originate through Parker's act of selection, troubling an understanding of history as a linear progression of time. This example illustrates the particular characteristics of archival practice identified by Foster, namely a willingness to work with the fragmentary and anomic as

⁹¹ Staff explains that Turner placed canvas liners between the primed canvas and the stretcher frame as a protective barrier, to avoid the front surface of a painting bearing traces of the wooden support. Staff, *Retroactivity and Contemporary Art*, p. 67.

productive conditions, resulting in new states of order which appear partial and provisional⁹².



[Cornelia Parker, 'Room for Margins', *Venetian Scene*, circa 1840, JMW Turner, NO5492, Tate Collection, 1998, Canvas lining with ingrained dust and ink, 840 x 873 x 35mm. Courtesy of the artist and Frith Street Gallery]

⁹² Foster, *Bad New Days*, p. 60.

Staff argues that 'Room for Margins' exemplifies Parker's broader artistic practice, which involves manifesting a history for an existing object or working with a history that has been conferred by someone else, as an anti-monumental form of memory-practice⁹³. In this example, Parker's use of historical objects draws out certain conditions regarding the actual preservation of the original material. For instance, the categorisation Tate conservation had made of the canvas liners as supporting material for Turner's artwork, rather than an artwork in themselves, meant that Parker was able to accession the objects and present them publicly under her own name. This creates a pluralised form of index as Parker's identification of the canvas liners as material worthy of aesthetic contemplation, overlays the initial material registration of Turner's creative process.

As in the previous example of Mondrian's *Wall Works*, the manner of presentation (specifically Parker's decision to stretch out the canvas liner and frame it so that it can be hung on the wall) facilitates a new reading of the original material. This has been observed by Staff when he suggests that Turner's canvas liners acquire an alternate meaning through a process of resemblance to art historical references, such as the use of stain in Mark Rothko's colour field paintings, or the connection to the body contained in the image of the Turin shroud⁹⁴. Through the act of selecting this material from the Tate archive and presenting it as an image, Parker has activated the capacity of the original material to accumulate content, revealing

⁹³ Parker states, "For a long time my work has been about trying to erode monuments, to wear them away and to digest them, and then create a moment, a fleeting thing". In Staff, *Retroactivity and Contemporary Art*, p. 66.

⁹⁴ Ibid. p. 68-9.

latent associations which have developed in the period between the objects historical function and subsequent re-presentation.

The co-option here of archival material into a personalised narrative form seems to illustrate Staff's assertion that history is marked by 'epistemological fragility'⁹⁵.

Parker's 'Room for Margins' also points to the particular temporality of the archive, marking the withdrawal of the material object from the ordinary flow of experiential time. This involves the suspension of the use-value of the canvas liner as a tool belonging to the site of studio, and subsequent status as a historical document which marks both the artist's working process and his death.

Rather than seeking to make an authorial claim on Turner's work this project can be seen as part of Parker's longer-term interest in states of impermanence and liminality, as Staff notes when he writes, 'the work operates within the interstitial space between what is concealed and what is revealed. Between latency (from the Latin *latent* -hiding) and a state of disclosure'⁹⁶. This example of retroactive practice shares the uncertain temporal register of the previous example of the *Wall Works*; positioned as authentic material which has a specific historical site, yet multiple points of origin, exerting an orientation towards both the past and the present, through the act of exhibition. In terms which echo the apparent liminality of the reconstruction of Mondrian's studio, Staff proposes, 'the work inhabits an interstitial space between that which it once was and that which it is in the process of becoming; while there is a sense of departing, its arrival remains ongoing'⁹⁷.

⁹⁵ Ibid. p. 3.

⁹⁶ Ibid. p. 69.

⁹⁷ Ibid. p. 70.

Like the *Wall Works*, the particular materiality of 'Room for Margins' has been slowly formed over time and has been mediated through the curatorial decisions of a second artist. This could appear contrary to the qualities associated with the contemporary, such as immediacy, presentness and instantaneity, however, these examples do seem to articulate the multi-faceted perspective of contemporary thought articulated by Terry Smith as 'multiplicitous complexity over the singular simplicity of distanced reflection'⁹⁸. This results in these cases from the multiple professional roles the artist performs, reflecting the closeness of archival and curatorial practice, as highlighted by Foster in the statement, 'Certainly the figure of the artist-as-archivist follows that of the artist-as-curator'⁹⁹. The archival operation of these projects does not appear to constitute a counter-position to contemporaneity, instead I propose that it establishes the contemporary character of these projects. These examples can be understood as contemporary on the grounds that they display different registers of time, evoking the intimate-social, local-remote, and actual-imagined simultaneously, and on account of the artwork offering a temporary contextualising framework, in the manner of an installation¹⁰⁰. This develops an understanding of contemporary practice as an act of 'presenting the present', in these examples reflecting on the position of historical material within contemporary culture¹⁰¹. This entails a form of place-making as alternate

⁹⁸ Terry Smith, Okwui Enwezor and Nancy Condee (ed.), *Antinomies of Art and Culture: Modernity, Postmodernity, Contemporaneity*, (Durham: Duke University Press: 2008). p. 8.

⁹⁹ Foster, 'An Archival Impulse', p. 5.

¹⁰⁰ Terry Smith's description of contemporaneity expressing multiple registers of time is quoted in, Cox and Lund (ed.), *The Contemporary Condition*, p. 15.

¹⁰¹ Boris Groys, 'The Topology of Contemporary Art,' in *Antinomies of Art and Culture: Modernity, Postmodernity, Contemporaneity*, ed. by Terry Smith, Okwui Enwezor and Nancy Condee (Durham: Duke University Press: 2008), pp. 71-80, p. 71.

ways of being in time, and belonging to time, are brought together, described by Terry Smith as a form of ‘cultural co-temporality’¹⁰². Central to this is the action of the second artist (i.e. Holtzman or Parker) in producing an installation. Boris Groys asserts that installation is the most contemporary mode of art because of the emphasis it places on the act of searching and relocating, ‘contemporary art is less a production of individual artworks than it is a manifestation of an individual decision to include or exclude certain things and images that circulate anonymously in our world...’¹⁰³. He goes on to argue that a single artwork can exert this function when publicly exhibited, ‘...even if an installation consists of one individual painting, it is still an installation, since the crucial aspect of the painting as an artwork is not the fact that it was produced by an artist but that it was selected by an artist and presented as something selected’¹⁰⁴. Groys’s argument is of note here because it asserts that the act of selecting and exhibiting pre-existing cultural material is a means to frame a particular present, temporarily marking, ‘a fixed, stable, closed context of a topologically well defined “here and now”.’¹⁰⁵.

The potential of the installation to produce new meaning is pursued by Groys through the categories of the original and the copy, leading him to propose that the act of exhibition, a ‘topological relocation’¹⁰⁶, can lend the copy originality. The authenticity of the *Wall Works*, which like Turner’s canvas liners, and Leighton Boyce’s black-out curtains, appeared to be located in the literal re-use of historical material, can be disturbed by the act of public presentation, because this

¹⁰² Smith quoted in, Cox and Lund (ed.), *The Contemporary Condition*, p. 15.

¹⁰³ Groys, ‘The Topology of Contemporary Art,’ in *Antinomies of Art and Culture*, p. 74-76.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. p. 76.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. p. 74.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. p. 74.

establishes an alternate form of originality. Following Groys, the official historicization of Mondrian's *Wall Works*, exemplified in the Mondrian/Holtzman Trust's declaration that, 'They are Wall works when on the wall and when removed for preservation. They don't take on a new life when placed on a panel (just a more portable life)', is called into question¹⁰⁷. Holtzman's desire to preserve the original material and share knowledge of Mondrian's composition process through the series of public exhibitions, seems to have inadvertently generated a series of originals, dependent on the principles established by Mondrian but differentiated from the source model of the studio. In this process of individualisation, Holtzman has made Mondrian contemporary.

Becoming Contemporary: Painting as Installation

The previous examples illustrated that there are numerous ways in which physical material can express an indexical relationship to a historical site, for instance, the discoloration of the cardboard in the *Wall Works*, the bleached fabric of the black-out curtains, or the fragility and stains of the canvas liners. These physical markers of the material's history prompt an affective response to a past that remains largely inaccessible, the time in which the materials and the artists, were at work.

Returning to the question of indexicality, specifically Isabelle Graw's assertion that painting holds a high cultural value because it appears to hold the living labour time of the artist, I will explore whether a conscious attention to the past of production,

¹⁰⁷ This is published in a footnote in, Nancy J. Troy, 'Piet Mondrian's last thoughts', in *Late Thoughts: Reflections on Artist and Composers at Work*, p. 35.

through acts of recycling or re-staging, shifts the temporal orientation of the material, as if work is still in progress.

In the early stages of my research project I developed a project *Public Action Painting* (2015), which sought to evoke the generalised past of the studio through an installation and a set of instructions intended to facilitate a live demonstration of producing a spatial wall-based composition. The installation consisted of objects which evoked the studio, such as painting materials and basic tools, presented alongside a completed painting. Consequently, it involved a negotiation of the relationships between work-in-progress and resolved image, or material artefact and process, that resonates with the previous examples. The key difference is that this project did not seek to consciously reconstruct or represent a historical image or idea that can be located externally to my own practice. Instead, *Public Action Painting* is an inversion of a previous series *Secret Action Painting* (2008-present), motivated by a desire to question my role within the production process, specifically the extent to which the production system I had devised came to determine the nature of the resulting composition. For this reason, whilst it contains multiple references to art history (for instance, the principles of reduction and elementarisation of De Stijl composition, gesture in Abstract Expressionism, conceptual proposition in Art and Language and instruction art) it does not locate specific past cultural material in the same manner as the previous examples, and is more accurately described as self-reflexive rather than archival. However, the pursuit of a 'live' form of presentation and use of instructions to extend an invitation for the audience to be involved in production was a move towards a mode of mark-making in which my role as primary author was consciously

displaced. Here I was seeking a mode of indexicality that might point beyond myself, to the broader circumstances of production and presentation. Although not initially conceived of in terms of re-enactment¹⁰⁸, this project repeats a moment of material discovery (the unexpected quality of oil-paint to perform as a glue), and publicly re-stages my previous studio experimentation in an approximate form. This double orientation towards a generalised past and specific present of exhibition, aligns this project to the sense of re-enactment put forward by Joan Gibbons, as ‘relational and participatory forms of memory-work’¹⁰⁹.

Public Action Painting was produced in 2015 as a contribution to the annual European Artistic Research Network conference¹¹⁰. The translation of my studio experimentation into a public form of demonstration responded to the conference theme, ‘Against Delivery’, which urged participants to challenge conventional audience-presenter relations. This provided an opportunity for me to question whether my methods of producing spatial compositions on site from modular parts were grounded in a conceptual system or a particular material sensibility. The changes I devised to my established way of working for this project were intended to challenge the habits of my studio practice and activate the sense of risk which the installation process implied.

¹⁰⁸ My interest in re-enactment emerged from earlier research into the recipe-form and the concept of Hospitality. Following my PhD upgrade in 2016 I moved away from this terminology on the grounds that the political connotations of ‘hospitality’ potentially mis-represented the interests of my practice.

¹⁰⁹ Gibbons, *Contemporary Art and Memory*, p. 8.

¹¹⁰ Hosted by Slade School of Fine Art, Woburn Research Centre, UCL, London. 12-13 Nov 2015. My contribution was selected by the conference committee from an open-call.



[Installation of *Public Action Painting*, 2015, Alaena Turner]

I intended for the installation to read as a functional workspace and a painterly image, where the separate elements displayed on the wall, tables, and (eventually) floor, would read together as a composition. This marked the first occasion of creating an environment which could be physically entered, rather than focusing on the 2D plane of the wall. Additionally, this installation was conceived of in durational terms, and intended to be encountered in multiple stages: first as a static set-up, then a live act of production, resulting in a new static image. This meant that the composition would be seen by an audience who had a memory of former iterations.

The initial set up consisted of two coloured wooden panels (one off-white, one pale blue) hung on the wall and a central table supporting more coloured panels. To the left of this was a second table resting against an adjoining wall, which held a pot of

black oil paint, gloves and tools to apply paint. I sought to outline the possible collaborative nature of this presentation through the inclusion of a text instruction; “*Public Action Painting* (2015). Should you wish to contribute to the making of this work you are invited to put on the gloves and add a coloured panel to the blank panel on the wall, using the paint that is provided as glue. Please take into account the possibility that the coloured panel may fail to adhere and could fall to the ground, so be careful of where you position your feet. The coloured panels may be re-used and repeatedly applied until you are satisfied with the composition, or until the supply of materials is exhausted.”

The off-white panel on the wall was intended to act as a blank surface onto which the coloured panels could be placed, designating a specific place for the composition to emerge within the room. The blue panel had been pre-made to evidence the process of using oil-paint as glue to act as a visual clue for the proposed activity and to lend the text instruction a degree of plausibility. I had anticipated that I would read the instruction during my presentation at the conference and activate the installation. However, this was not clearly expressed in the text instruction I had written, and as a result the installation acquired a new form prior to my presentation.

In addition to highlighting the ambiguity of my text instruction the spontaneous action of the conference delegates revealed that the emerging visual form of the installation also acted as a kind of instruction. For example, the first contributor to the installation placed the panel directly onto the wall, rather than onto the blank panel which I had anticipated would act as the ‘ground’ of the painting.



[Documentation of *Public Action Painting* (2015) at the close of the EARN conference]

This led to other panels being placed directly on the wall, so that the work developed a more expansive form than initially intended. Similarly, several delegates painted the coloured surface of the panel rather than the un-primed MDF back, which arose through my failure to specify this part of the process and as a result of participants observing and copying each other. I had planned for the panels to be used with the coloured surfaces facing outwards so that colour relationships could be explored and had expected that the material difference between the smooth, flat, uniform coloured surface and un-primed MDF would indicate this¹¹¹. As a result of the backs of the panels being visible certain direct references to the earlier stage of production were observable, for instance, the MDF surface was marked by measurements and my initials. In addition to these

¹¹¹ These panels had been carefully prepared beforehand in the studio by applying multiple thin layers of acrylic paint and sanding the panels.

slight deviations to the expected visual format this installation established a degree of dissimilarity to my previous spatialised compositions through the introduction of diagonal angles. Aside from revealing the lack of clarity in the text instruction, this highlighted the aspects of this production process which I had become familiar with to the extent that I had failed to register the contingent nature of my own decision-making. For instance, it was through witnessing the variation of my usual process that I became conscious of my own tendency in previous installations to place the panels on an imagined horizontal and vertical axis, as if an expanded version of a geometric grid painting. Despite my withdrawal from the literal process of production, the resulting installation displayed the particularities of my own practice whilst producing an image of an unfamiliar site of production.

Arguably this process satisfies some of the criteria of re-enactment, for instance, offering a form of 'lived historicity'¹¹², in a manner that emphasises bodily experience, collective decision-making and durational form. However, inadvertently I had directed attention towards my own personal history, through sharing an unconventional mode of producing a spatial composition. Whilst this generates a collective memory of the event of production, it is also highly limited as an act of remembering, because it refers to previous iterations of my own practice and aside from occasional moments of exhibition, this is not locatable within the public domain. Whilst I had conceived of the installation as a means to share knowledge of my production process, expressing a willingness to erase the temporal distance between the past stages of studio experimentation and live moment of

¹¹² Term used by Jerome de Groot, in 'Affect and Empathy', p. 592.

presentation, the new form of the installation revealed the discrepancies between my knowledge of the usual appearance of my spatial compositions and that of the audience. As in the previous examples, an impulse to bring the past into the present marks the past as inaccessible. This motivated my decision in subsequent projects (such as those which will be discussed in Chapter Two) to identify starting points in pre-existing cultural material external to my studio work, and to engage with collective forms of re-enactment through the role of artist-curator rather than practitioner. This responds to the limited accessibility of *Public Action Painting* by locating specific historical artworks to re-enact and is intended as a strategy to decentralise artist biography as a contextual framework.

Despite the fact that the composition of *Public Action Painting* evolved fairly organically over the course of the conference it retained the feel of a staged event. The initial decisions I had made regarding the installation meant that despite my loss of control of the actual production process the resulting outcome was largely pre-determined by the resources I had provided. For instance, locating the installation in the corner of the space and using furniture in the initial set-up established a rough perimeter for the composition. This was relatively small-scale so could only accommodate one or two people interacting with the materials and tools at any one time, and the limited quantity of materials restricted how many times the action of the instruction could be performed. The complimentary colour relationships of the panels and provisional nature of the set-up established an aesthetic which referred in a general manner to the studio. However, producing these panels specifically for this installation meant that they had not been previously used and as a result the physical material did not possess or convey a

sense of history. Aside from the deviations in visual form previously noted, the format of this composition roughly resembles that of my previous wall-based spatial compositions, and in a similar manner to previous installations the event of production comes to be recorded in the materials, resulting in dents, scuffs and painterly marks on the coloured panels. For this reason, this example does not produce a pluralised form of indexicality in the same manner as Holtzman's reconstruction of Mondrian's *Wall Works* or Parker's presentation of J.M.W. Turner's canvas liners. Although the installation was produced with the involvement of multiple contributors the production process continues rather than transforms the original experimental nature of the project, and despite the variation in visual form the conceptual schema is largely intact. The use of instructions here appears to have initiated a form of delegated production, comparable perhaps to forms of image-making which establish a degree of distance from the artist's body, such as the mechanised production processes of Wade Guyton or Natasha Kidd. The use of instructions also gives the work an ambivalent status, as a premise that can be simply repeated with fairly predictable results, which nevertheless has the capacity to produce materially distinct objects. These apparently contradictory qualities; generic and individuated, are most clearly articulated in the detail of the stain.

The physical material used to produce *Public Action Painting* was later recycled to produce a self-contained painting, *Secret Action Painting 7* (2016). Here the material object of the painting acts as a kind of document to the former iteration, which as an installation made for a specific site had no permanent form. Traces of

the activity are evident as material damage, for example, dents to the panels, scuff marks, finger-prints and stains from where paint has been removed.



[Alaena Turner, *Secret Action Painting 7*, 2016. Acrylic and oil on wood, 60 x 60cm]

However, it would not be possible to determine through visual inspection alone the event which produced these details, and there is no material evidence to suggest the involvement of multiple players. The stain functions here as a form of metonymic representation, evoking the past action through a process of reduction, inevitably entailing a high degree of information loss. As a result the temporal index of the stain lacks a specific object, described by Briony Fer as ‘an archive without memory’¹¹³. Fer associates the stain with the temporal register of daily repetition,

¹¹³ Briony Fer, *The Infinite Line: Re-making art after Modernism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press: 2004), p. 160.

as she writes, ‘Stains become an inventory of the subject remaindered in the substances and fluids that maintain daily existence’. This suggests an additional form of liminality as these apparently contingent marks express an indexical relationship to ordinary activities of handling material, showing the activity of making rather than creation.

The distinction between the connotations of ‘making’ and ‘creation’ has been highlighted by Ann Sophie-Lehman in her text, ‘Good art theory must smell of the studio’¹¹⁴. The term ‘making’ encompasses routines of daily work, including moments of failure and accident, whereas ‘creation’ implies editing, presenting certain aspects of a production process whilst hiding other elements. Lehman describes this as an act of ‘depresentation’¹¹⁵, an apt term for the contradictory qualities of offering and deferral that archival gestures seem to entail. In the previous example of *Secret Action Painting 7* the process of producing *Public Action Painting* is evoked and displaced by the new physical form given to the material, but making remains visible, as though documenting the labour of painting.

Here the surface of the painting is figured as a literal form of memory, and the specificity of painting as a means of image-making is bound to the sense of touch.

This painting was presented as part of my 2016 curatorial project, ‘Slow, thick Fingers’¹¹⁶, which sought to explore the proposition made by critic David Sweet, that painting might be embarrassing due to the emphasis that is placed on touch

¹¹⁴ Published as the epilogue in, *Hiding Making Showing Creation: The Studio from Turner to Tacita Dean*, ed. by Rachel Esner, Sandra Kisters and Ann-Sophie Lehmann (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press: 2013), pp 245-252 (p. 246).

