Painting after the Internet: Networked Materialities

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Abstract

This practice-led PhD thesis proposes a reconceptualisation of painting after the internet that departs with post-medium and post-internet discourses. As this thesis will show, such discourses function by identifying painting with an ultimate ontological reference point that serves to justify painting's ongoing survival. Defined within these paradigms, the sensual-material nature of practice is either disregarded as an inessential attribute in favour of the concept, or otherwise generalised into an event of possibility in the virtual realm, and hence art has no place for itself.

Critically, this thesis turns towards Barad, Golding and Stengers for an alternative approach, able to re-articulate the present as the local interference of continua or radical matter which is no longer reducible to an ultimate. This is emphasised within the thesis by the move from "network painting" as an aesthetic category to *networked materialities*: that is, instead of theorising practices as variably related identities, reality is a matter of mutually constituting entities. Thus, this thesis encourages one not to think the ultimate but to think painting in terms of the specific finite forms of its organisation, which are radically material.

Attending to the developments of my own practice helps make apparent the material conditions of practice-led research outside of representationalism, shifting the focus to how artworks and arguments *cohere*, emerging as material-discursive phenomena. Importantly, humour is re-conceptualised as *giddiness*, a vector of sensuous experimentation, which pertains to a practice's ongoing and problematic nature and helps to reframe assumptions concerning the anxiety of the artist in an increasingly connected world. Hence, this research offers a new paradigm for thinking and making contemporary painting that simultaneously accounts for the impact of new technologies, whilst situating painting as central to art practice.

Contents

List of Figures

4.I   Emily Sparkes, *The Most Probable of All My Theorems,*
2023 [detail].

4.J   Emily Sparkes, *The Most Probable of All My Theorems,*
2023, oil, acrylic and Flashe on canvas, 2 parts:
152.3 x 76.2 cm. Overall: 152.3 x 152.6 cm

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Chapter One: Introduction

> Yet sometimes what is read successfully stops us with its meaning.
> **Michel Majerus**[1]

> To understand, to be intelligent, is not our overriding passion.
> We hope rather to be set in motion.
> **Jean-François Lyotard**[2]

1.1 **Beyond Painting**

The starting point of this research is a curiosity about painting after the internet, that is, making paintings *now*.[3] This joins a host of urgent questions regarding the connectedness of painting and the internet and how painting operates and makes sense in the digital age. However, this curiosity in making and thinking about art meets with a frustration with current painting discourses based in discussions of the post-medium condition or the expanded field.[4] Although these discourses move away from canonical investments in medium specificity, they retain a longstanding dualism based in the separation of materiality and thought. This tends to sidestep the specific sensuousness of practices in favour of preordained concepts that the practice would embody, meaning that the

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[1] Cf. Michel Majerus, *Yet sometimes what is read successfully stops us with its meaning, no 1,* 1998, lacquer and silkscreen on aluminium, 278.5 x 485 x 15.5 cm. © Estate of Michel Majerus.

[2] Jean-François Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy,* trans. Iain Hamilton Grant (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993), 51.

[3] Cf. Sue (Johnny) Golding, "Curiosity," in *The Eight Technologies of Otherness*, ed. Sue Golding (London: Routledge, 1997), 10-28.

[4] Cf. Rosalind Krauss, *"A Voyage on the North Sea": Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1999).

material present becomes superficial in service of rational thought. Art practice therefore remains framed by language, a language that considers itself to be pure and ideal. Hence the feeling prevails that one can more fully access a theory than a physical painting, maintaining the privileged position of analytic philosophy in its relation to truth.

Perhaps it is true that this problematic distinction between material and meaning has remained overlooked in favour of the imperative to intellectually justify painting's ongoing existence in a world which threatens to outrun it. Such has been the basis of discussions pertaining to painting's death in response to technology or medium, for example.[5] This thesis attempts to address the problem differently, not by favouring the material over the conceptual side of the coin but by being accountable for the world in a different way, best understood as *mattering*.[6] As such, this thesis emphasises a notion of practice-led research which "begins" precisely where one "is" and aims to instigate 'the art of inhabiting, reading and listening to 'that' which presents itself'.[7] Hence the methodology of this research meets with a diffractive ontology as proposed by Karen Barad and others. Stepping out of the traditional optics of reflection and reflexivity, in a diffractive account, 'we too are part of the world's differential becoming' which embraces the inseparability of knower and

[5] These claims will be situated in the following part of this section.

[6] Cf. Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2007).

[7] Cf. respectively: Golding, Fractal Philosophy*: Attunement as the Task of Art", in *Deleuze and Contemporary Art*, eds. Stephen Zepke and Simon O'Sullivan (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010): 133-154, 133; and Golding, "The Courage to Matter", in *Data Loam: Sometimes Hard, Usually Soft: The Future of Knowledge Systems,* eds. Johnny Golding, Martin Reinhart, and Mattia Paganelli (Berlin and Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2020): 450-487, 486.

known.[8] What this thesis sets out to articulate therefore is a notion of practice-led research that reconsiders what written research might offer outside of a theoretical-critical reflection on the work as a knowable-object, and of the supposed conflicting accounts of artists and philosophers.[9] This is not to collapse the differences between painters and theorists but to emphasise that the connection of art and philosophy is never preordained. Jean-François Lyotard makes the point that:

> [a] postmodern artist or writer is in the position of a philosopher: the text he writes, the work he produces are not in principle governed by preestablished rules, and they cannot be judged according to a determining judgment, by applying familiar categories to the text or to the work. Those rules and categories are what the work of art itself is looking for.[10]

As such, this research has been orientated towards the creation of concepts which might allow for new ways of thinking in the studio, instead of attempting to seek answers in already-established ideas. These concepts are not meant to be definitive or entirely resolved but are to be understood for the ways that they might make matters emerge. The reasoning for this

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[8] Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway,* 91.

[9] Such an account is made apparent in Arthur C. Danto's discussion of historical definitions of art: 'After Kant - and Hume before him - there were Hegel, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and John Dewey, each delivering marvellous but conflicting theses. And then there were the artists themselves, with paintings and sculptures to sell in galleries and art fairs and biennials. Small wonder the question of what art is came up "in every class and every context."' Arthur C. Danto, *What Art Is* (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), x-xi.

[10] Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge,* trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 81.

stems from my own observations in the studio throughout the course of this PhD project, led by the *giddy* realisation that if you pay close enough attention to something, it starts acting *strangely*. This demands a writing process whereby, as Deleuze wrote: 'the only question is "Does it work, and how does it work?" How does it work for you?'[11] Furthermore when this thesis does immerse itself in the philosophical practices of others this might best be understood as a process of "thinking-with".[12] This also goes for my interest in the makings and writings of other artists, namely Laura Owens, Michel Majerus, and Helen Marten whose work has also helped shape this project. The choices of these artists are - of course - subjective preference; however, this can no longer be understood as arbitrary in a methodology which understands "readings" as intensive, whereby 'something comes through or it doesn't. There's nothing to explain, nothing to understand, nothing to interpret.'[13]

<div align="center">*****</div>

In a practical sense, this PhD research explores the implications of making paintings within touching distance of digital devices, a relationship that should be underlined at the outset to be understood as creative and productive. However, this thesis strongly attests to conceptions of the relationship between art practice and the internet based in representational approaches, as ways of interpreting or documenting that would see painting resolved as the mirroring of the world. This thesis is not an

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[11] Gilles Deleuze, "Letter to a Harsh Critic", in *Negotiations*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990): 3-12, 8.

[12] Cf. Isabelle Stengers, *Thinking with Whitehead*, trans. Michael Chase (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2011).

[13] Deleuze, *Negotiations*, 8.

attempt to provide an ideal relationship between painting and the present. As Heidegger pointed out, these kinds of attempts belong to 'art business' and not of the event of the work of art.[14] Such instrumentalist questions are evidence of a 'habit-provoking mode of discourse', encouraging 'the sedimentation or stabilisation that produces the effect of a boundary, [a] fixity [of practices]' to which "art business" assigns value.[15] Heidegger made clear that this is nothing other than the capturing of the present by rationality, an enframing mode of revealing.[16] A thesis that interrogates how the individual artist might respond to these kinds of normative claims or practices also makes little sense, either artistically or philosophically, especially when '[our] minds are on other things that are less public and more fun'.[17]

Nevertheless, to better situate the original contribution of this thesis it is worth offering a detailed account of the more recent history of painting discourses, starting with painting's longstanding association with medium.

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Throughout Modernism, it was largely through the confines of medium by which one came to know artistic practices. Painting as a medium is a logic based in the contemplation of painting's formal conditions to best

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[14] Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1977), 193.

[15] Barbara Bolt, *Art Beyond Representation: The Performative Power of the Image* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004), 152.

[16] Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology," in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (New York: Harper and Row, 1977): 3-35.

[17] Deleuze, *Negotiations*, 9.

articulate its norms and standards.[18] By abstracting the work in this way, the materiality of the artwork is subjugated and framed by the notion of rational discourse, which remains more important than the sensuous and specific nature of the work.[19] As Modernist painting developed then, medium became a logic based on purging extraneous influence, of distilling painting to its essence through the progressive elimination of elements that did not contribute to the pre-conceived qualities of medium (i.e. *flatness*).[20] In essence, Modernist painting became formally hermetic, whilst invoking the Neo-Hegelian conception that the primary task of modern painting was to work it through to its natural end, an end that is absolutely dependent on the concept.[21] As such, painting is declared at various points

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[18] Cf. Clement Greenberg, "Modernist Painting," in *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism,* Vol.4, ed. John O'Brian (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993): 85-93.

[19] As such, earlier periods of writing for this research project explored the premise that medium should be understood in the truly *psychic* sense of the term as conceptual clairvoyance; revealed as an intervening agent that purports to "speak with" dead matter and approached with appropriate scepticism. However, in respect of the influence of Isabelle Stengers' writings in the later stages of this research, it became evident that such categorisations are not only unhelpful but can only renew a sense of righteousness which continues to justify our own practices by disparaging the practices of others. Stengers describes this as 'our pride in our critical power to "know better" than both the witches and the witch hunters [that] makes us the heirs of witch hunting'. Isabelle Stengers, "Reclaiming Animism", *e-flux,* Issue. 36 (July 2012), accessed March 16, 2023, https://www.e-flux.com/journal/36/61245/reclaiming-animism/.

[20] Greenberg's interest in flatness was based in a 'resistance […] in the flat picture plane's denial of efforts to *hole through* it for realistic perspectival space.' Greenberg, "Towards a Newer Laocoon", in John O'Brian (ed.), *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism, Vol. 1* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986): 23-37, 34.

[21] Of the Modernists, it was probably Aleksandr Rodchenko who first declared the end of painting. On the creation of three monochrome paintings, *Pure Red Colour, Pure Yellow Colour, Pure Blue Colour* (1921), Rodchenko asserted: 'I reduced painting to its logical conclusion and exhibited three canvases: red, blue, yellow' […] I affirmed: it's all over. Basic colours. Every plane is a plane and there is to be no more representation.' Cited in Yve-Alain Bois, "Painting: The Task of Mourning," in *Painting as Model* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990): 229-244, 238.

to be at its end, whereby it hits a wall in its contribution to knowledge.[22]

The fact that painting did not stop - as evidenced by the "return to painting" in the 1980s, for example - produced understandable anxiety over its continued existence. This is most explicitly dealt with by Yve-Alain Bois in "Painting: The Task of Mourning", which is worth quoting at length:

> Yet has the time come? To say no (painting is still alive, just look at the galleries) is undoubtedly an act of denial, for it has never been more evident that most paintings one sees have abandoned the task that historically belonged to modern painting (that, precisely, of working through the end of painting) and are simply artefacts created for the market and by the market (absolutely interchangeable artefacts created by interchangeable producers). To say yes, however, that the end has come, is to give in to a historicist conception of history as both linear and total (i.e. one cannot paint after Duchamp, Rodchenko, Mondrian; their work has rendered paintings unnecessary; or: one cannot paint any more in the era of the mass media, computer games, and the simulacrum).[23]

The anxiety, pointed out by Bois, that painting could only become a commodity in light of the loss of its original purpose (that of progressing painting to its so-called logical conclusion) has manifested in a dependence on the continued rationalisation of art practices. Whilst also providing the reasoning for Rosalind Krauss's steadfastness to the term "medium" in

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Cf. 'In all these respects art, considered in its highest vocation, is and remains for us a thing of the past.' G. W. F. Hegel, Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art, Vol.1 trans. T. M. Knox (Oxford: Clarendon Press,1975), 11.

[22] Cf. Douglas Crimp, "The End of Painting", *October,* Vol. 16 (1981): 69-86.

[23] Bois, *Painting as Model,* 241.

subsequent discussions of the post-medium condition.[24] Despite the prefix 'post-' meaning after or succeeding, post-medium discourses do not dispense with medium entirely but only attend to the flexibility of the category, the "invention" of a new medium.[25] For Krauss, art practices may continue without 'retreating into etiolated forms of the traditional mediums' i.e. Modernist painting, through the creation of a 'differential specificity'. This move has led to a plethora of discourses whereby painting is positioned as being *in touch* with the world-at-large, implying a relation to its "outside", whereby painting is *beside* or *beyond* itself. As defined by Ewa Lajer-Burcharth and Isabelle Graw:

> [T]he term "beyond" may be said to define painting today: it speaks of painting's attempt to reach outside of itself – to situate itself beside itself […] – in an effort of self-redefinition. In this way, contemporary painting abolishes and yet also sustains itself.[26]

Although this allows for a more heterogeneous understanding of practices outside of the purity of the logic of medium specificity, such discourses remain framed by a situation whereby practice can only be considered by passing from the materiality of the art object towards the idea of the unity of such matter (painting in general). Hence the binary distribution

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[24] Cf. Rosalind Krauss, *"Voyage on the North Sea"*.

[25] Ibid., 56. Cf. Krauss, ""...And Then Turn Away?" An Essay on James Coleman", *October,* Vol. 81 (Summer 1997): 5-33.

[26] Ewa Lajer-Burcharth and Isabelle Graw, "Preface", *Painting beyond Itself: The Medium in Post-medium Condition* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2016): 7-10, 9. Cf. David Joselit, "Painting Beside Itself", *October,* Issue 130 (Fall 2009): 125-134.

separating object and materiality from concept and thought holds firm.[27] In such a paradigm, art practice can only function as a "prop" for the idea of painting.[28] Painting is therefore not "beside" itself as its proponents claim; rather, it has *escaped itself* towards pure ontological concerns.[29]

Any attempts to step outside of the paradigm of medium, by identifying art with technology more broadly is plagued by the same problem: an inability to deal with an artwork's specificity and complexity, and only in general metaphysical or conceptual terms. This is nowhere more evident than in the term "post-internet". The proliferation of "post-" artistic and intellectual discourses not only marks a strictly temporal "after" which serves to homogenise the present (refuting any practice to which it does not refer as Other), but also invokes the (pseudo)totalisation of society. This is addressed by Zach Blas in his essay "Contra-Internet Aesthetics"; Blas argues that, rather than having anything productive to contribute, "post-internet" functions only as an empty descriptor, stretching out across the world whilst flattening out its manifold conditions. As Blas puts it: 'is 'post' not more of a stylistic convenience that evinces a blind spot, an inability to account for the

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[27] Cf. Mattia Paganelli, "Finitude, Possibility, Dimensionality; Aesthetics After Complexity" (PhD thesis: Birmingham City University, 2016).

[28] The notion of painting becoming a 'prop' was put forward by Laura Owens in*: Sarah Lehrer-Graiwer, "Optical Drive", *Artforum,* (March 2013): 231-229.

[29] Such is the claim of the second chapter of this thesis, which endeavours to install an alternative proposal.

present in its specificity and singularity?'[30] It is this yearning to address art practice in its singularity that could be said to be the very aim of this thesis.

Furthermore, in tandem with the increased rationalisation of practices, debates as to the ongoing "liveliness" of painting continue to be posed.[31] This has led further to various unhelpful metaphors, whereby mechanical reproduction and/or digital technology has contributed to practices that are "undead zombies",[32] or else delivered 'a vampire's kiss that makes painting immortal'.[33] These discursive framings question the supposed capacity of the medium of painting to *respond* to the contemporary moment and have remained prevalent, often problematised but never dispelled, since the 1980's, for example Hal Foster's questioning of whether it is possible to 'seriously engage issues of a technoscientific, post-industrial society in a medium, like painting, based in preindustrial craft'.[34] As this thesis will show, these debates are fundamentally flawed and will always fail, since, as Catherine Ferguson points out, they are

[30] Zach Blas, "Contra-Internet Aesthetics", in *You are Here: Art After the Internet*, ed. Omar Kholeif (Manchester: Cornerhouse Books, 2014), pp. 86-97, 87.

[31] Cf. Graw, "The Value of Liveliness: Painting as an Index of Agency in the New Economy" in *Painting beyond Itself*, 76-101. Also: Graw, "The Value of Painting: Notes on Unspecificity, Indexicality, and Highly Valuable Quasi-Persons" in *Thinking through Painting: Reflexivity and Agency beyond the Canvas*, eds. Isabelle Graw, Daniel Birnbaum, and Nikolaus Hirsch (Frankfurt am Main: Sternberg Press, 2012): 45-47.

[32] Cf. Alex Bacon, "Surface, Image, Reception: Painting in a Digital Age", *Rhizome* (May 24th, 2016), accessed March 28, 2023, https://rhizome.org/editorial/2016/may/24/surface-image-reception-painting-in-a-digital-age/. Also: Walter Robinson, "Flipping and the Rise of Zombie Formalism", *Artspace* (April 3, 2014), accessed March 28, 2023, https://www.artspace.com/magazine/contributors/see_here/the_rise_of_zombie_formalism-52184.:

[33] David Reed in David Joselit et. al, "The Mourning After: A Roundtable", *Artforum* (March 2003), 66-71, 70.

[34] Hal Foster, "Signs Taken for Wonders", *Art in America*, Vol. 74, No. 6 (June 1986): 81-91, 88.

framed towards 'problems that animate the sphere of art criticism and not that of the studio.'[35] This thesis hopes to dispel anxiety over the plausibility of painting's survival, by quietly proving such anxiety to be irrelevant.

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An initial solution to readdressing the specificity and sensuousness of art practice was sought by turning towards methodological approaches that attempt to emphasise the visual (over structuralist thought, for example), such as Jean-François Lyotard's notion of the figural. Lyotard's book *Discourse, Figure* criticises the notion of reading the real as text, contesting the suggestion that what is visible is readable and intelligible (textual).[36] As Ronald Bogue writes, '[to] the extent that the visual is recognised, comprehended, and assimilated within a rational order, Lyotard contends, its truth is lost, for it is thereby coded, made "readable," and textualized.'[37] For Lyotard the figural is not simply "the seen", but as Bill Readings makes clear, 'the point at which the oppositions by which discourse works are opened to a radical heterogeneity or *singularity*'.[38] Art practices, in Lyotard's analysis, would therefore remain productively *beyond* language, whereby 'every form of discourse exhausts itself before exhausting it.'[39] For Lyotard, an image can never fully *illustrate* a text, and

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[35] Catherine Ferguson, "Painting, Deleuze and the Art of 'Surface Effects'", (PhD thesis: Manchester Metropolitan University, 2006), 2.

[36] Cf. Lyotard, "The Bias of the Figural" in *Discourse, Figure*, trans. Antony Hudek and Mary Lyndon (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011): 3-19.

[37] Ronald Bogue, *Deleuze on Music, Painting, and the Arts* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 113.

[38] Bill Readings, *Introducing Lyotard: Art and Politics* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), xxxi.

[39] Lyotard, *Discourse, Figure,* 7.

a text can never fully *describe* an image, and experience is always "extra" than mere representation. This emphasis on the singularity of the sensuous is surely more favourable than discourses which would stranglehold the sensuality of the work in reference to the idea (i.e. medium, post-medium). However, to the extent that these radically singular art practices remain incommensurable with language in Lyotard's philosophy - by maintaining the 'presumption that we can know what we mean, or what our verbal performances say, more readily than we can know the objects those sayings are about' - artworks will remain out of reach.[40]

The inability to engage with artworks outside of description or categorisation requires a step change in thinking. As Deleuze and Guattari make evident, to account for the world in its dynamic specificity, one must pass from a preconceived staging of thought disguised as *truth*, to a *logic of sense*, an immersive kind of philosophy.[41] Chapter 2: "On Infinite Connotations" will show how this immersive logic put forward by Deleuze makes painting far more palpable than in any of the discussions aforementioned, whereby the sensual is no longer opposed to the rational or ruled by the concept. Yet this move still leaves painting embedded in a logic marked by a shared univocity at the horizon of all practices, pure difference which is tangent to the present. This move is important to unpack and provides much needed context for a new way of thinking the sensuous, as Karen Barad writes: 'a different configuration of the world,

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[40] Joseph Rouse, *Engaging Science: How to Understand Its Practices Philosophically* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press,1996), 209. Cited in Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 49.

[41] Cf. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (London: Continuum, 2008).

not merely a different description of a fixed and independent reality' which meets with the concept of *mattering*.[42]

1.2 **From Medium to Mattering**

In *Meeting the Universe Halfway* (2007), Barad puts forward their framework of 'agential realism', a conception of the world which is no longer based on the dualistic relationship between words and objects. Building on the work of Niels Bohr, Barad argues that the basic units of reality are *phenomena*, which Barad describes as 'ontologically primitive relations – relations without pre-existing relata.'[43] Phenomena are composed of 'intra-acting' components which are ontologically inseparable:

> in contrast to the usual "interaction," which assumes that there are separate individual agencies that precede their interaction, the notion of intra-action recognises that distinct agencies do not precede, but rather emerge through, their intra-action.[44]

In Barad's analysis, *matter becomes a matter* of ongoing entanglements, superpositions 'of seemingly disparate parts.'[45] This is a wildly different understanding of the world than that of classical physics, whereby the

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[42] Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 390.

[43] Ibid., 139. Barad defines the fundamental lesson in Bohr's interpretation of quantum physics as '*we are a part of that nature that we seek to understand.*' Ibid., 26. Cf. "The Science and Ethics of Mattering" and "Niels Bohr's Philosophy-Physics: Quantum Physics and the Nature of Knowledge and Reality, Ibid., 3-38 and 97-131 respectively.

[44] Ibid., 33.

[45] Barad, "Diffracting Diffraction: Cutting Together-Apart", *Parallax*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (2014): 168–187, 176.

world would be composed of individually bounded entities with inherent properties which inhabit space as if a Euclidean container. Discussions of representationalism (in art discourses or elsewhere) ensures the smooth-running of this world view. Instead, the approach offered by Barad opposes the notion of an intrinsic separability of knower and known, whereby individuals do not reflect on things as if from a distance from the world but always as part of ongoing situations of which they are a part. This is an understanding, as Johnny Golding writes, which offers 'a kind of visceral materiality that exists without the aid of Cogito, reason or the ego-I as the mark of its intelligibility, primary 'start' or beginning first-move'.[46] Understanding the world comes from differentially inhabiting phenomena, which emerge as open-ended material-discursive practices in which a property is characteristic of the phenomenon, and not of a pre-existing object.[47] This moves the discussion away from truth as inherent property of an individual or thing to the question of *mattering*.