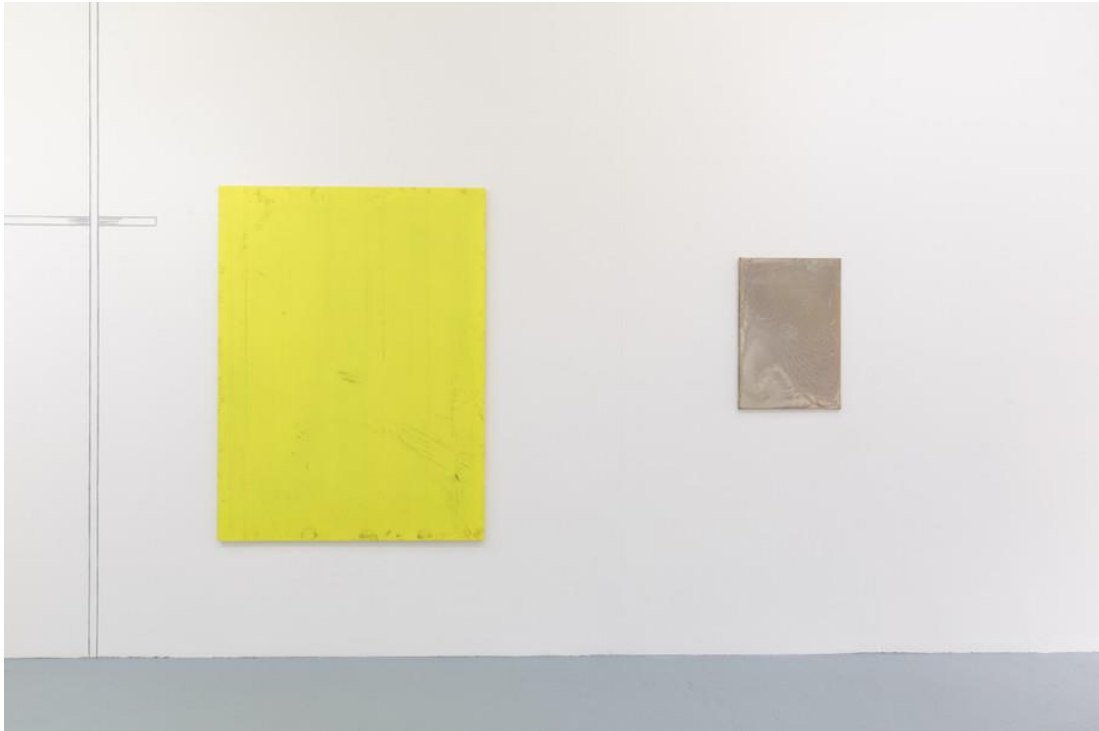
¹¹⁵ Ibid. p. 246.

¹¹⁶ *Slow, thick fingers...* Kingsgate Project Space, London, 13 Feb- 12 March, 2016.

and the apparent lightness of work involved in production. In an article, 'Touched and Untouched: The Wealth of Painting', published in 2014 Sweet declared: There is something embarrassing about painting. Making sculpture seems like labour. But once the stretcher has been screwed together and the canvas stapled- and someone other than the painter can do that- then what? Making a painting mainly means touching. The avoidance, or more commonly the repression, of touch can of course be a pictorial strategy, but its absence or limitation proves its power rather than irrelevance. Inevitably, to paint means to touch, and touching risks embarrassment.¹¹⁷

Included in this exhibition were two recent paintings by Damian Taylor that responded to the curatorial theme by playing on the idea of accidental mark-making and the fetishization of the artist's touch. His paintings initially appear to be monochromes with a highly reflective surface, constituting one possible example of how an artist might repress touch as a pictorial strategy. Upon close inspection it is possible to identify material traces of production, such as scuff-marks and fingerprints just visible at the edge of the paintings frame. Whilst these paintings adopt a fairly conventional form, Taylor has developed a technique of working with aluminium surfaces and polyurethane resin, as a means to make visible the incidental marks which accrue through the life of the material within the studio.

¹¹⁷ David Sweet, 'Touched and Untouched: The Wealth of Painting', *abstractcritical.com*, <<https://abstractcritical.com/article/touched-and-untouched-the-wealth-of-painting/index.html>> [Accessed 11/10/2015].



[Installation view of 'Slow, thick fingers', Kingsgate Project Space (2016). From left, Damian Taylor, *Untitled (In)*, and *Untitled (Out)*, (2015). Pigmented epoxy resin, glass fibre, honey-comb resin, 160 x 120cm and 69 x 48cm]

The fingerprints which we might assume to be a sign of the artist's presence, actually document those left by the delivery men who transport the material to the studio, again asserting a pluralised form of indexicality. Here the stain is used to challenge a conventional notion of indexicality, as rather than expressing a direct biographical connection to the artist the artwork points to the broader circumstances which surround the production of the image. If this is imagined as a form of archiving, the subject here appears to be the everyday of painting. Like the previous example of *Secret Action Painting 7*, the production of Taylor's paintings enters into the problem articulated in the case study of Holtzman's reconstruction of Mondrian's studio and Parker's accession of Turner's studio material, of negotiating a form which might act as a document of a production process.

Paradoxically, the originary site of the studio and category of work-in-progress is marked as absent through acquiring a permanent physical form, and subsequent public presentations generate new associations, as though the work of the artist is unfinished.



[Detail of *Untitled (In)*, Damian Taylor (2015). Pigmented epoxy resin, glass fibre, honeycomb resin, 160 x 120cm]

These examples locate the historical in physical matter, i.e. in each case it is the literal re-use of original material which establishes the material object as authentic. This offers an alternate understanding of the anachronistic quality of painting, to the contemporary examples presented in the introduction, which expressed a self-conscious relationship to style, repeating recognisable motifs and modes of mark-making. Instead of pictorial repetition, the selection and presentation of historical material in the case of both Holtzman and Parker constitutes an archival operation, entailing a non-mimetic form of repetition grounded in an engagement with the materiality of the object. This is marked by a poetic tone and can be differentiated from earlier Postmodern forms of appropriation on the grounds that these projects are without cynicism and adopt an oppositional position to the logic of mass-production as idiosyncratic expressions. These examples appear motivated by a desire to bring marginal material, located within the artworld but on the periphery, into public view. In both circumstances this might lead to a new engagement with the working time of the original artist. This aligns the personal time of the studio with the public time of the institution, initiating a new contemporary form through enacting a coming together of times¹¹⁸.

In the moment of public exhibition, the past material functions as an installation, establishing a temporary contextual frame and adopting an alternate form of originality. The emphatic expression of the past, located in the materiality of these examples, means that they are encountered as liminal objects, defined by their historical context and accumulating new meanings through the act of selection and

¹¹⁸ Smith quoted in, Cox and Lund (ed.), *The Contemporary Condition*, p. 11.

presentation. This indicates that attempting to record the site and processes of artistic production will inevitably exceed a documentary mode, as original material acquires new associations. This illustrates the generative action of archival gestures noted by Derrida when he proposes, 'archivization produces as much as it records the event'¹¹⁹. The question of how historical material can be kept in motion will be further pursued in the next chapter, moving from questions of how the past might be represented, to how it might be performed.

¹¹⁹ Jacques Derrida (and Eric Prenowitz), 'Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression', *Diacritics*, Vol 25, No. 2 (Summer 1995), pp. 9-63 (p. 17).
<http://artsites.ucsc.edu/sdaniel/230/derrida_archivefever.pdf> [Accessed 01/05/2013].

Chapter Two:

Networked Matter: Painting as Score

In this chapter I aim to establish how re-enactment offers a conceptual schema to examine the claim that contemporary painting is plural and heterogenous. Taking as a starting point David Joselit's claim that contemporary art is marked by a transition from an object-based aesthetic to a network aesthetic, requiring a shift in focus from the individual artwork to the relational dynamic of 'populations of images'¹²⁰, I will approach the artistic re-make as an 'after'-image of an original. The historical example of Piet Mondrian's last unfinished painting, *Victory Boogie-Woogie*¹²¹, and a subsequent set of copies, will open a discussion concerning the performativity of an artwork over time and establish a distinction between forensic and interpretative modes of repetition. To further develop an understanding of an artwork as a score which facilitates repetition and re-invention I will introduce Allan Kaprow's writings regarding the re-enactment of his live work, pursuing the conditions which frame the re-make as productive or necessary. This will be considered in relation to examples from a recent curatorial project which sought to collaboratively realise and re-document artworks from the 1960s¹²². This offers a speculative response to Joselit's question, 'Where will the painting- or the image

¹²⁰ David Joselit, *After Art* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press: 2013), p. 19.

¹²¹ Since 1998 this has been in the permanent collection of the Gemeente Museum, the Hague. <<https://www.gemeentemuseum.nl/en/collection/victory-boogie-woogie>> [Accessed 01/08/2018].

¹²² *Ingredients, Method, Serving Suggestion*, A.P. T Gallery, London, June-Sep 2016. This project was supported by the A.P.T Curatorial Fellowship, a WRoCAH Knowledge Exchange Partnership Award and funding from CePRA.

go? How will it behave?’¹²³ pursuing the latent qualities of an original and the retroactive potential of the re-make.

Unfinished Painting

At the moment of his death in 1944 Piet Mondrian’s final painting, *Victory Boogie-Woogie*¹²⁴, was unfinished with bits of coloured tape and paper stuck to the surface as a provisional way of placing colour and line¹²⁵. Within four years of Mondrian’s death, there were four versions of this artwork in public circulation; the original in a fragile condition, two copies produced to act as substitutes, and a third speculative copy which imagines how the painting would appear if Mondrian had lived to finish it. By reflecting on how this set of material objects work together to construct a pluralised image of the original I aim to draw out the implications of Joselit’s claim that a painting stores time, articulating a form of performativity directed towards a future moment¹²⁶.

This historical example probes the critical potential of the re-make, exploring the potential value of accurate and expressive reproductions as a means to share knowledge and conserve past cultural material. An archival instinct motivates the production of the two copies intended to act as stand-ins for *Victory Boogie-*

¹²³ David Joselit. ‘Marking, Scoring, Storing, and Speculating (on Time)’, in *Painting Beyond Itself; The Medium in the Post-medium Condition*, ed. by Isabelle Graw and Ewa Lajer-Burchard (Berlin: Sternberg Press: 2016), pp. 11-20 (p. 17).

¹²⁴ Mondrian begins work on ‘*Victory Boogie Woogie*’ in June 1942. Cees W. De Jong (ed), *Piet Mondrian: The Studios*, p. 223.

¹²⁵ It has also been noted by Yves Alain-Bois in his discussion of Mondrian’s series of ‘*New York City*’ paintings that this method of working out a composition offers a degree of immediacy that is very different to the act of producing a hand drawn line. He writes “each coloured strip is an atom (indivisible: it is applied all at once) and...the atom is immediately laid out from edge to edge. It immediately governs the surface”. Yves Alain-Bois (trans. Amy Reiter-McIntosh), ‘Piet Mondrian, *New York City*’, *Critical Inquiry* 14 (Winter 1988), pp. 244-277 (p. 274).

¹²⁶ Joselit states “in painting the MARKING and STORAGE and ACCUMULATION of time are simultaneous and ongoing”. Joselit, ‘Marking, Scoring, Storing, and Speculating (on Time)’, in *Painting Beyond Itself*, pp. 11-20 (p. 12).

Woogie, with each approaching the task of documenting the original in a different manner. The first, produced by a professional conservator, offers visual verisimilitude through a ‘map’-like copy, and the second, produced by an abstract painter, sought to replicate the technical aspects of Mondrian’s painting processes, allowing for a greater degree of interpretation. This distinction between a forensic and interpretative response reflects the different agenda and context of production for each copy. The map copy, commissioned by the Director of the Stedelijk Museum, Willem Sandberg, during a memorial exhibition of Mondrian’s work in Amsterdam in 1946, was justified on the basis that it might facilitate research and scholarship outside of the US, acting as a document of the condition of the painting as it was in that point in time¹²⁷. In a manner akin to photographic documentation, the map-copy precisely replicates the geometric measurements of the original painted and taped lines, and flattens the distinction between fixed and provisional line due to the conservators decision to use oil-paint to depict both types of line rather than replicating the original use of mixed media. The interpretative copy, commissioned by the owner of the painting, Emily Tremaine, was produced to replace the original during the major US touring exhibition ‘Painting Towards Architecture’ (1947-52), and intended to offer an insight into the original method of composition. Realised by Perle Fine, an artist known for her fluid, expressive brush-marks and biomorphic, irregular shapes, the interpretative copy employs a ‘trompe l’oeil’ technique to differentiate between the painted marks and taped lines¹²⁸. The

¹²⁷ Troy notes that despite the declaration that the ‘map’ copy would promote research it is hung in the 1950s in the office of the Stedelijk Museum’s deputy director, Hans L. C. Jaffé. Troy, *The Afterlife of Piet Mondrian*, p 45.

¹²⁸ Fine takes on the commission after abstract artist (and Mondrian’s legal heir) Harry Holtzman abandons the task after 3 weeks of work. Nancy J. Troy has highlighted that there may have been a

decision to commission a fine artist rather than a specialist conservator was justified by Emily Tremain¹²⁹ on the basis that the original was left unfinished, and consequently should be approached within the speculative framework of work-in-progress. Tremain articulated this in a letter to Sandberg as she writes, 'We consider it more like a musician playing a score which has never been played before, rather than the work of making an exact copy'¹³⁰. Fine's interpretative copy placed a new emphasis on the 'textures and feelings of materials', controversially promoting an affective response to the original, which certain of Mondrian's contemporaries felt to be at odds with the rigour and system of his painting practice¹³¹.

Each copy introduces then a degree of distortion into the image of the original unfinished painting; the map-copy homogenising the textured surface through 2D representation of mixed media, and the interpretative copy amplifying the distinction between the provisional and painted lines through expressive mark-making. Further to this, in each version the decision to paint the provisional taped lines into the overall composition integrates the unstable element, suggesting a fixed and finalised form. Whilst the interpretative copy produced by Fine sought to represent the original as unfinished this does not impede the projective function of the copy, seeming to simultaneously document the original as work-in-progress and

pragmatic rationale at play here, in that Perle Fine's quote was considerably cheaper than that offered by abstract painters Fritz Glarner and Harry Holtzman, and that she is also an artist known to the Tremaines because they hold one of her paintings in their collection. Troy, *The Afterlife of Piet Mondrian*, p. 52.

¹²⁹ Fine's copy is intended to replace the original in the touring exhibition, '*Painting towards Architecture*,' An exhibition of 40 artworks from the Miller Company Collection, touring US venues between 1947-52. Ibid. p. 52.

¹³⁰ Ibid. p. 52.

¹³¹ '*Painting towards Architecture*' arrives at Baltimore Museum of Modern Art in April 1948. Fritz Glarner criticised the copy on these grounds in an open letter. Ibid. p. 54.

to offer an image of it as if it were a completed work. This has been noted by Mondrian scholar Nancy J. Troy, who explains:

Oddly, the copy was thus presented as if it somehow fulfilled or finalised Mondrian's 'taped indications', while at the same time it was said to have carefully reproduced his 'intentions'- a rather peculiar mix of vocabulary that obfuscated what was actually the case, namely that Fine's work, although commissioned as an exact replica of Mondrian's unfinished painting, was never supposed to include his mix of paint with pasted and taped materials and certainly could not represent his intentions for the painting since these had not been finalised by the artist before he died.¹³²

Returning to the understanding of re-enactment offered by curator Laura Hoptman, as painting-in-drag¹³³, this example moves beyond a stylistic form of appropriation and is performative in the fullest sense of the term, as Fine attempts to think *with*, and perhaps *as*, Mondrian. This is most clearly evidenced in the second interpretative copy Fine produces, which explicitly set out to apply Mondrian's principles of composition to produce a completed version of the original painting. Described as a process of 'relating through tensions'¹³⁴, Fine presented this speculative copy to the public alongside a series of annotated diagrams, picturing how the composition would have developed in Mondrian had lived to complete it. Paradoxically, this approach of actively thinking with the original is perhaps the most successful out of the copies in representing the painting as unfinished,

¹³² Ibid. p. 54.

¹³³ Hoptman, 'Atemporality', in *The Forever Now*, p. 36.

¹³⁴ Troy, *The Afterlife of Piet Mondrian*, p. 56.

framing the original as the founding concept which underpins a series of possible responses.

Fine's willingness to enter into the logic of Mondrian's painting practice can be located within the tradition of artistic copying as a mode of study. For instance, Pablo Picasso painted Eduard Manet's painting *Déjeuner Sur l'herbe* 27 times, whilst Manet's original re-worked *The Judgement of Paris* which was itself based on a composition by Raphael¹³⁵. In the case of the speculative copy, which attempts to continue the painting in the manner of Mondrian, copying moves towards a pluralised form of authorship, perhaps producing a 'Mondrian-Fine'. The extent to which Fine's painting practice comes to act directly upon the legacy of Mondrian is marked by the status her interpretative copy gained as the most familiar version of *Victory Boogie-Woogie* for the US public and the subsequent use of Fine's interpretative copy as the benchmark for acts of restoration, conflating the categories of original and copy. For example, in 1949 conservators removed two pieces of black tape from the original because these were not apparent in Fine's interpretative copy, and so were presumed to have been added at some point after Mondrian's death¹³⁶. Later in 1958, Fine was engaged to restore both her copy and the original painting, leading to a confused situation of reciprocal authentication as she was 'guided first by the one and then by the other'¹³⁷. This resulted in substantial changes to the copy, described by Fine as, 'wherever necessary, matching colour and repainting whole areas, grey, blue, off-white, yellow squares,

¹³⁵ Observation made by Maaiki Blaeker, Professor of Theatre Studies, Utrecht University; '(Un)covering artistic thought unfolding', delivered at University of California, Santa Cruz, Feb 9 2012. <<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0149767712000083>>.

¹³⁶ The conservators were Sheldon and Caroline Keck. Troy, *The Afterlife of Piet Mondrian*, p. 60.

¹³⁷ Ibid. p. 60.

all over the canvas, too numerous to mention'¹³⁸. This implies that the copy was altered to reflect the ageing of the original, whilst it simultaneously acted as the basis for restoring the original to its former condition. Approaching the categories of image and after-image through this narrative reveals that it is presumptive to consider the copy to be acting purely as a secondary function of the original, as instead a mutual form of exchange and interdependence has been initiated. This case study can perhaps be historicised as a precursor to recent painting practices which similarly present the image of historic painting as in-flux, expressing a self-consciousness to the network aesthetic, described by Joselit as attention to, 'the very texture of transmission- including the noise that interrupts or impedes it'¹³⁹. In the example of *Victory Boogie-Woogie* the capacity for the copies to misrepresent the source artwork, or inadvertently constitute a form of cultural memory loss, is offset by the range and variety of modes of documentation. Here, the speculative copy can be understood as a re-enactment of the original, revealing the contingency of the copy and framing the original as the overall conceptual schema for the image which comes to encompass the material object, mimetic and interpretative documentation, and narrative accounts. Re-enactment is useful here as a framework to insist on the complex form of a plural image, because it requires an originary model and clearly positions the pre-existing artwork as a score which might be repeated.

As a case study concerning the performativity of the image over time this example highlights the need to conceptualise the image of painting as inherently plural,

¹³⁸ Ibid. p. 61.

¹³⁹ Joselit, 'Signal Processing'.

encompassing subsequent repetitions and the retroactive potential of a re-make upon the original. Joselit's theory of 'Network Painting' asserts that once images circulate within the public domain they are highly susceptible to translation and remediation, described as an 'accumulation' of contexts¹⁴⁰. However, there is a tendency in his writing to speak of the networked image as if it circulates with a fixed and stable identity, for instance, 'In network painting, aesthetic labour consists of carrying objects from one historical, topographic, or epistemological position to another (and back again)....'¹⁴¹, which implies that when past material is re-imagined in an alternate temporal-spatial site there is no risk of permanent transformation. The critical position that network painting asks us to adopt, appears to be one of over-view rather than immersion, for instance, surveying a broad cultural field which incorporates digital and social infrastructures of production, distribution and presentation, and expanding a notion of medium to that of format. Joselit introduces the concept of formats in his publication *After Art* to articulate how the circulation of images is regulated in terms of force, speed and clarity. He writes 'a format is a heterogenous and often provisional structure that channels content. Mediums are subsets of formats- the difference lies solely in scale and flexibility'¹⁴². Terry Smith has argued that Joselit's notion of format articulates the contemporary character of composition, understood in our current age as a form of search which allows a new understanding of existing content, 'what now matters most is not the production of new content but its *retrieval* in

¹⁴⁰ Joselit, 'Painting Beyond Itself', p. 15.

¹⁴¹ David Joselit, 'Reassembling Painting,' in, Manuela Ammer, Achim Hochdorfer and David Joselit (ed.), *Painting 2:0, Expression in the Information Age, Gesture and Spectacle, Eccentric Figuration, Social Networks* (New York/ London: Prestel Publishing: 2015), pp. 169-181 (p. 173).

¹⁴² Joselit, *After Art*, p. 52.

intelligible patterns through acts of *reframing, capturing, reiterating and redocumenting*¹⁴³. However, Smith also expresses a degree of scepticism towards the particular mode of connectivity of image-based practices, such as painting, on the grounds that this may be predetermined by the commodity status of the artwork and dominant position of EuroAmerican artworks within the global gallery system. He argues that this results in ‘remodernist’, ‘retro-sensationalist’ and ‘spectacularist’ tendencies¹⁴⁴, raising the issue of how distribution systems are encountered and what an affective experience of network painting might mean. The value of this shift in perspective from an object aesthetic to a network aesthetic is that it offers a way to move forward from outmoded discussions of medium-specificity, providing an account of how painting is responding to contemporary culture, whilst the potential limitation of such an expansive critical position is that ethical and aesthetic questions concerning the way that populations of images act upon each other are subdued. An intermedial approach located within the everyday, for instance, embracing hybrid forms of production or cross-disciplinary modes of thought, may counter Smith’s concerns regarding the susceptibility of mainstream art practices to slip into a nostalgic or spectacular mode¹⁴⁵. To explore this proposition further I will reflect on the example of Allan Kaprow, presented here as an artist who has actively engaged with the inherited institutions of art and

¹⁴³ Terry Smith cites David Joselit’s text ‘After Art’, in *The Contemporary Condition: The Contemporary Composition* (Berlin: Sternberg Press: 2016), p. 44.

¹⁴⁴ Smith doesn’t actually use the term painting here or offer examples of specific artists. However, his description appears to describe the same trend in current painting described by Laura Hoptman as ‘anachronistic’ and myself as ‘archival’ or ‘retroactive’. For example, “It instinctively recurs to earlier styles in the history of art, particularly modernist, post-modernist, and late modernist formats and imagery.” Smith, *The Contemporary Condition*, p. 24-26.

¹⁴⁵ Briony Fer has noted how an orientation towards the everyday can act as a way to avoid the spectacular. Fer, *The Infinite Line*, p. 169.

attempted to author the conditions regarding the historicization of his live work. This asserts my position that a critical understanding of how populations of images interact across a network can be developed by supplementing the theoretical framework of network painting with multiple case studies, pursuing the performativity of images over time. This involves tracing the agency of an image across different spatial-temporal sites and negotiating the distinction between the personal form and public character of memory; a task practitioners seem well-placed to realise.

Towards a collective memory-form

The title of my research project references Allan Kaprow's score *Useful Fictions* (1975), which describes an action for two people, with the first carrying a mirror and the second mimicking the gestures which they observe in the reflection, presented here as a possible analogy for the artistic strategy of re-enacting past material. To explore the circumstances which might position retroactive art practices as productive or necessary I propose that a critical model exists in performance theory related to the problem of collecting the live. Focusing here on the example of Allan Kaprow and the conditions he outlined prior to his death regarding the re-staging of his live works, I will explore the relationship between re-enactment and re-invention.

Emerging from earlier experimentation with assemblage, Kaprow's *Happenings* express a relationship to the archival and enfold a notion of repetition, both in terms of defining a discrete everyday activity to be performed as an art gesture,

and in the relation of the live event to the material score¹⁴⁶. This encompasses a complex temporality, emphasizing the live experience of participants, and operating between the projection of an orchestrated scenario and the collective memory of an event¹⁴⁷.

Whilst initially conceived of as events which would happen only once, a series of retrospective exhibitions in the 1980s led Kaprow to confront his own mortality and address the problem of how the *Happenings* might continue to exist without his literal presence. For Kaprow, re-enactment required a creative engagement with the original, as revealed in his statement that he intended ‘to *create* 1960 wholesale, *not* to re-create it’¹⁴⁸. Kaprow began to produce new versions of his earlier artworks for an exhibition ‘Precedings’ at the University of Texas in 1988¹⁴⁹, and by 1996, in planning the exhibition ‘Out of Actions: Between Performance and the Object 1949-1979’, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (1998)¹⁵⁰, he established a clear set of conditions concerning the re-enactment of his live work. Kaprow argues that authenticity is not to be located in a forensic reproduction of the original, but instead requires entering into the logic of the past artwork and re-imagining it for a new context. Kaprow proposed a controlled process of re-invention, mediated between himself, participants and the host institution. He states that the re-make should be ‘markedly different from its earliest form’ but

¹⁴⁶ Alex Potts, ‘Writing the Happening: The Aesthetics of Non-Art’, in *Allan Kaprow, Art as Life*, ed. by Eva Meyer-Hermann, Andrew Perchuk and Stephanie Rosenthal (London: Thames and Hudson: 2008), pp. 20-28 (p. 20/21).

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.* p. 27.

¹⁴⁸ Stephanie Rosenthal ‘Agency for Action’ in *Allan Kaprow, Art as Life*, ed. by Eva Meyer-Hermann, Andrew Perchuk and Stephanie Rosenthal (London: Thames and Hudson: 2008), pp. 57-71 (p. 61).

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.* p. 62.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.* p. 62.

emerge from ‘at least 3 previous versions’, developing a new form which is distinct and yet recognisable within the historical trajectory of the original¹⁵¹. He also specified that the *Happening* should ideally take place in a daily environment rather than in a museum, and that it should involve participants rather than an audience¹⁵². Again, this de-centralises the biography of the artist, instead promoting a collective memory-form, by probing the public character of memory. The *Happening* is conceived of then in relation to a distinct point of origin and understood as an accumulative form which evolves historically through the mutual consent of participants. By his 2004 retrospective exhibition, ‘Allan Kaprow: Art as Life’ (Vanabbemuseum, Eindhoven), Kaprow had devised a system which allowed a greater degree of authorial responsibility to be passed on, inviting guests, usually academic scholars, to lead the *Happenings*. This involved nominating a person to singularly lead the re-enactment, using Kaprow’s original scores and determining practical details, such as the location, and whether or not the invitation to participate should be extended to a wider group¹⁵³.

Curator, Stephanie Rosenthal, has stressed how bodily experience and affect are prioritised within the process of such re-enactments. For instance, her account of realising the score *Round trip*¹⁵⁴ in 2006 with a group of students details how the

¹⁵¹ Ibid. p. 62.

¹⁵² Kaprow describes how participants would go through an induction introducing them to the principles of the Happening, and suggests that additionally he would give a lecture about the Happening, incorporating the most recent version of the Happening and participatory workshop (the host gallery was invited to exhibit documents relating to the realisation of the new happening and workshop). Rosenthal ‘Agency for Action’ in *Allan Kaprow, Art as Life*, p. 65.

¹⁵³ A selection of scores were also distributed as handouts for visitors to the exhibition to realise independently. Ibid. p. 65.

¹⁵⁴ *Round Trip* (1968), “Tiny ball of paper, cardboard, string, rolled several blocks. Ball enlarged with more materials. Rolled several blocks again. Enlarged...Rolled several blocks again. Process repeated until ball is too large to roll”. Rosenthal ‘Agency for Action’ in *Allan Kaprow, Art as Life*, p. 66.

physical labour accentuated the flow of experiential time. She explains how the realisation of the score as a group involved problem-solving, for instance, working out how to enlarge the ball with more materials, and certain unexpected moments of poetic resonance, such as the juxtaposition of the object on certain surfaces¹⁵⁵. In this example re-enactment serves as a means to initiate a shared encounter with a past artwork, emphasizing duration, site and the social dynamic involved in co-production.

Kaprow's promotion of a principle of re-invention within re-enactment expresses an awareness that the radical aspect of the original, located in the new attention to the everyday and the appearance of 'nonart', cannot simply be repeated. Further to this, Kaprow's willingness to delegate production to informed participants appears to acknowledge the risk identified by Hal Foster that re-enactment as a mode of art production is highly susceptible to slipping into a derivative and popularised form. Foster argues that the recent trend towards re-enacting pivotal live works in institutional settings often results in a banal and predictable encounter with the past artwork. He writes, 'Not quite live, not quite dead, these re-enactments have introduced a zombie-time into these institutions. Sometimes this hybrid temporality, neither present nor past, takes on a gray tonality, not unlike that of the old photographs on which the re-enactments are often based, and like these photos the events seem both real and unreal, documentary and fictive'¹⁵⁶. Kaprow's approach to the re-enactment of his live work expresses a commitment to siting the

¹⁵⁵ Ibid. p. 65.

¹⁵⁶ Foster, *Bad New Days*, p. 127.

work in the present, as a collectively determined form that can only partially be anticipated.

Returning to Stephanie Rosenthal's description of the experience of re-enacting Kaprow's score *Round Trip*, the emphasis she places on duration, group problem-solving, and contingent material details, indicates that rather than simply animating the existing documentation re-enactment has offered a form of actualisation within a particular present. This appears to meet Foster's criteria for a critical form of performance which brings together 'different registers of experience (aesthetic, cognitive, and critical) but also different orders of temporality'¹⁵⁷. However, it should be noted that whilst this allows a new audience to access a past artwork this is necessarily limited in scale (for instance, the workshop for participants were devised to accommodate around 20 people¹⁵⁸), so the primary mode of encounter will be through the documentation of the event rather than the live experience. Re-invention necessitates a negotiation between the literal and figurative qualities of the original, or in the words of performer Tim Etchells, a question of prioritising the 'replication of surface' or the 'replication of heart'¹⁵⁹. Inevitably, as the previous discussion of map-like or interpretative forms of repetition revealed, a degree of distortion will occur when an artwork is re-made, and in the case of artists consciously seeking to re-invent past cultural material the nature of the original is revealed by that which survives the transformation, as Milena Tomic has identified when she proposes, 're-invention produces difference through fidelity to whatever

¹⁵⁷ Ibid. p. 140.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid. p. 62.

¹⁵⁹ Tim Etchells, 'Live Forever', *TATE*, <<https://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/video/live-forever-tim-etchells>> [Accessed 20/06/2017].

is so essential in a work that it can survive its radical transformation'¹⁶⁰. In the case of Kaprow, the conditions he sets out promote co-production (i.e. the re-invention relies on joint memory and group problem-solving), bodily experience (positioning sound/ smell/ touch as diffuse forms of knowledge) and an expansive context, directed towards life in broad terms (such as the everyday as a category, and the experiential time of social relations).

The conditions which Kaprow has established regarding the re-staging of his live work offers the beginnings of a critical methodology for approaching the procedures and ethical implications of art practices which use the past as core material or position an existing artwork as score. In addition to practices which include a live or durational element, conceptual artworks which use instructions involve a negotiation with seriality and re-invention. In the following analysis I will present examples from my practice which sought to re-materialise several artworks from the 1960s as part of my curatorial project 'Ingredients, Method, Serving Suggestion', produced for A.P.T Gallery in 2016. With reference to Kaprow's principle of reinvention I will question the conditions which frame a re-make as productive.

Artwork as Score: Re-enacting the 1960s

'Ingredients, Method, Serving Suggestion' (2016) was conceived of as a means to explore sharing as a contemporary value. The project consisted of 14 responses to Yoko Ono's score *Time Painting*, a live painting machine by Natasha Kidd, a *Mobile*

¹⁶⁰ Milena Tomic, 'Reinvention as parallax: allegorical and other afterlives of Allan Kaprow's un-art', *Word and Image*, 33:2, (2017), pp109-126 (p. 110).

Kitchen Workstation produced with Gary Woodley, and a new video-work

Underwater Watercolours, produced with Bruce McLean and Eddie Farrell.



[Installation of E-flux *Do-It* manual, A.P.T Gallery, 'Ingredients, Method, Serving Suggestion' 2016).

This was informed by a period of research into the concepts of hospitality and generosity, here seeking to make the 'back-stage' of art production visible through a focus on instructional modes of address and live material demonstrations¹⁶¹.

Responding to the call of Mary Jane Jacob, 'How can artists be more generous and encourage an experience of their art that is more open, allowing "others" entry and equally appreciating their experiences? How can art be an exchange?'¹⁶² curation

¹⁶¹ To coincide with the exhibition I developed a public program of events involving material demonstrations. These ranged from practical art workshops, for instance, demonstrating traditional techniques, such as, preparing chalk gesso or iron gall ink, to a live Skype cookery lesson. This involved a number of the exhibiting artists and was facilitated by the production of a '*Mobile Kitchen Workstation*' by Gary Woodley and a 'Knowledge Exchange Partnership Award' from WROCAH.

¹⁶² Ted Purves (ed.), *What we want is free; Generosity and Exchange in recent art* (Albany: State University of New York Press: 2005), p. 5.

offered a means to share knowledge of past artworks and collectively explore the contemporary relevance of 1960s experimentation.

Working as an artist-curator enabled me to probe the relationship between archival practice and curation. As has been noted by Terry Smith¹⁶³, artist-curated exhibitions tend to be highly idiosyncratic and often apply a conceptual or premise-based approach, in this case focusing the project on artworks which expressed a relationship to the form of the recipe. This corresponds to the traits Foster associates with archival art practice, such as eccentricity, provisional organisation and indeterminate form. In this project this manifests through inviting artists to submit responses to a proposal, rather than selecting pre-existing artworks, and by planning an exhibition installation that would incorporate a degree of flexibility. For instance, the inclusion of Hans Ulrich Obrist's digital collection of artist instructions (*E-Flux Do-It manual*)¹⁶⁴, and relevant materials to realise selected instructions, was intended to facilitate the production of new artworks which could be added to the gallery space. Additionally, Gary Woodley's *Mobile Kitchen Workstation* was devised to move around the exhibition and to be physically re-configured according to use, and the surface of Natasha Kidd's canvases were intended to accumulate drip marks over the course of the exhibition.

I will focus my discussion on two aspects of this project which relate to re-enactment and painting; the responses to Ono's score *Time Painting* (1961) and the re-materialisation and re-documentation of Bruce McLean's *Underwater*

¹⁶³ Terry Smith, *Thinking Contemporary Curating* (New York: Independent Curators International: 2012), p. 116.

¹⁶⁴ A digital collection of artist instructions collected by Hans Ulrich Obrist. Available online: *DO-IT*, <http://projects.e-flux.com/do_it/manuals/0_manual.html> [01/04/2016].

Watercolour (1969). Through this I aim to draw out the distinction between enacting and re-enacting, and to apply Kaprow's principle of re-invention as a critical model.

Time Painting (1961): 'Make a painting in which the colour comes out only under a certain light at a certain time of the day. Make it a very short time'. Yoko Ono.

In the 2013 Artforum article, 'The Year in Re-', the authors pose the question, 'when is a gesture, act, or work of performance art simply enacted, and when is it considered a re-enactment?'¹⁶⁵. This notes the emphasis established by the prefix re-, indicating a repetition of an originary model, and the inherent performativity of the speech-act. In the context of the exhibition 'Ingredients, Method, Serving Suggestion' and the invitation I issued to 14 painters to realise Yoko Ono's score *Time Painting*, the question of whether this constitutes a process of enacting or a re-enactment depends on how the original is understood and the nature of the response¹⁶⁶.

Time Painting did exist for a period of time as a material object, exhibited as part of Ono's exhibition at AG Gallery, New York (1961)¹⁶⁷. However, Ono chose to historicise the artwork as a linguistic score, published in her book of instructions

¹⁶⁵ Buskirk, Jones and Jones, 'The Year in Re-'.

¹⁶⁶ The participating artists were Katrina Blannin, Jane Bustin, Kieran Drury, Dan Howard-Birt, Benjamin Jenner, Jo McGonigal, Sarah McNulty, Sarah Pettitt, Robert Rivers, Damian Taylor, Jack Vickridge, Jo Volley and Sarah Kate Wilson. I also produced a response which means there were 14 new artworks in total.

¹⁶⁷ '*Paintings and Drawings of Yoko Ono*', AG Gallery, 925 Madison Avenue, New York, <<http://fluxusfoundation.com/archive/about-yoko-fluxus-foundation-archive/paintings-drawings-of-yoko-ono-at-ag-gallery-1961/>> [Accessed 24/08/2016 14:40].

Grapefruit (1964)¹⁶⁸. This indicates that it was the artist's intention that the artwork is approached as a conceptual score, suggesting that following the instruction involves a process of enacting rather than re-enacting.

This particular instruction was selected because it appeared to describe an act that it would be possible to realise, without dictating a specific method of production or detailing more than a transitory quality of the visual form of a painting. As the common starting point for each of these interpretations, does the Ono score come to define the ontology of the new paintings? In what sense do these apparently diverse and individual responses articulate, conserve or re-invent the original score?

Like many of Ono's instruction pieces the general mode of address and poetic tone of *Time Painting* encourages a creative response, as one is invited to think through the possibility of how the instruction can be realised, 'like an invitation to follow a train of thinking'¹⁶⁹. For Ono, interpretation is a necessary aspect of working with a score, that acknowledges the limitations of trying to record the complexity of sensory experience in a graphic or verbal form¹⁷⁰. The 14 paintings which were produced in response to the Ono score can be roughly grouped into 3 categories; paintings which attempt to realise the instruction through material performance, paintings which use analogical imagery and paintings which incorporate a text

¹⁶⁸ Yoko Ono, *Grapefruit* (New York: Simon and Schuster: 1964).

¹⁶⁹ Mike Sperlinger, "Orders! Conceptual Art's Imperatives." In, *Afterthought, New writing on conceptual art*, ed. by Mike Sperlinger (London: Rachmaninoffs: 2005), p. 9.

¹⁷⁰ In an interview with curator Hans Ulrich Obrist, Ono has explained that her use of instructions to produce paintings, objects and events emerged from early musical training, in Jiyu Gakuen, Japan, which taught her to listen to daily sounds and translate this into notation. Ono states that through this process she became aware of the limitation of the musical score to fully capture and communicate the complexity of sound, and recognised that each time the score was realised a degree of interpretation on the part of the performer was required. Hans Ulrich Obrist, *Interview with Yoko Ono*, <http://www.eflux.com/projects/do_it/notes/notes.html> [Accessed 25/08/2016].

instruction¹⁷¹. Of these strategies the first category which manipulates painting materials so that colour and light is experienced as durational, appears closest to the nature of the score as a gesture against the permanence of traditional Fine Art forms, such as painting or sculpture.



[Jo Volley, *Time Painting*, 2016. Gesso and phosphorescent pigment, 30cm diameter]

The phrasing of Ono's instruction makes a distinction between colour and light, perhaps leading us towards a consideration of both the material properties of the artwork and environmental conditions which may act upon it during the moment of presentation. Several of the artists invited to interpret the Ono score chose to follow the instruction by using materials which would react to changes in light, for

¹⁷¹ A more extensive analysis of these paintings has been published online, '*Painting (in) the imperative form: An exploration of instruction painting*'. Alana Turner, 2016. <<https://aestheticinvestigations.eu/index.php/journal/article/view/113>>.

instance, Sarah McNulty used photosensitive primer to record gestural marks, and Jo Volley and Robert Rivers used phosphorescent pigments, to produce different colours at particular times of day.

In each case the score sits naturally within longer-term material experimentation of each practice, such as research into colour, surface and mark-making, whilst expressing specific traits which can be read in relation to the score. For instance, Jo Volley's contribution *Time Painting*, appears on first inspection to be an off-white circular panel, roughly the size of a domestic wall-clock, hung slightly ajar from the wall. This has been back-painted with a fluorescent pigment and the surface contains a phosphorescent medium, so that it emits a gentle orange cast during the day, transitioning to a green glow during the night. It is interesting to note that whilst this seems to fully absorb the instruction into the form of the painting it results in a material performance which requires such a long duration that it cannot be witnessed during the ordinary opening hours of the gallery. This resonates strongly with the poetic tone of the score and Ono's decision to archive *Time Painting* as linguistic score rather than as a material object, which can perhaps be understood as an initial orientation or aspiration towards the condition of invisibility.