Mattering, then, names a material logic, a 'techne of poesis; where meaning [and matter] is generated by resorting to its own recursive birthing process, recursive genealogy, recursive systematising[; mattering is] a repeat performance that both copies itself and, in so doing, creates anew: a kind of re-remembering [that is] an affirmation of intensity, an objective intensity transcending value, and in that seductive curiosity,

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[46] Golding, "The Courage to Matter", 476.

[47] Cf. Barad, "Agential Realism: How Material-Discursive Practices Matter", in *Meeting the Universe Halfway,* 132-188

forming the very basis, process and goal of the present-tense (is).'[48] Matter

is therefore not fixed but is enacted through material-discursive practices

by which materiality and intelligibility are co-constituted. This meets with

one of the main claims of Queer Theory, best defined by the maxim that

'there is no truth to sexuality or gender, simply the enactments that make

truth "stick"'.[49] This understanding can be felt (but not *applied*) more

broadly in the present: there is no truth to the present, only the material-

discursive practices that make truth 'stick'. Importantly, accountability

and responsibility become indelible aspects of this process of 'what matters

and what is excluded from mattering.'[50]

In Barad's framework, "inside" and "outside" are also not absolute or

intrinsic separations but are formed agentially, through ongoing intra-

actions in the world. In terms of this thesis, the refutation of the essential

and total binaries of inside/outside help make evident the inseparability of

online/offline, digital space and "meat space" in discussions of the

Technosphere, for example, whereby the digital world permeates daily life

to such an extent that it no longer makes sense to say that there is an

"outside" of the internet.[51] Thinking with Barad, practices are

reconfigurings of the world which *matter*. This understanding offers the

chance to speak of painting in radically different terms from than those

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[48] Golding, "The Assassination of Time (or the birth of zeta-physics)" in
Deleuzian Events: Writing History (N-1 Work-Science-Medium), eds. Hanjo Beressem
and Leyla Haerkamp (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2009): 132-145, 139, 143.

[49] Golding, "Ana-materialism and the Pineal Eye: Becoming mouth-breast (or
visual arts after Descartes, Bataille, Butler, Deleuze and Synthia with an 's')",
Philosophy of Photography, Vol. 3, No. 1 (2012): 99-120, 110.

[50] Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 220.

[51] Cf. Donna Haraway, "Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene,
Chthulucene: Making Kin" in *Environmental Humanities*, Vol. 6 (2015): 159-165.

outlined in Chapter 1.1 of this Introduction. Mattering permits a discussion of painting practices whereby meaning is not a matter of logos, but an ongoing material-discursive performance of the world. Defaulting from this position towards an investigation of what paintings might *mean*, as a kind of epistemological deep dive towards its supposed bedrock, could only be reductive. As a friend told me, we do not know a loved one by taking them apart.[52] A dissection of painting in the hope of reaching its inner essence would be equally as destructive. The argument is developed along three chapters:

Chapter 2: "On infinite connotations" demonstrates the urgency of the move towards the mattering of painting through a reconsideration of David Joselit's essay, "Painting Beside Itself" (2009). In particular, Joselit's claim of the 'infinite' possibilities of painting made available by a turn towards networks - whereby the body of painting becomes subject to 'infinite dislocations, fragmentations, and degradations'.[53] In light of the work concerning ontology by Barad and others, Joselit's unified notion of infinite possibility, which would imply an ontology in the form of an ultimate must be re-examined, and move instead towards local and finite forms of coherence. This is not merely a matter of re-examining painting but takes the short-comings of Representation, which maintains an image of painting within an absolute and optical geometry that exists per se before

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[52] I attribute this lesson to Sonia Bernaciak during a seminar as part of the Planet PGR Group (School of Arts and Humanities, Royal College of Art, 2022) led by Dr Catherine Ferguson and Dr Josephine Berry.

[53] David Joselit, "Painting Beside Itself", *October,* issue 130 (Fall 2009): 125-134, 134.

events.[55] In opposition, Barad's conceptualisation of diffraction is a phenomenon which is physical without being visual, whereby knowledge-making practices are formed by intra-acting from *within* the world, *of* the world, rather than reflecting on them as if from a distance.[56]

This re-consideration of Joselit's text will be accompanied by a discussion of Deleuze's conceptualisation of becoming, or a 'becoming-internet' which grounded the earlier periods of this research project and is important to address. [57] As such, this chapter goes on to unpick Deleuze's discussion of the transcendental virtual since this relies on ontological justification in the form of an ultimate, which abstracts art practice from its context within an ecology of practices.[58] The claim that painting can only be reached through discussions of the infinite - the infinite potential of painting in Joselit's account or Deleuze's concept of pure difference can no longer stand. *Networked materialities* supersedes these discussions by offering an account of practice which accounts for its sensuality without recourse to a priori ontological structures (identity, difference).

Although the aims outlined in this thesis make it important to step into Deleuze and Joselit's work (that is, offer criticism), it is important to note that this is motivated by an interest and affinity for their work, and how my thinking has been motivated by their writings. This is not as the

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[55] Cf. '[R]eflection and recognition construct an optical geometry of Being around sameness that takes vision and Euclidean space for a model, which is posed as absolute.' Paganelli, "Finitude, Possibility, Dimensionality", 231.

[56] Cf. Barad, "Diffractions: Differences, Contingencies, and Entanglements that Matter" in *Meeting the Universe Halfway,* 71-96.

[57] Cf. Deleuze, "The Image of Thought," in *Difference and Repetition,* trans. Paul Patton (London and New York: Continuum, 2008): 164-213.

[58] Cf. Stengers, "Introductory Notes on an Ecology of Practices", *Cultural Studies Review* 11(1) (January 2005):183-196.

negative to which this thesis now offers a positive solution. Indeed, one of the great benefits of a diffractive methodology is that it does not require "reflection" on other theorists as being *objectively wrong* but, as Donna Haraway writes, 'trains us towards a more subtle vision'.[59] That is, one no longer need maintain the dichotomy of what Stengers calls the "they believe/we know better" paradigm.[60] Instead, the question increasingly becomes "what is made possible through an engagement with these writings as the continuation of an increasingly intimate discussion?" Not as the proverbial punching bag (objective critique) or fixed marker (pillar of knowledge) from which to navigate/clarify one's own position, but always as a positive and productive intra-action.[61] It is with this in mind that I venture to stay with certain theorists, not with the aim to further *reflect* on their ideas but as a *re-turning*.[62] Diffraction means no longer considering another's work as if from the outside looking in, but working from *within*,

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[59] Haraway, "The Promises of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics for Inappropriate/d Others" in *Cultural Studies,* eds. Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula Treichler (New York: Routledge, 1992): 295-337, 300.

[60] Cf. Martin Savransky and Isabelle Stengers, "Relearning the Art of Paying Attention: A Conversation" *SubStance*, Vol. 47, No. 1 (2018): 130-145, 132.

[61] Objective critique is a particularly enduring thought trap which, at points of writing during this research project, has been maddeningly difficult to get out of, luring you with the possibility of movement which is nevertheless confined and restrained by the parameters of the thought, like a hamster on a wheel. As Stengers writes: 'I don't usually spend a lot of my time criticising others, because that is still to engage in a certain kind of authoritative gesture. You cannot criticise such ways of doing philosophy without, in fact, entering into the same kind of game.' Ibid., 131.

[62] As in Barad's metaphor of the earthworm making compost, busying itself with work and play, by 'turning the soil over and over – ingesting and excreting it, tunnelling through it, burrowing, all means of aerating the soil, allowing oxygen in, opening it up and breathing new life into it.' Barad, "Diffracting Diffraction: Cutting Together-Apart", *Parallax*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (2014): pp. 168–187, 168.

whereby one passes from the idealisation objective knowledge/universally valid law, towards more nuanced claims about truth.

This mode of thought is further explored in Chapter 3: "The Peculiar Miracle", an analysis that directly stems from my own concerns as a painter. This includes the practice of appropriating images, techniques, and ideas from the history of painting. Chapter 3 focuses on painting's meaning-making in relation to these practices, a line of questioning that is, first and foremost, inspired by the changes in my own painting practice over the course of this PhD project. However this change should not be understood as the difference between a linear before/after, paintings made at the beginning and paintings made later, rather these changes continue to emerge. Hence my practice, and my understanding of it, *grows from the middle* always in the contingent *now*.[63]

Chapter 3 begins to account for my own practice, which is often explicitly involved in the making of images, yet without resorting to representationalism.[64] The aim of the chapter is not making the case that painting is non-representational in itself, especially since this debate already exists between multiple theorists.[65] Instead, this chapter offers three new concepts: *the peculiar miracle, paintings that remember others,* and *prolonging eroticism.* The *peculiar miracle* is perhaps the least precise of these

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[63] Cf. Deleuze and Félix Guattari, "Introduction: Rhizome", in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (London and Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005): 1-25, 21.

[64] '[…] practices of representing have no effect on the objects of investigation.' Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 87.

[65] Cf. Bolt, "Painting is Not a Representational Practice" in *Unframed: Practices and Politics of Women's Contemporary Painting*, ed. Rosemary Betterton (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2004): 41-61.

concepts, however its importance lies in the ways that it begins to situate the way in which art practices intervene in the present, often with unexpected relevance. This turns the problem of painting around from a representational logic of copies and originals towards questions of painting's ongoing mattering, which also affords a re-evaluation of the painterly cliché so maligned by Deleuze in his own discussions of painting, for example: *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*.[66] For Deleuze, cliché is a problem of recognition, a trap out of which the artist must overcome. However, although Deleuze's appeal to 'count on an encounter' bypasses a priori concepts as a 'thought without image' this always relies on a trajectory towards the transcendental limit of the senses - the being of the sensible - where what matters is purely ontological, diminishing a practice's sensuousness in favour of pure difference. The 'truth of the relative', as proposed by Isabelle Stengers, provides an alternative logic in Chapter 3, whereby practices may have conflicting but equally valid claims on truth. The concept of the *peculiar miracle* denotes a fundamentally positive situation that requires no further hostility towards the intentional form, whereby cliché can be rethought as a positive problem.

This is taken further in the original concept of *paintings that remember others,* which understands that memory is not a phenomenological experience happening inside the confines of a mind but is a reconfiguring of the enfolding of the world, in which matter 'is not subject to time, but is always an ongoing historicity.'[67] This allows for a reconsideration of those

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[66] Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation,* trans. Daniel W. Smith (London and New York: Continuum, 2003), 89.

[67] Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 151.

painting practices that engage with art histories outside of linear understandings of time which would reduce the logic of the work to an act of comparison between now-and-then. What the concept of paintings that remember others aims to bring to light is that art practices are not original (or hackneyed) ideas of the artist forced onto matter but are as Stengers writes, 'what the present enables you to add to the truths you intervene upon'.[68] This reframes the question from a consideration of the artist's representation to a diffractive logic of poetic relevance for the future for what might happen in it.

The final concept of Chapter 3 is *prolonging eroticism*, a term appropriated from Mike Kelley in his discussions of his own writing-fictioning practice. The term is used here to discuss the ways in which artists such as Laura Owens utilise digital structures (for example, gallery websites) as a way to iteratively extend the sensuous process of meaning-making of their work, without collapsing into generalised dissemination.[69] In this reading, it is no longer a question of finding the right words to describe the haecceity of the painting-object as an independent ontological unit but emphasises that knowledge making practices necessarily include a curiosity or *giddiness* towards what might happen. The role of the researcher then, is to avoid situations which would denude practices of a wider intelligibility, in the understanding that meaning is not a property of words

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[68] Stengers, in Stengers and Savransky, "Relearning the Art of Paying Attention: A Conversation" *SubStance*, Vol. 47, No. 1 (2018): 130-145, 133.

[69] Mike Kelley in Graw, "Interview: Isabelle Graw in Conversation with Mike Kelley", in *Mike Kelley* (London: Phaidon, 1999: 6-41, 10.

and things but emerges as an intimacy from within a boundary making practice.

Chapter 4: "A Giddiness Born of Rules" is, in many ways, the core chapter of this thesis. This chapter offers three further concepts that all aim to deal, in some way, with the humour of painting practice. This is not concerned with what people find funny, or why they do, as in Freud's discussion of humour as the release of tension or in Bergson's account as a response to the mechanical fixity of life.[70] This chapter is not concerned (though not uninterested) in the ability of the painter to visually communicate a joke, where the artwork would represent a semiotic capacity and ultimately lead one back to discussions of the artist and their psychological profile. Outside of these reflexive and representational paradigms another kind of humour is lurking, whereby painting emerges as a giddiness in the very thinking-making of the work.

The original concepts offered by Chapter 4 are s*orry drips, a giddiness born of rules* and *making luck happen.* Two of these terms - 'sorry drips' and 'making luck happen' - are appropriated from the artist, Helen Marten.[71] However they are both expanded upon in the chapter to discuss broader issues: namely, the relation of the chaotic to the creative event.[72] This

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[70] Cf. Sigmund Freud, *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, trans, James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1971). Also: Henri Bergson, *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*, trans. Cloudesley Brereton and Fred Rothwell (London: Macmillan, 1914).

[71] Cf. Helen Marten, *Drunk Brown House*, ed. Hans Ulrich Obrist (London: Serpentine Galleries and Koenig Books, 2016), 184. Also: Matias Faldbakken, "Show Hidden Characters: Helen Marten", *Mousse* Vol. 28 (April–May 2011): 192-199, 195.

[72] Cf. Mattia Paganelli, "Finitude, Possibility, Dimensionality; Aesthetics After Complexity" (PhD thesis: Birmingham City University, 2016). Also: Deleuze

chapter refutes the common-sense understanding of chaos as total disorder as the term, the "edge of chaos" implies (as in Deleuze's analysis of free mark making) but instead understands chaos as an unpredictable order from which patterns form over time. In this way, practices are iteratively (re)constituted through the (re)making of boundaries, which do not align with certain "details" of the work but must involve a consideration of all the tangible and intangible matters that constitute the work (which are all radically material). Following the original contributions of Chapter 3, in Chapter 4, the traditional narrative of the artists' intention to express a given meaning gives way to a humour in the unforeseeable ways that matter and ideas cohere. In this rethinking, neither the material or the discursive are 'ontologically or epistemologically prior', rather the painting-event in situ becomes more real - *giddy,* even - through its ongoing performance whereby 'matter and meaning are mutually articulated', which considers that art is situated within a field of practices that it is seeking to change. [73]

Chapter 4 also considers the nature of technology or artistic apparatuses, whereby the notion of the interrelation of independently existing identities - such artist and canvas - is replaced by a queer sort of cohesion, a *laughing-with* which involves inhabiting situations and attuning to their greater relevance. The role of digital technologies such as painting apps within my own practice are readdressed outside of paradigms based on causality. Collage will also be readdressed, in light of these claims, to

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and Guattari, *What is Philosophy*? trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchill (London: Verso, 1994).

[73] Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway,* 152.

account for matter's dynamism outside of more dismissive approaches to collage as the putting together of what already-is. [74] This final aim of Chapter 4 is to install a new understanding of humorous approaches to painting methodologies as epistemologically productive. This supersedes notions of "great" or "serious painters" (supra: Chapter 3.1), whereby painting is no longer a matter of skill but of attunement. Importantly, the humour of art practice cannot be generalised into a 'pure event' as it was for Deleuze, smothering the complexity of the present onto ultimate difference. Rather, practice is a process of "making luck happen" that takes account of a practice's situatedness within/of a genealogy of heterogeneous shifts and changes. This is an altogether different way to think and practice art that doesn't rely on an absolute definition of "how art works" but functions in the form of a game, which will last as long as it matters, or else be ended.

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Thinking with Barad, Golding, Haraway and Stengers, practices do not take place but *make* place, as Stengers writes: 'relating the power of truth to a *practical event* and not to a world to which practices would merely provide access.'[75] This process requires thinking from the present, of what the present makes *matter*, which affirms that to study a thing is also to *do* that thing—to summon "it" into being: '[d]oing theory requires being open to the world's aliveness, allowing oneself to be lured by curiosity, surprise,

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[74] Cf. Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque,* trans. Tom Conley (London: Athlone Press, 1993.

[75] Stengers, *Cosmopolitics,* Vol.1, trans. Robert Bononno (London and Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 24.

and wonder. […] Theories are living and breathing reconfigurings of the world'.[76] This does not mean that "anything goes" (supra: Chapter 4.2), rather it calls for new forms of rigour. As Henry Rogers makes clear:

> those who refuse to recognise the *matter* of research, the odour of exquisite practices, the dirt of exquisite ways of doing, those material things so true to their own materiality – yes, for those who will refute the possibilities of *matter,* leads not to rigour but rather [again] to rigor-mortis […].[77]

This rigour amounts to an attentiveness to the ongoing matter of work as it develops and not forfeiting this for instrumental practice. The following thesis is therefore the result of ongoing thought experiment which has required subtle (and not-so-subtle) reformulation as it has developed, which belies the scholarly convention of a research project as formulating itself at the outset (inflexible) and unfolding teleologically towards its goal. Instead, efforts to inhabit and sustain a practice-led PhD project embody the kind of gentle but pervading humour laid out in Chapter 4 of this thesis, a *giddiness*. That is, it requires taking the risk of entering in a generative play with the problems that animate it, of becoming more intensely felt, and of allowing oneself to be changed.

Hence, if at points this thesis seems to drift away from the notion of painting's relation with the internet the entanglement is never over for good, but iteratively emerges and remerges. As pointed out at the outset of

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[76] 'Barad, "On Touching – The Inhuman That Therefore I Am", in Witzgall, Susanne and Stakemeier, Kirsten. *Power of Material/Politics of Materiality* (Berlin and Zürich: Diaphanes, 2015), 153-164, 154.

[77] Henry Rogers, "Exquisite Methods: ruminations of corporeal becoming in artistic research" in *Data Loam*: 356-377, 357.

this introduction the aim of this thesis is not to uncover the ideal relationship of painting in a networked society: to keep the idea of the internet as a fixed marker to which one must always be beholden, but to attend to the specific ways that the internet *matters* for painting practice. Not a description of painting *in* networks but an immersion in the sensuous *networked materialities* of the present. This research is therefore not a reflection on an object of knowledge, but the effects of a material-discursive practice in which matter and meaning are mutually constituted.

Fig. 1A

Fig. 1B

Chapter Two: On infinite connotations

> Matter is when the soul is the body,
> […]– a body full of the "what", disinterested in the "what is?".
> **Jean-François Lyotard**[1]

> Connectedness is of the essence of all things and all types.
> It is of the essence of types that they be connected.
> […] No fact is merely itself.
> **Alfred North Whitehead**[2]

2.1 **Transitivity**

It was in "Painting Beside Itself" (2009) that David Joselit first asked

the question - *how does painting belong to a network?* - a line of questioning

inspired by artists such as Martin Kippenberger, whom Joselit quotes:

> Simply to hang a painting on the wall and say that it's art is
> dreadful. The whole network is important! […] When you say
> art, then everything possible belongs to it.[3]

In Kippenberger's rationale (1990-1991) this "whole network" amounted

to consideration of the gallery space: the floor, the architecture, the colour

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[1] Jean-François Lyotard, *Que Peindre / What to Paint? Adami, Arakawa, Buren,* trans. Anthony Hudek, Vlad Ionescu and Peter W. Milne (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2012, 181.

[2] Alfred North Whitehead, *Modes of Thought* (Toronto: Macmillan. 1966), 2.

[3] Martin Kippenberger in David Joselit, "Painting Beside Itself", *October,* Issue 130 (Fall 2009): 125-134, 125. Originally quoted in Jutta Koether, "One Has to Be Able to Take It!" in *Martin Kippenberger: The Problem Perspective*, ed. Ann Goldstein (Los Angeles: The Museum of Contemporary Art; Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008): 310-340, 316.

of the walls.[4] Joselit's interest in this particular quote could be said to be a direct repercussion of Rosalind Krauss' discussion of the post-medium condition whereby, instead of understanding artworks to be 'about nothing but their own essence [...] necessarily disengaged from ever thing outside their frames', theoretical interest moves towards an art *as such*, which involves art's histories and criticism including institutional critique.[5] As Krauss writes, this is a dialectic of 'remembering and forgetting'.[6] In Joselit's terms, it is painting's 'capacity to hold in suspension the passages internal to a canvas, and those external to it.'[7] Krauss' move was to transform medium into 'differential specificity', where medium is reimagined to include both the histories of artistic discourses (i.e. modernist painting, the avant-garde) and a 'technical support', a term inclusive of 'strange new apparatuses' (such as the car and the slideshow) and the set of new conventions derived from their material form. Krauss's 'Knights of the Medium' are those who are 'reinventing the medium by inventing or

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[4] Achim Hochdörfer touches on a similar point in his discussion of Robert Rauschenberg: '[he] insists that it is no longer tenable to define the aesthetic view as some dreamy, timeless state; instead the work must assert itself within the riotous spectacle around it.' Achim Hochdörfer, "How the World Came In" in *Painting 2.0: Expression in the Information Age,* eds. Manuela Ammer, Achim Hochdörfer and David Joselit (Munich; London; New York: Prestel, 2016): 13-27, 16. This also has a flavour of Marshall McLuhan's discussion of site-specificity: 'environments are not passive wrappings, but are, rather, active processes which are invisible. The ground-rules, pervasive structure, and over-all patterns of environments elude easy perception.' Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore, *The Medium is the Massage: An Inventory of Effects,* (Corte Madera, CA: Gingko Press, 2006), 69.

[5] Cf. Rosalind Krauss, "*A Voyage on the North Sea": Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1999), 11; also: "Chapter 1.1: Beyond painting".

[6] Krauss in Yve-Alain Bois, "Rosalind Krauss with Yve-Alain Bois", *Brooklyn Rail* (February 2012), accessed March 29. 2023, https://brooklynrail.org/2012/02/art/rosalind-krauss-with-yve-alain-bois.

[7] Joselit, "Painting Beside Itself", 129.

borrowing a new technical support.'[8] That is, their efforts 'to wrestle new mediums to the mat of specificity.[9] Importantly for Krauss, this equates to something made in iteration rather than something given (a generality), which sustains the habit of serious art.[10]

Joselit move is to exponentially scale Kippenberger's understanding of the "whole network", a move which Joselit rightly observes is 'incomprehensible'.[11] A foundational problem with this move is that it requires imagining the architecture of digital networks as mapped over existing infrastructure, reinforcing the notion of the "network" as merely an additional layer of reality. This is a problem of the universe considered geometrically, a *spatialisation*, a move which forgoes the material object for the idea of its material limit. As Joselit points out, this conception of a network both infinitely small and infinitely large amounts to 'the contemporary sublime'.[12] Although Joselit asserts that the practices he discusses (namely Jutta Koether and Stephen Prima), do not try to *picture*

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[8] Krauss in Bois, *Brooklyn Rail.* As Krauss writes: 'my constant effort is to find what I call "technical support" as a substitute for traditional supports, "technical" as opposed to "artisanal," and "support" a way of generalizing the specificity of the traditional mediums of oil on canvas or marble or wood—because I think that, of course, with postmodernism, conceptual art, and deconstruction, the idea of the medium has been completely dissolved.' Ibid.