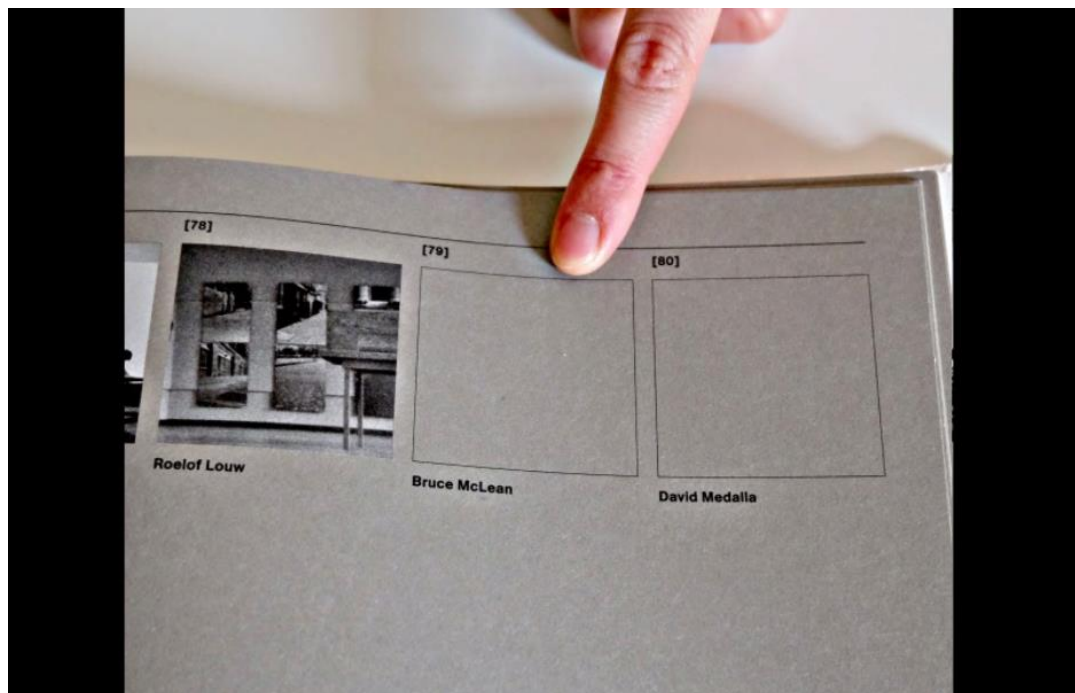
Whilst there is evidence that the process of working from an external stimulus has led to the exploration of new techniques and manners of presentation each painting can easily be recognised as the product of the individual artist and situated within the broader trajectory of their own practice. The paintings may share a common starting point but the process of interpreting the instruction has led to varying degrees of conscious distancing from the Ono score, particularly evident in

the responses which bear a new title. This leads me to propose that these paintings only exhibit a clear relationship to the original Ono artwork when experienced as a group during the event of the exhibition. If approached collectively as an incomplete series of possible responses, these paintings reflect the nature of the score as open or unfinished, exploring ephemerality and encouraging sensitivity to the phenomenological aspect of looking. As a fulfilment of the curatorial invitation they appear to extend the logic of the original score by situating conceptual proposition and the tacit knowledge of painting as related rather than oppositional forms of practice.

Positioning Ono's score as a curatorial strategy rather than a historic artwork expresses my judgement that the radical quality of the original may no longer be relevant to current discourse. For instance, the use of ephemeral, durational form in the context of the 1960s can be read as a radical gesture, challenging the Modernist insistence on presence and understanding of the temporality of the artwork as instantaneous. The post 1960s trajectory of experimental practice means that examples of painting intersecting with other media (e.g. in the *Time Painting* project Robert Rivers use of sound or Sarah Kate Wilson's use of audience participation) no longer register as oppositional, and instead this merely reflects the heterogeneous nature of current practice and inherited traditions of expanded painting.

However, initiating a collective realisation of *Time Painting* reveals the paradoxical nature of the score-event: the moment of expansion initiated by realising the score is also a moment of contraction. In each example, as the score is realised it is given specific material form, duration, and texture, marking the transition from a

conceptual proposition to a physical object. The variety of responses in this project illustrates the possibility of the score, and yet the patterns which emerge in terms of how the score is realised reveals a degree of predictability, indicating that the format of the score also forecloses certain approaches. The process of realising a past score appears to be expanding an understanding of the original, a gesture towards openness, that necessarily involves the fixing of particular details to form a singular articulation, or in this particular project, a series of singular articulations. This simultaneous movement of conceptual expansion and contraction in the score-event has been described by performer Tim Etchells as the moment when, ‘all questions in the air become decisions in the room’, allowing the past to be historicised¹⁷².



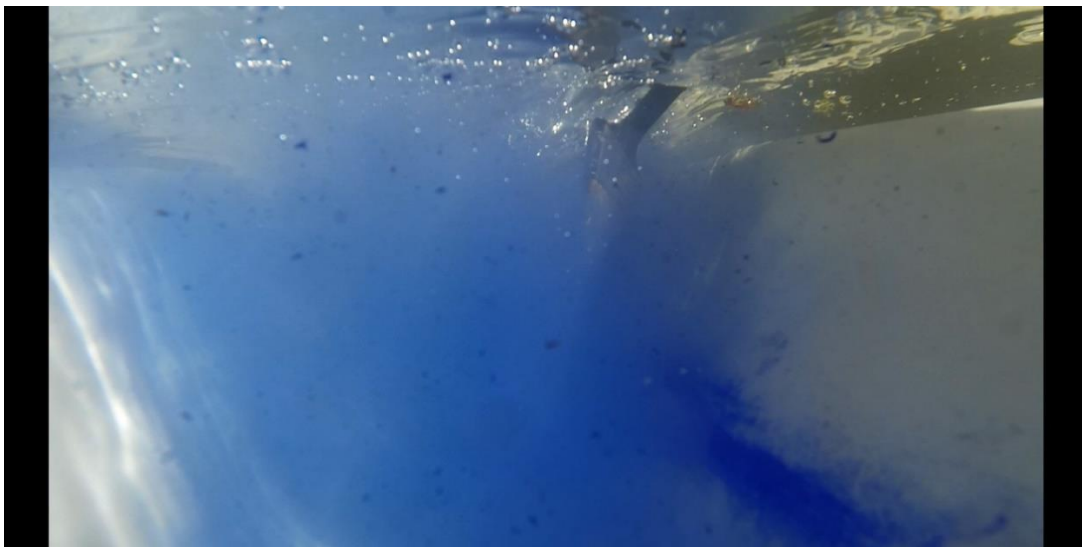
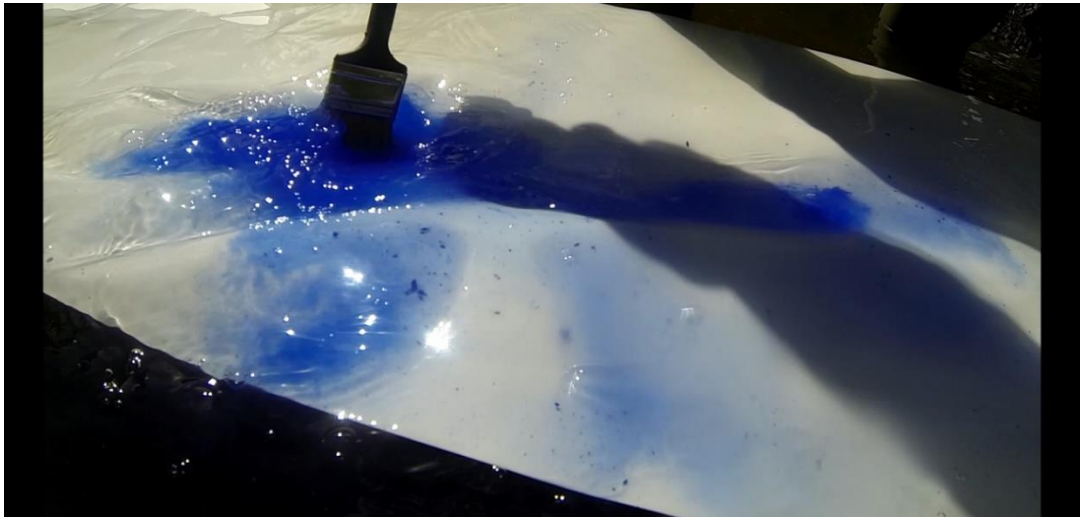
[Eddie Farrell, Bruce McLean and Alaena Turner, Still from *Underwater Watercolours*, 2016, colour video, 11:53]

¹⁷² Tim Etchells, ‘Live Forever’.

To expand upon the issue of how re-materialising a past artwork might offer a new insight or access point I will discuss a re-enactment of Bruce McLean's 1969 artwork *Underwater Watercolour*, which was produced as part of the same curatorial project as the previous *Time Painting* example. This re-enactment illustrates the point implicit in Joselit's notion of network painting that any existing artwork can come to serve as a score.

McLean's *Underwater Watercolour* was originally exhibited as part of a series of black and white photographs during the survey exhibition 'When Attitudes become Form' at the ICA, London, (Sep-Oct 1969). The premise for initiating this re-enactment within the context of my curatorial project 'Ingredients, Methods, serving Suggestion' was to try to produce a 'how-to' instruction for an implausible painting process. The rationale for physically re-making the original work was reinforced by an apparent loss of the original documentation, which meant that re-staging and re-documenting served the practical purpose of sharing the original work with a secondary audience.

The resulting colour video (11 min 53 sec) documents McLean returning to the original site and attempting to recall how he made the original photograph. The video visualises the process of McLean painting underwater and uses close angles to draw out a suggestion that this might offer a form of material study. It also incorporates parts of our conversations regarding the re-enactment and an unsuccessful attempt to locate the original photographs.



[Stills from *Underwater Watercolours*]

My selection of this specific artwork is symptomatic of a trend in retroactive practices towards repeating the art of 1960s. Beyond the pragmatic aspect of compensating for missed first-hand encounters or lost documentation of live events, the period of the 1960s seems to hold a particular appeal for current practitioners as the historic moment when the category of the contemporary emerged¹⁷³. This has been noted by James Meyer when he asks, ‘Could it be that “the sixties” in becoming history, returns to us as a trope of contemporaneity- as an object for present-day use?’¹⁷⁴. As in the previous example of Kaprow, working with the recent past means that questions of memory are likely to be active, positioning retroactive practices as a way to act upon and construct cultural memory forms. For example, filmmakers Iain Forsyth and Jane Pollard have translated iconic conceptual art performances into alternate forms of performance grounded in everyday entertainment. In *Kiss my Nauman* (2007), Bruce Nauman’s video performance, *Art Make-Up* (1967) is re-imagined as a 4 channel video installation that documents the performers in a tribute act to the band *Kiss* applying their stage make-up, and in 2009 Forsyth and Pollard produced a live performance work for Site Gallery which translated Dan Graham’s, *Performer, Audience, Mirror* (1975), into an improvised stand-up comedy routine. Their films express the subversive potential of re-enactment, identified by Jerome de Groot as a practice of historical representation which ‘challenges, upsets, unsettles and solidifies conceptualisations

¹⁷³ Peter Osborne has proposed that the distinction between modern and contemporary art is stabilised after 1945, with the 1960s marking an ontological break with former object-based practices and the rhetoric of medium-specificity. Peter Osborne, *Anywhere or not at all*, p. 19.

¹⁷⁴ He cites examples such as Renee Green’s *Partially Buried* (1996) and Tacita Dean’s film *Mario Merce* (2002). James Meyer, ‘The Return of the Sixties in Contemporary Art and Criticism,’ in *Antinomies of Art and Culture, Modernity, Postmodernity, Contemporaneity*, ed. By Terry Smith, Okwui Enwezor and Nancy Condee (Durham and London: Duke University Press: 2008), pp. 324-332 (p. 326-8).

of the past'¹⁷⁵, here countering the mythologization of the conceptual artist.

Reflecting on the process of re-enactment Forsyth and Pollard have clarified that the focus of their attention is not the source artwork which acts as model, but the difference which emerges through the process of making and witnessing the copy, described as a productive lack:

it's rarely the event or action being repeated that we're interested in reconsidering. Repetition works like a catalyst, and it's our relationship to the imitation and the act of creating and witnessing the 'copy' where something interesting happens...Copying anything, the copy never reproduces the original completely. And this shortfall is where the real emerges, where understanding can begin.¹⁷⁶

In terms of my own experience of re-enacting *Underwater Watercolour*, with the original artist, Bruce McLean, and his regular collaborative partner, film-maker Eddie Farrell, the strength of the work emerged through the apparent differences in each of our relationships to the original and a degree of uncertainty regarding the authorship of the re-enactment. This model of co-production resulted in a shift in the original premise of the project, so that showing or revealing a making process, is expanded beyond the literal question of manipulating materials to produce an image, to incorporate the narrative of working together. To facilitate this transition certain details, such as specific material choices, have been edited out, and moments of distraction and diversion, for example, McLean noting the calls of certain birds, or singing, and points of confusion (such as, McLean asking "Why are we doing this anyway?") remain visible. The decision to document the process in

¹⁷⁵ Groot, 'Affect and empathy: re-enactment and performance as/in history,' p. 590.

¹⁷⁶ Iain Forsyth and Jane Pollard quoted in, Staff, *Retroactivity and Contemporary Art*, p. 85.

colour marks the historical gap between the original and the re-make, playing upon the way experimental art of the 1960s has been historicised¹⁷⁷.

The absence of the original artwork underpins the narrative of the video and certain conversational exchanges included in the video, such as McLean stating “So you’re doing my work?” and asking “How will you show it?” indicate that he regarded this re-materialisation as an aside to his overall practice and to some extent was willing to hand over responsibility. This allowed the re-enactment to develop into a discursive form, resulting in an open-ended narrative that archives the original through meandering conversation and material experimentation. Whilst McLean set all the practical details of the re-enactment he delegated the editing of the footage and presentation of the video to myself and Farrell. We sought to present the video in a manner that might convey and continue the spirit of the original artwork, which combined the aesthetic of conceptual art (e.g. the grid format of the original presentation of the black and white photos) with the linguistic play and potential absurdity of *Underwater Watercolour*, adopting a counter-position to the grandiose nature of site-specific sculpture. This motivated the decision to devise a method to project the film underwater into a fish tank, so that the video was only visible from one angle and otherwise read as an incongruous arrangement of objects. It was also decided collectively to pluralise the title as a means to indicate the dependence of the video on the performativity of the original artwork, whilst listing each of our names as contributors¹⁷⁸. Treating

¹⁷⁷ In reference to ‘*When Attitudes become Form*’ Briony Fer notes that by the 1960s informal modes of display are commonplace and there is a renunciation of colour. Fer, *The Infinite Line*. p. 142.

¹⁷⁸ The video of ‘*Underwater Watercolours*’ is available freely online as an Atmen Resource work. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2yjh3sunpc0>>.

the original as a score, which led to re-enactment and re-documentation, creates a shift in this instance of the terminology of network painting, so that painting is employed as verb rather than noun, and instead of circulating as an image of a material object the video captures an image of an action, emphasising materiality and narrative.



[Documentation of *Underwater Watercolours*, during 'Ingredients, Method, Serving Suggestion', A.P.T Gallery, July-Sep 2016]

As in the previous examples considered in this chapter, re-enactment as a means of locating a past artwork within the present, involves a degree of re-invention that is mediated socially. This produces new individualised interpretations which are dependent upon the original source for a founding conceptual schema, and bear the traits of archival practice, for example, engaging with open-ended narratives, idiosyncratic juxtapositions, and fragmentary, provisional form. Taking forward the

generalised definition of the archival as a 'a will to collect, organise and conserve'¹⁷⁹, in contemporary art practice, to conserve is to reinvent.

¹⁷⁹ Jacques Derrida's proposition in *'Archive Fever'*, paraphrased by Marlene Manoff, 'Theories of the Archive from Across the Disciplines', *Libraries and the Academy*, Vol. 4 No. 1 (2004), pp.9-25. <doi:10.1353/pla.2004.0015>.

Chapter Three

Serial Gesture: Fictioning Painting

'I want to buy a building, a particular type of building, and decorate and furnish it in a particular way. I have precise requirements, right down to the smallest detail. I want to hire people to live in it, and perform tasks that I will designate. They need to perform these exactly as I say, and when I ask them to. I shall most probably require the building opposite as well, and most probably need it to be modified. Certain actions must take place at that location too, exactly as and when I shall require them to take place. I need the project to be set up, staffed and coordinated, and I'd like to start as soon as possible.' (Tom McCarthy, *Remainder*¹⁸⁰)

In the introductory essay to *The Mattering of Matter*, the publication issued by Tom McCarthy's semi-fictitious avant-garde project the 'International Necronautical Society', Nicholas Bourriaud lists the dominant tendencies of 20th century art as 'documentation, appropriation, Fluxus, conceptual art, performance and re-enactment'¹⁸¹. The order in which these categories are presented suggests a progressive cycle where re-enactment, informed by the experimental nature of 1960s practice, completes a historical loop as (re)documentation and appropriation are once again framed as central concerns. In this chapter I will focus on the ways in

¹⁸⁰ Tom McCarthy, *Remainder* (London: Alma Books: 2016), p. 78-9.

¹⁸¹ Nicholas Bourriaud, 'New Entry on Mediums, or Death by PDF: A Glossary of the Exploratory Zones of the INS', in *The Mattering of Matter: Documents from the Archive of the International Necronautical Society*, ed. by Tom McCarthy and Simon Critchley (Berlin: Sternberg Press: 2012), pp10-52 (p. 10).

which the principle of conservation through re-invention can be put into practice in terms of studio production, using Tom McCarthy's novel *Remainder* to introduce an alternative understanding of re-enactment to the model derived from performance theory discussed in the previous chapter. *Remainder* offers a speculative mode of re-enactment which foregrounds procedures of repetition, resulting in the deferral of a clear sense of an ending, and initiating a state of self-observation. Based around the eccentric project of an individual author and casting doubt on memory of the past as a marker of authenticity, the premise of this work of fiction allows me to extend my questioning of the productivity or necessity of re-enactment. *Remainder* will be discussed in relation to a new body of abstract paintings produced in the later stages of my research project, which apply the principles of re-enactment to visual form to realise a non-mimetic form of appropriation. The idea of a speculative form of re-enactment, producing from a *possible* rather than *actual* past will be contextualised through a brief discussion of a televised lecture on the post-humous paintings of Piet Mondrian, delivered by a speaker posing as historian Walter Benjamin. With reference to Briony Fer, I will propose that re-enactment constitutes a new category of seriality, characterised by a propensity to fictionalise. Through this discussion I aim to pursue the implications of archival and retroactive art practice, asking how we understand the object which presents itself, 'again, and again and again...'¹⁸²

¹⁸² This has been noted as the catchphrase of the protagonist of McCarthy's novel. Sydney Miller, 'Intentional Fallacies: (Re)enacting the Accidental in Tom McCarthy's 'Remainder'', *Contemporary Literature*, Vol. 56. No. 4 (Winter 2015), pp. 634-659 (p. 638).

'Again, and again and again...'

In 1986 Walter Benjamin made an unexpected re-appearance on Belgrade TV to present a lecture *Piet Mondrian 63-96*¹⁸³. Delivered 46 years after the death of Benjamin, and in an incongruous British accent, the speaker stands in a lecture hall in front of six geometric paintings, introduced as 'Mondrians'. This descriptor is troubled by the fact that this group of six paintings consists of three identical pairs, and by the dates of these paintings, ranging from 1963-1996. This reveals that these compositions were made after Mondrian's death in 1944 and are in fact anonymous copies, leading the speaker to ask, "Who is the real author of these pictures?"¹⁸⁴.

The speaker pursues this by reflecting on the logic of the copy and the possible motivations for re-making an existing cultural artefact. He notes that historically the most obvious reasons to produce a copy would be either to gain technical artistic skills, or to produce a forgery which might pass for the original. However, whilst the paintings on display in the lecture theatre express a formal resemblance to Mondrian's original paintings they are described as imperfect replicas, so unlikely attempts at forgery. Furthermore, he argues that the apparent simplicity of these geometric compositions offers little opportunity to gain skills through the act of copying, so these paintings cannot be situated within the educational tradition of copying from a model. He concludes that the act of copying in this instance is

¹⁸³ The lecture attributed to Yugoslavian artist Goran Djordjevic was broadcast by TV Galerija, and organised by the Marxist Centre in Ljubljana. It is currently in the public domain through the video hosting platform Vimeo (22:33), <<http://vimeo.com/61669696>> [Accessed 08/01/2019].

¹⁸⁴ Ibid. (06:16).

without purpose or senseless, and it may be the lack of a clear reason for being which is the defining characteristic of these six 'Mondrian' paintings.

Drawing attention to the painting in the centre of the display, which the audience is prompted to identify as a copy of Mondrian's *Composition II* (1921), held in the National Museum of Belgrade¹⁸⁵, the speaker begins to narrate an imaginary journey through the museum collections. If this copy were presented with contemporaneous artworks we might encounter it a room devoted to the art of the 1980s, and as a consequence of the chronological arrangement of artworks in the National Museum, as we walk through the galleries we would see the same Mondrian painting exhibited twice. Paradoxically, the speaker suggests that the copy may have the greater claim to originality, as it contains both the invention of the original and its own subversive rationale, appearing to express Mondrian's system of composition, whilst overlaying itself as the critical framework we now see the original through. As the camera pans out to reveal that the audience has gradually disappeared, the speaker closes the lecture by reminding the audience that this is all mere speculation, based on the material fact of these paintings.

¹⁸⁵ This particular painting is in the permanent collection of the National Museum in Belgrade. <<http://www.narodnimuzej.rs/new-age-and-modern-period/foreign-art-collection/?lang=en#>> [Accessed 08/01/2019].



[Walter Benjamin, *Piet Mondrian 63-96*, 1986, Colour video (22:33). <https://vimeo.com/61669696>]

This example is of interest within the context of my research project because it indicates the logical extreme of re-enactment as a means to think within an alternate historical perspective by embodying a fictional subject position. This suggests an alternative understanding of re-enactment to the examples discussed in previous chapters, as here the use of past material primarily appears to offer a form of ‘othering’ the present. Rather than seeking to re-enact an actual past, this example uses a fictional premise to construct a possible past, so that ‘cultural co-temporality’¹⁸⁶ incorporates that which has no singular, direct referent in reality. As a result this example is closer to the motif of re-enactment as developed in McCarthy’s novel *Remainder*:

¹⁸⁶ Smith quoted in, Cox and Lund (ed.), *The Contemporary Condition*, p. 15.

We hired an architect. We hired an interior designer. We hired a landscape gardener for the courtyard. We hired contractors, who hired builders, electricians and plumbers. There were site managers and sub-site managers, delivery coordinators and coordination supervisors. We took on performers, props and wardrobe people, hair and make-up artists. We hired security guards. We fired the interior designer and hired another one...¹⁸⁷

McCarthy's fictionalised depiction of re-enactment intersects with archival practice and the concept of re-enactment as it has entered art discourse through performance theory in the ideas of a productive excess and productive short-fall, pointing to the generative potential of the historical document, as articulated by filmmakers Forsyth and Pollard in their description of 'witnessing the copy'¹⁸⁸. In McCarthy's novel the experience of *déjà vu*¹⁸⁹ underpins the project of re-enactment with the state of consciousness entailed in self-observation, and themes of excess and shortfall are explored through the protagonist's meticulous approach to reconstruction, articulated through material details:

We had this problem often, as you might imagine: making things look old. The hallway had to be scuffed down with sandpaper and smeared with small amounts of grease-diluted tar. The banisters had to be blasted with vaporized ice to make them oxidize. And then the windows were too crisply transparent: the courtyard and the roofs didn't look right through them.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁷ McCarthy, *Remainder*, p. 105.

¹⁸⁸ As discussed in the previous chapter. Iain Forsyth and Jane Pollard quoted in, Staff, *Retroactivity and Contemporary Art*, p. 85.

¹⁸⁹ Following Paolo Virno's summary of Henri Bergson, *déjà vu* is understood as a disruption in immediate sensory perception caused by an excess of memory. Paolo Virno, *Déjà vu and The End of History* (London and New York: Verso: 2015), p. 11.

¹⁹⁰ McCarthy, *Remainder*, p. 122-3.

Here the protagonist constructs elaborate sets and hires actors to perform everyday exchanges as a way to give tangible, material form to *possible* memories. This understanding of re-enactment draws certain parallels with the construction of an alternate art historical narrative presented in *Piet Mondrian 63-96*. For instance, the appropriation of Walter Benjamin's identity, the presentation of the Mondrian copies, and the speaker's reference to the National Museum of Belgrade, provides a level of verifiable historical detail, playing upon notions of artifice and authenticity. This resonates with the paradox of fiction which McCarthy's motif of re-enactment draws out; that artifice (i.e. the constructed environment or scripted dialogue) may appear more authentic than reality.

The form of a televised lecture (currently in the public domain through the online platform Vimeo), can be understood as an engagement with liminal or marginal spaces of production and alternate forms of visibility. The present is 'othered' here by speculating on an alternative past, for instance, disrupting a teleological historical timeline, imagining two pivotal early 20th century figures in dialogue, and orientating a discussion of avant-garde innovation within Eastern Europe. This imagines an alternative perspective to the broad overview encouraged by approaching visual art in terms of a network aesthetic, using fiction as a means to explore a position beyond actual systems of production, presentation and distribution. Speaking as Walter Benjamin in 2006 the performer proposed, 'If art history as a narrative becomes the internal subject matter of a work (its internal

narrative) if it is contained inside that work, then this immediately opens up a possibility for a position “outside” of art history¹⁹¹.

This performance-lecture also highlights that certain past cultural material is particularly susceptible to appropriation. For instance, the reductive qualities of Mondrian’s early geometric abstraction, and high degree of cultural visibility, results in a highly recognisable format. Additionally, the particular biography of Walter Benjamin, such as the loss of his final manuscripts, his own archival projects, and theories concerning history and the ontology of the copy, establishes a broader cultural framework which is leveraged by the performance-lecture.

This performance-lecture offers two distinct forms of seriality; the mimetic copies of the Mondrian paintings, which express a formal resemblance to an original, and the appropriation of Walter Benjamin’s identity, a fictional conceit which can be understood as a divergent form of repetition. In the 2004 publication, *The Infinite Line: Re-making Art after Modernism*, Briony Fer argues that art post-1960s is characterised by a shift from a collage aesthetic (a pictorial form of juxtaposition, utilising multiple historical references within a singular frame) to a serial aesthetic (a temporal form of juxtaposition, aligning different moments of production and presentation to conceptualise an artwork within a series). Fer expands a notion of seriality by listing 10 categories of repetition: Picture/ Series/ Infinity/ Diagram/ Tableau/ Encounter/ Studio/ List/ Mobility/ Utopia. Of these terms ‘Picture’ and ‘Diagram’ are useful to advance a discussion of the presentation of the Mondrian copies within the performance-lecture.

¹⁹¹ Walter Benjamin, ‘Interview with Beti Zerovc’, in, *Appropriation*, ed. by David Evans (Cambridge: Whitechapel Documents of Contemporary Art/ MIT Press: 2009), pp. 149-152 (p. 151).

Fer uses the category 'Picture' to make a case that even paintings which appear to be unique objects might convey a serial aesthetic through establishing certain recognisable and repeatable formats. For instance, speaking in reference to Abstract Expressionism Fer notes how these paintings, traditionally prized for the quality of singularity, have established certain formats which repeat over a body of work to establish a recognisable style. In the case of Mark Rothko, Fer observes how the rectangular band of the colour fields, and saturation of the visual field (enabled through the large scale of the canvases and the requirement that the painting is hung low) establishes the particular format of the work¹⁹². In the example of the Mondrian copies, inadvertently, the original painting has facilitated a serial mode by establishing a highly recognisable format, specifically, the use of the grid, restriction to primary colours, and rejection of pictorial depth. Here the act of repetition frames the historical artwork as the founding gesture of a potentially infinite series of copies, and the visual similarity masks the difference in intention between the original and copy. This gives new meaning to Rothko's assertion, 'If a thing is worth doing once, it's worth doing again'¹⁹³. However, there is an important distinction to be noted here between repetition within a practice, which for Rothko entailed a form of concentration, and repetition across practices, such as appropriative strategies. Whilst the question of style underpins both forms of repetition, the mimetic copy moves towards Mel Bochner's understanding of seriality as a method or attitude that is 'systematically self-exhausting'¹⁹⁴.

¹⁹² Fer, *The Infinite Line*, p. 16.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.* p. 10.

¹⁹⁴ Mel Bochner, 'The Serial Attitude', *Artforum*, 6:4 (December 1967), pp. 28-33.

The presentation of the copies within the narrative of the lecture also aligns the paintings to the category of 'Diagram', as a visual form which might aid cognition¹⁹⁵. Fer introduces the characteristics of the diagram in relation to Dan Flavin, quoting his own summation of his artworks as 'physical facts', devised to aid 'rapid recognition' through a rejection of metaphoric association in favour of literal objecthood¹⁹⁶. Speaking in reference to the phenomenological aspect of Minimalism, Fer argues that the diagram expresses seriality through 'an endless deferment' as the temporal experience of looking registers as 'waiting for something to happen'¹⁹⁷. She describes diagrammatic artworks as having the potential for continual repetition, possessing a kind of self-destroying logic or serial cancellation, referred to as, 'deathly'¹⁹⁸.

This 'deathly' logic can be located in the copy which prioritises visual mimesis over the conceptual identity of the artwork. This embodies the form of repetition encapsulated in the catchphrase 'again and again and again', as the past is encountered as if it possesses a fixed identity which remains constant. Approaching the Mondrian copy through the categories of picture and diagram asserts the contradictory nature of the copy as simultaneously conserving and undermining conventions, as pointed to in Fer's statement, 'For Rothko, ultimately, repetition acts as a means of conservation, a means of preserving the picture in this expanded affective sense. For Flavin, on the other hand, it would offer a logic of disintegration'¹⁹⁹.

¹⁹⁵ Fer, *The Infinite Line*, p. 65.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.* p. 65.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.* p. 67.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.* p. 78.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.* p. 16.

In addition to the modes of a serial aesthetic which Fer has identified, the apparent pre-occupation of contemporary art with re-enacting past material leads me to propose that we could add a new category of *Fictioning*. This is encapsulated in the example of the performance-lecture, which can be thought of as a divergent form of repetition, on the grounds that it introduces certain irregularities and inconsistencies from the conventions of an academic lecture. This ranges from minor technical details, such as the way the event is filmed (for instance, the camera shot which reveals that the audience has left) to the highly implausible claim that the speaker is Walter Benjamin. Whilst this appropriation of a historical identity raises certain ethical issues, the performance-lecture locates a gap in the archive of Walter Benjamin's life and work which has an unexpected poetic quality; highlighting that there is no existing recording of Benjamin's voice. In this particular example, re-enactment marks an absence rather than seeking to locate an inaccessible past.

This example of fictioning past material frames cultural memory as complex, consisting of both an actual and virtual past²⁰⁰. This poses the problem that if re-enactment is based on recollection, whether individual or collective, this involves a process of negotiating both gaps in memory and the possible excess of memory manifested in *déjà vu*. To explore this idea further I will employ Tom McCarthy's novel *Remainder* as a model for an introspective and speculative mode of re-enactment, initiating self-observation and a re-imagining of historical narratives.

²⁰⁰ Following Paolo Virno's summary of the theories of Henri Bergson, the temporal procedures of memory and perception are understood as co-existent rather than sequential. Virno, *Déjà vu and The End of History*, p. 14-19.

Second hand gestures

In McCarthy's novel *Remainder*, the central character experiences memory loss following an accident, resulting in a period of rehabilitation focused on re-mastering the actions of his own body. The narrative describes how an action can be broken down into a series of smaller connected movements, which are consciously performed, resulting in the sensation that the gesture is 'second-hand' rather than authentic²⁰¹. The protagonist explains this by comparing his own gestures to that of an actor, who he perceives as possessing a greater fluidity: Every move he made, each gesture was perfect, seamless. Whether it was lighting up a cigarette or opening a fridge door or just walking down the street: he seemed to execute the action perfectly, to live it, to merge with it until he was it and it was him and there was nothing in between.'²⁰²

I draw on this idea to propose an understanding of 'second-hand' as a consciously performed action rather than simply designating that which has been inherited or which has belonged to another. In relation to the theme of originality, second-hand connotes the old-fashioned or outmoded, so it might also be understood as a willingness to embrace the aesthetic of a previous era.

In McCarthy's narrative the inability for the central character to act without perceiving himself as re-enacting is framed as a negative condition, resulting in a sense of displacement or detachment, 'No Doing without Understanding; the accident bequeathed me that for ever, an eternal detour'²⁰³. This differs substantially to the proposition made by artistic re-enactment, which treats

²⁰¹ Tom McCarthy, *Remainder* (London: Alma Books: 2016), p. 24.

²⁰² Ibid. p. 23.

²⁰³ Ibid. p. 22.

consciousness to the act of performing the past as a productive site of labour, directed towards advancing an understanding of an original model through dialogue and collaboration. This distinction can be drawn out by reflecting on the concept of appropriation set out by Paul Ricoeur, as the act of locating something external and unfamiliar to oneself, involving a willingness to dispossess self, described as “to make one’s own” what was initially “alien”, so that interpretation brings together, equalises, renders contemporary and similar²⁰⁴. In the case of collective forms of re-enactment, such as the examples in the previous chapter of re-materialising conceptual artworks or the legacy of Kaprow’s live work, the term ‘alien’ might refer to both the identification of the artwork as authored by another artist and the recognition of the past moment of production as distinct from the present. However, the agenda of such projects is to dissolve this feeling of alienation, using collective decision-making and sensory experience to locate points of resonance between the original model and subsequent re-make. The idea of re-enactment developed in McCarthy’s *Remainder* expresses a less optimistic agenda and is instead marked by a certain absurdity or futility, as the ‘alien’ is located within subjectivity itself, as a displacement of self that arises through a disruption of memory. This frames the past, and by extension the originary model of the past artwork, as ultimately unknowable, positioning re-enactment as a process of speculative invention.

To pursue the implications of appropriating past cultural material as primary content I will discuss my 2017 project based on Guy de Cointet’s performance *Tell*

²⁰⁴ Paul Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences; Essays on language, action and interpretation* (Cambridge/ NY: Cambridge University Press: 1981), p. 18.

Me. Tell Me was first presented by Guy de Cointet at Rosamund Felsen Gallery, Los Angeles (1979), as a performance lasting approximately 45 minutes, and is an artwork that I have experienced 'second-hand' through the documentation of the original and commentary in recent art criticism²⁰⁵. The original work consisted of a set of angular domestic furniture, painted white, and brightly coloured geometric objects, some of which displayed capital letters²⁰⁶. This was presented on a raised platform which acted as the stage for the performance. Three female actresses, dressed in monochrome outfits of white, black and red, performed a dialogue which animated the objects and assigned a purpose which would not be identifiable through appearance alone. For instance, a pyramid of stacked orange cubes is engaged with as a 'precious book', and a green T-shaped object on the wall is described as a 'new painting', admired by one of the actresses because it appears 'soft'²⁰⁷. The conversation is fragmented, moving fluidly between subjects, and there is no overall plot aside from the premise that the three characters are waiting for the arrival of a fourth character, 'Mark', who fails to appear. Over the course of the performance the use of the objects becomes increasingly surreal, for instance, a long, angular object identified as a 'trumpet' is used to mend a sore leg, and dialogue eventually breaks down so that words are replaced by repeated sounds, recalling the experimental nature of Dada performance.

²⁰⁵ For instance, the summary offered by Clare Gormley, 'Guy de Cointet, *Tell Me* 1979: Case Study', *Tate Research Publication* (2016), <<https://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/performance-at-tate/case-studies/guy-de-cointet>> [Accessed 22/07/2019].

²⁰⁶ The use of letters here emerges from Guy de Cointet's interest in codes, developed in earlier encrypted drawings and books. This is often attributed to his experiences within a military family. Magali Arriola, 'Tempo Rubato', in *Guy de Cointet: Tempo Rubato*, ed. by Magali Arriola, Marie de Brugerolle and Jay Sanders (Mexico: Fundación/Colección Jumex: 2013), pp. 18-47, (p. 19).

²⁰⁷ Guy de Cointet, *Tell Me* (1979), <<https://vimeo.com/205684780>> [Accessed 05/06/2017].

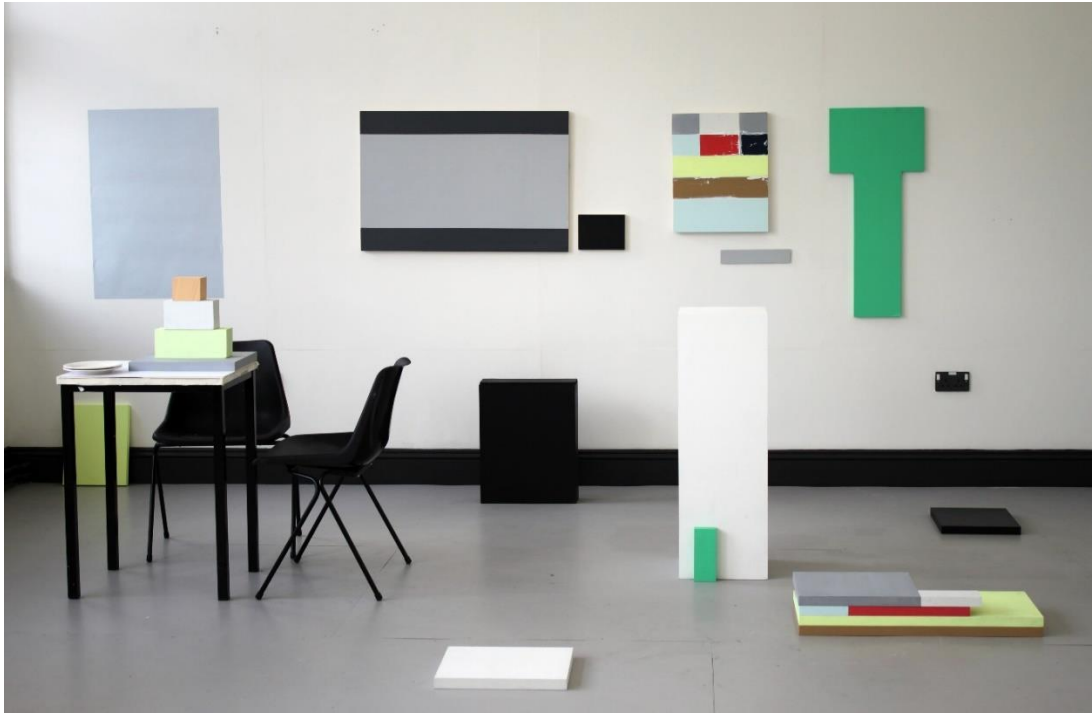
This example appeared to offer a hybridised form of presentation, drawing on conventions of theatre performance and TV melodrama, and the aesthetic of minimalism, resembling to some degree a form of spatialised painting²⁰⁸. I was interested in the use of humour (for example, the surreal quality of the dialogue and incongruous use of objects) as a means to act upon art historical narratives, and to establish an open sign system. The particular character of this performance, for example, the sense of spontaneity or improvisation, described as ‘narratives-in-the-making’²⁰⁹, resonates with my previous explorations in visualising production processes and locating creative acts within the context of the everyday.

This project emerged from my previous explorations of re-enactment, such as the examples discussed in the previous chapter, whilst marking a move away from the model of producing in the hybrid role of artist-as-curator. My decision to work individually grounds this project in the procedures of my studio practice and offers a greater degree of authorial control, so that the open-ended quality of re-enactment is approached in relation to principles of composition. As in the previous examples presented as part of ‘Ingredients, Method, Serving Suggestion’ there is a certain didactic tone to this project, as it was initially conceived of as a way to generate an encounter with a past artwork and share knowledge of the original. However, critical reflection on the outcome of this project prompted a shift in my understanding of re-enactment, as curatorial acts become enfolded within

²⁰⁸ As contemporary examples of artists working in a hybrid mode the gallery-based performances of Alexis Teplin or Oscar Murillo similarly question the relationship between physical matter and verbal language.