[9] Krauss, *Perpetual Inventory* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2013), xiii.

[10] Cf. 'A medium is a little bit like a language - you can't just speak it once, it is repeated. The way that an artist secures the nature of his support as a medium is to continue to work at it, repeating it. The repetition is very important. Krauss, in David Plante, "The Real Thing: An Interview with Rosalind E. Krauss", *Artcritical* (August 30, 2013), accessed March 29, 2023, https://artcritical.com/2013/08/30/rosalind-krauss-interview/.

[11]As Joselit writes: 'It's worth pausing to consider how difficult it is to visualize networks, which, in their incomprehensible scale, ranging from the impossibly small microchip to the impossibly vast global Internet, truly embody the contemporary sublime.' Joselit, "Painting Beside Itself", 127-128.

[12] Cf. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgement,* trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

this relationship in their work by visualising 'the overall contours of the network', Joselit asserts such practices (Koether, Prima) embody the same notion of *transitivity*, which describes 'the status of objects within networks - which are defined by their circulation from place to place and their subsequent translation into new contexts.'[13] That is, their work 'renders the plasticity of networks visual and palpable.'[14] Here, Joselit takes Krauss' understanding of 'differential specificity' one step further by combining it with the sublime power of the network. This is a mode of thought that maintains that the body of painting, once it enters the structure of networks (social, digital, financial), is submitted to endless conceptual organisations – 'infinite dislocations, fragmentations, and degradations.'[15] As Joselit points out, these observations are 'extra-perceptual' and not merely phenomenological.[16] The identification of the incomprehensible network as the technical support provides the limit of possibility from which the artwork differentially materialises, that is, *its medium is an infinite relation*.

Both Joselit and Krauss, despite their efforts to overcome the dematerialisation and commodification implied by the post-medium condition, reinforce an ontological distribution that can only consider art as a *passage* from the materiality of the present towards the idea of a unified material system. Whilst art is no longer tied to medium specificity in a traditional sense it remains framed by a conceptual move that holds all the

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[13] Joselit, "Painting Beside Itself", 128.

[14] Joselit, "Reassembling Painting", in *Painting 2.0: Expression in the Information Age,* ed. Manuela Ammer, Achim Hochdörfer, and David Joselit (Munich, London, New York: Prestel, 2016): 168-181, 173.

[15] Joselit, "Painting Beside Itself", 134.

[16] Ibid., 132.

cards, whereby the materiality of the artwork remains superficial in relation to the concept. This does nothing to think through the specific nuances of making and thinking painting, but only to make the so-called 'etiolated' field of painting conceptually justifiable.[17]

In Joselit's case this also evidences a continuity from the present to the ultimate (even if this ultimate is 'incomprehensible'). Joselit's transitivity functions through different scales and conceptions of the network which are *commensurable*: that is, the ability to *spatialise* into the micro (e.g. relationships between individual brushstrokes) and the macro (e.g. social networks, performance) and imagine the relationships between them. This image of the universe as a network of independent but interrelated parts amounts to an invisible supporting structure that functions a priori, silently organising the space in which thought acts: an *image of thought,* in Deleuze's terms.[18] The abstraction of the present into merging trajectories merging at the limit, means conceiving of the present and the ultimate simultaneously, a spatialised logic of Being. So, although Joselit installs the transitive in the spirit of *flexibility*, transitivity in fact only demonstrates the all-consuming power of the category, a *continuity* that is formalised a priori of scale as well as all ontological constructions (the possible positions that objects may occupy), leaving the world to be understood as nothing but the

[17] Krauss, *"Voyage on the North Sea"*, 56.

[18] Cf. Gilles Deleuze, "The Image of Thought," in *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (London: Continuum, 2008), 164-213. This reinstates the image shared by both modern science and metaphysics; a model which converges on Euclidean geometry, a totalising framework of possibilities based on a prior unity (ontology). This space governs the emergence of all thoughts and ideas, and 'whose determinations pre-existed the bodies they constructed or to which they were applied'. Brian Massumi, *Parables of the Virtual,* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002), 4-5.

reductive world of surfaces. Faced with this stalling paradigm at the beginning of this research project, the question became how to meaningfully account for practice outside of this image of thought, which define a priori what art can be (however flexible). What seems necessary is a move from an ontology as an a priori idealisation of an idea - which lays out the space in which it can move - towards a notion of the world as evolving matter.

In a project starting with *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze lays out his philosophy of ontological difference. In *Difference and Repetition* Deleuze suggests replacing a logic of existence based on Euclidean geometry with a 'geometry of sufficient reason', or logic of sense.[19] This facilitates the shift from being (static) to becoming (temporal), an approach which is certainly more fluid than discourses inevitably tied to identity and has arguably been the most favoured approach for artists so far. Motivated by Deleuze's ontology and bolstered by the situations that were emerging in my practice and those of others, earlier forms of this research project centred on an approach that attempted to replace notions of "network painting" with the "becoming-internet" of painting. However, this approach quickly failed. As the next section will show, the move to ontological difference, Deleuze's transcendental empiricism, may be sufficient for installing an organisation of art practice as particular and sensuous, but this still relies on a transcendental move which escapes the contingency of the present, that is,

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[19] Cf. Deleuze, "The Image of Thought," in *Difference and Repetition,* 164-213.

the ways in which a practice makes a difference.[20] To properly engage with the implications of so-called *network painting*, it is necessary to disengage with all ontological references (identity, pure difference) towards a non-ontological *mattering*, the crux of which is laid out in Chapter 2.3.

2.2 **Becoming-internet**

Deleuze's concept of 'becoming-x' is an allusion to *how* something is not what something is, which is a break away from metaphysics of becoming the thing in itself. Deleuze is not interested in that which is descended or derived from, 'bringing us back to the reproduction of given characteristics.'[21] Instead, becomings are 'unnatural participations', which arise from an 'encounter' between things which are not preordained but galvanised by a kind of mutual fascination.[22] This becoming is not imitation, transferred from A to B. As Deleuze writes with Claire Parnet:

> There is no terminus from which you set out, none which you arrive at or which you ought to arrive at. Nor are there two terms which are exchanged. The question 'What are you becoming?' is particularly stupid. For as someone

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[20] Cf. '[the] experience we have is always particular and immanent, but there is still a possibility of adding the new from the outside (which is, paradoxically, not exterior), there is always a possibility of creating, and there is never a point at which we can say that a certain concept is so solidified that it cannot be overturned. A concept is always in becoming, "[a] concept is a brick. It can be used to build the courthouse of reason. Or it can be thrown through the window."' Andrej Jovićević, "Concepts Between Kant and Deleuze: From Transcendental Idealism to Transcendental Empiricism", *Epoché,* Issue #41, June (2021). The quote is from Brian Massumi, "Translator's Forward: Pleasures of Philosophy", in Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (London and Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987): ix-xv, xii.

[21] Deleuze and Guattari, "Becoming-Intense, Becoming-Animal, Becoming-Imperceptible", in *A Thousand Plateaus*: 232-309, 241.

[22] Ibid., 239-240.

becomes, what he is becoming changes as much as he does himself.[23]

Hence, becoming is not clear-cut transformation and cannot be sufficiently conceptualised in terms of a before and after. It is not the singular relation or change of a thing, but a contagion with a multiplicity.[24] Therefore, becoming does not involve the representation of traits but an acquiring of modes, and insofar as becoming is this very matter of modality, this acquiring never stops.[25] Furthermore, becomings are always in reference to a given environment, that is not left unchanged but evidences a kind of 'double capture' since "what" each becomes changes no less than "that which" becomes:

> It should not be thought that a haecceity consists simply of a decor or backdrop that situates subjects, or of appendages that hold things and people to the ground. It is the entire assemblage in its individuated aggregate that is a haecceity […] Climate, wind, season, hour are not of another nature than the things, animals, or people that populate them, follow them, sleep and awaken within them. […]"The thin dog is running in the road, this dog is the road," cries Virginia Woolf. That is how we need to feel. Spatiotemporal relations, determinations, are not predicates of the thing but dimensions of multiplicities.[26]

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[23] Deleuze and Claire Parnet, "A Conversation: What is it? What is it for?" in *Dialogues II,* trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007): 1-35, 2.

[24] For Deleuze, the present is defined by heterogeneity, not as the One and the Multiple, but as the (qualitative) variety of multiplicity that materialises in coextensive eternal present and eternal past.

[25] Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition,* 76

[26] Cf. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus,* 262-263.

Thus, Deleuze ascribes an open system, which does not merely allow for change but embodies this very change: 'it is Being-in-the-World, as the phenomenologists say: at one and the same time I *become* in the sensation and something *happens* through the sensation, one through the other, one in the other.'[27]

This is not equivalent to an a priori *idea* of the object that lays out the space in which it can move, freeing the present from representation. However, this openness may only function with reference to an ontological distinction between the actual and the virtual in Deleuze's analysis. Deleuze's virtual, inspired by the philosopher Henri Bergson, is a relation of *differentiation,* an image to which the present continuously returns and diverges.[28] The process of actualisation of the virtual greatly differentiates from the realisation of the possible, to which both Deleuze and Bergson administer negative treatment. As Deleuze writes:

> The only danger in all this is that the virtual could be confused with the possible. The possible is opposed to the real; the process undergone by the possible is therefore a 'realisation'. By contrast, the virtual is not opposed to the real; it possesses a full reality by itself. The process it undergoes is that of actualisation. It would be wrong to see only a verbal dispute here: it is a question of existence itself.[29]

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[27] Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation,* trans. Daniel W. Smith (London and New York: Continuum, 2003), 34-45.

[28] Cf. Deleuze and Parnet, "The Actual and the Virtual," in *Dialogues II,* 148-152, 150-1. Cf. also Gilles Deleuze, "Memory and Virtual Coexistence," in *Bergsonism*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (New York, NY: Zone Books, 1991), 51-72.

[29] Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition,* 211.

As Bergson writes, 'the possible is only the real with the addition of an act of mind that throws its image back into the past once it has been enacted'.[30] In other words, the possible involves the 'false problem' of projecting a negation of the real into a past in which it did not exist: the possible being only an extrapolation retroactively projected from the actual event, an uncovering or "discovering" of what plausibly could be said to exist, which requires linearity.[31] Hence it is not that the real resembles the possible, but that the possible resembles the real, which remains within a regime of sameness. The possible is therefore unable to account for truly new or *unimaginable* events.

Deleuze's virtual is different, since the actual and the virtual do not resemble each other in the same way that the real and the possible do (the ground does not resemble that which it grounds).[32] For Deleuze, the virtual is a realm of untimely relations, which although not actual (to which it is opposed), is nevertheless real: '[r]eal without being actual, ideal without being abstract'.[33] This relation is constant passage, which is never depleted but continues to exist as an immanent presence, an *ultimate* which exists at

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[30] Henri Bergson, *The Creative Mind: An Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Mabelle L. Andison (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1946), 118.

[31] On resemblance and limitation of the possible, versus the difference or divergence of the virtual, Cf. Deleuze, "Élan Vital *as Movement of Differentiation*", *Bergsonism*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (New York: Zone Books, 1991), 60.

[32] Instead, the virtual must '*create* its own lines of actualization in positive acts.' […] 'In short, the characteristic of virtuality is to exist in such a way that it is actualized by being differentiated and is forced to differentiate itself, to create its lines of differentiation in order to be actualized.' Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, 97. Since these actual events 'never resemble the singularities they incarnate […] actualization or differenciation is always a genuine creation'. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 212.

[33] Ibid. 272.

the limit of the actual.[34] This relation makes a becoming a literal 'event' in which something new always transpires, the actual is never in stasis. Importantly, this is not a purely conceptual exercise happening in the mind, as Deleuze instead implores one to 'count upon the contingency of an encounter', which also involves the encounter of art.[35] This encounter cannot be rationally envisioned but 'can only be sensed', that is, it is opposed to recognition. However, this is not sensible experience - which would converge on a common sense - but a transcendental one: 'not a sensible being but the being of the sensible […] not the given but that by which the given is given'.[36] Although this avoids relying on recognition for our understanding of the present, by formulating that which matters as the purely ontological - *the givenness of the given* - which happens beyond the senses, we render specific material organisations mute.[37] An artwork's meaning resides in the fact that it renders or 'restores' the ultimate (understood variably as the virtual, difference, becoming) through its

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[34] Deleuze's virtual is greatly influenced by Bergson's writing on duration, which as Deleuze writes is 'defined less by succession than by coexistence.' Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, 60.

[35] Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 139.

[36] Cf. 'In recognition, the sensible is not at all that which can only be sensed, but that which bears directly upon the senses in an object which can be recalled, imagined or conceived.' Ibid., 139, 222.

[37] This is reconceptualisation is the fulcrum of Mattia Paganelli's PhD thesis, and his own original contribution. Cf. '[W]hile [Deleuze's] exercise bypasses the authority that claim organisation of sense in the present, it also bypasses the material presence of matter, pushing that which matters to something purely ontological (the being of the sensible) something that, as Deleuze claims, is at the transcendental limit of the senses.69 Therefore, the distinction between aesthetics and ontology is still firmly in place, and so is the hierarchy that sees sensible presence as less relevant than the abstraction of Being.' Paganelli, 248.

various forms.[38] Hence the organisation of the Deleuzian encounter still maintains ontological idealisation: the univocity of pure difference at the horizon of all practices.[39] Therefore our interactions with artworks must only make sense in relation to this passage towards the ultimate.

In *What is Philosophy?* Deleuze refers to Hubert Damisch's 'accurate' assessment of Paul Klee's *Equals Infinity* (1932):

> It seems to us that the brown blobs dancing in the margin and crossing the canvas are the infinite passage of chaos; the sowing of points on the canvas, divided by rods, is the finite composite sensation, but opening onto the plane of composition that restores the infinite to us, $= \infty$.[40]

The notion of the infinite possibility of an artwork is an appealing proposition.[41] However, art and the imagination cannot offer anything by continuing to think of the infinite as an ontological and ungraspable limit that would take one beyond what is happening in the present. Any discussion of art as *infinite potential* can only serve to justify the present by favouring the ontological over the material. Thus, this thesis turns to theories of diffraction for an alternative ontological approach which no

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[38] Cf. 'Perhaps the peculiarity of art is to pass through the finite in order to rediscover, to restore the infinite.' Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchill (London: Verso, 1994), 197.

[39] Deleuze's conception of Being is this difference. 'Moreover, it is not we who are univocal in a Being which is not; it is we and our individuality which remains equivocal in and for a univocal Being.' *Difference and Repetition*, 39.

[40] Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* 197. Cf. Hubert Damisch, "Equals Infinity", *20th Century Studies*: *Visual Poetics*, Issue 15/16 (December 1976): 56-81.

[41] As Joselit writes: '[in] every work of art there is an irreducible singularity, a fund of affect and visual stimuli that is inexhaustible.' Joselit. "Marking, Scoring, Storing, and Speculating (on Time)", *In Painting Beyond Itself: The Medium in Post-medium Condition*, eds. Isabelle Graw and Ewa Lajer-Burcharth (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2016): 11-20, 11.

longer relies on recourse to the "outside", "beyond", "beside" or "limit" of painting to justify its being. Furthermore, in such an approach, existence is never pure or ideal but always contingent, which moves the discussion from difference *in itself* to *differences that matter,* which is an opportunity to revitalise both making and thinking about art.[42]

2.3 **Networked Materialities**

Diffraction, like Deleuze's difference, is not a logic constructed upon prior sameness. However, diffraction is not equal to difference; as Donna Haraway makes clear: 'a diffraction pattern does not map where differences appear, but rather maps where the effects of difference appear.[43] In other words, diffractions are patterns of difference that make a difference, emphasising specific, meaningful engagement in the world. Barad makes effort to emphasise the point that 'if diffraction is to serve as an important metaphor for differences that matter, it is crucial that we pay attention to the kinds of differences that different understanding of diffraction evoke'.[44] As laid out in the introduction to this thesis, in Barad's framework practices of knowing, observing and thinking are material-discursive practices of intra-acting with the world. These practices do not uncover inherent facts about a pre-existing world but intra-act in the world's becoming in the form of specific material configurations: practices

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[42] Barad, "Diffractions: Differences, Contingencies, and Entanglements that Matter," in *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2007): 71-94.

[43] Donna Haraway, "The Promises of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics for Inappropriate/d Others'", *Cultural Studies*, eds. Lawrence Gross- berg, Cary Nelson, Paula A. Treichler (New York: Routledge, 1992), 300.

[44] Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway,* 419n25.

of knowledge are '*specific material engagements that participate in (re)configuring the world,*' they are 'not simply about making facts but about making worlds, […] making specific worldly configurations.'[45] The defining feature of this shift is that a problem or practice is always engaged, with no further need for recourse to notions of the transcendental in order for it to function. An ongoing diffraction pattern based in "patterns of difference that make a difference" never returns to pure ontological concerns. Importantly, language can no longer be thought of as disembodied or external, '"written" somewhere beyond matter'.[46] Discourse happens from within the system, and the material-discursive cannot be considered separately. Theory is also a material practice that makes a difference to the world, rather than merely interrogating what goes on there from some place of idealised distance.[47] Phenomena are therefore not uncertain phenomenological impressions, to be idealised to pure ontological claims, but are 'objective.'[48]

Importantly, in the diffractive methodology outlined here, what an artwork *means* becomes irrelevant since the objective referent is no longer an observation-independent object but a *phenomenon*. Diffraction is physical without being visual, that is without resorting to the kinds of visualising so often found in paradigms of reflection and representationalism. Following Barad, the notion of the thing-in-itself has no self-contained existence -

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[45] Ibid., 91.

[46] Paganelli, email to the Royal College of Art Entanglers Google Group, Feb 21, 2023.

[47] If diffraction teaches us anything, it is that there is no such thing as a passive observer.

[48] Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 90.

whether as object, idea, method, or style - but only relationally as things-in-phenomena. Or, put another way, these configurations are momentary stabilisations, *doings*, rather than *beings*, which are not absolute. [49] In this way, painting practice is a singular, material-discursive event, entangled in broader situations, histories and networks: *networked materialities* which supersede definitions of 'networked painting'.[50] Which is to say, that instead of painting being theorised as variably related identities, reality is a matter of mutually constituting entities, constituting an *ontological inseparability* of the agencies and objects that constitute phenomena. Considered in this way, artworks are not merely observed (contemplation) but emerge through intra-actions. The "immediately given-ness"' of the painting-object which demands to be understood no longer stands.[51] In terms of a methodological position, the central idea is that "the thing" "we" observe (or research) is enacted in an entanglement with "the way" we observe (and research) it, demanding a kind of responsibility. Barad's fundamental insight is based in the consequences of proposing that one consider not only *what* matters but *how* it matters and *for whom* it matters.[52]

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[49] Cf. Ibid.,135.

[50] The term 'networked materialities' is appropriated from Johnny Golding, "Ecce Homo Sexual: Ontology and Eros in the Age of Incompleteness and Entanglement", *Parallax*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (2014): 217 - 230.

[51] Hence the artwork and the observer ("we", "me" or "you") is not pre-given, but it is 'through specific agential intra-actions that the boundaries and properties of the "components" of phenomena become determinate and that particular embodied concepts become meaningful.' Barad, "Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter" *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, Vol. 28, No. 3 (2003): 801-831, 823, 815.

[52] This is an ethical project that holds hands with other writers including Donna Haraway, who writes of what is at stake in our conception of ecology: 'what counts as nature, for whom, and at what costs'. Donna Haraway, *Modest_Witness*

In fact, this organisation of *what? how?* and *for whom?* becomes the primary ontological unit in Barad's methodology (phenomenon), making the present a relational affair which cannot be broken down into pure ontological concerns without imposing some kind of idealisation/reduction.[53] Importantly, once the present is articulated in such matted questions, one enters a situation that clamours in multiple directions at once, *interfering* with the ontological imperative to seek a unique or ultimate answer (which includes the question *what is painting?*) Our interactions with artworks do not reveal what is already there but evidence our participation with it as part of the world's ongoing mattering. It is this way that diffraction makes sense of the present, or more accurately, diffraction *makes sense.*

Returning to Joselit's discussion, a diffractive account allows for a consideration of the artwork in a new way:

> Simply to hang a painting on the wall and say that it's art is dreadful. The whole network is important! […] When you say art, then everything possible belongs to it.[54]

Viewed through the implications of this chapter, Kippenberger's comment might be differentially understood as a diffractive event (instead of a

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@ Second_Millenium. FemaleMan Meets_OncoMouse (New York and London: Routledge, 1997), 104.

[53] In his own PhD thesis, which has been invaluable in its contribution to my own thinking, Mattia Paganelli has pointed out that reductionism and idealisation is essentially the same concept, 'for they both dismiss the attributes or interactions of the present as contingent, in favour of an ultimate reference point.' Mattia Paganelli, "Finitude, Possibility, Dimensionality; Aesthetics After Complexity" (PhD thesis: Birmingham City University, 2016), 83.

[54] Joselit, "Painting Beside Itself", 125.

situation based on a differential and transitive medium) by which an environment/setting is not an empty stage for a pre-given object but contributes to the phenomenon of the viewing experience. Understood this way, a painting only illusorily ends with its frame; in fact, *all paintings are installations,* and all paintings are site-specific.[55] However, to avoid this "everything possible" being understood via Deleuze's concept of absolute difference, it is important to contrast Joselit-Kippenberger's discussion of the "everything possible" with Alfred North Whitehead's proposition that 'philosophy can exclude nothing'.[56] Pointing out the difference between these two statements might seem like semantics. However, the crucial difference lies in the way in which a diffractive ontology is not an imperative to take *everything* into consideration - which would amount to a generalisation of the everything that is available - it is instead a rejection of the right to disqualify. In fact, the lure of endless choice, amounting to the alleged freedom of postmodernity, only reintroduces a negative account of the world as accumulable identity, or limit.[57] Instead, a system articulated by *singularities* involves the *irreducibility* of experience, as Whitehead writes: 'philosophy cannot neglect the multifariousness of the world - the fairies dance, and Christ is nailed to the cross.'[58] Any attempt to smooth out

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[55] Alberto Condotta, "Diffracting Painting: 'Mattering' as Reconfiguration of its Making, Understanding and Encountering" (PhD thesis: Birmingham City University, 2017).

[56] Alfred North Whitehead, *Modes of Thought* [1938] (Toronto: Macmillan. 1966), 2. Quoted in Didier Debaise and Isabelle Stengers, "The Insistence of Possibles: Towards a Speculative Pragmatism", *Parse Journal,* Issue 7 (Autumn 2017): 12-19, 14.

[57] Supra "Chapter 4.2 Anything Goes".

[58] Whitehead, *Process and Reality. An Essay in Cosmology* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Inc., 1929), 338. Quoted in Debaise and Stengers, "The Insistence of Possibles", 15.