²⁰⁹ Magali Arriola, ‘Tempo Rubato’, in *Guy de Cointet: Tempo Rubato*, ed. by Magali Arriola, Marie de Brugerolle, and Jay Sanders (Madrid: Fundacion Coleccion Jumex: 2013), pp. 18-47 (p. 19).

production and presentation, and a mode of enquiry as artist-as-(other) artist emerged.



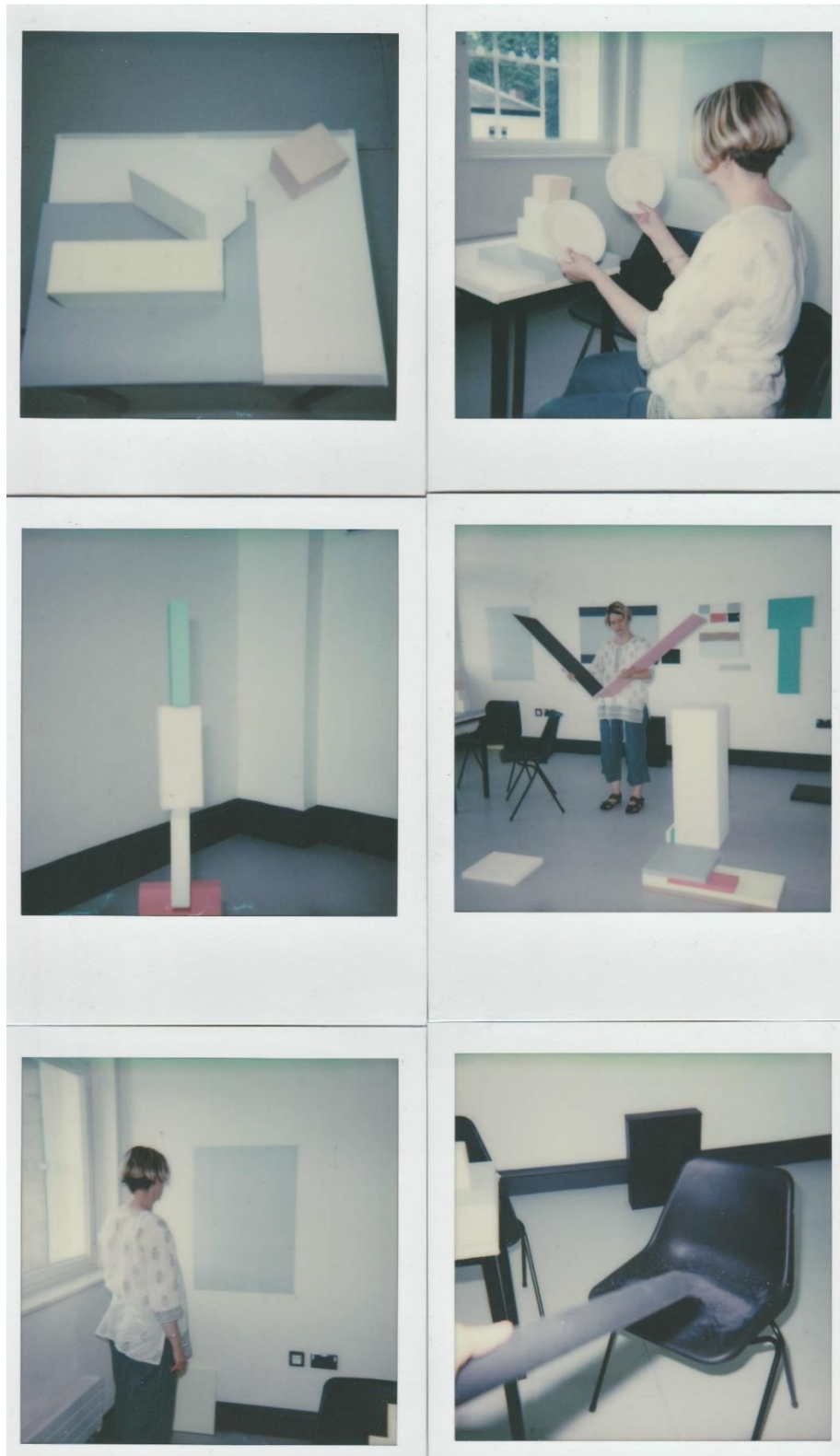
[Documentation of *Tell Me* presentation, PaRNET conference, University of Leeds, 2017]

In 2017 I presented a partial re-construction of the original set of *Tell Me* as work-in-progress during the 'Practice as Research Network' conference, University of Leeds²¹⁰. This was based on video footage of the original performance and photographic documentation of subsequent re-enactments. The set approximated the original aesthetic, with one of my own paintings replacing one of the original wall-based objects in the middle of the set²¹¹. My intention was to share my research into re-enactment as a methodology, and to marshal art history as a

²¹⁰ This conference was organised by the student-led organisation PARNET (Practice as Research Network), supported by a WRoCAH network partnership award. It was held on 7th July 2017 at University of Leeds.

²¹¹ 'Still Life (after Bell)', 2017, Acrylic and Oil on Wood, 40 x 50cm. This is visible next to the green 'T' in the documenting photograph.

setting for my painting, siting my own work temporarily within the practice of another artist.



[Documentation of *Tell Me* polaroids, 2017]

To share knowledge of the original performance of *Tell Me* conference delegates were given polaroids which suggested a use for the geometric objects of the set and were invited to move these objects around the installation to re-create the spatial arrangements captured in the photographs. Extracts of the original script which related to specific objects were then read to demonstrate how the performance used conversation between the actresses to establish and disrupt meaning. This helped to reveal the eccentricity of the original version of *Tell Me*, which had been partially subdued due to my decision to simplify the objects in the set. For example, the original used irregular geometric forms rather than nameable shapes, and the colour and scale of the objects was central to the object humour, such as an overly large black rectangle designated in the performance as a 'camera'. The script also establishes a specific temporal orientation for the original artwork, because it draws on dialogue patterns from TV melodrama and advertising, parodying the pop culture of the 1980s.

The painting I had included in the installation acted as a substitute for one of the objects from the original set which it slightly resembled; a rectangular object, divided into a grid. It visually assimilates the reductive aesthetic of Guy de Cointet's set, such as the use of geometric form and artificial colour, which exceeds a question of style and can be understood as a conscious strategy of marking ambiguity. The multiple and often unlikely meanings the objects acquire through the role they play in the narrative has been described as an action upon 'our memory of the everyday'²¹². The inclusion of my painting within the partial

²¹² Arriola, 'Tempo Rubato', in *Guy de Cointet*, p. 41.

reconstruction of *Tell Me* allows it to participate in the ‘performed object manipulations’²¹³ of the narrative. This painting *Still life (after Bell)* (2017), had been colour-matched to several objects within the set so that it might act as a diagram or instruction for how the objects should be arranged. In the original set this object was contextualised through the actions and dialogue of the three actresses, who engaged with it initially as an ‘Old Map’ and later as a ‘Game’. This established a logic where each object is understood as an open sign or possible artwork, offering a specific visual form but resisting a closed identity. This plays upon the title *Tell Me*, articulating the urge for a revelation or explanation which is not fully disclosed. In Guy de Cointet’s *Tell Me* the scripting of an exchange between characters and interaction with a constructed environment positions the meaning of objects as contingent, established through social relations which unfold over time. As in *Remainder*, where the sensory experiences of the protagonist are carefully choreographed, an event can be experienced as banal or fantastic depending on the exact circumstances, such as timings of actions or scaling of material. For example, in the narrative of *Remainder* re-enactment takes on a philosophical character as it moves beyond the initial project of re-constructing an apartment building to probe the meaning of everyday experiences. During a scene at a mechanics the protagonist of the novel is fascinated by the apparent disappearance of brake fluid within his car, ‘They’d vaporised, evaporated...It was as though I’d just witnessed a miracle: matter – these two litres of liquid- becoming un-matter – not

²¹³ Jay Sanders, ‘Mood Elevators and Changing Shapes’, in *Guy de Cointet: Tempo Rubato*, ed. by Magali Arriola, Marie de Brugerolle, and Jay Sanders (Madrid: Fundación Colección Jumex: 2013), pp.50-61 (p. 60).

surplus matter, mess or clutter, but pure, bodiless blueness. Transubstantiated'²¹⁴, which turns out to be merely the result of a technical fault, 'The engine caught - and as it did, a torrent of blue liquid burst out of the dashboard and cascaded down'²¹⁵. This perceived disaster is meticulously re-enacted in a warehouse, by creating 'a whole mini plumbing system in the car', and training teams of staff to perform the event as a continuous relay²¹⁶. The labour involved here reveals the potential absurdity in pursuing a forensically accurate, mimetic form of re-enactment. For example, here re-enactment is based on an actual memory of an experience but aims towards replicating a moment of misunderstanding; a misperception of the brake fluid miraculously disappearing, realising the *possible* rather than actual past. In the case of a re-enactment based on an existing artwork, such as my reconstruction of *Tell Me*, the concept of trying to produce 'as before' involves trying to enter an alternate subject position and past moment of invention. This rupture in continuity, i.e. attempting to recall a past which is not one's own, can be understood as an attempt to use the disturbance of memory as a composition method. Composition is positioned here, following McCarthy, as always dependent on pre-existing material, and an expression of a new form of order which is not purely random, 'assiduous composition- composition understood in all its secondary nature: as reading, tracing and reconfiguring'²¹⁷. The problem I intend to highlight is that in the process of re-enactment, the act of composition involves

²¹⁴ McCarthy, *Remainder*, p. 159.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.* p. 160.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.* p. 165.

²¹⁷ Tom McCarthy, *Transmission and the Individual Remix: How Literature Works*, (e-book: Penguin Vintage Digital: 2012), p. 282.

'reading, tracing and reconfiguring' that which can only partially be known in the present.

This was particularly an issue for my re-enactment of *Tell Me* because I lacked a direct connection to the original, which meant my memory was constructed entirely through secondary material, such as the existing documentation of the performance. As a result of primarily referencing photographs I was more familiar with the visual form rather than the overall script, and this limited the potential of my installation to offer a new insight. This indicates the difficulty of avoiding a mimetic approach, especially if the visual aesthetic is part of the appeal of the original artwork. My decision to produce an approximate reproduction of the set was informed by my previous experiences of re-enactment, particularly the re-make of *Underwater Watercolour* where a point of interest had emerged through the way the video differentiated itself from the original photograph. However, in the *Tell Me* project the changes I had introduced were relatively minor and appeared to continue the overall conceptual schema of the original. This allowed the installation to serve the purpose of introducing Guy de Cointet's work to a new primary audience, i.e. the conference delegates. In this example it is more accurate to describe the re-enactment as a means to facilitate discussion within the immediate context of the conference, but it did not embody a conversation between various players in the same manner as my previous collaborative video work (*Underwater Watercolours*, 2016). The rationale for working with this particular example was also troubled by the process of research which led me to become aware that this artwork had been re-staged and re-documented multiple times in recent years, for example, at CRAC, Sèle (2006), Tate Modern, London

(2007) and Tripostal, Lille (2017)²¹⁸. Several of these re-enactments involved the original three actresses, who were able to use their recollections of the original performance to animate the score, for instance, clarifying certain pronunciations and moments of improvisation. This raises the issue of who is well-placed to realise an artistic re-enactment and re-iterates the point that practitioners may be drawn to the recent past because the re-enactment appears richer and more dialogical when it is grounded in living memory.

This project marked a shift in my understanding of the value of re-enactment, specifically the conditions which might frame the act of re-making past material as productive. As indicated in the closing statement of the previous chapter, ‘to conserve, is to re-invent’, my previous projects attributed an archival value to re-enactment when it allows us to see the original in a new light; aligning productivity with the sharing of knowledge through collective problem-solving and the accumulation of affective experience, in order to determine a new context for a past artwork. The emphasis this places on a dialogical form is not entirely compatible with independent modes of production, such as the *Tell Me* project, which was grounded in my individual studio practice. Instead a competing mode of value asserts itself, in terms of developing an understanding of the ways in which a historical artwork can be used to develop new procedures for making and establish principles of open composition as the original artwork is approached as though it is unfinished. This entails a shift in creative priorities; moving away from the model offered through performance theory of using re-enactment to share knowledge of

²¹⁸ Clare Gormley, ‘Guy de Cointet, Tell Me 1979: Case Study’, *Tate Research Publication* (2016), <<https://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/performance-at-tate/case-studies/guy-de-cointet>> [Accessed 22/07/2019].

an original, and towards a study of re-enactment as a procedure, or set of procedures, that might construct an alternative, highly subjective, art history.



[Alaena Turner, *Still life (after Bell)*, 2017. Acrylic and oil on wood, 50 x 60cm]

This expands the previously offered rationale of re-enactment, so that in addition to recovering or recollecting a past artwork, the artwork that recycles existing

historical content might be valued for the ways it constructs a specific form, including the ephemeral category of sensory information, and that which eludes memory. For example, the reductive form of my painting, *Still life (after Bell)*, marks my inability to recall specific details, in a manner that is perhaps equivalent to the physical re-constructions of gaps in memory in *Remainder*. Within the protagonist's project of designing an apartment block based on partial recollections a permanent physical form is assigned to the blanks in his memory:

I'd left blank stretches in my diagrams, as I mentioned earlier- stretches of floor or corridor that hadn't crystallised inside my memory...I'd decided that these parts should be blank in reality, with doorways papered and cemented over, strips of wall left bare and so on. Neutral Space.²¹⁹

The failure of memory is presented here as a creative prompt, marking a particular relationship to the past through an intervention in the experiential present. The inclusion of my painting *Still Life (after Bell)* within the reconstruction of Guy de Cointet's set, points to the potential of using re-enactment as a means to compose by bringing together images and objects from different historical periods and contexts. This painting was part of a new body of work begun in 2017 consisting of paintings based on historical source images. The geometric form of the composition enables the painting to be assimilated within the installation and de Cointet's exploration of inherited or 'readymade' language systems. This particular painting was conceived of as an object within the *Tell Me* installation and as an artwork which could subsequently be encountered independently, drawing on my memory

²¹⁹ McCarthy, *Remainder*, p. 113.

of Vanessa Bell's painting *Still Life on Corner of a Mantle-piece* (1914). Preparatory line-drawings for this composition revealed I was unable to recall specific details of the original image, although I could describe the strange angle of perspective and sense of precariousness which arises in Bell's painting from looking at a stack of objects from below. The resulting painting translates weight and potential accident into a stacked grid painting and roughly approximates the overall colour scheme of the original. The use of white paint to mark the seams of the construction creates an association with DIY, sustaining the original premise of the painting as an observation of the everyday.

Including this painting within my reconstruction of *Tell Me* introduces an anomaly to the chronology of re-enactment, as Guy de Cointet's parody of Minimalism here incorporates a reference to an earlier period of formalist abstraction, so that the re-make locates itself both 'before' and 'after' the original source. Re-enactment is approached here as a form of composition that acts upon a teleological understanding of art history, reflecting the condition of contemporaneity in this instance through a simultaneous identification with both the emergence and legacy of geometric abstraction. The capacity of speculative re-enactment to frame art history as contingent and to personalise through acts of repeating styles, gestures and motifs will be further pursued through reflection on the way that abstract painting is historicised through acts of re-making.

Surplus Matter

The proposition that the practice of painting might constitute a particular kind of memory form is suggested by Craig Staff in his publication *Retroactivity and*

Contemporary Art. Staff situates the idea historically by citing Charles Baudelaire's comments on Delacroix's colour, leading Baudelaire to comment on the capacity of painting to think. Staff extends this proposition towards the action of memory, asking 'If it is indeed the case that the colour of an artwork is capable of thinking, then the implicit horizon...is that the materiality of an artwork is capable of remembering'²²⁰. Whilst Staff is speaking about contemporary art in general I intend to focus specifically on the procedures of painting, and pursue how the principles of re-enactment, such as conservation through re-invention, can be applied to realise a non-mimetic form of appropriation. I will focus my discussion on a new body of work produced from 2017 onwards which used existing cultural material, drawn from both art history and pop culture, as the starting point for new geometric compositions. I aim to outline the ways in which this approach is archival, i.e. an idiosyncratic act of selection, provisional organisation, and care, exploring the ways in which abstraction is historicised through repetition.

Returning to the survey exhibitions mentioned in the introduction of this project, the curation of 'The Indiscipline of Painting...' highlighted that the appropriation of abstract painting is more widespread than one might assume, a view echoed in curator Laura Hoptman's comments in reference to her exhibition, 'The Forever Now...', as she states, 'Abstraction is a language primed for becoming a representation of itself because as much as it resists the attribution of specific meanings, the abstract mark cannot help to carry with it an entire utopian history of modern painting'²²¹. This poses the problem of how abstract painting might

²²⁰ Staff, *Retroactivity and Contemporary Art*, p. 65.

²²¹ Hoptman, 'Atemporality', in *The Forever Now*, p. 21.

archive art history without generalising or undermining the principles of abstraction. I propose that re-enactment offers painting practice a theoretical framework that can be used to reflect on the ways in which art history manifests within contemporary painting. Central to the value of re-enactment as a methodology is the emphasis that is placed on the principle of re-invention, which encourages individual experimentation and emphasizes the temporality of interpretation.

Focusing on my individual painting practice entails approaching re-enactment as a strategy for negotiating art history and the everyday of the studio. The concept of 'Surplus Matter' formulated by McCarthy in *Remainder* will be employed in this discussion of my recent paintings to develop an understanding of speculative re-enactment as an open-ended archival process, facilitating transformation of past material through collecting sources, processing imagery and provisional grouping of references. This extends my previous discussion of a lack of memory acting as a motivating factor or rationale for re-constructing past forms, by factoring in the related issue that contemporary practitioners might be confronted with an excess of memory, enabled through the 'boundless information'²²² of a network aesthetic. In McCarthy's narrative 'Surplus matter' is a recurring theme, associated with waste and material traces, such as tyre-marks or blood-stains, but also presented as an obstacle to clarity of perception. For instance, the protagonist describes his memory of an art lesson and the instruction to produce through a process of removing excess material, "Your task isn't to create the sculpture", he said; "it's to

²²² Hoptman, 'Atemporality', in *The Forever Now*, p. 14.

strip all the other stuff away, get rid of it. The surplus matter”²²³. I intend to carry this idea forward to as a means to reflect upon the process of selecting source images from the vast collection of art history, and to attend to the emphasis in re-enactment on the body and affect.

In 2017 I began a new series of paintings based on selected historical images from a range of sources, exploring expressions of subjectivity within visual composition through re-making historical artworks. Although not conceived of as a series, this body of work expresses certain common characteristics, for instance, returning to a more conventional format (rectangular, flat, self-contained) and locatable within the traditions of painting whilst expressing a visual association with craft. This can be understood as an expression of an archival instinct because it is grounded in an initial act of selection which makes obvious the close relationship between archival operations and curation. Here curation is used as a way to articulate the ordinary operations of an artist within their studio, for instance, collecting source material and reflecting on how images act upon each other, as a means to determine how existing material can be given a new platform through the act of re-making. This returns to the ideas explored in the previous chapters that discussed how painting acts as installation and as score, specifically posing the problem of how an artwork which is dependent on past material can define a ‘here and now’ and questioning the manner in which an artwork ‘returns’.

²²³ McCarthy, *Remainder*, p. 87.



[Alaena Turner, Documentation of studio 2017, compositions based on Nicholas de Stael]

These paintings arise through a system that is comparable to the production of a jigsaw puzzle; using a line-drawing as the basis for physically dismantling and then re-assembling a wooden surface. This system for repeating a source image is fairly slow and laborious, allowing me to spend time processing the image, literally breaking it into parts which can be handled, moved around and modified through the application of coloured paint and veneers. The use of stained veneers was initially intended as a means to emphasize the nature of these images as hand-made, highlighting the constructed nature of the painting, whilst the application of colour on the directional grain of the veneer additionally suggested a flowing movement, reminiscent of a gestural brush mark. Tactility is further stressed by the use of oil-paint as an adhesive to fix the parts of the composition in place and mark the seams of construction. This process of physically dismantling and reconstructing

was devised to systematically pursue the identity of the selected source material, exploring the particularity of the image and potential contemporary relevance. As a collection of source references, the historical paintings I choose to work with resist a simple classification as either figurative or abstract, and express a sense of precariousness, dealing with ideas of balance and motion in pictorial terms. For example, William Hogarth's *The Battle of the Pictures* (1745), depicts a constellation of apparently weightless paintings, which converge at irregular angles as if competing for a central spot in the composition, and Nicholas de Stael's studies of his studio, such as *Blue Studio* (1955), appears to anticipate a relational approach to composition, as the canvases propped on the floor and hung on the wall are reduced to rectangular coloured planes which seem to float in space. These historical images were fragmented through line-drawing, isolating particular details, for instance, honing in on de Stael's depiction of his painting tools to reconfigure the image as a still-life. Approached as a collection it is possible to identify certain patterns in the source images, for example, these images relate to the act of placing colour in space, often resembling graphic forms of measurement or visual information, such as diagrams, maps, or charts. Whilst this reflects my interest in geometric abstraction and early avant-garde experimentation it also encompasses free association, locating possible equivalents in the everyday, for instance, maritime flag signals or commercial design patterns. The extraction of specific details from the source image was intended as a strategy to avoid a mimetic mode of repetition, instead promoting an interpretative act of editing. However, the reliance of these initial experiments on a reproduction of the source material over-emphasized visual detail at the expense of a more imaginative engagement with

the artwork. To counter this I began to work from my memory of artworks (as in the example presented previously, *Still Life (after Bell)* p. 112), and to produce from non-visual starting points, for instance, the memory of an action or handling of an object (e.g. *Four colour trick*, illustrated below).



[Alaena Turner, *4 Colour Trick*, 2017. Acrylic and oil on wood, 50 x 60cm]

The seams of the construction, which emerge through the process of physically deconstructing and re-assembling the wooden support, suggest that the composition emerges inwards from the physical edge of the frame, maintaining a tension between the registers of image and object. The paint which acts as an adhesive homogenises the surface and draws attention to the physical actions of construction, visible through smears and stains that remain on the flat coloured parts of the compositions, so that touch is both literal and represented. This

suggests a form of memory that is routed through the body, for example, the act of touch and handling materials, rather than a purely visual registration, as in a mimetic form of representation or recollection.

This process of working with a source image in a tactile way is one possible interpretation of Kaprow's assertion, set out in his conditions of re-invention discussed in the previous chapter, to attend to the broader register of sensory information; a proposition that is similar to the expansive notion of memory explored in McCarthy's novel *Remainder*. In *Remainder* memory is pictured as akin to peripheral vision, pursuing an object always partially out of reach, and accessible primarily through sensory experience. For example, the protagonist's initial decision to reconstruct an apartment block involves carefully choreographing background visual details (cats on the roof), off-stage sounds (a pianist practising) and atmospheric smells (frying liver), as well as engaging re-enactors to fulfil the parts of type-cast neighbours (e.g. old lady, boring couple, motorbike enthusiast). As in my paintings which pursue a previously encountered image through a process of reduction and reconstruction, this speculative form of re-enactment involves devising a set of conditions which facilitate the re-imagining of the past model. In *Remainder* the act of transferring a particular detail from the bathroom wall in the déjà vu scene to the reconstructed apartment building highlights the difficulty of translating a memory into material form, framing the labour which is involved as a kind of surplus. 'Surplus Matter' evokes an unintended or unanticipated change in physical state, which occurs as the result of something else, in the manner of a by-product. It implies an excess, pointing to a distinction between physical causality (for example, the accumulation of fat blocking an air-vent) and conscious action

(the protagonist's decision to recreate the smell of liver cooking). This highlights that the material trace exists as the remnant of a complex pattern of conscious action and inadvertent effect, offering a fairly oblique representation of an event. For example, McCarthy's narrative describes the process of tracing the crack in the bathroom wall which triggered the experience of *déjà vu*, and the difficulties encountered when the central character hires a plasterer to recreate it. First, he asks the plasterer to adjust the colour so that it is more fleshy, then when this dries the colour is too dark and he asks for it to look as it did when it was wet. Then the surface needed to be artificially cracked, so the plaster is deliberately mixed too dry, then salt is added, and finally using a razor blade, applying heat, rubbing over and using a scalpel dipped in TCP with varnish, the plasterer is able to produce a crack which is sharp enough to seem authentic²²⁴. Despite this level of attention to material detail, the physical trace of the crack possesses the same oblique form of referentiality as the stain, i.e. it holds a relevance for the protagonist which cannot be simply re-sited or shared. In a similar manner to the examples of Mondrian's *Wall Works* discussed in Chapter One, the reconstructed physical trace functions as a self-authenticating document, as it legitimises the process of creative decision-making within re-enactment. This moves further away from the dialogical model of re-enactment discussed in the previous chapter, where the rationale for re-making was dependent on an absent original source, by instead placing value in the labour or actual processes of re-enactment. This expresses a will towards deviation, framing the source model as not only an image that accumulates meaning over

²²⁴ McCarthy, *Remainder*, p. 62 and p. 121-2.

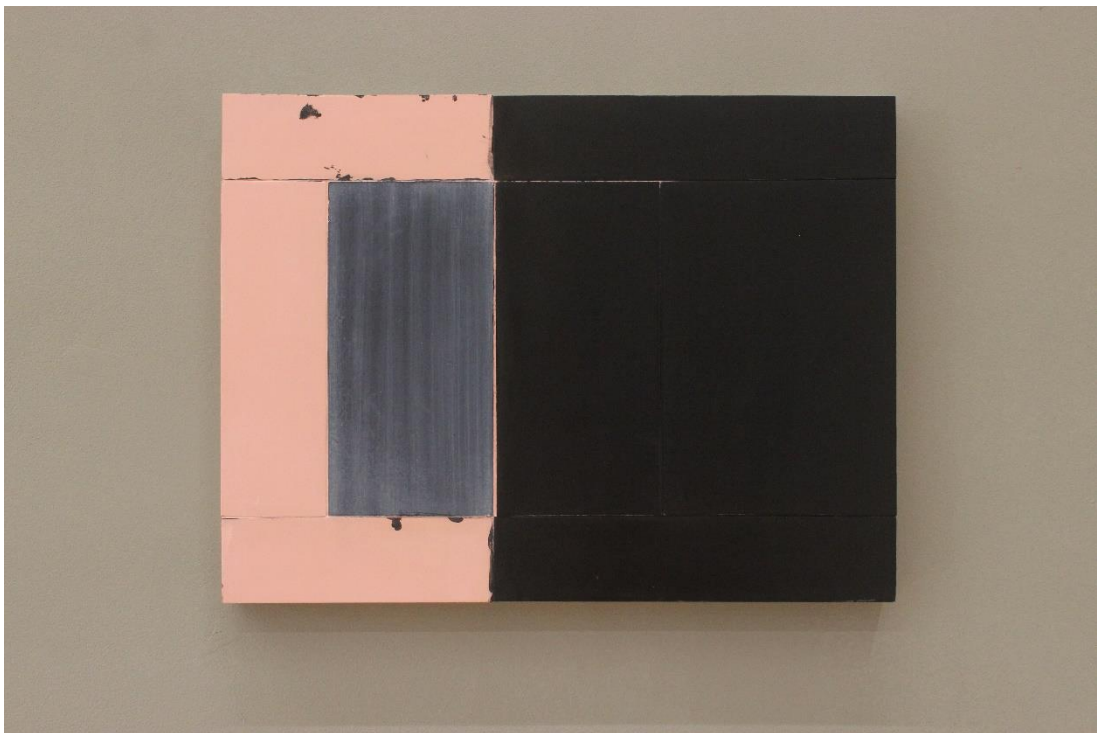
time, but an image that through re-making is subject to a process of accretion, as new physical forms are determined. This might be understood as an expression of contemporaneity on the basis that multiple, apparently contradictory qualities are simultaneously expressed; the mark is consciously authored whilst incorporating accidental elements, both authentic (observed in nature) and constructed (to be observed as natural).

McCarthy's description of the act of transferring a material index from one site to another frames re-enactment as an eccentric form of labour and creative assertion of individual subjectivity, as 'surplus' is associated with an excess of productivity. I propose a parallel in examples of contemporary practices which re-enact historical painting through the repetition of painterly gesture. Briony Fer has identified the illusive character of material traces, proposing that; 'Stains become an inventory of the subject remaindered in the substances and fluids that maintain daily existence. There is something rather ghostly in the way that the stains are the only surviving mark in a series of repetitive gestures, like an archive without memory. Gesture hardly survives the exercise, and if it does, it survives only as a form of improvisation'²²⁵. This points to one of the particular characteristics of painting as it re-enacts historical material; that consciously repeating existing gestures entails an engagement with the appearance(s) of abstraction, and consequently is likely to be in some manner representational as the history of abstraction is leveraged as a 'graphic language'²²⁶. Fer's description of the gestural quality of the stain as somewhat provisional or deferred is amplified by the process

²²⁵ Fer is referring here specifically to Ed Ruscha's 'Stains' series (1969). Fer, *The Infinite Line*, p. 160.

²²⁶ Daniel Sturgis uses this term to describe a point of commonality between Fine Art and commercial design. Sturgis, 'The Indiscipline of Painting', p. 8.

of using an existing artwork as primary content, because this constitutes a re-iteration in the manner of a 'double signing' or 'performative signature code'²²⁷. This extends beyond the ordinary understanding of appropriation, as a form of visual quotation or re-purposing of existing content, as it involves an attempt to align oneself with the subjectivity of another artist, as in the earlier example of artist Perle Fine attempting to complete Piet Mondrian's last painting (discussed in Chapter Two). This relates to the educational tradition of copying by working from a model but here the emphasis is not on visual similitude but on entering the working problems of another artist.



[Alaena Turner, *Still life (after Heilmann)*, 2019. Oil and acrylic on wood, 40 x 30cm.]

²²⁷ Bäcklund, 'The Paradox of Style', p. 221.

For example, the two-tone paintings of Mary Heilmann in the *Sliding Square* series (1970s) can be evoked fairly simply by approximating the colour scheme and employing a geometric composition. However, a more particular trait can be identified in Heilmann's use of the drip within a plane of colour as a means to resist a clear de-lineation between foreground/ background, and to confuse a reading of the chronology of mark-making. For instance, in *Save the Last Dance for Me* (1979) Heilmann plays with the viewer's ability to trace her actions as the black paint appears to overlay the pink ground whilst simultaneously the pink paint sits on top of the black as a stain, so that it is difficult to work out the order in which colour has been applied to the surface. My painting based on Heilmann's work (*Still life (after Heilmann)*, 2019, p. 126) participates in the working problem she has set up of two colours seeking to override each other through a development in my method of using oil-paint as glue. This involves constructing the painting in a particular sequence so that each colour acts as both surface support and interrupting stain, so that re-making Heilmann's painting necessitates a greater level of consciousness towards my own production processes. This reflects the volatile or unstable aspect of contemporaneity on the grounds that this is at once a position of immersion, an attempt to ground my work within Heilmann's methods of composition, and an act of othering, as I identify with a subject position which is not my own.

This movement towards a form of performed repetition, re-doing rather than re-presenting, allows for a greater integration between my own practice and external references. As a collection of works these 'jigsaw' paintings foreground process and a tactile engagement with materials, and in general the high level of reduction of the source image also counters a reading of the work as a form of visual

quotation²²⁸. This new body of work finds a point of resonance in the earlier example of David Diao's painting, which similarly introduced the strategy of working with historical images as a way to re-engage with painting, marking a transition in his practice from a formalist approach to a more self-reflexive stance. This performs the history of abstraction by bringing together the divergent strands of abstraction as a radical act (associated with the avant-gardes of Europe and Russia), and the formalist pursuit of autonomy (articulated by Clive Bell/ Bloomsbury group), as Michael Corris describes, 'For Diao, the proper response to modernism's internal contradictions is a full and frank admission rather than a wholesale rejection'²²⁹. By devising a mode of mark-making which registers as performative a painter might 'admit' both the appeal and disillusionment of modernist thought, a strategy of making contradictions visible whilst avoiding a position of complicity.

Speculative re-enactment entails a form of self-observation which might act as a strategy to negotiate the risks of apathy, fatalism and indifference associated with a sense of disconnection from a historical continuum and an excess of memory²³⁰. For instance, in *Remainder* a special emphasis is placed upon an engagement with physical matter because the project of re-enactment is prompted by an experience of déjà vu which occurs when the protagonist looks at a crack in a bathroom wall:

I was going to recreate it: build it up again and live inside it. I'd work outwards from the crack I'd just transcribed. The plaster round the crack was pinky-grey, all

²²⁸ This body of work is highly dependent on the titles of the paintings to give an indication of the source material.

²²⁹ Corris is quoted by Alison Green in, in Sturgis (ed.), *The Indiscipline of Painting*, p. 28.

²³⁰ Paolo Virno describes how déjà vu entails the risk of apathy and indifference, so that an excess of memory might paralyse action. Virno, *Déjà vu and The End of History*, p. 8/ p. 41.

grooved and wrinkled from when it had been smeared on. There'd been a patch of blue paint just above it, to the left (its right), and, one or two feet to the left of that, a patch of yellow. I'd noted this all down, but could remember it exactly anyway...²³¹

The author, Tom McCarthy, has claimed that this scene is in fact a description of the moment he conceived of the plot of the novel, a result of an actual experience of déjà vu, triggered by looking at a crack in a bathroom wall whilst at a party²³². The pivotal moment in the narrative, where the protagonist conceives of his plan of re-enactment, is in fact then a fictionalised memory of the author, an image of himself apparently 'remembering' the present. This highlights that déjà vu entails a form of self-observation and raises the possibility that engaging with past material might be a wilful form of false recognition, seeking to remember the present rather than perceive it.

This suggests an alternative rationale for the anachronistic appearance of contemporary abstract painting, so that instead of dismissing this quality as a disengaged mode of juxtaposing historical references, or an inevitable consequence of painting in the Information Age, we approach this trait as a reflexive narrative mode. Re-making historical painting displaces questions of style and artist biography as periodizing devices, as the artwork appears to express a pluralised form of indexicality and gesture is revealed as performative. The subject position this entails of self-observation of the act of appropriation is perhaps comparable to the semi-fictionalisation of self which characterises the literary genre of

²³¹ McCarthy, *Remainder*, p. 64.

²³² Miller, 'Intentional Fallacies', p. 633.

'Autofiction', encapsulated in the opening line of Olivia Laing's novel *Crudo*, 'I, that is Kathy [Acker]'²³³.

Re-enactment appears to offer then a form of seriality that might constitute an act of fictioning, positioning the historical source image as both resolved and accumulative, awaiting the 'lived' time of re-enactment. Approaching painting through the conceptual framework of re-enactment constructs a relationship to fiction that is grounded in performative actions rather than representation; orientating painting within contemporary discourse related to archival practice, as source material is personalised and becomes increasingly encoded. Returning to Bourriaud's conceptualisation of art history as a kind of feedback loop, this surprisingly seems to return us to the familiar territory of Modernism, as Bourriaud declares:

This question of fiction (or rather, of the fictional, for this has nothing to do with the 'fictive', which is the opposite of reality: the fictional by contrast, integrates reality and does not deny it) turns out to be the fundamental building block of contemporary thought: the fictional is to contemporary art what flatness was to modern art. In other words, fiction represents the current form of the modernist claim of autonomy, the will to not depend on a social context, and as a consequence, the power (among other things) to generate forms in a constructed space and time²³⁴.

The ambivalent quality of the painterly gesture that is dependent upon historical painting highlights an issue which emerged in my practice through employing

²³³ Olivia Laing, *Crudo* (London: Picador: 2018).

²³⁴ Bourriaud, 'New Entry on Mediums', p. 46-7.

historical sources as models; working with references which appear sufficiently different to my own practice facilitates the process of re-invention but potentially overstates my relationship to the source, whilst working with familiar and respected references is highly restrictive. As the focus on Piet Mondrian as a case study throughout this thesis has revealed, I attempted for a period of time to produce new compositions which expressed the narrative of the *Wall Works*. The competing agenda of trying to resolve a composition whilst also expressing the nature of the original as an open system for placing colour within a space, rather than a series of fixed images, led to this project frequently stalling and it exists at present as a collection of material parts²³⁵. The difficulty of developing this as a body of work arises from an initial degree of resemblance between these spatial colour experiments and my earlier series of spatial compositions made from modular parts²³⁶, so this historical source is perhaps not sufficiently 'alien'²³⁷ to my own practice to register as 'second-hand'. Consequently, my attempts to re-enact the *Wall Works* read as a less assertive version of an idea locatable within my own professional trajectory rather than offering a new insight into a historical artwork. Further to this, the research this studio experimentation triggered into Mondrian's studio led to a greater consciousness of the affective qualities I was drawn to in this example, such as the subtle tones and fragility of the coloured pieces of cardboard, and the fact that this was a distortion of the original artwork that had occurred over

²³⁵ Work-in-progress from the 'Wall works' project was presented as part of the 'Threads' discussion programme, Turner Contemporary, Margate, 25 October 2018.

²³⁶ Such as my earlier 'Secret Action Painting' series, 2008-present.

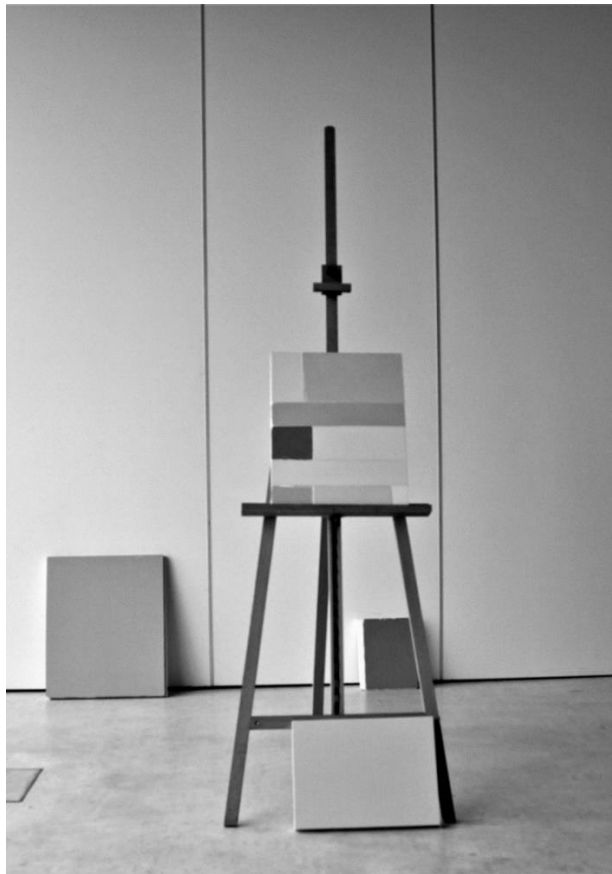
²³⁷ I refer here to the earlier quote by Paul Ricoeur, "'to make one's own' what was initially 'alien', so that interpretation brings together, equalises, renders contemporary and similar". Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, p. 18.

time rather than the intention of the artist²³⁸. This means that the works I produced using this faded colour palette can be understood as documenting the ‘surplus matter’ of the original, incorporating the visual distortion of the original within the accumulative image of Mondrian’s *Wall Works*, which is now in public circulation as a result of Holtzman’s reconstruction. The complex nature of ‘surplus matter’ is felt here in the tension between revealing and re-inscribing the trajectory of a historical artwork, resulting in a heightened sensitivity to the potential of the artistic re-make to obscure.

Re-enactment within painting reveals the contingency of art historical narratives, offering an active engagement with the past rather than a nostalgic mode as existing material is approached as open and active. Returning to the ideas of composition as an act of search (Joselit) and always secondary in nature (McCarthy), my project of developing a theory of re-enactment and applying this to painting practice highlights how an individual practice can act as an idiosyncratic filter. For instance, my long-term interest in geometric abstraction has brought together a range of artists that do not sit obviously within a historical lineage or thematic approach (for example, William Hogarth, Vanessa Bell, Guy de Cointet, Mary Heilmann) whilst also offering a platform to marginal figures (such as Perle Fine, Yaacov Agam or Vilmos Huszár). This tendency of re-enactment towards the personalisation of received historical content can be aptly summed up by referring to William Burroughs, identified by McCarthy as a proponent of ‘assiduous composition’, who when challenged about whether his cut-up techniques can really

²³⁸ As explained in Chapter One, the distortions in the colour palette arise through the natural ageing of the material and the colour saturation of the photographic film.

be considered random replied, 'Yes, but it's *my* random'²³⁹. Re-enactment within painting is to be understood then as subjective and speculative, as images from alternate historical contexts come together in an uneasy synthesis, marked by an inherent instability, as points of difference are held in tension rather than resolved and content becomes increasingly encoded. The primary value of this speculative form of re-enactment is that it positions the past artwork as accumulative and accretive, so that the artwork returns not simply as an image, but as a set of working problems to be addressed.