(approximate) the complexity of painting's material presence, the way a particular colour functions alongside another or a particular situation interacts with another in the ongoing messiness of the world of which we are a part, is an ethical and political decision as well as phenomenological and aesthetic. As Barad writes: '[t]he world is materialised differently through different practices.'[59] This does not necessitate a new ontological paradigm since one cannot conceptualise this entire system of diffractive patterning: entanglements cannot be conceptualised, only encountered.[60]

Understanding artworks as *networked materialities* supersedes the post-medium condition in order to come to terms with those practices that appear to "speak" to notions outside of those possibilities bounded by the logic of medium specificity. Whereas the expanded field and "network painting" metaphors speak of centres and peripheries: pre-given objects which interact with things outside of itself, in a diffractive reading, no "thing" is ever autonomous. Diffraction is not about the One and the Other, the relationship of painting with that which sits outside of it (painting *beside* itself), since "distinct" agencies are only distinct in a relational, not an absolute sense. This also helps demonstrate the fundamental difference between diffraction and actor network theory, for which the entities within the phenomenon (or actants within the network) are assumed to have essential boundaries, aiming to show the surprising

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[59] Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 89.

[60] I once heard an artist at a gallery talk describe a canvas as a way to "process the world at a manageable scale". I remember thinking that they had it all figured out, but now I see that an artwork is just as wide as the whole world.

ways that these actants affect each-other.[61] Hence, in a diffractive account, 'differentiating is not about othering or separating but on the contrary about making connections and commitments'.[62] This understanding only allows for one form of interrogation, that of inhabiting and intra-acting with the contingencies of the present, and of attuning to their relevance. It is 'a "holding together" of the *disparate* itself...': where to intervene, to intra-act is the only thing of importance.[63]

Hence it is not so much that Joselit and Krauss are incorrect, but that the way in which their practices intra-act in the world creates certain kinds of effects, joining a lineage of theories of art and aesthetics based on manifestos and territorial claims. The logic of centres and peripheries so palpable in discussions of the expanded field reveals itself as colonial, displaying a will, in Stengers' terms, for 'examining practices from the point of view of the rules with which they must conform.'[64] For Krauss, this can only surface as antagonism towards certain kinds of practices.[65] This is not to say that criticism is no longer warranted, but this need not form assertions based in a practice's limited ontological credibility: 'a

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[61] Cf. Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

[62] Barad *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 392.

[63] Barad, "Nature's Queer Performativity" in *Kvinder Køn & Forsaking,* 1-2 (2012): 25-54, 46.

[64] Stengers, *Cosmopolitics, Vol. I,* trans. Robert Bononno (London and Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 80.

[65] Cf. 'I hate the medium of printmaking', 'I don't really like video very much,' 'I hate installation art, and my hatred energises me in relation to the book I'm now writing on the medium. I just hate it.' Krauss in David Plante, "The Real Thing".

simulacrum of originality'.[66] Rather, diffraction frees the present from the negativity of the simulacrum. Indeed, we *must* be critical because we cannot address a practice without considering its relevance for the 'heterogeneous set of those who accept to be shaken up, modified, interested by it.'[67] A diffractive account of art practice is not concerned with difference in itself (which likewise plays into capitalist modes of thought and desire for the new), instead, diffraction is concerned with contingent interferences that have causal consequences, generating new interferences, new effects, which *matter*. These differences need no longer be considered through a terminology of impurity ('dislocations, fragmentations, and degradations') since no object pre-exists its interaction(s), and hence all ontological situations are fundamentally positive.[68] This is a radical movement away from classical understandings of matter's opposition to form: *to exist is to make a difference* and vice-versa. Hence the difference of a practice is not the threshold between the sensible experience and transcendental Being but between other practices, situations, and phenomena. This establishes a heterogeneity of knowledge whereby: 'part of the world becomes differentially intelligible to another part of the world'.[69] Difference is therefore never pure or absolute (which would ignore the relevance of history in a pure line of flight): difference has a history.[70] History is also not an external or intangible force, indeed as Barad writes, '[matter] is always

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[66] Walter Robinson, "Flipping and Rise of Zombie Formalism", *Artspace* (April 3, 2014).

[67] Stengers, *Cosmopolitics I*, 43. Supra: "Chapter Three: *the peculiar miracle.*"

[68] Joselit, "Painting Beside Itself", 134.

[69] Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 342.

[70] For 'line of flight', Cf. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 9-10.

already an ongoing historicity.'[71] This history is material, patterns that 'record the history of interaction, interference, reinforcement, difference.'[72] Therefore an artist never makes something from nothing but enters a process of intra-actively engaging in the world 'in giving it specific material form.'[73] So although Joselit is right to point out that '[a] Poussin might land in the hands of Jutta Koether, or Stephen Prina might seize the entire oeuvre of Manet', this must not be understood through reflection.[74] Rather, artists interact in the material of ongoing histories, creating feedback loops, whereby, in Paganelli's terms, 'results become parameters for the next iteration.'[75] Th notion of artist's interactions with the histories of medium will be reimagined in the following chapter of this thesis.[76]

However, it is important to note at this stage (which will be returned to at later stages of this thesis), that diffraction does not mean that anything is now possible, anytime: 'intra-actions iteratively reconfigure what is possible and what is impossible - possibilities do not sit still.'[77] Some decisions mean going "back to the drawing board", not because we have demonstrated a failure of knowledge, but because possibilities emerge through the intra-action of material-discursive practices, and not in relation to ontological difference at the limit (Deleuze). Matter is

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[71] Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 151.

[72] Haraway, *Modest_Witness*, 273.

[73] Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 91.

[74] Joselit, "Painting beside Itself", 132.

[75] Paganelli, "Finitude, Possibility, Dimensionality", 88.

[76] "Supra: Chapter 3.2 Paintings that remember others".

[77] Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 177.

'morphologically active', and the question becomes where to interact, or cut.[78] These cuts are never absolute:

> That is, if "parts," by definition, arise from divisions or cuts, it does not necessarily follow that cuts sever or break things off, either spatially or temporally, producing absolute differences of this and that, here and there, now and then. […] After all, to be a part is not to be absolutely apart but to be constituted and threaded through with the entanglements of part-ing.[79]

This threading together of differences, of interferences that matter, problematises the Hegelian notion of linear developments. An object doesn't change *in time,* rather our very notion of the temporal 'is produced through the iterative enfolding of phenomena', 'the sedimenting historiality of differential patterns of mattering.'[80] The implication of this non-ontological mattering is that there is no perfect understanding of initial conditions, since the world is constructed in itself as well as for us, making diffraction a 'heterogeneous history, not about originals.'[81] In this way, we may finally give new energy to Joselit's idea that 'no painterly problems exist in isolation or ever disappears; instead, there are shifts in emphasis in which earlier questions are reformulated through newer ones.'[82] In a diffractive understanding of creative practice, the past can never be stilled,

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[78] Ibid., 375. Furthermore, these interactions are not inert determinations, but reveal the intrinsic creativity of the world in its relative nature, in the ways in which we are "meeting the universe halfway."

[79] Barad, "Transmaterialities: Trans*/Matter/Realities and Queer Political Imaginings," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies,* Vol. 21, No. 2-3 (2015): 387-422, 406.

[80] Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway,* 180.

[81] Haraway, *Modest_Witness,* 273.

[82] Joselit, "Painting Beside Itself", 125.

but remains open for future reworkings. From such a perspective, no declaration of painting's death or reification need be taken seriously (or made at all).

2.4 **Commodity to Coherence**

In light of the diffractive inhabiting of painting practice as *networked materialities*, the question of painting's relation to capitalism can also be posed anew.[83] As previously implied, an anxiety over painting's increasingly intimate relationship with finance has been the cause of much of its intellectualism. This includes Joselit's discussion in "Painting Beside Itself". In that text, Joselit describes painting practices as: 'the most collectible type of art, which combines maximum prestige with maximum convenience of display (both for private and institutional collectors), [making] painting […] the medium most frequently condemned for its intimate relation to commodification.'[84] There is a palpable sense of dread in theoretical circles that lingers around the possibility that by accepting the "outside" of painting as medium one has also accepted capitalism. Indeed, Yve-Alain Bois described the purging of extraneous influence in Modernist painting as 'a deliberate attempt to free art from its contamination by the forms of exchange produced by capitalism.'[85] This is

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[83] Cf. "If you go to an auction, out comes the Picasso: dead silence. Once the hammer comes down on the price, applause! […] We live in a world where they applaud the price but not the Picasso." Fran Lebowitz in Martin Scorsese, "Cultural Affairs", *Pretend it's a City*, S1 E2 (2021), Netflix. https://www.netflix.com/.

[84] Cf. 'Joselit, "Painting Beside Itself", 132.

[85] Cf. Yve-Alain Bois, "Painting: The Task of Mourning," in *Painting as Model* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990), 235.

ultimately also the reason for Krauss's steadfastness to medium discourses, a hope pinned to the aesthetic contemplation of a 'differential specificity' which might function outside of the spectacle of pure equivalency that Krauss associates with contemporary culture.[86]

Joselit's writing is fuelled by an attempt to escape the "reification trap", which connotes:

> […] the permanent arrest of an object's circulation within a network: it is halted, paid for, put on a wall, or sent to storage, therefore permanently crystallizing into a particular social relation.[87]

As previously discussed, this line of thought led to Joselit's concept of 'transitive painting', which:

> invents forms and structures whose purpose is to demonstrate that once an object enters a network, it can never be fully stilled, but only subjected to different material states and speeds of circulation ranging from the geologically slow (cold storage) to the infinitely fast.[88]

Here, Joselit is imagining taking a step back from painting as if coaching it from the side of the pitch, ensuring the smooth play of its various players, but this amounts to keeping painting always on the run. Painting "survives" once more in discourse by always playing a certain kind of game (at a cost which this chapter has hopefully made apparent). What is needed (and has been found in diffraction) is a material-discursive account whereby theory

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[86] Cf. Krauss, *"Voyage on the North Sea"*.

[87] Joselit, "Painting beside Itself", 132.

[88] Ibid, 132.

is no longer a last-ditch attempt to save painting from the corrupt and cruel material powers at work outside of it.

So, whilst it is true that capitalism *matters,* and in forms which have real and often devastating impacts on one's life – including as the *Great Destroyer of practices* - what is important in diffraction is that capitalism cannot be thought of as a sacrosanct structure but is also a dynamic and changing topology.[89] Dealers, collectors, curators, and artists will not miraculously vanish if we rediscover the correct methods to think painting properly: as a freedom from capital, or ability to work against it. What might be more important, is not to play to the rules of the game as they have been posed. As Stengers writes: 'Is it not the case, indeed, that capitalism is exploiting to its own advantage any trust we may have in a conveniently settled perspective, turning it into an opportunity for new operations?'[90] What is needed is a line of thought that is against, as Didier Debaise and Stengers write, the kinds of 'critical, demystifying thinking, [that]was "right" but this being "right" extended the desert, ratified capitalist appropriation, [and] was an insult to that to which practitioners are attached, to what binds them.'[91] In Barad's discussion for example, capitalism is not a totalising system, but 'one stream in a turbulent river of agencies', and artistic practices, as 'entangled, contingent, and changing material conditions […] produce much more than saleable commodities.'[92] In a diffractive account

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[89] Stengers, "Diderot's egg: Divorcing materialism from eliminativism". *Radical Philosophy*, No. 144, (July/August 2007): 7-15. Cf. Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway,* 243.

[90] Stengers, "Diderot's egg", 15.

[91] Debaise and Stengers. "The Insistence of Possibles", 19.

[92] Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 239.

the world is never final or complete - which would think away the agency of our intra-actions into mere observation or passive consumption - but emphasises the possibility of meeting each moment, 'since the possibilities for what the world may become call out in the pause that precedes each breath before a moment comes into being and the world is remade again.'[93] An awareness of this logic allows for the possibility for practitioners to create more relevant and intense practices, with greater attention and responsibility.

Thus, we no longer need actualise the inevitability of defeat, a special kind of thought exercise where counter-actualisation would be a return to the commodity form. Knowing is not the capacity of the human intellect, but a radical materiality. This shift in perspective comes with responsibility and accountability for our practices, which does not equate to a negation capitalism as we recall that this response-ability is never entirely separate: we cannot stand outside of the performance of the world. Indeed, as Haraway writes: 'blaming Capitalism, Imperialism, Neoliberalism, Modernization, or some other "not us" for ongoing destruction webbed with human numbers will not work either.'[94] Instead, this is work that resides in the spirit of curiosity, of making work that matters, rather than fulfilling a kind of disinterested speculation/recognition based on the commodity form.[95] Avoiding the approximation of practice through some

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[93] Ibid., 185.

[94] Haraway, "Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene: Making Kin", *Environmental Humanities,* vol. 6 (2015), pp. 159-165, 164.

[95] This speaks to Mike Kelley's comment about the fatal flaw in made for market artworks: 'the recent trend of commodity art […] doesn't appeal to me especially, since I don't find the reduction of the art object to its economic value

concept, mode or model which would suffocate and censor the practice's sensuousness, is a problem that is both artistic and political. As is the problem of the market's desire for the new and how the artist might respond. As Barad writes:

> for although in a certain sense there is nothing but the new, this point should not deflect our attention from the fact that the uncritical embrace of the new (the brighter, shinier, lighter model) fits all too comfortably with capitalism's reliance on the continual production of new desires and a desire for the new. [96]

This conceptualisation of art practice as networked materialities raises a series of emerging and matted questions. Rather than focusing on how events come into being, which would imply a single, totalising logic – the key question is rather how situations *stick*, how they are relevant and make a difference. This does not amount to exemplifying the new in itself since these diffractive situations are always heterogeneous and hence, unable to be generalised. This will be considered further in the following chapters.

Finally, it is of the greatest importance not to conflate the terms currently in circulation in post-medium painting discourses with the vocabulary of diffraction. For example, Barad writes that matter is: 'not a thing, but a doing, a congealing of agency.'[97] It is imperative to understand that this is *not the performance of a thing within a system* but the *system performing itself*, which expands the existing space through its emergence. To say that

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or position to be very interesting.' Mike Kelley, *Foul Perfection: Essays and Criticism*, eds. John C. Welchman (Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 2003), 154.

[96] Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 473n57.

[97] Barad, "Posthuman Performativity", 822.

'matter is agential' is not the same as saying that a 'painting-object performs', that is, equivalent to imagining paintings as personas.[98] The ability for a practice to perform its ongoing mattering (that fact that a practice matters) is not equivalent to the agency of the artist transmuted into the otherwise inanimate painting-object, as in Isabelle Graw's discussion of painting's *liveliness*. In Graw's writing, painting, 'regardless of its depiction or reference, […] will be perceived as a physical manifestation of its absent author. It is through the indexicality of painting that the absent author retains a ghostlike physical presence in the work.[99] This process - unique to painting in Graw's formation - results in some particularly nasty psycho-economic side-effects: 'buying artworks indeed comes close to buying people—and this is especially true for painting'.'[100]

A painting's ability to matter is also unable to be equated with the object's ability to 'step out' as its own set of idiosyncratic behaviours, and by imagining its histories and social networks as a kind of spatialised social life, as in Joselit's account. In fact, the move to diffraction means that the need to anthropomorphise painting as 'a bodily interlocuter' becomes irrelevant.[101] Matter is no longer a blank slate lying-in wait for the intellect

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[98] For a more in-depth examination of the history of this phenomenon as stemming from 1960's debates of American minimalist sculpture, see: Paul Smith, "Quasi-Subject Commodities- Labour, Minimalism, and the Social Life of Things", *Persona Studies*, Vol. 2 No.1 (2016): 70-83.

[99] Graw, "The Economy of Painting: Notes on the Vitality of a Success Medium and the Value of Liveliness", in *Painting beyond Itself: The Medium in Post-medium Condition*: 260-261, 260.

[100] Graw, "The Value of Painting: Notes on Unspecificity, Indexicality, and Highly Valuable Quasi-Persons," in Isabelle Graw, Daniel Birnbaum, and Nikolaus Hirsch (eds.), *Thinking through Painting: Reflexivity and Agency beyond the Canvas* (Frankfurt am Main: Sternberg Press, 2012): 45-47, 47.

[101] Cf. Joselit, "Painting Beside itself'. 128.

of the artist who is inherently separate, and neither need one uphold the humanist assumption of the givenness of autonomous subjects and objects that might stand before discourse. We know because we are *of* the world.[102] And not because knowing is a specifically human practice.

This is a far-reaching ethico-onto-epistemological project with broader implications for thinking and making art yet without designating this thesis as constituting a partial reading, since knowing is not the singular incarnation of the Idea, as it was for Deleuze.[103] In fact, for Deleuze, the world must always be 'regarded as a 'remainder'', and what is real in the world understood in terms of fractional or even incommensurable numbers.[104] Diffraction instead marks a fundamentally positive embrace of the world, which can be neither further reduced nor defined by a third external or transcendental position. Hence the next chapter will attend to a logic of *coherence* in painting practices that cannot transcend its presence, by which material conditions are no longer superfluous but are *what matters*. In this diffractive account, the important "work" of the work of art is no longer done "objectively" from "outside" of the frame whereby matter

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[102] Cf. 'The point is not simply to put the observer or knower back in the world (as if the world were a container and we needed merely to acknowledge our situatedness in it) but to understand and take account of the fact that we too are part of the world's differential becoming.' Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 91.

[103] Cf. 'To learn is to enter into the universal of the relations which constitute the Idea, and into their corresponding singularities. The idea of the sea, for

example, as Leibniz showed, is a system of liaisons or differential relations between particulars and singularities corresponding to the degrees of variation among these relations - the totality of the system being incarnated in the real movement of the waves. To learn to swim is to conjugate the distinctive points of our bodies with the singular points of the objective Idea in order to form a problematic field.' Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 165.

[104] Cf. 'Every phenomenon refers to an inequality by which it is conditioned.' Ibid., 222.

becomes a *mirage*, but intra-actively from within as a continuum of material-discursive practices.[105] Furthermore, by thinking of material and the discursive as a continuum, instead of opposing coordinates, we may finally put an end to distinction between "ideatic" and "retinal" painting going back to Duchamp.[106]

This thesis poses a notion of art based on diffraction and interference, rather than an image of representation. Art practices are no longer symptomatic of the ways in which a 'networked society' functions (prioritising painting's capacity for *assimilation*, *distribution*, and *de-specification*) but are intransitive.[107] As we will see, this no longer relies on a binary distribution of thought and matter, nor a privileged relationship with infinite possible. It might not be easy to hold these material-discursive

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[105] Critics such as Greenberg and Michael Fried, in an attempt to protect the autonomy of Modernist art, considered it essential to distinguish painting and sculpture from mere objects. To this end, Greenberg advocated an elimination of the tactile to create the appearance 'that matter is incorporeal, weightless, and exists only optically like a mirage.' Clement Greenberg, "The New Sculpture" [1949], in *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism, Vol. 2,* ed. John O'Brian (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988): 313-319. By the end of the 1960s, Conceptualism pushed this de-materialization even further whereby some sought to abolish the object completely to transcend to the realm of pure ideas. As Arthur C. Danto writes, 'objects [of art] approach zero as their theory approaches infinity, so that virtually all there is at the end *is* theory, art having finally become vaporized in a dazzle of pure thought about itself' - that is, 'art really is over with, having become transmuted into philosophy.' Arthur C. Danto, "The End of Art," *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005): 81-113, 111, 86.

[106] Duchamp summarises his position on "ideatic" painting thus: 'since Courbet, it's been believed that painting is addressed to the retina. That was everyone's error. The retinal shudder! Before, painting had other functions: it could be religious, philosophical, moral. If I had the chance to take an antiretinal attitude, it unfortunately hasn't changed much; our whole century is completely retinal, except for the Surrealists, who tried to go outside it somewhat. And still, they didn't go so far!' Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, trans. Ron Padgett (New York: Da Capo Press, 1987), 43.

[107] Joselit, "Painting Beside Itself".

notions in a world based in a general theoretical proposition, based in "facts", where relationships are quantified, and depend on hedging your bets, sweating your assets and those things that can be seen. Diffraction is no shorthand to what we already know, or to a recognisable style defined by immediacy and well-definability but requires *responsibility*. In a diffractive account there is no pure notion of painting, and no solutions, only heterogeneous diffraction patterns whereby art is not a medium (or post-medium) but an event, networked materialities that constitute the present without the possibility of reaching a totality. From such a perspective, we are always facing the beginning of a new art and not the end of art.

Fig. 2A

Fig. 2B

Chapter Three: The peculiar miracle

Painting never ceases to elaborate the conditions of painting and to try to show them through its own devices. It includes its own commentary. There is no painting, especially over the past century, that fails to paint the question: "What is painting?"
Jean-François Lyotard[1]

I try to never separate a proposition from the problematic path from which it resulted, situating it in an open-ended story, not concluding it. In a way, I am continuing an experience I had when I was very young. I always felt stories were too short, or too poor. What happens then?
Isabelle Stengers[2]

My work is not about encountering a fixed empirical problem, but a deciding of how much of an archaeologist you feel like being […]
Helen Marten[3]

3.1 **Serious Painters**

By taking account of Karen Barad's understanding of phenomena, the previous chapter installed the concept of networked materialities, whereby art practices emerge through intra-actions which are not reducible to pure ontological definitions.

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[1] Jean-François Lyotard, *What to Paint? Adami, Arakawa, Buren,* trans. Anthony Hudek, Vlad Ionescu and Peter W. Milne (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2012, 107.

[2] '[continued…] The first response was to feel sad, alone in an environment that was too easily satisfied. But now I ask: who is killing those stories? How do they kill them? In this way, you may criticize the operation of authority but from the point of view of what it is *doing.*' Isabelle Stengers in Martin Savransky and Isabelle Stengers, "Relearning the Art of Paying Attention: A Conversation", *SubStance*, Vol. 47, No. 1 (2018): 130-145, 131.

[3] Helen Marten, "Conceptual Textures", *Elephant,* Issue 26 (December 7, 2016), accessed March 22, 2023. https://elephant.art/conceptual-textures/.

The aim of this chapter is to begin to underpin an analysis of practice -
both my own and others' - through the concept of *the peculiar miracle*, which
accounts for the meaning of artworks as a material-discursive practice
entangled within broader contexts.[4] Building on this notion, this chapter will
further consider *paintings that remember others,* to account for contemporary
painting's re-interpreting of painting's histories. This will afford
reconsiderations of painterly cliché - discussed by Deleuze in *The Logic of
Sensation* - as well as the artist's relation to the interpretation of their work as
prolonging eroticism, considered through the works of Michael Krebber and
Laura Owens respectively.

As will be seen, what is of importance in this chapter is not detailing the
ways a practice is truly creative per se but examining the creative relation of
painting, its artists and its audiences within the cultural environment
engendered by digital technologies. Ilya Prigogine writes more broadly of the
risks for society of the digital era in an interview titled "Internet and Life" in
which he uses an analogy of 'blind ants' to warn of the dangers of large,
interconnected societies in which the role of the individual is diminished in
favour of the role of the society to which it is a part:

> There are small ant societies, a few hundreds as well as large
> ant societies that number in millions. The behaviour is
> different. In small ant societies each individual ant has an
> essential role, it is independent and finds food for itself. In large

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[4] This concept is not meant as a way of explaining *why* an artwork work*s*, since
artworks are intransitive (Cf. Chapter 2.), but rather to begin accounting for ways
that artworks might be effective and affecting outside of purely cerebral
contemplation which would arbitrarily separate the material from the discursive.

ant societies there are collective processes, the individual is less important. In many of these societies the ants are blind.[5]

In terms of the focus of this research, Prigogine alerts to the potential danger that artists and audiences might succumb to paradigms, presented by social media and the increased visibility of the art market, of what art by authority *already is*. As Prigogine writes, '[t]he Internet produces indeed mass culture, but we should not overlook that it may also decrease creativity because many people look for information and they have no time to think by themselves.'[6] This research confronts this risk but without taking on the contra-position that would require artists to retreat into reclusiveness (as in hermetic understandings of medium specificity for example). Rather, the situation calls for a certain kind of inhabiting of the present.