[Alaena Turner, Documentation of *Wall Works* presentation, Turner Contemporary, 2018]

²³⁹ Chris Kraus, *Where Art Belongs* (South Pasadena: Semiotext(e): 2011), p. 103.

Conclusion:**Picturing the Remainder.**

In McCarthy's novel, *Remainder*, the protagonist's elaborate plan of re-enactment is facilitated by a sudden accumulation of wealth which eliminates the need for ordinary work and instead formulates the problem of how time is to be spent. A precedent to this narrative premise can be located in the story of the wealthy amateur artist, watercolour tutor and jigsaw puzzle-maker, in George Perec's novel *Life A User's Manual*²⁴⁰. This complex novel, produced using constraint writing techniques, presents a series of interwoven stories concerning the residents of a fictional apartment block in Paris. The narrative pivots around the central character, Bartlebooth, who devises an eccentric plan to spend his fortune and occupy his entire life, whilst leaving no visible trace of his work. This involves spending 10 years under the tutelage of Valéne²⁴¹ learning to paint watercolours and a further 20 years travelling the world producing paintings of seaports. Bartlebooth then hires a jigsaw puzzle-maker, Gaspard Winckler²⁴², to turn the paintings into puzzles. Once Bartlebooth has completed each puzzle the image is removed from the wooden support and sent back to its place of origin where it is then destroyed. Bartlebooth dies before his plan is complete, holding a jigsaw puzzle piece (W) that does not fit the last gap in the puzzle (X).

²⁴⁰ George Perec, *Life, A User's Manual*, 2008 Vintage Classics edition (London: Hachette: 1978).

²⁴¹ The character Valéne sets out to produce a painting of the façade of the apartment building on which the novel is based, but fails in his task.

²⁴² The character Gaspard Winckler also appears as an art forger in Perec's first novel '*Portrait of a Man*'. This novel was unpublished until 2014. George Perec, *Portrait of a Man*, (London: Quercus Books: 2014).

I use this example, marked by a distinctive circular logic, to turn to the theme of productivity, or specifically an impulse towards continuous productivity or eccentric forms of labour which might be entailed in the continuum of a present subjected to a loss of history or deferral of a future moment²⁴³. Re-enactment positions art history as possible content for future production, and if Rothko's assertion, 'If a thing is worth doing once, it's worth doing again'²⁴⁴ is taken literally, the past is figured as an impossible workload.

Building upon the paradoxical proposition that painting may express contemporaneity when it fulfils an archival operation I will outline what has been produced through this research and speculate on how it might be applied or extended. Drawing on the outcomes of my practice-based projects I will address my initial assumption that re-enactment might offer an egalitarian mode of engaging with the past by questioning how access to past cultural material is distributed. Through this summary I aim to evaluate the value of re-enactment as a critical methodology for painting to negotiate a relationship to art history and the broader context of contemporary culture, proposing that re-enactment serves the function of making a network aesthetic visible.

Over the course of this thesis I have developed an understanding of re-enactment as a complex mode of engaging with the past, operating as an individual practitioner and in the capacity of artist-curator. In Chapter One I introduced

²⁴³ Following Jonathan Crary, productivity is linked to an emerging mode of subjectivity which arises through a cultural impetus towards continual production and constant availability, "24/7 markets and a global infrastructure for continuous work and consumption have been in place for some time, but now a human subject is in the making to coincide with these more intensively". Jonathan Crary, *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep* (London and New York: Verso: 2013) p. 3-4.

²⁴⁴ Fer, *The Infinite Line*, p. 10.

material indexicality as a sign of the artist's presence and marker of the temporal site of the studio. Here an understanding of archival practice as a restorative act was put forward, constituting a process of bringing original material which had been lost or obscured into the public sphere. This highlighted that working with the conditions of fragmentary form and free association often led to indeterminate outcomes, marked by liminality and often a certain poetic quality. As the evolution of my practice from *Public Action Painting* to *Secret Action Painting 7* indicated, the act of selecting and exhibiting objects from the studio simultaneously evokes the past site of production whilst marking it as absent. Situating this example in relation to Holtzman's reconstruction of Mondrian's *Wall Works* or Parker's re-use of Turner's canvas liners, the contradictory aspect of this gesture becomes apparent; as a platform is offered to past material, the originary site is marked as inaccessible. The capacity of work-in-progress to act as an installation, delineating a specific 'here and now', troubles the claim of the original material to authenticity, because in the moment of presentation it is re-contextualised, so that the categories of original and copy are displaced and a new mode of non-hierarchical exchange is initiated. As the case studies discussed here revealed, indexicality can become pluralised through archival gestures, as we come to understand Mondrian through Holtzman, or Turner through Parker, revealing that there is a productive excess to the archival impulse.

Chapter two further developed an understanding of the retroactive capacity of painting practice, through focusing on the transition in recent discourse from an object aesthetic to a network aesthetic, positioning the act of re-making as an intervention in the way an image circulates over time. The principle of re-invention

devised by Kaprow offered a rationale for developing open-ended and participatory forms of re-enactment as part of my curatorial project, 'Ingredients, Method, Serving Suggestion'. The discovery that attempting to conserve past material may inadvertently alter it was embraced as a productive condition that might lead to a new understanding of the original, for example, producing a new interpretation of McLean's *Underwater Watercolour*. Additionally, the recognition of difference between the re-make and source model, and act of watching oneself copy introduced the idea of a productive shortfall within re-enactment. This curatorial project explored the preoccupation in archival practice towards the past contemporary of the 1960s and affirmed that working with the recent past allows for an intergenerational exchange of knowledge which draws on actual memories. Returning to Staff's proposition that retroactive art practices are driven by the 'radical otherness of the "before now"'²⁴⁵, the radically other appears to be temporally close. Here re-enactment is embraced as a collective act of remembering, where differences in subject position or access to an original, facilitate a discursive mode.

Chapter three set out to apply the insights I had gained through my previous projects to my studio practice, using the observation that archival operations might involve a productive excess and a productive shortfall to pursue a non-mimetic form of repetition. An understanding of re-enactment as a new form of seriality with a particular relationship to fictioning, producing *as if* from an alternate temporal-spatial site, was put forward through the case study of Walter Benjamin's

²⁴⁵ Staff is quoting Keith Jenkins here. Staff, *Retroactivity and Contemporary Art*, p. 7.

re-appearance as a public speaker in the 1980s. Drawing on the ideas of Tom McCarthy, a more introverted form of re-enactment associated with the excess of memory which characterises déjà vu, aligns the act of re-materialising the past to self-observation. Re-enactment offered a system for processing the surge in referential material encountered during the process of PhD research and the principle of conservation through re-invention revealed a need to identify source images sufficiently dissimilar to my own practice in order to fully integrate the source as a model. Painting is figured here as a memory form routed through the body, synthesizing tactile and visual information, and in the case of the particular production method I developed this results in a mode of re-enactment that is laborious and slow. The reductive nature of these images expresses the idiosyncratic nature of acts of selection and recollection, supporting my proposition that an anachronistic appearance might arise from an archival instinct and be understood as a means of personalising historical narratives. This aligns my practice with the prevalent strategy in contemporary painting of employing past material as primary content but is positioned against second-order representation, such as the mimetic form of the photograph, instead seeking a status as a historical document that enfolds the aesthetic experience of an original. The value of re-enactment within my studio practice going forward is that it has established a system for identifying and using models in a speculative fashion, perhaps using past cultural material as a new form of constraint system²⁴⁶.

²⁴⁶ My studio practice has been informed by a longer-term interest in constraint systems, such as the techniques of the Oulipo group ('Workshop of Potential Literature'). This often takes the form of arbitrary material rules, such as the previously mentioned technique of using oil-paint as glue.

In summary, re-enactment has led me to understand the meaning of an artwork as accumulative, visualising a continuation of the conceptual schema established by the original. This encourages a fluid subject position, transitioning between individual and collective modes of practice as the curatorial aspect of archival practice is realised. Re-enactment indicates the latent potential of historical material, whilst determining a specific form, understood as one of many possible versions. This conscious engagement with liminality can be understood as distinct from spectacularist 're-modernist' tendencies. The primary insight of my research project lies in the theorisation of re-enactment as a method of studio production, here specifically addressing the practice of painting. This offers a means to adopt both an immersive and speculative relationship to the past, through acts of repetition and re-ordering, painting contemporaneity through a range of archival operations.

One implication of re-enacting past material is that it suggests an alternate system of distribution which does not depend on the circulation of paintings as commodity objects and instead depends on the discursive potential of re-iteration. Barry Schwabsky points to this shift in value when he states, 'The meaning of an artwork is finally independent of its price and of its exhibition history because it's made and remade by anyone prepared to formulate a contribution to the creative act already embodied in it'²⁴⁷. Even in the case of solitary practices of painting re-enactment seems to promote connectivity through an imagined alignment of perspectives, recalling Perec's description of the jigsaw puzzle, 'despite appearances, puzzling is

²⁴⁷ Barry Schwabsky, *The Perpetual Guest: Art in the Unfinished Present* (London: Verso: 2016), p. x.

not a solitary game...every insight, each hope and each discouragement have all been designed, calculated, and decided by the other'²⁴⁸.

The integration of re-invention as a principle of re-enactment, so that a re-make seeks to be close to an original but not identical to it, allows for an engagement with the past that seeks to avoid nostalgia and fatalism. This expresses the notion of the contemporary put forward by Antoni Negri, as a philosophical position that might fall *between* modernism and postmodernism rather than *after*, constructing a site for new contradictions²⁴⁹. The inherent plurality of re-enactment and contradictory nature of performed historicity can be understood as painting incorporating contemporaneity. For instance, re-enactment expresses the paradox of style (as an original is identified through repetition) and the paradox of fiction (as artifice registers as more authentic than experiential reality). Practical experiences of seeking to reconstitute the past have made the paradoxical nature of archival practice particularly felt, for instance, seeking to create an access point to the activities of the studio in *Public Action Painting* amplified a sense of distance from the past site: collectively realising the score *Time Painting* illustrated the possibility contained in the original but entailed an act of closure: and sharing knowledge of *Tell Me* perpetuated the playful ambiguity of the original. Despite the complex nature of re-enactment, the collective elements of this research project, such as the those discussed in Chapter Two (*Time Painting/ Underwater Watercolours*), suggest there is a dialogical or pedagogical potential in re-enactment, and further research

²⁴⁸ George Perec in 'Preamble' to *Life, A User's Manual*.

²⁴⁹ Antonio Negri, 'Contemporaneity between Modernity and Postmodernity', in *Antinomies of Art and Culture: Modernity, Postmodernity, Contemporaneity*, ed. by Terry Smooth, Okwui Enwezor and Nancy Condee (Durham and London: Duke University Press: 2008) pp. 23-29.

might be directed towards how institutions can embrace this methodology to provide new forms of access to art history.

Returning to the question of what re-enactment might mean in relation to painting it is possible to distinguish between an application for conventional modes of practice and the expanded notion of painting. For instance, re-enactment is applicable as a conceptual framework if a painter consciously seeks to produce 'as if' from an alternate subject position, such as Perle Fine's attempt to finish Mondrian's last painting, or my paintings based on recollections of historical images. The second meaning of painting 're-enacting' which has emerged through this project involves a move towards hybridised modes of production which aim to re-perform the past. The meaning of re-enactment as it emerges through performance theory as a form of 'lived historicity'²⁵⁰, is most likely to be encountered when painting takes on a durational form, extending perhaps into live event, video or text, as in *Underwater Watercolours*. The central issue in each case is determining what is worth re-enacting. Approached from the perspective of an individual practice this problem appears to be orientated within the everyday and questions of habit, so that bringing past material into the present enriches or challenges a familiar way of working or notion of self. Pursuing the question from a broader perspective, as in instances of collective production, re-orientates re-enactment towards issues of representation, offering a means to engage with marginal or lost artworks or to explore alternative historical narratives. In each case

²⁵⁰ Groot, 'Affect and Empathy', p. 592.

the past is not simply understood as an inherited prior condition, but as material which can be anticipated and re-shaped, as though the past awaits us.

Whilst I have highlighted certain values of re-enactment as a methodology my research has also led me to become aware of certain limitations. Joan Gibbons categorisation of re-enactment as 'relational or participatory forms of memory-work' perhaps forewarns that the criticisms which have been formulated in response to relational art practice are applicable here. These focus on questions of accessibility and the extent to which a collective form of thought or dialogue is realised. In Chapter One I presented examples of artists literally re-using original historic material, such as Holtzman re-constructing Mondrian's studio colour experiments or Parker's acquisition of Turner's studio material. Whilst in each case there is a benefit that extends beyond the individual artist, for instance, providing an insight into another artist's production process, it is evident that these projects rely on the status of Holtzman (as Mondrian's heir) and Parker (an established artist), perpetuating a sense of hierarchy in terms of who can access original historical material. In addition to this, research presented in Chapter Two into the re-staging of Kaprow's *Happenings*, revealed that whilst he stipulated these should take place outside of institutional settings, and made efforts to organise workshops to induct participants, these could only accommodate a small amount of people, and principle details were set by academic scholars rather than collectively devised. Similarly, whilst the video I presented in Chapter Two, *Underwater Watercolours*, was intended to promote access to a historical artwork, the realisation is dependent upon a pre-existing relationship between myself and Bruce McLean, my former painting Professor at Slade School of Fine Art, UCL. These examples

illustrate that e-enactment entails the risk of simply repeating, rather than extending, existing relational networks and conditions of privilege. Fictioning might hold a value here as a possible means to re-imagine the present in a more radical way, for instance taking on the model of the Walter Benjamin performance-lecture, or as Bourriaud noted in the close of the previous chapter, to imagine a position outside of the social context of production²⁵¹.

The primary value of applying re-enactment as a methodology to painting is that it offers a means to negotiate art history, inhabiting the contemporary understanding of painting as plural and heterogenous and medium as aggregative by proposing that painting self-differs through the juxtaposition of alternate temporal sites. This addresses the potential connectivity of painting, engaging with the concept of a network aesthetic from the perspective of a studio-based practice, involving acts of re-siting, re-performance and recollecting.

For instance, in the example of Mondrian, identifying the reconstruction of his studio experiments and the efforts to complete his last unfinished painting as instances of re-enactment, makes visible the position of his work within a relational system, acted upon over time by multiple players. This offers an understanding of a network aesthetic that precedes our current digital age, revealing that in this historical example a relational network becomes visible retrospectively and may still only be partially accessible. For example, the narratives concerning the afterlife

²⁵¹ The capacity of re-enactment to fulfil a social function, for instance addressing collective memory and issues of trauma, has been noted by Robert Blackson in, 'Once More...with Feeling', p. 33. Additionally, Joan Gibson has pointed to the dialogical potential of participatory projects, such as, Jeremy Deller's, *The Battle of Orgreave*, 2001. Gibbons, *Contemporary Art and Memory*, p 112. More recently, Milena Tomic has highlighted the use of re-enactment to engage with questions of identity politics, in 'Re-invention as Parallax...', 2017.

of Mondrian's studio are only traceable now because of the time which has elapsed since his death, and as recently as 2013 claims have been made that current scholarship on his work, particularly the *Wall Works*, has been impaired due to copyright restrictions imposed by the Mondrian/Holtzman Trust²⁵².

The key benefit of approaching this narrative through the conceptual framework of re-enactment is that it asserts an idea of the historical image as plural, consisting of both the original artwork and subsequent interpretations. A further interpretation of re-enactment as restorative emerges here that is applicable to artworks which already possess a high cultural visibility and are highly susceptible to appropriation; re-enactment as a means to promote an understanding of the systems of a painting practice, such as Mondrian's placement of colour in space, or provisional placement of line and method of interlacing a grid structure in *Victory Boogie Woogie*, with the aim of avoiding a simplistic reduction to style. In addition to multiple appropriations of his iconic grid paintings by artists as diverse as Barnett Newman, Martin Kippenberger and Sherrie Levine, the distinctive visual form of a black grid on a white ground with planes of primary colours is ubiquitous in everyday graphic design and can be encountered within the public sphere through an array of commodities. For instance, to mark the 50th anniversary of his death in 1994 the Mondrian/Holtzman Trust licensed over 100 new 'Mondriana' products, 'ranging from ties and socks to carpets and videotape boxes, wall clocks and pens, dozens of greeting cards and posters and 41 books in 9 languages' and his final painting *Victory Boogie-Woogie*, entered 50000 homes as a jigsaw puzzle²⁵³. A new rationale

²⁵² Troy, *The Afterlife of Piet Mondrian*, p. 2.

²⁵³ This puzzle was published by Springbok Editions in 1967. Ibid. p. 18/68.

for re-enactment emerges here as a means to keep a historical image in motion, with the agenda of avoiding a permanent or singular re-contextualisation.

This highlights that abstract art is not exempt from ethical issues concerning the way an image is appropriated²⁵⁴.

In *The Aesthetics and Ethics of Copying*, Lisa Jones has argued that a critical approach to appropriative activities should involve a questioning of how the source artwork is changed by the re-purposing of its content²⁵⁵. Jones asserts, 'In assessing the value of appropriative art and appropriative activity, we should look not only at the new object that is brought into being by the act of appropriation, but also at what remains of the source work in the wake of the appropriative act'. I would argue that the liminal character of re-enactment, and instigation of a mode of seriality, protects rather than diminishes a source model. The interventions of Holtzman and Fine in the historicization of Mondrian may have introduced distortions to the original but they also facilitate discourse and an understanding of the historical image as plural. This avoids the risk identified by Jones that repeated exposure to an appropriation may create a permanent distortion²⁵⁶. Instead the original is presented as an image in-flux and susceptible to further iterations, like a visual equivalent to the proposition made by Staff that history is understood as a

²⁵⁴ The question of appropriating historical material is more politically charged and sensitive in instances of representational art, as the controversy concerning Dana Schutz's 2016 painting 'Open Casket' revealed. Oliver Bascione, 'Whitney Biennial: Emmett Till casket painting by white artist sparks anger', *The Guardian* <<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2017/mar/21/whitney-biennial-emmett-till-painting-dana-schutz>> [Accessed 06/05/2019].

²⁵⁵ Lisa Jones, 'Appropriation and Derogation: When is it wrong to appropriate?', in *The Aesthetics and Ethics of Copying*, ed. by Darren Hudson Hick and Reinold Schmucker (London: Bloomsbury Academic: 2016), pp.187-210 (p. 197).

²⁵⁶ Jones refers here specifically to advertising, noting how Dvorak's 'New World Symphony' is now colloquially known as the 'Hovis' music. Jones, 'Appropriation and Derogation', p. 197.

contingent series of subjective accounts whilst the past appears as vast and irrecoverable²⁵⁷.

Critic Jan Verwoert has proposed that if our current cultural moment entails a sense of a loss of history or loss of future, grounding experience in a perpetual present, the alternative to 'empty duration' is to adopt a position of agency; identifying a perspective or making a decision²⁵⁸. Re-enactment, as an individual or collective, might constitute a counter-position to casual appropriation or an attitude of indifference. Extending Verwoert's assertion that, 'history is broadcasted life', in an era that conceptualises painting as a broadcasting medium, painting lends itself as the middle term between the everyday and the past, picturing the remainder²⁵⁹.

²⁵⁷ Returning here to the definitions offered by Staff which he develops through a reading of Keith Jenkins. Staff, *Retroactivity and Contemporary Art*, p. 3-4.

²⁵⁸ Jan Verwoert, 'The Crisis of Time, in Times of Crisis', in *Experience, Memory, Re-enactment*, ed. by Anke Bangman, Steve Rushton and Fiona Wüst (Rotterdam: Piet Zwart Institute/ Revolver Books: 2005) pp. 35-39 (p. 39).

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.* P. 39.

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