Paying attention to art practice is not a rational process. As Donald Schön wrote in *Educating the Reflective Practitioner*, 'the problems of real-world practice do not present themselves to practitioners as well-formed structures. Indeed, they tend not to present themselves as problems at all but as messy, indeterminate situations.'[7] These are not provisional problems which imply a lack of understanding, rather the problematic is first and foremost an

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[5] Ilya Prigogine, "Internet and Life*,"* in: *Is Future Given?* (New Jersey, London, Singapore, Hong Kong: World Scientific, 2003): 71-76, 73.

[6] Ibid., 73. This is not a new problem, but one that is trying again to be heard; Cf. Wassily Kandinsky's discussion of gallery visitors from 1910: '[w]ith cold eyes and indifferent mind the spectators regard the work. Connoisseurs admire the "skill" (as one admires a tightrope walker), enjoy the "quality of painting" (as one enjoys a pasty). But hungry souls go hungry away. The vulgar herd stroll through the rooms and pronounce the pictures "nice" or "splendid." Those who could speak have said nothing, those who could hear have heard nothing…' Wassily Kandinsky, *On the Spiritual in Art,* trans. Michael T. H. Sadler (Blackmask Online, 2002), 8, accessed March 25, 2023, http://www.public-library.uk/ebooks/22/92.pdf.

[7] Donald Schön, *Educating the Reflective Practitioner* (London and San Francisco: Jossey-Baas Publishers, 1987), 4.

invitation to think which, as Isabelle Stengers writes, emphasises our role in 'the imbroglio, perplexity and messiness of a worldly world, a world where we, our ideas and power relations, are not alone, were never alone, will never be alone'.[8]

Chapter 2's discussion of painting as networked materialities whereby the question moves from "if" something matters towards "how it matters" and "for whom", has further led this research to Stengers' discussion of the relativity of truth.[9] Stengers' inquiry was initially directed to the ways in which the practices of Science lay authoritative claims to the objective truth of the world. Stengers equates this with a kind of seriousness affecting scientific practices, which could only greet other kinds of practices (*non*-science) with a corrosive (ironic) laughter: 'a more lucid and more universal power to judge that assures [their] difference from those being studied'.[10] Turning this problem around, Stengers reformulates the certainty of the scientist as the 'truth of the relative', which takes account of the existence of cohabiting scientific practices which create equally valid yet radically diverging images of the universe. This is not because of a *lack* of certainty, which would claim this plurality as a weakness - the 'relativity of truth' - rather Stengers shows that absolute claims are impossible, which makes the present expressly finite.[11] Truth becomes a local event, which simultaneously distributes its objects and

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[8] Stengers, "Wondering about Materialism", in Graham Harman, Levi R. Bryant and Nick Srnicek (eds.), *The Speculative Turn: Continental Materialism and Realism* (Melbourne: Re.Press, 2011): 368-380, 371.

[9] Cf. Isabelle Stengers, "Irony and Humour," in *The Invention of Modern Science* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000): 57-70.

[10] Ibid., 65.

[11] Cf. Stengers and Prigogine, *The End of Certainty: Time, Chaos, and the New Laws of Nature* (New York, London, Toronto and Sydney: The Free Press, 1997.

subjects. The descriptions of scientific practices are therefore no longer transparent (representational) but inherently *creative* in their worlding of the world, a kind of productive fiction, which converges onto Barad's rejection of the dualism between tangible matter and "intangible" discourse whereby language also becomes material: 'the world is materialized differently through different practices.'[12] Thinking with Barad and Stengers, practices do not take place but make place. A new environment is made at the same moment that a new artwork is made; however, this is not the arbitrary "scrambling of code" but the production of contingent consequences in relation to the problems developed.[13] The question then becomes, how can one's practice contribute to constructing the present, and in what ways: '[i]f it fails, the fiction will remain a fiction. If it succeeds, the fiction will "make history." It will become part of new arguments and devices.'[14]

It is in light of Stengers' idea of practice as productive fiction that this chapter will install the concept of *the peculiar miracle* of the painting-encounter.[15] *The peculiar miracle* is understood as a kind of radical interest, or curiosity to the way that artworks cohere as heterogeneous material-discursive encounters to create productive problems. This discussion should not be thought of as

[12] Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2007), 89.

[13] The notion of "scrambling code" [*brouillage*] was put forward by Deleuze and Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus* to refer to a schizophrenic way of inhabiting the world which must always involve a deterritorialization, by recourse to the 'absolute limit'. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia,* trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 170.

[14] 'Stengers, "Another Look", 47.

[15] This concept can be understood as complementary, but not corollary, to Stengers' account of the event of truth in science as "an *It works*!" Stengers, *Cosmopolitics,* Vol.1, trans. Robert Bononno (London and Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 42.

applying Stengers' ideas as a readymade stamp onto my own concerns, but rather a thinking-with, of paying attention to what an interaction with Stengers may cultivate in my own foray into painting practice.

The initial aspect of my practice to be considered was my use of photographs and other found images as material resources for paintings, perhaps a returning point of contention for painters in the sense that 'we are image-makers and image-ridden.'[16] This chapter aims to productively respond to Deleuze's conclusion in *The Logic of Sensation* that 'most interesting cases' of painting are those where the painter integrates the photograph 'apart from any aesthetic value', whereby resemblance need only emerge through 'accidental and nonconforming means.'[17] Thinking with Barad and Stengers allows a reconsideration of a practice's "truth". Whereas for Deleuze the function of painting was to escape from representations of an independent reality - in a move towards transcendental difference (Supra Chapter 2), the 'humour of truth' or *peculiar miracle* points to a different understanding whereby painting practices intervene and contribute to meaning in the present. This is not "thought without image" as it was for Deleuze, but a *multiplication* of images: the 'production of *new relations that are added* to a situation already produced by a multiplicity of situations.'[18] Or in other words, the role of the painting might be understood as adding new moves to already

[16] Philip Guston [1960] in Clifford Ross (ed.), *Abstract Expressionism Creators and Critics* (New York: Abrams Publishers, 1990), 61.

[17] Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation,* trans. Daniel W. Smith (London and New York: Continuum, 2003),183, 98.

[18] Stengers, *Cosmopolitics,* Vol. 2, trans. Robert Bononno (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 33. Emphasis added.

complex patterns.[19] This is not based in displacing the Same elsewhere 'in more or less distorted form.'[20] The logic of painting as a purely imagistic and representational baseline of why an artwork *works* is not restored/sustained but must be considered in the light of broader questions about who this *works for*. As Stengers writes:

> Who is interested, how can one be interested, at what price, by what means and under what constraints - these are not secondary questions associated with the "diffusion" of knowledge. They are the ingredients of its identity, that is, the way in which it exists for others and the way in which it situates others.[21]

In this mode of thought, the distrust of the "figurative" after Modernism is itself a productive problem, where the risk one takes on is not a matter of making an audience *convinced* but a transformation of interests. This has helped situate a change in my attitude towards reference images and painterly processes since the start of this projectt, a change that I have more recently referred to as "internet folklore". This is not a concept that has been put to work in writing (in this thesis or elsewhere) but returns in the studio as part of ongoing material conversations whereby artistic choices have become pragmatics, as Stengers writes 'of making stories more risky, interesting,

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[19] Cf. Donna Haraway, "Playing String Figures with Companion Species", *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016): 9-29.

[20] Haraway, *Modest_Witness @ Second_Millenium. FemaleMan Meets_ OncoMouse* (New York and London: Routledge, 1997), 273.

[21] Stengers, *Cosmopolitics*. Vol.1, 27.

shareable, of producing effects which you cannot dominate but you can learn with and learn from.'[22]

An initial development of this thinking emerged in the making of *Fork Handles* (Fig. 3A), a relatively large painting (110 x 193 cm) made in 2020. The painting is dominated by a large, outstretched hand and four lit altar candles, painted in thin layers of oil, which abruptly fades out towards the bottom edge and is taken over by a small four panel cartoon made from a textured acrylic medium that requires pushing around the canvas like writing in wet sand. The sides of the canvas are painted in a fluorescent orange on the left side (Fig. 3C) and fluorescent green on the right side (Fig. 3D) The shape of the canvas emerges as a monolith of a smartphone screen, emphasised by a slightly grubby pooling of paint in the brushwork of the background. The description of this painting is not offered to explain the work by identifying a phenomenological appearance that belies a concrete meaning of what painting offers, rather the development of the work instead offered an intensification of sense of my own practice. The painting both represents and does not represent: the disembodied hand emerges by way of a speculation, as histories of hands extending and hands touching in Renaissance and Medieval paintings; the socio-political implications of the whiteness of flesh and of folds of fabric, the everlasting stillness of Vanitas; and yet also productively resonating with recent histories of digital advertising, the aestheticisation and dynamism of hands that sell watches or smartphones, of aggrandised tapping and swiping. And yet, despite working towards direct

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[22] Stengers in Stengers and Savransky, "Relearning the Art of Paying Attention", 131.

referents, the painting is not *about* candles or hands or smartphones, it is not *about* anything. Rather, these speculations mobilise simultaneously and autonomously as *matter which matters.*

This painting - more so than the paintings made before it – emerged as a *peculiar miracle.* It is far more materially convincing than its "idea" alone, it is an intensity that continues to be felt in thinking and making. The painting-encounter does not collapse into a single legible meaning, as in unbroken communication moving from A to B, rather it supports an impure or heterogeneous coherence of sense which is both sensual and material. An encounter with the work is a process of inhabiting these relations, through what Johnny Golding describes as the 'multiple listening-gathering gestures which produce in their attunement, the 'here', right 'now''.'[23] In this sense painting is not simply looked at, even as Bill Readings puts it so memorably 'as friction on the retina' but emerges as friction on the iterative patterning of the present.[24]

[23] Johnny Golding, "Fractal Philosophy: Attunement as the Task of Art" in *Deleuze and Contemporary Art*, edited by Stephen Zepke and Simon O'Sullivan (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010): 133-154, 148.

[24] Bill Readings, *Introducing Lyotard: Art and Politics* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), 9.

Fig. 3A

Fig. 3B

Fig. 3C

Fig. 3D

3.2 **Paintings that Remember Others**

Fig. 3E shows another artwork made later in this research project. For some, this painting will immediately recall Philip Guston's 1961 abstract work, *The Tale*.[25]

Fig. 3E

Following a brief introduction to the idea of the *peculiar miracle* of painting (to which I will return to in the next section), and considering Deleuze's discussion of painterly cliché, I would like to provocatively claim that what

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[25] Cf. Guston, *The Tale* (1961), oil on canvas, 173.4 x 182.9 cm. Anderson Collection at Stanhope University. © The Estate of Philip Guston.

has been made here (Fig. 3E) is not a "remake" in order to interpret or make some critical comment on the Guston and neither is it cliché. Nor is the material evidence of the artist's gall to "paint a Guston" on a scrap of cardboard (which, incidentally, once formed the backboard of a stack of tear-off palettes). Rather, it is an altogether peculiar (and unplanned) situation.

To help discuss this oddity this chapter will now consider the concept of *paintings that remember others*.[26] This concept resists the simplistic notion that this (Fig. 3E) is an object made by working in paint on cardboard (medium) with the found image of the Guston to provide a fixed frame of reference for the work. This would collapse the heterogeneity and peculiarity involved in making and inhabiting the present into the binary separation of form and content: an a priori linear history of painting and the representative skill of the artist, whereby material becomes transparent.

Re-membering is not reducible to the new *compared* to the old which would imply a spatialisation of time, but requires thinking from the present, embracing that '"[t]his" and "that," "here" and "now," don't pre-exist what happens but come alive with each meeting.'[27] This refutes a classic image of time as absolute background by which the artist "steps-in", offering an interpretation of what has been (linear trajectory). Neither is it a transcending of the conditions of history as 'that [which] one leaves behind in order to "become," that is, to create something new.'[28] Instead, *paintings that remember others* aim to make evident that painting practices are always in continua,

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[26] This remembering should explicitly not be grasped as *recognition* or *recollection* on the part of the viewer, as in arbitrarily seeing in the face of a passing stranger a glimmer of a friend which would make the painting arbitrary and subjective.

[27] Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway,* 396.

[28] Deleuze, *Negotiations* (New York: Columbia University Press 1995), 170-171.

embedded in material-discursive networks (*networked materialities*, supra: Chapter 2) whereby time emerges locally as part of the phenomena. The skill of the artist is not in accurately representing, but in inhabiting these diffractive intra-relations in order to make new relevance. This must involve attuning and *re-membering* other histories of painting, which is not conceptual (implying dematerialisation) but 'attends to specific material entanglements.'[29] This other is never totally separate, whereby a practice reaches out to something outside of itself, but itself emerges as part of a decision (a 'cut' or 'boundary-making device' in Barad's terms) in which the new painting, the Guston, and the artist/audience are simultaneously implicated in one breath.[30] Re-membering is not, therefore, a move happening cerebrally in the confines of the mind at all – whether of the artist or the viewer - as Barad makes clear:

> Memory does not reside in the folds of individual brains; rather, memory is the enfoldings of space-time-matter written into the universe, or better, the enfolded articulations of the universe in its mattering.[31]

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[29] Ibid., 88. The wording of remembering as "re-membering" is a notion put forward by Barad in this volume in relation to a discussion of the brittlestar, Cf. "Chapter 7: Quantum Entanglements: Experimental Metaphysics and the Nature of Nature", Ibid.: 247-352. 'Re-membering' is also mentioned in the following papers: Barad, "Transmaterialities: Trans*/Matter/Realities and Queer Political Imaginings", *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies,* Vol. 21, No.2-3 (2015): 387-422, 406-407; and Barad, Rick Dolphijn and Iris van der Tuin, "Matter feels, converses, suffers, desires, yearns and remembers: Interview with Karen Barad", in *New Materialism: Interviews & Cartographies* (Ann Arbor, MI: Open Humanities Press, 2012): 48–70.

[30] Barad's agential 'cut' "undercuts" the inherent determinism of the Cartesian cut between subject and object towards a notion of boundaries which are enacted rather than inherent. That is, one can no longer take for granted the

delineation of the "object" and "agencies of observation", which reconstitutes the "inside" boundary as an object of analysis. Cf. "Part II: Intra-Actions Matter" in *Meeting the Universe Halfway,* 97-188.

[31] Ibid., ix.

In this way, the past is not finished but emerges through our intra-actions with the world. Memory does not look backwards but always forwards, towards new situations, increasing in information. The past is considered for its relevance in the present. Hence the Guston *matters* in the encounter of the artwork (Fig. 3E), not in the way that it exists as ultimate canon, but neither has it been demoted to only mattering when the occasion calls for it, as in Heidegger's standing reserve.[32] Rather the present emerges, and keeps emerging, as entangled materialisations in productive friction with painting's histories to which it is a/part. The present cannot be identified as a point in the linearity of history, instead each event augments those that come before and after, 'not a continuous mutation of what was or the unravelling of what will be […] but the iterative differentiatings of spacetimemattering.'[33]

Artists' works are not made in a vacuum, rather our works and actions are materially agglomerative, a process of worlding, which frees artists from discussions of legitimacy based on claims of originality towards discussions of relevance and mattering. The notion that paintings *remember others* aims to bring to light is that activities are not original (or hackneyed) ideas of the artist

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[32] Cf. 'Today all things are being swept together into a vast network in which their only meaning lies in their being available to serve some end that will itself also be directed toward getting every-thing under control. Heidegger calls this fundamentally un-differentiated supply of the available the "standing-reserve." William Lovitt, "Introduction", in Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays* (London and New York, 1977), xxix. Cf. Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology", Ibid., 3-35.

[33] Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 179. Scale of space and time do not pre-exist in Barad's account but are iteratively reconfigured as 'space-time-mattering', which was the subject of Barad's keynote speech at Duke University in 2014; Cf. Barad, "Re-membering the Future, Re(con)figuring the Past—Temporality, Materiality, and Justice-to-Come", Keynote speech at the 8th Annual Feminist Theory Workshop at the Women's Studies Department of Duke University, filmed September 3, 2014. Video of lecture, 1:05:52. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cS7szDFwXyg&t=2s.

forced onto matter but are Stengers 'what the present enables you to add to the truths you intervene upon', moving the question from a reflexive consideration of painting's representation of an a-temporal a priori, to a diffractive logic of relevance for the future for what might happen in it.[34]

These situations are relevant in the ways in which they produce a solution to a problem, in the understanding that 'the function of solutions is not to make problems disappear but to invent forms of developing them.'[35] This is not a flippant or post-modern claim of making based in a logic of "because you can", a kind of ironic consumption which 'claims that there is nothing new under the sun'. [36] Rather this requires a responsibility and careful attention to the kinds of solutions one is able to produce (considered further in the next chapter). Since re-membering is not a phenomenological situation between artist and canvas which would 'replay of a string of moments, but [is] an enlivening and reconfiguring of past and future that is larger than any individual.'[37] The skill involved in these kinds of works is not in accurately representing but in "sticking the landing" which, in my own peculiar situation (Fig. 3E) cannot be divorced from the various ad hoc aspects of the work - the relatively small size, the way in which the cardboard is peeling at the edge, the faint pencil line which marks out the delineation where the painting begins and the cardboard "ends". These are not superficialities, secondary to the

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[34] Stengers, in Stengers and Savransky, "Relearning the Art of Paying Attention: A Conversation" *SubStance*, Vol. 47, No. 1 (2018): 130-145, 133. As in Barad's discussion of Biomimesis in *Meeting the Universe Halfway,* emergence is not about making copies but about enacting new cuts and reconfiguring entanglements. Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway,* 384.

[35] Savransky, "The Humour of the Problematic: Thinking with Stengers", 42.

[36] Cf. Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, trans. Mark Lester (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 135-41.

[37] Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, ix.

meaning of the work but are "the is"; the work functions because of, and not despite, these aspects, and always in relation to its position in an ecology of practices, whereby it productively diffracts other paintings in my "oeuvre."[38]

Furthermore, the ability to create such a painting (as Fig. 3E) is perhaps a direct implication of the digitisation of artworks by museums and galleries, an era for painters 'in which instant access to images of artwork from all points on the historical timeline is not just a phenomenon but a given.'[39] Much of the discussion of the implications of "post-internet" painting is in response to this ease of use, by which 'painters do not simply invent their paintings from scratch but reassemble in individual canvases already-existing art histories.'[40] The contribution of this chapter is in offering a new way to think through these contemporary painting practices - which includes their recuperation and reformatting of previous techniques, images and ideas - as creative, but not without responsibility. This line of thought is not devised in order to throw a conceptual lifeline to the painter that would free them from a tight spot by way of conceptual justification. Rather it invites an even more intense scrutiny to the ways in which paintings re-member by remaining in the "now" of the work, instead of being deferred elsewhere (in considerations of technical skill

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[38] Cf. 'An ecology of practices does not have any ambition to describe practices 'as they are'; it resists the master word of a progress that would justify their destruction. It aims at the construction of new 'practical identities' for practices, that is, new possibilities for them to be present, or in other words to connect. It thus does not approach practices as they are - physics as we know it, for instance - but as they may become.' Stengers, "Introductory Notes on an Ecology of Practices", *Cultural Studies Review* 11(1) (January 2005):183-196, 186.

[39] Glenn D. Lowry, "Foreword", in Laura Hoptman, *The Forever Now: Contemporary Painting in an Atemporal World* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2015):6-7, 6.

[40] Cf. Manuela Ammer, Achim Hochdörfer, and David Joselit, "Introduction" in Manuela Ammer, Achim Hochdörfer and David Joselit (eds.), *Painting 2.0: Expression in the Information Age,* (London, Munich and New York: Prestel, 2016): 10-11, 10.

for example). This enlivens an ability to reimagine and re-member art's histories without feeling imprisoned by them, and without looking for a gap in which one might "fit". This does not mean that painting has become atemporal, as some discourses imply, whereby painting 'contains elements of history but isn't historical; it is innovative but not novel'.[41] Rather *paintings that remember* others create new creative-critical problems which emerge by way of their relevance: 'imaginaries with material existences in the thick now of the present-imaginaries that are attuned to the condensations of past and future condensed in each moment.'[42]

This understanding therefore reimagines the painterly cliché so maligned by Deleuze in *The Logic of Sensation*, whereby any attempt to *re-member,* to interact with painting's histories would remain too intellectual, since '[e]very imitator has always made the cliche rise up again, even from what had been freed from the cliche.'[43] As Deleuze writes: '[o]nly when one leaves [clichés] behind, through rejection, can the work begin.'[44] The goal is no longer how to step out of paradigm of reflection and recognition, amounting to Deleuze's hostility towards the 'intentional form', which could only cast aspersions over painting's reformatting of images or concepts.

What *paintings that remember others* offers is a positive account of practice, proposing a way out of an enduring line of thought whereby ideas or images would be considered (as John Kelsey writes) 'a structural base giving rise to

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[41] Laura Hoptman, "The Forever Now: Contemporary Painting in an Atemporal World": 13-62, 14.,

[42] Barad, "Trans*/Matter/Realities, 388.

[43] Deleuze, *The Logic of Sensation,* 89.

[44] Ibid., 92.

towers of paint, or a false bottom, ensuring that the painting will always be confused with and undermined by something else, and never totally itself.'[45] Rather, when played with poetically, painting is a process in which 'matter regularly *becomes other matter* that may not completely nor singularly *be* itself'.[46]

Painting need not exist as framed by an enduring negative - *how to get out of the canvas in which one finds oneself.* [47] The approach outlined here affords a positive account whereby the artist takes on clichés as productive and creative problems. Clichés do not act as a baseline of recognition from which one must escape but are productively made and remade in the feedback loop of practices. In fact, the notion of cliché - when played with poetically - can also provide the material of an entire practice, as evidenced by the work of Michael Krebber.

Kelsey writes of Krebber's practice in an *Artforum* review titled "Stop Painting Painting":

> Krebber has famously declared his own lack of ideas, since anything good he might think of has already been thought before (his idea is to not have an idea).'[48]

Krebber's practice is then to work as a strategist, in the ways that his paintings are sparsely constructed and presented in gallery space, through hesitancy and expectancy which becomes radically material (Fig. 3F). Sparseness needs no

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[45] John Kelsey, "Collage and Program (Rise of the Readymetal Maidens)", in *Rich Texts: Selected Writings for Art* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2010)*,* 55-63, 55.

[46] Rebecca Schneider, "New materialisms and Performance Studies" in *The Drama Review*, Vol. 59, No. 4 (Winter 2015): 7-17, 14.

[47] Cf. 'An entire battle takes place on the canvas between the painter and these givens.' Deleuze, *The Logic of Sensation,* 99.

[48] Kelsey, Stop Painting Painting". *Artforum,* (October 2005): 222-225, 222.

longer imply the dematerialisation of conceptualism, whereby matter and

discourse would be thought of as static elements only subsequently entering a

relationship.[49] Krebber's sparseness *matters*, without implying a material void

to be filled with interpretation. The efficacy of Krebber's move is not in the

way that he cleverly *echoes* a particular model or idea, but in the way in which

he finds strategies of *re-membering* the images and ideas of painting's histories

and making them productively resonate with clichés of the role of the artist.

As Kelsey writes:

> Krebber keeps finding ways of reminding us that it's not only
> that artists produce paintings, but that *paintings produce artists*
> (and viewers, reviewers, dealers, collectors), and this is the
> productive relation that must sometimes be interrupted if we
> too are to have a hand in our own making.[50]

Krebber's practice is a situated knowledge, evidencing 'condensations or

traces of multiple practices of engagement.'[51] *Painting that remember others*

emphasises the dynamic nature of such practices that engage with eachother

in 'reconfigurings of which we are a part.'[52]

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[49] Cf. Lucy Lippard, *Six Years: The dematerialization of the art object from 1966 to 1972* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2001).

[50] Kelsey, "Stop Painting Painting", 225.

[51] Cf. Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 3 (1988): 575-599. Barad, Meeting the Universe Halfway, 53.

[52] Ibid., 93.

Fig. 3F

3.3 **Prolonging Eroticism**

Krebber's work further points to a questioning of the role of the artist in a world in which the completion of paintings is only a first step in a greater entangled context of cultural circulation and dissemination.[53] This research, therefore, finds what happens once a painting leaves the studio to be crucial, and unable to be overlooked for the ways in which it might materialise as part of further intensive situations which in Stengers' words: 'challenges business-as-usual explanatory frameworks.'[54] Emphasis must be placed on retaining -

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[53] Matias Faldbakken points to this in his discussion of the "aura" created by exhibition photography: '[l]ike photos from parties you didn't attend. Places you haven't been. Times before you were born. You missed something, and that adds something.' Matias Faldbakken, "Show Hidden Characters: Helen Marten", *Mousse* Vol. 28 (April–May 2011): 192-199.

[54] Stengers, "Relearning the Art of Paying Attention", 133. Unfortunately, this is not something that my own painting practice has been able to grapple with to any sufficient extent. This must partly be considered in light of the disruptions bought on by the Covid-19 pandemic during this PhD research, which cancelled many of my own exhibition plans and lessened the possibility of further opportunities.

or iteratively performing - the sensuousness of a practice by avoiding languages and situations which would grant them the power to explain it, 'denuding it of a wider intelligibility'.[55] The naming of artworks has always been pivotal to this process, where a label functions as the first moment of intimacy in an entanglement with a work, rather than as a system of designation.

To avoid practices being neutralised into generalities, the artist might offer, as Stengers writes, 'other kinds of narratives, narratives that populate our world and imaginations in a different way'.[56] In this respect, this research has turned to artists such as Mike Kelley and Helen Marten, for whom writing is not a superfluous activity but intrinsic to practice.[57] As Marten writes, the processes of making, writing, drawing and thinking are 'component pieces […] in a similar manner to parts on a game board - they're circuitry, and they

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However, this interest has been sustained in the research presented here, as well as through my involvement in other events including *Entanglement: Just Gaming,* an RCA SoAH Research Platform Online Event (June 25, 2020) arranged by Professor Johnny Golding, in which I organised an interactive digital painting session using *Aggie.io,* a real-time collaborative in-browser painting application, whereby participants could paint together whilst simultaneously listening to the presentations of the presenters. Cf. https://aggie.io/.

[55] "03_06_Lexicon" in Golding, Martin Reinhart, and Mattia Paganelli (eds.), *Data Loam: Sometimes Hard, Usually Soft: The Future of Knowledge Systems* (Berlin and Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2020, 344. It was not that long ago that painting, and the teaching of painting, was firmly tied to systems of thought. Students were "taught to paint" through a particular School, if they were allowed to paint at all. This thesis firmly refutes the notion of a painting-object with inherent meaning, as well as imperatives to "think painting properly", if that thinking lies in accepting consensual and conventional purposes, to be made to *understand* what painting is doing.

[56] 'Stengers, "Wondering about Materialism", 371.

[57] Cf. Mike Kelley, *Foul Perfection: Essays and Criticism,* ed. John C. Welchman. (Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 2003)); and Helen Marten, *Drunk Brown House,* ed. Hans Ulrich Obrist (London: Serpentine Galleries and Koenig Books, 2016).

need one another to function.'[58] This is also key to my own understanding of the role of this thesis, which is not interested in "best practice" of representing or distilling my ideas but in creating productive fictions which matter.

Both Marten and Kelley's practices firmly demonstrate the power of writing as a productive defence against 'a conquering gaze from nowhere', in Haraway's terms, which would claim absolute power over how practices are understood.[59] It was Kelley's understanding that '[i]f you don't write your own history, someone else will, and this 'history' will suit their purposes': writing therefore becomes a direct antagonism of the "canon".[60] This kind of writing has nothing to do with providing biographical anecdotes or telling the "real truth" of the artwork, but might be best understood, in Kelley's words, as ways of 'prolonging the eroticism of the viewing experience'.[61]

This section develops this notion as a useful way to consider artists' use of techno-cultural structures – such as gallery websites - not as models for reflexive dissemination but as opportunities for further speculative and creative engagement, whereby these structures are more than a necessary evil, but beneficially contribute to knowledge-making practices.[62] Kelsey speaks of

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[58] Marten, "Conceptual Textures", *Elephant,* Issue 26 (December 7, 2016), accessed March 22, 2023, https://elephant.art/conceptual-textures/.

[59] Haraway, "Situated Knowledges, 581.

[60] Mike Kelley in Graw, "Interview: Isabelle Graw in Conversation with Mike Kelley", in Welchman, *Mike Kelley* (London: Phaidon, 1999): 6-41, 10.

[61] Ibid.

[62] This attempts to offer a useful counterpoint to Michael Sanchez's essay "Art and Transmission" which argues that the critical legitimisation offered by galleries has now dwindled into 'simple visibility' due to the use of social media. Cf. Michael Sanchez, "2011: Michael Sanchez on Art and Transmission", *Artforum,* (Summer 2013), 295-301, 297; Kelsey "The Sext Life of Painting" in *Painting 2.0: Expression in the Information Age,* eds. Manuela Ammer, Achim Hochdörfer and David Joselit (London, Munich and New York: Prestel, 2016): 268-270.det

the problems of painting's neutralisation in his essay "Big Joy Time", in which he describes 'the work of seeing' as 'ever more efficiently compressed into the production of a *recognised now* (which works by remaining somehow blind to its own work and to how we are implicated in it)'.[63] On the other hand, an emphasis on *prolonging eroticism* calls for situations which are 'experiential and not definitional', which might further offer differential understandings of experience itself, as part of a 'complex network of human and nonhuman agents.'[64]

Fig. 3G

Fig. 3G shows an installation image of Laura Owens' self-titled solo show at Sadie Coles HQ, London (October 5 – December 17, 2016). In lieu of an

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[63] Kelsey, "Big Joy Time" in *Rich Texts*: 33-42, 34. Emphasis added. Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 23.

[64] Kelley in Graw, "Isabelle Graw in Conversation with Mike Kelley", 10.

orthodox exhibition guide, gallery visitors were directed to a webpage - *why11.com* - offering an unassuming dropdown menu which invited the visitor to "Select a Painting" from 45 options, somewhat erratically numbered, corresponding to the number of works in the show.[65] Each option (see Fig. 3I) offers a partial close-up image of one of Owens' paintings along with an embedded .mp3. These audio clips offer snippets of discussions pertaining to anecdotal or technical accounts of the making of the paintings, in voices that are unspecified (presumably Owens' studio assistants), spoken by text-to-speech generators, or occasionally the voice of Owens herself. These audio clips rotate between images so that the combination of audio and image is not always the same.

Fig. 3H

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[65] Cf. Laura Owens, http://why11.com/, accessed March 26, 2023.

Fig. 3I
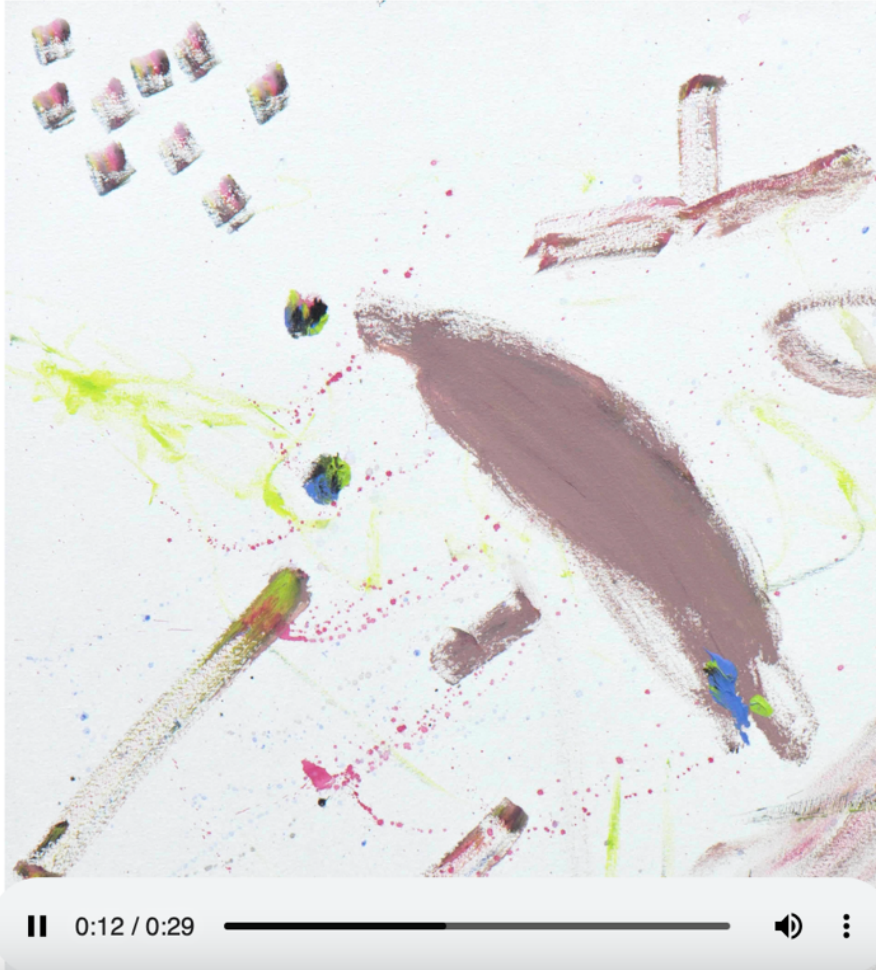
Owens' webpage does not reveal the truth of the work by putting into relation separate entities - works and words, or words and situations - whereby meaning-making is an epistemological matter between object and subject. The ability for the artist to freely move between audio descriptions and paintings is not a matter of extending the meaning of artworks into infinite discursive speculation (retaining a ground where discussion becomes a limit of the world).

Rather, as Owens has commented of her work 'the painting keeps making itself less locatable within the rectangular surface of the canvas'.[66] The meaning of the work is therefore not a matter of information passing from A to B but emerges as an intensity, 'a capacity to be affected'.[67] Owens has previously spoken of how 'a large part of the work is what happens between paintings', but in the account offered here, this "betweenness" is not a gap emerging in relation to the paintings, the webpage and the viewer, in which the viewer might contemplatively dwell.[68] Meaning is not found in a productive vagueness between audience and work, but materialises as a complex network of human and non-human agents, '[w]ithout distinct edges or boundaries, though distinct nevertheless.'[69]

In her studio-discursive-computer-painting encounter, Owens offers a posthuman understanding of painting practice, which goes decidedly further than thinking technology as 'ready to hand' in service of the work.[70] Rather the installation emerges as a situation whereby the notion of painting as a purely human practice (i.e. the hand of the artist) becomes unfixed and one is forced to consider the paintings in a different way. There is no clear-cut

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[66] Laura Owens in Anthony Huberman, "Laura Owens: In Conversation with Anthony Huberman", *Los Angeles Art Quarterly,* Issue 1 (September 20, 2016), accessed March 20, 2023, https://www.sfaq.us/2016/09/laura-owens-in-conversation-with-anthony-huberman/.

[67] Stengers, *The Invention of Modern Science,* 147.

[68] Owens in Phyllis Tuchman, "The Sky Is the Limit: Laura Owens Is in Top Form in Superb Whitney Museum Retrospective", *ARTnews* (January 4, 2018), accessed March 20, 2023, https://www.artnews.com/art-news/reviews/sky-limit-laura-owens-top-form-superb-whitney-museum-retrospective-9592/.

[69] Sue (Johnny) Golding, "Breaking the [honour] code": ex-, post-, digi-facto A Few Assumptions", *parallax,* Vol. 5, No. 4 (1999): 26-37, 28.

[70] Cf. Martin Heidegger, "III. The Worldliness of the World" in *Being and Time,* trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1996): 59-106.

opposition between human and non-human but 'a hybrid of machine and organism'.[71] This is not simply the human entangled with the nonhuman ('subjugated interaction') but amounts to a 'differential responsiveness', as Stengers writes: 'in a double creation of meaning, of oneself and the world'.[72]

The creative work therefore belongs to the audience, as much as the artist, who do not rest but play an active role in meaning-making, not through mere contemplation but as components within an ongoing boundary-making practice, where meaning 'is not a property of individual words or groups of words [or of objects and words] but an ongoing performance of the world in its differential dance of intelligibility and unintelligibility': this includes (but it not limited to) the tone of the voices in the audio recordings, the texture and colour of the paintings, the electronic circuitry and the physical space.[73]

Or in other words, the work does not stop with the paintings or their phenomenological-experiential consideration but emerges as one series, as a sensuous process of *prolonging eroticism*, in which the viewer is implicated as part of the ongoing thinking-making-organisation of the work. As voiced in the audio-guide, this leaves the audience 'unsure what was really happening throughout this painting. It seemed like a lot of things were being decided as we went […]. But then another painting was made.'[74]

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[71] Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century", *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York; Routledge, 1991):.149-181, 149.

[72] Stengers, *The Invention of Modern Science*, 147.

[73] Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 149

[74] "Painting 031" mp3 file, transcript my own. Accessed March 26, 2023, Owens, http://why11.com/. Note: this comment was originally made by one of Owens' studio assistants concerning the material making of the work in the studio.

In this way, painting practices are not superficial or self-serving but are understood based on their "objective" relevance, how they might *matter* for the present.[75] The fact that painting practices continue to emerge in such a way – which relates to the artist but is not confined by them, and also includes their relationships with technologies - is what is defined here as *the peculiar miracle*.

In conclusion, the meaning of painting is not based in communication, but rather involves an erotics of thought. The artist's role might also be found in prolonging this eroticism, whereby knowledge is understood not as a closed practice but an ongoing performance of the world. What is important - aforementioned by Prigogine in the introduction of this chapter - is education, 'permanent education'.[76] *Paintings that remember others* are open to reinventions with "other givens", clichés, histories and nonhuman agencies.

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[75] Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway,* 89-90.

[76] Prigogine, "Life and the Internet", 74.

Chapter Four: A Giddiness Born of Rules

Most art being made can be divided into two categories. The first has a passively angry stance against those who would question "What is art?" It can be easily found, quietly receding, mistaking art for something static instead of the moving target that it is. The second is art that does ask this question. You will often find it trying to activate existing limitations, questioning conventional wisdom, and calling on the dynamics of engagement in order to move conversations.

Laura Owens[1]

What is learning to laugh again? It is relearning a laugh which would not be the irony and derision which always avoids risk-taking, going beyond the differences to recognise the same.

Isabelle Stengers.[2]

What looks good today may not look good tomorrow.

Michel Majerus[3]

4.1 **Sorry drips**

The previous chapter discussed *the peculiar miracle* as way to highlight the ways in which practices are ongoing and sensuous material situations that *matter*. Building on this, Chapter four looks a little more closely at the role of experimentation, as well as the material methods of my own practice, and at what have led to the theoretical realisations that have further defined this research. Hence, this chapter begins with a small but not insignificant detail: the drip (Fig. 4A). Taken in a representational mode, the ability for a drip to attract the attention of the artist must only be to single it out as a mistake; an area in which the painting does not

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[1] Laura Owens, "Artist's Favourites", *Spike* #64 (Summer 2020), 16-21, 16.

[2] Isabelle Stengers, "Another Look: Relearning to Laugh", trans. Penelope Deutscher, in *Hypatia*, Vol. 15, No. 4, (2000): 41-54, 52.

[3] Cf. Michel Majerus, *what looks good today may not look good tomorrow* (2000), acrylic and pencil on canvas, 303.1 x 341 cm. MoMA. © Estate of Michel Majerus.

resemble its external model, making the drip-in-itself a formal problem, a fundamental error, requiring a negation through covering up or blotting out. If the artist chooses this path, it will be to affirm a failing of the material in favour of the "truth" of the idea.

Fig. 4A

This drip might otherwise point to the re-emergence of essentialising ideas of painting as medium (as refuted in the introduction of this thesis).

This would anaesthetise the singular event, hollowing it out, making it a mere example of the "facts" of painting, externally written. All that is happening in this case is the witnessing of the inherent properties of painting playing out on the canvas, whereby painting would become a self-referential exercise.

Deleuze affirms a far more sensuous approach when he writes of the "free marks" of Francis Bacon in *The Logic of Sensation.* These marks occur by accidental or involuntary means and hence are "nonrepresentative", serving to destroy figuration, in favour of the figural:

> These marks are accidental, "by chance"; but clearly the same word, "chance", no longer designates probabilities, but now designates a type of choice or action without probability.[4]

The drip confronts the artist with a consideration of chance, a situation which is partly out of the artist's hands. Deleuze and Guattari detail an intrinsic relation between the creative and the role of chance in *What is Philosophy?* claiming that art functions 'close to chaos', which accounts for its experimentational nature.[5] The role of the artist is 'to introduce chaos, the chaos germ […] which will define the possibility of the pictorial fact'.[6]

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[4] Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, trans. Daniel W. Smith (London and New York: Continuum, 2003), 94. Cf. It is *manipulated chance,* as opposed to *conceived or seen probabilities.*' Ibid.

[5] Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy*? trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchill (London: Verso, 1994), 127.

[6] Deleuze, "Painting and the Question of Concepts," trans. Alina Cherry, Second Lecture given at Paris 8 University Vincennes-Saint-Denis (April 7, 1981), accessed March 10, 2023, https://deleuze.cla.purdue.edu/seminars/painting-and-question-concepts/lecture-02.

The figural (or pictorial fact) is hence always a kind of distortion and this is important because it breaks open the territory of recognition, of 'organised mindlessness', in which thought would be dictated by the image of the Same.[7]

For Deleuze, it is this confrontation with chaos that frees the artist from their proclivity towards clichéd representations - the 'pre-pictorial givens' - and accounts for the radically new.[8] The differential introduction of chaos in the creative act is what Deleuze defines as responsible for painterly style. Modernist abstraction - the works of Mondrian, Kandinsky, Klee, and others - are understood as functioning as a kind of "reduction" or "codification" of chaos.[9] The earlier Abstract Expressionist practices - as exemplified by Pollock in Deleuze's discussion - are understood as chaos 'deployed to the maximum'.[10]

What is important for this discussion is that Deleuze delineates chaos as 'the threshold of suspension of the infinite', which may only be grasped via a kind of sublime intuition decidedly beyond the senses: a realm without

[7] Deleuze, "On the Time-Image", in *Negotiations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995): 57-61, 60.

[8] For the 'pre-pictorial phase', see: Deleuze, *The Logic of Sensation* 86-90. Deleuze's notion of cliche was refuted in the previous chapter, however it briefly returns in this chapter in order to address the lingering issue of the role of chance in the means of production of painting.

[9] Deleuze, *Negotiations,* 103, 104.

[10] It should be noted that for Deleuze, neither of these approaches are entirely successful, since in abstraction '[t]he code is inevitably cerebral and lacks sensation, [it lacks] the essential reality of the fall, that is, the direct action upon the nervous system' (*optical*) and the 'all-over' (*manual*) diagram of Pollock creates in Bacon's words, a 'veritable "mess."' Ibid., 68, 109. For 'all-over painting', see: Clement Greenberg, "The Crisis of the Easel Picture" [1948], in John O'Brian (ed.) *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism, Vol. 2* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 221-225.

'consistency or reference, without consequence'.[11] Deleuze is the most explicit in this when he writes (with Guattari) that:

> [t]he artist brings back from the chaos varieties that no longer constitute a reproduction of the sensory in the organ but set up a being of the sensory, a being of sensation, on an anorganic plane of composition that is able to restore the infinite.[12]

It is in this way that, as Catherine Ferguson points out, painting is 'not a matter of comparison within a closed set of alternatives measured as more or less different by an external concept of 'painting' but the expression of difference itself.'[13] However, despite Deleuze's assertion that the works of 'great painters' - such as Francis Bacon – do not 'claim to dictate universal solutions', they emerge via this same ontological move: by way of a continuity posed between the present and the limit.[14] As previously argued in this thesis (supra "Chapter 2.2 Becoming-internet), this is unsatisfactory since the act of painting can only make sense in relation to this horizon, its sensuality always beholden to it, despite its liberation from identity.

This chapter attends to the role of chance in painting in a different way. Deleuze's interpretation that chaos is 'a void that is not a nothingness but a virtual' is a misnomer, since it relies on a common-sense

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[11] Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* 119, 118.

[12] Ibid., 202- 203. Cf. 'Art wants to create the finite that restores the infinite: it lays out a plane of composition that, in turn, through the action of aesthetic figures, bears monuments or composite sensations.' Ibid., 197.

[13] Catherine Ferguson, "Painting, Deleuze and the Art of 'Surface Effects'" (PhD thesis, Manchester Metropolitan University, 2007), 33.

[14] Deleuze, *The Logic of Sensation*, 93.

understanding of chaos and an "edge" which separates order from disorder.[15] Chaos and complexity theory is not the study of total disorder, but of iterations that produce complex, unpredictable results: an unpredictable order from which patterns emerge over time. This *patterning* is important: it implies a history, a rhythm. In this sense, we may always predict probabilities, but not actual events.[16] A purely ontological explanation of chaos - as in Deleuze and Guattari's picturing - cannot stand, as Mattia Paganelli makes clear, 'not because chance has no play in the emergence of the organisation of the present, but because projecting [chaos] as the ultimate is an operation internal to the very paradigm of linear ontology that chaotic behaviours undermine, and therefore cannot be adopted as their explanation.'[17] Chaotic behaviour revokes the assurance of an ultimate proposition, whether as a reduction towards the identity or idealisation towards pure difference.

Therefore, it is not that sometimes things go to plan (order, recognition) and sometimes chance takes over (chaos, difference). In fact, it is no longer a question of the difference between predictable and unpredictable which would still see the present 'distributed in a conceptual space.'[18] What has been lost in this reconsideration of chaos is the idea that creative events are in productive relation with a realm of pure difference,

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[15] Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* 118.

[16] Cf. Ilya Prigogine and Stengers, *Order out of Chaos: Man's New Dialogue with Nature* (New York: Bantam Books, 1984), 227.

[17] Mattia Paganelli, "Finitude, Possibility, Dimensionality; Aesthetics After Complexity" (PhD thesis: Birmingham City University, 2016), 85. For a discussion of how the principle of non-integrability requires the impossibility of totalisation or ontological reduction in non-linear systems, see Paganelli's subchapter "2.5 Prigogine, Finitude and the Image of Time', Ibid.: 58-84.

[18] Ibid., 85.

in a way that would make them a world unto themselves.[19] This is not due to a *lack* of certainty, which would claim this as a weakness, rather absolute claims are impossible, which makes the present expressly finite.[20] What this understanding makes evident is that an artwork cannot be understood in its functioning towards the absolute (even if that meaning is not a priori but undetermined difference itself), which necessitates a move from the relation of the present and the ultimate to the relevance of conditions.

The drip must now be rethought, not as the expression of pure ontologised chaos, but as the 'sorry drip', a term used by Helen Marten:

> '[a] drip – of paint, of piss, of ice – is treacherous, but really
> sorry too. It is pure tragicomedy.'[21]

This is not attributing subjectivity to the drip, as in discussions of painting as 'quasi-personhood' dispelled in Chapter 2.[22] What Marten's wording makes evident in the light of this discussion is that the drip is able to be anticipated as a possibility but not as an actual event. This is a small but vital difference. When it emerges, the drip is not "sorry" because it has scuppered the artist's ideal plans or acted out of turn. Rather the

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[19] Cf. 'It is like the emergence of another world.' Deleuze, *The Logic of Sensation*, 100.

[20] This was also the outcome of Stengers' discussion of the 'truth of the relative' / 'humour of truth' (supra "Chapter 3.3 Serious Painters"). Cf. Stengers, "Irony and Humour," in *The Invention of Modern Science* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000): 57-70.

[21] Helen Marten, "Technical Glossary" in *Drunk Brown House*, ed. Hans Ulrich Obrist (London: Serpentine Galleries and Koenig Books, 2016), 184. Note: the notion of 'poetic explanation' directly relates to the ideas laid out in the previous chapter: supra "Chapter 3.3 Prolonging Eroticism.

[22] Supra "Chapter 2.4: Commodity to Coherence".

emergence of the drip is "apologetic" because it "recognises" that it is *relevant* and *matters* for the present, that once it enters the game, the game must organise itself differently, "Apologies!"[23]

This does not mean that the drip is a problem in the negative sense of the term, since the present is not a problem seeking a solution (implying a lack). The drip belongs to the creative iteration of the present and not to error, expressing an open possibility, a break in equivalence between cause and effect.[24] The drip's emergence brings with it new potential iterations of the creative event, which were not inscribed in a previous phase of its thinking-making. Hence the drip, to the extent that it matters, is not a problem that must be accepted or thwarted by the stable mind of the artist, but denotes a vested interest in inhabiting the present, by which one pays attention to the game that one finds oneself in. If this sounds like a tautology, it must be emphasised that painting is the creation of decisions that do not act as mere material consequences but involve *wondering* (curiosity) about its relevance.[25]

What this chapter claims is that this process - of attuning to these new patterns of sense afforded by such events as the 'sorry drip' - might be best

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[23] Marten *Drunk Brown House*, 184.

[24] The drip sparks interest outside of more limited understandings centred on glitch, whereby the drip would merely embody the thesis/antithesis of paint acting differently than prescribed (the linearity of reason).

[25] Cf. Sue (Johnny) Golding, "Curiosity," in Sue Golding (ed.), *The Eight Technologies of Otherness*, (London: Routledge, 1997): 10-28. Also: Stengers, "Wondering About Materialism" in Graham Harman, Levi R. Bryant, Nick Srnicek (eds.), *The Speculative Turn: Continental Materialism and Realism* (Melbourne: Re.Press, 2011): 368-380. Cf. 'Out of the dialogue with nature initiated by classical science, with its view of nature as an automaton, has grown a quite different view in which the activity of questioning nature is part of its intrinsic activity.' Prigogine and Stengers, *Order out of Chaos*, 301.

understood as cultivating a humorous mode of address within/of artistic practice. This is not compatible with Deleuze's notion of humour, which would always emphasise 'the savoir-faire of the pure event', smothering the complexity of the present onto ultimate difference.[26] Rather, painting draws out possibilities from the present and looks forward towards their relevance, a cohesive process of emergence. As Amy Sillman writes, painting is about being 'interested in discovering, rather than "producing" the work'.[27] The work is "discovered" not to the extent that the artist stumbles upon it, revealing an authentic relation with truth (transcendental) or converging onto any one definitive position (the embodiment of an idea). Neither is it the effect of a 'strange coupling, the coming together of two orders, one chaotic, the other ordered' but continuously emerges through relevance/diffraction.[28] Humour, as it is defined here, is intrinsic to this ongoing commitment by way of 'staying with the trouble' to reference Donna Haraway, to an involvement in situations without prior structure.[29]

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[26] Cf. Deleuze, "Nineteenth Series of Humour", *The Logic of Sense*, trans. Daniel W. Smith (London and New York: Continuum, 2003): 134-141, 141. Cf. 'Humour falls or collapses: 'down' from meaning and intentions to the singularities of life that have no order, no high and low, no before and after. […] Humour is not the *reversal* of cause and effect but the abandonment of the 'before and after' relations - the very line of time - that allow us to think in terms of causes and intentions, of grounds and consequents.' Claire Colebrook, *Irony* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 134.

[27] Amy Sillman in Jennifer Sauer, "Construction and Deconstruction: An Interview with Amy Sillman", *ArtDependence Magazine* (February 8, 2018), accessed March 18, 2023, https://www.artdependence.com/articles/construction-and-deconstruction-an-interview-with-amy-sillman/.

[28] Elizabeth Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art: Deleuze and the Framing of the Earth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 9.

[29] Cf. Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).

Humour is not to be understood as excessive positivity which would imply an inability to truly face the 'treacherous' situations in the studio (or elsewhere).[30] It is not merely the ability to *roll with the punches*, which would still prioritise the intention of the serious artist who would bend the situation to their will. The kind of humour I am outlining here is not a process of questioning of how best to respond in a 1:1 position at all but a queering of interaction, a *being-with*. Johnny Golding discusses this being-with in her discussion of friendship as:

> the move away from an anthropocentric agency of Self:Other [which] expresses a queer economy of sorts, one that enables a kind of "together-apartness" in each other's company without, in so being "apart-together", becoming an all-exclusive, cannibalising, co-dependent unity of One.[31]

In the heady environment of the studio, the notion of the interrelation of independently existing identities (artist and canvas) is replaced by a cohesion that distributes its objects and subjects and by which the present finds stability (feedback loop).[32] For this reason, painting can no longer be imagined as happening *in* space - which would make the present superficial

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[30] For example, Byung-Chul Han details the problems of 'excessive positivity' in his book *The Burnout Society* as a kind of malaise that occurs in the shift from a 'disciplinary society' as discussed by Michel Foucault, towards a society based in achievement which produces the 'achievement-subject'. Cf. Byung-Chul Han, "Beyond Disciplinary Society", *The Burnout Society* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015): 8-11; and Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995).

[31] Golding, "Friendship", in Lynn Turner, Undine Selbach, and Ron Broglio (eds.), *The Edinburgh Companion to Animal Studies* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 262-276, 262.

[32] Cf. Prigogine and Stengers, "Actors and Spectators," in *Order out of Chaos*, 298-301. Also: Paganelli, "Chapter 2.6 Self-Constrained Chance" in "Finitude, Possibility, Dimensionality; Aesthetics After Complexity": 84-94.

in service of some greater idea - but is *of* the world in its ongoing material performance, a situation to which the artist is a part.

This has made a profound difference in my own practice, which has increasingly become an activity of *laughing-with*. On one hand, this is a result of a conscious effort or intention to be less "precious" with the surface of the painting. On the other hand, this "intention" would also be better understood as attributable to an attunement with the ongoing situation (feedback loop) and not due to the profound insight of the artist who reflects on their work from any distance. The humour of the drip makes palpable how the matter of painting has creative agency outside of purely anthropocentric notions of artistic production, here: 'the world kicks back.'[33] Or in other words, matter is not inert and passive in relation to the 'guile' of the artist.[34]

Laughing-with painting emerges in patterns also apparent in certain strands of stand-up comedy, whereby a rigorous effort to "commit to the bit" offers greater intensity: studio situations may be *funny*, then *not* funny, then "pretty dull", then *irritating*, and then funny once more through mere iteration.[35] This is not laughter in response to a situation which is happening outside of oneself but is the *is*. The painter laughs at the joke, the joke that is themselves, and continues to work.

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[33] Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 215.

[34] 'Guile' is a term used by Deleuze in his discussion of the task of painting: '[o]ne can fight against the cliche only with much guile, perseverance, and prudence: it is a task perpetually renewed with every painting, with every moment of every painting.' Deleuze, *The Logic of Sensation*, 96.

[35] This idea will be returned to in "Chapter 4.3 Making Luck Happen".

What I am outlining here is not the reassertion of Douglas Crimp's provocation in "The End of Painting" (1981) whereby painting is 'understood as the "pure idiocy" that it is'.[36] The notion of humour put forth here has nothing to do with an ideological judgement relating to the relevancy of painting as a medium, but pertains to art practice as a sensuous and situated knowledge.[37] It installs a mode of analysis that avoids privileging discursive over material concerns, whereby the drip would be an abstract material example of some more concrete theoretical notion. The drip is no longer an inherent *example* of anything, it has no prior meaning to pass on. Rather, the drip contests 'the excessive power granted to language to determine what is real.'[38] Neither the material or the discursive are 'ontologically or epistemologically prior', rather the painting-event *in situ* becomes more real - *giddy,* even – through its ongoing performance whereby 'matter and meaning are mutually articulated.'[39] In writing this studio-event becomes out of focus but is still intensely felt, as Marten writes: '[w]hen we apologise, the depth of sincerity can be deliberately fuzzy.'[40]

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[36] Douglas Crimp, "The End of Painting", *October,* Vol. 16, 1981: 69-86, 86. The notion of painting as 'pure idiocy' comes from Gerhard Richter: 'One must really be engaged in order to be a painter. Once obsessed by it, one eventually gets to the point where one thinks that humanity could be changed by painting. But when that passion deserts you, there is nothing else left to do. Then it is better to stop altogether. Because basically painting is pure idiocy.' Ibid., 69.

[37] Although the humour of the drip can also be found in the inevitable 're-membering' of Jackson Pollock, for example (supra "Chapter 3.2 Paintings that remember others").

[38] Barad, "Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter", *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, Vol. 28. No 3 (2003): 801-831, 802.

[39] Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway,* 152.

[40] Marten, *Drunk Brown House,* 184.

4.2 **Anything Goes**

This section follows from a consideration of *laughing-with* accidents towards more deliberate forms of risk-taking, to consider in more detail the putting-together of techniques, objects, and images. Hence this section turns to collage, the term "collage" being purposefully used here over "pastiche" or "combine" to directly reference David Salle who wrote, in 2018, that:

> a big part of our culture is involved with putting things together, with little distinction made between the invented and the found, and even less between the past and the present. The fragmentary, the deconstructed, even the deliberately mismatched - that *is* our reality. We are all collage artists now.[41]

Salle's comment was made in relation to the work of Laura Owens (specifically her mid-career survey at the Whitney, 2017-2018), but this notion of the "collage artist" is also inseparable from a history of discussions leading back, but not limited to Robert Rauschenberg, Martin Kippenberger, Sigmar Polke, and Salle himself.[42]

Deleuze had also partially considered this prospect in his own consideration of Rauschenberg, in whose practice: 'the surface stops being

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[41] David Salle, "Art in Free Fall", *The New York Review of Books* (8th February 2018), accessed March 10, 2023, https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2018/02/08/laura-owens-art-free-fall/.

[42] Cf. Scott Rothkopf, *Owens, Laura* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art and New Haven, C.T.: Yale University Press, 2017), ex. cat. I am also thinking here of the work of contemporary painters such as Jamian Juliano-Villani, as well as the recent interest in retrospectives of the work of the late, Michel Majerus.

a window on the world and now becomes an opaque grid of information.'[43]

Deleuze is - of course - alluding to Leo Steinberg's discussion of the 'flatbed plane' here, a term devised by Steinberg to categorise a proliferation of practices that expressed 'a shift from nature to culture':

> The flatbed picture plane makes its symbolic allusion to hard surfaces such as tabletops, studio floors, charts, bulletin boards—any receptor surface on which objects are scattered, on which data is entered, on which information is received, printed, impressed—whether coherently or in confusion.[44]

Deleuze, along with Guattari, return to the 'flatbed plane' in their rejection of conceptual art in *What is Philosophy?* claiming that such a collaged composition has allowed art to become 'informative', by which 'the sensation depends upon the simple "opinion" of a spectator who determines whether or not to "materialise" the sensation, that is to say, decides whether or not it is art.'[45] A similar rejection of such practices is also taken up by Lyotard. For Lyotard, the mentality of the "collage artist" would reduce art to the prevalence of the ubiquitous image which would work to 'stabilise the referent' but also 'panders' to what Lyotard believes to be baseline of postmodern culture: eclecticism:

> Eclecticism is the degree zero of contemporary general culture: one listens to reggae, watches a western, eats McDonald's food

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[43] Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque,* trans. Tom Conley (London: Athlone Press, 1993), 27.

[44] Leo Steinberg, "The Flatbed Picture Plane" in *Other Criteria*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975): 61-98, 84.

[45] Deleuze and Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?* trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchill (London: Verso, 1994),198.

for lunch and local cuisine for dinner, wears Paris perfume in Tokyo and "retro" clothes in Hong Kong; knowledge is a matter for TV games. It is easy to find a public for eclectic works. By becoming kitsch, art panders to the confusion which reigns in the "taste" of the patrons. Artists, gallery owners, critics, and public wallow together in the "anything goes", and the epoch is one of slackening. But this realism of the "anything goes" is in fact that of money; in the absence of aesthetic criteria, it remains possible and useful to assess the value of works of art according to the profits they yield. Such realism accommodates all tendencies, just as capital accommodates all "needs".[46]

The "anything goes" absorbs the world's recognisable forms, narratives, and ideas (however marginal) and curates them in endless combinations. For both Lyotard and Deleuze, this mirrors the way in which control societies no longer work through confinement but through seemingly endless choice. This choice does not equal freedom, Deleuze makes that clear: '[you] do not confine people with a highway. But by making highways, you multiply the means of control.'[47] This specific kind of "novelty" consisting 'of new groupings of the what-already-is' can therefore only be understood as the wide-sweep of 'appeasement', which covers up the 'mutterings of the desire for a return to terror.'[48] For Lyotard, its artists would be designated as those: 'who refuse to re-examine the rules of art' and who 'pursue successful careers in mass conformism by communicating,

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[46] Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge,* trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 74, 76.

[47] Deleuze, *Two Regimes of Madness: Texts and Interviews 1975–1995,* trans. A. Hodges and M. Taormina (New York: Semiotext(e), 2006), 322.

[48] Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, 82.

by means of the "correct rules", the endemic desire for reality with objects and situations capable of gratifying it.'[49]

In response to such strident debate, the following sections will explore my recent painting practice in order to revaluate Salle's claim that we are all 'collage artists now' in positive terms, which might itself be considered a process of "re-examining the rules".

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[49] Ibid., 75. This animosity towards "appeasing" paintings (in Lyotard's terms) has been shared more recently in critical discussions of "Hi-lite painting", described as 'manifestations of the triumph of literalness in society: a desire for relatable images with everyday subjects that remind us of our own lives. Cf. Dean Kissick, "The Rise of Bad Figurative Painting", *The Spectator,* (January 30, 2021), accessed March 7, 2023, https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/the-rise-of-bad-figurative-painting/. Lyotard's discussion of eclectic society is also shared by Deleuze in his discussion of the 'civilisation of the cliché' as 'one single misery.' Deleuze, *Cinema 2, The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Roberta Galeta (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 21. In Deleuze's sense, cliché is not just bare repetition; it also marks our 'mental deficiency', 'organised mindlessness' and 'cretinisation'. Deleuze, "On the Time-Image", in *Negotiations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995): 57-61, 60. This view is bolstered by critiques of the regimes of mass production in Walter Benjamin's *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproducibility* as well as Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle*. Although not referred to specifically by Deleuze, this is further emphasised by Raoul Vaneigem's description of the "inauthenticity" of social life, embodied by a man who '[e]ach morning […] takes his car, drives to the office, pushes papers, has lunch in town, plays pool, pushes more papers, leaves work, has a couple of drinks, goes home, greets his wife, kisses his children, eats his steak in front of the TV, goes to bed, makes love, and falls asleep. Who reduces a man's life to this pathetic sequence of clichés? A journalist? A cop? A market researcher? A socialist-realist author? Not at all. He does it himself, breaking his day down into a series of poses chosen more or less unconsciously from the range of dominant stereotypes.' Raoul Vaneigem, *The Revolution of Everyday Life,* trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oakland: PM Press, 1994), 116.

Fig. 4B

Fig. 4B shows *Untitled (I heard it from the Valleys)*, a relatively small canvas painting made in the studios at the Royal College of Art in the later part of 2020.[50] This painting taught me that relatively simple actions can produce complex and unpredictable results, and as such, is considered a significant work for this PhD project.

The work can be considered as composed of three corresponding components: 1) an undulating oil ground of warm naphthol reds, blush pinks, Indian yellow, Cerulean blue and Cadmium green; over which is painted 2) the outlines of faces in rock formations (taken from an image torn from a science fiction magazine). Atop of the stretched canvas frame is 3) a small humanoid sculpture constructed of individual matchsticks hand-painted in neon green, neon orange, navy blue and black acrylic. Although the work was partly planned (see Fig. 4C), the making of the work amounted to a total reconsideration of my own idea of my practice. The artwork was unrecognisable - and yet it asserts itself in the form of a necessity, the illusion that it could not have been otherwise.

What *mattered* in the making of this painting had very little to do with 'new groupings of the what-already-is', a linear trajectory guided by what was already known.[51] Starting with the underpainting, which was applied with a large flat brush, the oils were squeezed out in blobs directly onto the canvas and moved around for far longer than usual, creating a vortex or coloured mist. Rothko is re-membered (supra "Chapter 3.2 Paintings that

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[50] This painting was the first thing made in the studio after the reopening of the Royal College of Art (28th September 2020) following the first UK Coronavirus lockdown.

[51] Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, 82.

remember others") but so are the fluctuations of a screensaver, whereby the repetitive act of brushing back and forth amounted to a process of zoning out/in to undulating colour relationships, which transforms and sustains.[52]

Fig. 4C

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[52] Cf. 'No one chose the pastel blue of the young cyclist from a colour chart and applied it to the horizon of his journey; rather it befell him. The mind regroups, tell this blue's (hi)stories. But back then, over there, the mind was transformed into soul and sustained by the blue occurrence.' Lyotard, *Que peindre? / What to Paint? Adami, Arakawa, Buren,* trans. Anthony Hudek, Vlad Ionescu and Peter W. Milne (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2012), 131

The risk presented by the work was then in the possibility of working

the colour-situation into a more complex structure, through the careful

commitment to relatively simple actions which created interferences (intra-

actions) amongst materials. This sense of precarity was made durable in

the rudimentary building of matchsticks into a stick figure, a truncated

approximation of people, houses, churches, giants, monsters, that stands

on top of the canvas frame (see Fig. 4D). This foray into sculptural elements

amounted to a path of least resistance in the ongoing reconfiguring of the

work, whereby the challenge became a matter of maintaining the

minimum consistency at which the work *sticks,* that is, continues to *make*

sense.[53]

Fig. 4D

Once this painting was made it no longer made sense to imagine

breaking it back up into disparate parts, it expresses a *wholeness.* Barad

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[53] This experience aligns with Barad's discussion of a cascade experiment: 'not a serial chain of consequences, an inevitability set in motion by some initial act, but an iterative reconfiguring of possibilities entailed in our passional advances toward the universe.' Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway,* 364.

writes of wholeness as 'not [being] about prioritising the whole over the sum of the parts' but as pointing towards the ways in which 'reality is (iteratively) (re)constituted through the (re)making of boundaries.'[54] These boundaries do not align with the edges of certain "details" of the work, since a diffractive account is not purely optical understanding but must involve consideration of all tangible and intangible matters that constitute the work (which are all radically material). As Marten writes of her own creative process, these aspects move 'in a strange dance together, not quite totalised in terms of their relationships or movements, but certainly not random either'.[55] No part can be moved or removed without radically altering its sense.

This moves the discussion of the "collage artist" from a phenomenological consideration of accumulating and structuring information (the world as it is) towards an embrace of complex (re)enactments, whereby the "collagist" is also a choreographer of ripples of material-discursive intra-active configurations. The creative process is not about fitting a priori ideas and things together in the correct order (good taste) but giving value to the inevitable yet unforeseen ways that ideas and materials interfere. This process is always heterogeneous and wildly singular, and hence unable to be abstracted into an example of the

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[54] Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 441n9. Cf. Barad, "Transmaterialities: Trans*/Matter/Realities and Queer Political Imaginings", *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, Vol. 21, No. 2-3 (2015): 387-422.

[55] Marten, "Conceptual Textures", *Elephant*, Issue 26 (December 7, 2016), accessed March 22, 2023, https://elephant.art/conceptual-textures/.

'universals of communication.[56] It is rigorous and not random: a *giddiness born of rules*, a term borrowed from Jean Baudrillard:

> In order to understand the intensity of ritual forms, one must rid oneself of the idea that all happiness derives from nature, and all pleasure from the satisfaction of a desire. On the contrary, games, the sphere of play, reveal a passion for rules, a giddiness born of rules, and a force that comes from ceremony, and not desire.[57]

These are not the "correct rules" since they are not imposed from the outside, which would imply the grounding of an ontology, but emerge through the making of the work: '[o]ne is without criteria, yet one must decide.'[58] This creative act then emerges in the form of a game, in Baudrillard's terms: 'play, [in] the "ludic" sense, connoting the suppleness and polyvalence of combinations'.[59] Representation and the artist's intention is (and *must be*) undermined and replaced by the plurality of the *laughing-with*, an attunement to the possibilities of further plays of the game, further differences that might matter.

4.3 **Making Luck Happen**

This last section will explore the final paintings made for this PhD project, *Pig Party* (2022) and *The Most Probable of All My Theorems* (2023).

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[56] Deleuze, "Gilles Deleuze in conversation with Antonio Negri", *Futur Anterier 1*, trans. Martin Joughin (Spring 1990), accessed January 3, 2023, https://www.generation-online.org/p/fpdeleuze3.htm.

[57] Jean Baudrillard, *Seduction*, trans. Brian Singer (Montréal: Culture Texts, 2001), 132.

[58] Lyotard and Jean-Loup Thébaud, *Just Gaming*, trans. Wlad Godzich (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 17.

[59] Baudrillard, *Seduction*, 163.

Fig. 4E

Pig Party (see Fig. 4E) is a painting made in 2022. This painting was not entirely successful and, hence, may be painted over before the PhD Viva, however the making of the work proved useful for the ways in which it shaped my thinking. This was an ambitious painting in terms of its size (236 x 186cm) which was a response to the space of Southwark Park Galleries, London where the painting was shown as part of *Unruly*

Encounters, the Royal College of Art Postgraduate Research Show (March 19 – 20, 2022).[60]

Johnny Golding and I discussed this painting in progress in the studio in 2022, working out some of the problems. We felt that the painting had much to do with dreaming, daydreams, and in the relationship between the banal and fantastical. Where the painting works (middle to top-left sections, see Fig. 4F), the painting feels as though it is dreaming itself, with many little eddies in which to dwell, however the right-hand section "feels like the alarm clock going off…" Like a dream, not all aspects of the material world hold the same weight. The other sections become stuck regarding the content of the reference photograph versus the lifeworld of the painting, ensnared by the fixity of a goal whereby the painting "dried up" in the corners. Local areas of detail work in isolation but fail to intra-act with the rest of the painting, sitting in stark contrast. The painting fails to productively resonate with my other works.[61]

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[60] The width of the painting is 186 cm (which as tall as the doors of my studio at the Royal College of Art). 'Unruly Encounters' takes its name from Francesco Varela's essay "The Re-enchantment of the Concrete". Cf. Francesco J. Varela, 'The re-enchantment of the concrete: Some ingredients for a nouvelle cognitive science" in *The Artificial Life route to Artificial Intelligence: Building Embodied, Situated Agent,* eds. L. Steel and R. Brooks (New Haven: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1995.

[61] Maurice Merleau-Ponty discussed Cézanne's own failed attempts in the studio the following terms: 'he himself was never at the centre of himself: nine days out of ten all he saw around him was the wretchedness of his empirical life and of his unsuccessful attempts, the leftovers of an unknown party.' It was this sense of the 'leftovers of an unknown party' which took on a certain giddy relevance in relation to this work. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Cézanne's Doubt", *Sense and Non-Sense* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University: 1964): 9 -45, 25.
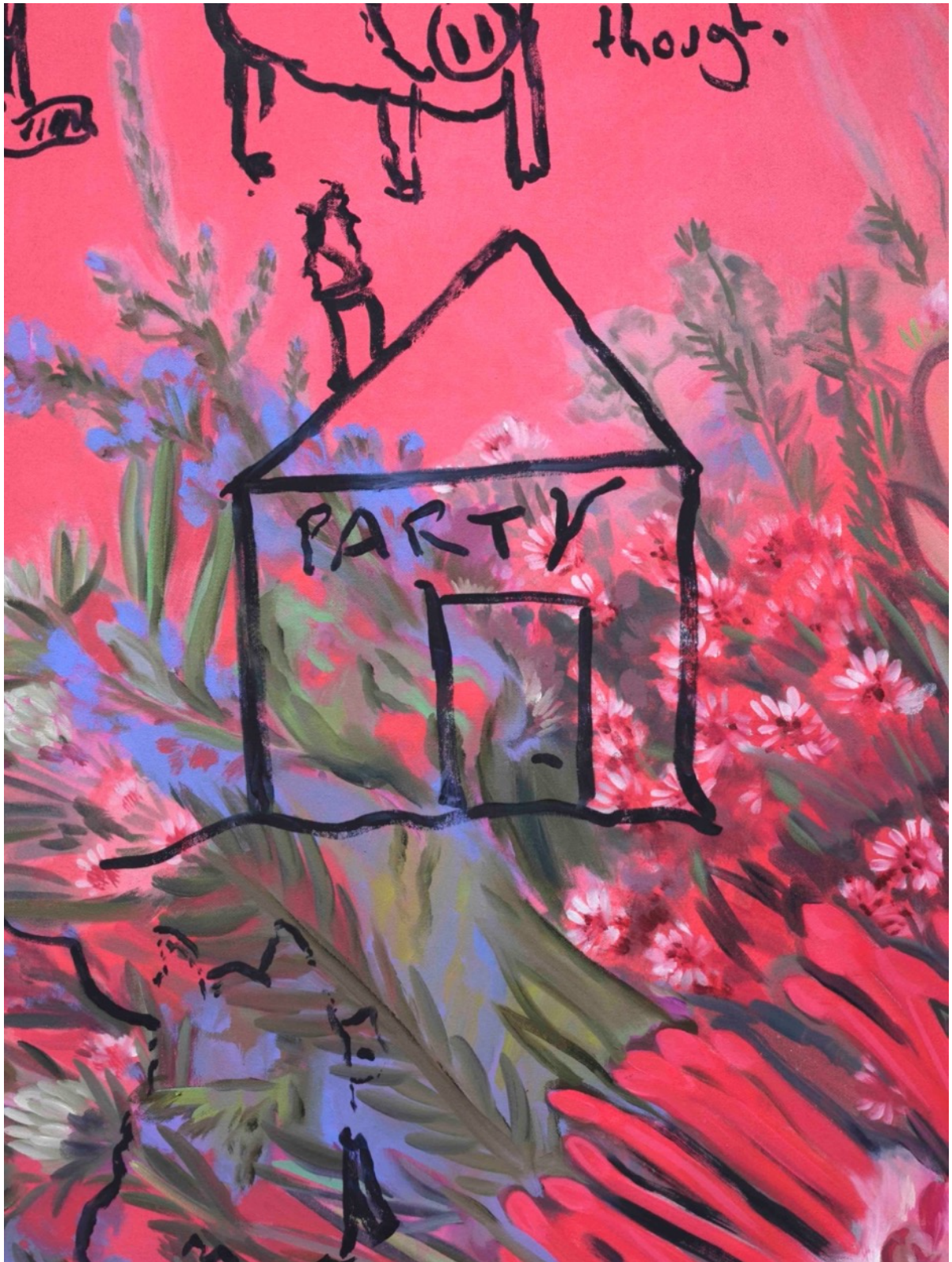
4.F

The Most Probable of All My Theorems (2023) was the last painting made for this PhD project. Fig. 4.G shows the preliminary sketch made for this painting in late 2022, one of many drawings made in quick succession. The idea of the work emerged from a bank of words and images (including the featured quote), a photo of fruit, and a vague notion of wanting to utilise pearlescent paint (*bristling articulations*). The small box in the bottom-right corner was initially intended to represent *The Tale (retelling)* - the "re-membered" Guston discussed in Chapter 3.3 - with the original plan being to stick the smaller painting-on-cardboard to the surface of the canvas. However, the drawing became somewhat irrevocable in the thinking-process, functioning by way of a productive rhythm of scribbles and the jostling together of lines, an event in which the hand outruns the brain.[62] This stopped the text from being singled out as a slogan, which would threaten to collapse the giddiness of the drawing into a more concrete situation by overemphasising the semantic aspect of the work.[63] Instead the crossings-out function not as errors but like the *sorry drip* mentioned at the start of this chapter, hilarious "mistakes" that reformulate the notion of the work through a productive friction between legibility and illegibility.

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[62] This is not meant to evidence a Cartesian mind-body split, but the eroticism of thought whereby the hand becomes the brain.

[63] I thank Phil Allen (Turps Studio Programme Leader and MA Painting Tutor at the Royal College of Art) for his insight during a discussion of the progress of this painting vis-à-vis the collaborations made by Christopher Wool and Richard Prince. Cf. Christopher Wool and Richard Prince, *My Act* (1988), enamel and Flashe on aluminium and steel, 203.2 x 152.4 cm. © Christopher Wool and Richard Prince.
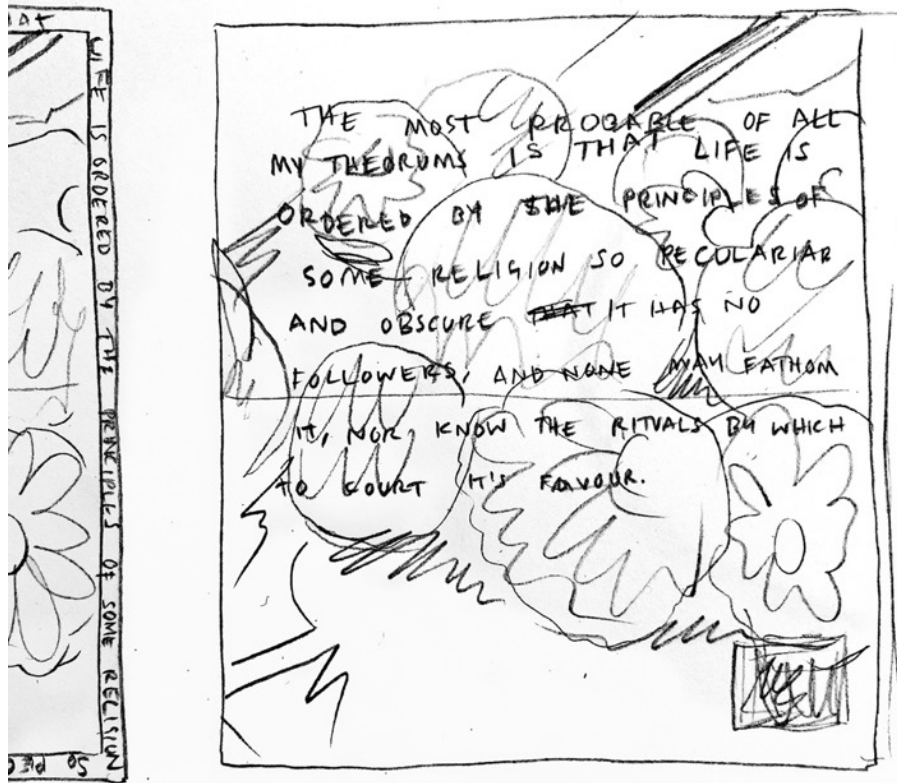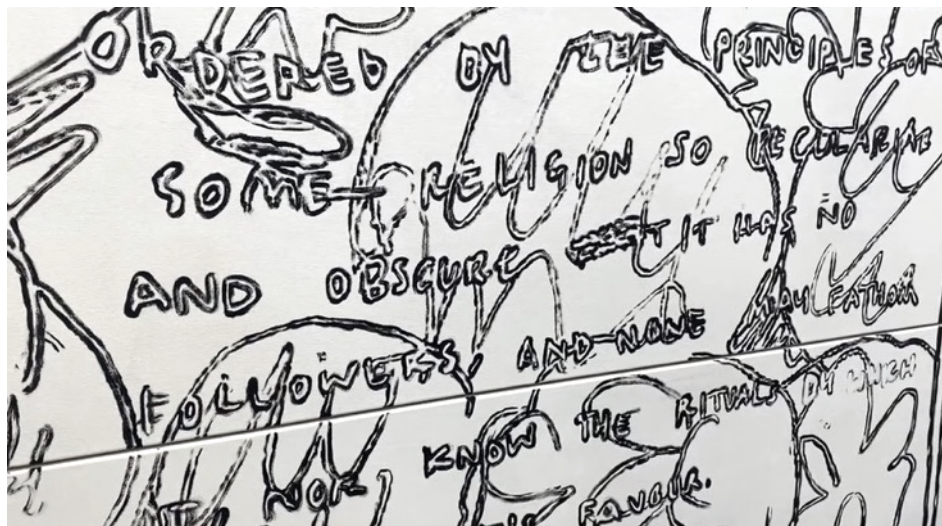
Fig. 4G

Fig. 4H

This legibility/illegibility was emphasised further through digital manipulation of the drawing using *You Doodle*, an iOS painting app. The app offers user-friendly drawing tools, as well as themed stamps and simple photo editing. The use of one of these filters ("Toonify") transformed the drawing into something resembling scumbled bubble writing (Fig. 4H), in which drawn line and written text become less easily distinguished. Foucault comes to a similar conclusion in his discussion of the calligram which manages 'to show and to name; to shape and to say; to reproduce and to articulate; to imitate and to signify; to look and to read.'[64]

This was then digitally projected onto the canvases. Although digital projectors are designed to produce faithful images – the geometrical optics of reflection and sameness to which diffraction provides a challenge – the process of being within the glare of the projection itself presents its own amusing situations: problems of getting in one's own way which often require guesswork and approximations that factor in the ongoing making-thinking of the work. Hence projection should not be thought of as entirely transparent in the causal sense.

Unlike *Pig Party,* this painting was not driven by a determined idea, making the work impossible to maintain. Instead, it developed through attentive, and cumulative strategies, embodying a giddiness. This included a series of techniques based in material tests with paints and mediums in productive tandem with experiments with digital technologies. As outlined previously in this chapter, these techniques are not arbitrary but emerge as

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[64] Michel Foucault, "The Unraveled Calligram" in *This is Not a Pipe,* trans. James Harkness (Berkley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1982): 19-31, 21.

solutions to ongoing material situations in the studio. As such, these techniques do not amount to my personal manifesto for art practice but can only be said to be the rules of the game as they are currently played; a game that will continue, in one form or another, while it matters, or otherwise be ended.

In the making of this painting, the use of screens was ubiquitous. In finding the right marks to complete the painting, the studio process became a constant process of photographing the work (on my iPhone) and utilising *You Doodle* to test out approximations of possible ways forward before adding these new marks to the painting. The use of technology does not make these choices arbitrary, one choice among many. The possibilities involved in using such technologies might be infinite, but this does not mean that anything is possible at any time, rather the coherence of the painting emerges locally, and like any aspect of the studio practice it requires careful attunement, a process of *making luck happen*.[65] This is not the endpoint of a gradual process of development moving from less to more but requires constant testing, a rhythm of working whereby logic cannot be divorced from erotics, where work intra-acts with play.

Apps are used to create densities and clusters of marks. Some may be too conservative, too wild, too polished, "janky" or inconsequential, but this can also be fruitful, offering strange new colour combinations or concepts of texture. One can quickly go very far beyond the original idea

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[65] This term is appropriated from Helen Marten: '[by] assign[ing] substance to thinking. […] You make luck happen.' Martin in Matias Faldbakken, "Show Hidden Characters: Helen Marten", *Mousse* Vol. 28 (April–May 2011): 192-199, 195.

for a work in favour of an improvisation, which in Tim Ingold's words 'forsakes the security of the fragile centre that we may have drawn around ourselves for an uncertain and unknown future.'[66] On the screen the painting is compressed, flattening out certain details, allowing for others to become contrasted. This is not total smoothness, ease of use, but evidences a new kind of productive clumsiness which comes from painting from the fingertip as well as the arm. In fact, technology does not make things any easier, as if in the form of a solution, rather – thinking with diffraction - it emerges as form of pattern making in the studio process, joining a history of other kinds of material technologies (such as the invention of acrylic paint, for example). As Laura Owens writes of Photoshop, this is: 'a natural part of painting that shouldn't be avoided or, on the other hand, given too much meaning, because it just comes out of hundreds of years of printmaking, as the newest version of it.'[67]

The process of finding the right marks to complete the painting (see Fig. 4I) was not a matter of displaying the "correct forms" from gesture to gesture, but gaming the anticipation of holding patterns, which lubricate further consequences. This is an aim for greater coherence, not just productivity, the attempt to stay in the giddy/precarious stabilisation of new situations. Indeed, there is nothing pure or linear about this emergence, as Helen Johnson writes of her own painting practice: '[o]ne thing undoes another; a painting throws the register of its neighbour; things

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[66] Tim Ingold, "Thinking Through the Cello, in *Thinking in the World: A Reader*, eds. Jill Bennett and Mary Zournazi (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2020): 202-222, 217.

[67] Cf. Laura Owens in Sarah Lehrer-Graiwer, "Optical Drive", *Artforum*, March 2013: 231-229, 235.

presumed to be privileged are pushed towards disappearance; backgrounds are made visceral.'[68] These are, therefore, not just reflexive actions but intra-actions, whereby the process of experimenting/testing reconfigures the possibility of the painting: 'possibilities aren't narrowed in their realisation; new possibilities open up as others that might have been possible are now excluded: possibilities are reconfigured and reconfiguring.[69] This does not mean that "anything goes", but emphasises the rudimentary process of making something to see it, calling for rigorous and dynamic forms of sense in the form of *laughing-with*. This does not eradicate struggle but reframes a problem as moments of possibility to think and not as obstacles to overcome, as Barad writes:

> Most experiments don't work most of the time. To ignore this fact is to forget what experimentation is doing. To experiment is to create, produce, refine and stabilize phenomena.'[70]

Or, as Amy Sillman writes of painting: 'we are trying to surprise ourselves and that is hard to do. '[71]

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[68] Helen Johnson, "Why I Paint", *Phaidon* (December 7, 2016), accessed March 23, 2023,
https://www.phaidon.com/agenda/art/articles/2016/december/07/helen-johnson-why-i-paint/.

[69] Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway,* 177.

[70] Ibid.,144.

[71] Amy Sillman, "Shit Happens: Notes on Awkwardness", *Faus Pas. Selected Writings and Drawings* (Paris: After 8 Books, 2020):145-152, 146.

Fig. 4I

The iterative process of making luck happen means entering into unseen cotillions with technology. Sometimes this is as simple as moving between the sensuousness of the glowing screen and the sensuousness of the surface of the painting, like Cézanne squinting in the illumination of Mont Sainte-Victoire.[72] However when this really works (as it did for Cézanne and the mountain), this betweenness evaporates into an intimacy, whereby the distinction between place, reference, and painting fades away. In the situation I am outlining here with the painting and the screen, it is as if working on two paintings at once, instead of a painting and its referent, which productively intra-act with each other. The space of the studio simultaneously shrinks and expands into new spatialities which offer, to quote Golding's discussion of the photographic darkroom, 'an immediate intensity that draws together, and indeed swallows up, subject, object, anything in between or in its path; swallowed all up into […] a "being-there", right here, right now.'[73] A together-apartness (as discussed in Chapter 4.1.) which emerges in the form of a paradox, whereby the closer one gets, the more complex the situation becomes (instead of becoming more easily distinguishable as individual elements).[74] A *giddy* situation.

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[72] Cf. P aul Cézanne, *Mont Sainte-Victoire with a Large Pine* (c.1887), oil on canvas, 67 x 92cm. The Courtauld, London. © The Courtauld.

[73] Golding, "~~After~~ the Dark Room: Ana-materialism and the Sensuous Fractalities of Speed and Light (or does the image still speak a thousand words?)" in Daniel Rubinstein, Johnny Golding, Andy Fisher (eds.), *On the Verge of Photography: Imaging Beyond Representation* (Birmingham: ARTicle Press, 2013): 141-150, 148.

[74] As in Benoit Mandelbrot's discussion of fractal materiality: 'Bottomless wonders spring from simple rules, which are repeated without end.' Benoit Mandelbrot, "Fractals and the Art of Roughness", TED Talks (2010), 16:53, https://www.ted.com/talks/benoit_mandelbrot_fractals_and_the_art_of_roug hness?utm_campaign=tedspread&utm_medium=referral&utm_source=tedcom

In this way, one does not go looking for solutions in technology (in the form of a tool or solution) but engages with the sensuousness of its materiality. Not testing out the material limits of painting as medium in a new form but improvising new contexts, new habits which define the parameters of experimentation as a kind of intensification which keeps the process open. As Owens writes:

> It's about letting it, the space and time for experimentation, happen as long as humanly possible before you really have to deliver.[75]

In this way, painting is not finished once it looks like its referent (or not, as in the case of *Pig* Party) but involves a kind of hilarious commitment to walking away at the opportune moment, making another new cut that will enter one into a new pattern of making-thinking.

<div align="center">*****</div>

This chapter has set up a notion of artistic methodology based on a kind of sensuous economy, a response-ability to the *gently* funny, often *giddy* situations that emerge in the studio.[76] This is neither the essential aspect of painting as medium playing out on the canvas, and neither is it experimentation at the threshold between sensible practice and transcendental Being (chaos/difference) as it was for Deleuze (supra

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share. Cf. Mandelbrot, *The Fractal Geometry of Nature* (New York: W. H. Freeman and Company, 1983).

[75] Laura Owens in Stephen Berens and Jan Tumlir, "Still Lifing: Conversation with Laura Owens", X-TRA, Vol. 6 No. 2 (Winter 2014), accessed March 30, 2023, https://www.x-traonline.org/article/still-li%EF%AC%81ng-conversation-with-laura-owens/.

[76] All this to get to the bottom of the simple fact that some things work differently than other things!

Chapter 4.1). This also embraces the creativeness of artistic experimentation: those material tests, studies and smaller works so intrinsic to many painting practices, outside of supporting the claims founded on medium that all is being obtained is an understanding of the inherent properties of painting. What this section also aims to make evident is a rethinking of claims made in recent "post-internet" painting discourses, that the painterly devices most often associated with medium specificity such as the brushstroke, flatness, gesture, the drip, are being utilised by artists as 'informational units', 'infinitely citable and combinable as demystified units of artistic production'.[77] In the account outlined here, these are not readymade devices as universally applicable generalities - which would make them transparent and without consequence - but are thick and opaque, to borrow Lyotard's terminology.[78] They are practices of knowledge, sense-making practices which are 'objective' and consequential, outside of the reductive paradigms found whereby 'painting becomes a metaphor for the painterly.'[79]

Some things do not work; some ideas will not get off the ground. To think otherwise would be to refute the materiality of the world in its ongoing iteration. The "anything goes" - as denounced in Lyotard's

[77] Kerstin Stakemeier, "Controlled Medium Specificity: Networks and Painting" in Manuela Ammer, Achim Hochdörfer and David Joselit (eds.), *Painting 2.0: Expression in the Information Age* (London, Munich and New York: Prestel, 2016): 262-267, 267.

[78] Cf. Jean-François Lyotard, "The Bias of the Figural" and "Signification and Designation," in *Discourse, Figure*, trans. Antony Hudek and Mary Lyndon (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 3-19 and 23-156 respectively.

[79] Stakemeier, "Controlled Medium Specificity", 262. Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway,* 90.

discussion of eclecticism - is an idealisation that denies the intricacies involved in material-discursive practices, and which is replaced by the notion of 'many things matter', a pluralism not a relativism.[80] *Making luck happen* then becomes essential, a form of experimentation which involves inhabiting sensuous situations that might involve both the smell of turpentine and the touch of the screen. As such, the later part of the studio practice for this PhD research has focused on the generation of methods and situations towards greater *coherence,* which cannot be equated to neoliberal forms of productivity since it is non-linear and without external measure, it is a sensuous economy.

Finally, a *giddiness born of rules*, understood here as a non-linear intra-active involvement, provides a helpful contrast to Kierkegaard's notion of anxiety as the 'dizziness of freedom', whereby the painter could only be overwhelmed by the sublime proposition - *what to paint?*[81] Losing oneself in such a giddiness of making also amounts to a methodological attitude in the way that such an entanglement becomes epistemologically productive, leading to theoretical understandings that serve to constantly reshape practice (feedback loop). Hence the serious painter is paradoxically one who laughs with their practices, in the understanding that they are behaving in ways which are unpredictable and meaningful. What makes

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[80] This position is also held by Martin Savransky in his discussion of Stengers' reassessment of Science practices as the 'truth of the relative.' Cf. Martin Savransky, "The Humour of the Problematic: Thinking with Stengers," *SubStance*. Vol. 47, No. 1 (2018): 29-46; and Stengers, "Irony and Humour," in *The Invention of Modern Science* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000): 57-70. Supra "Chapter 3.1: Serious Painters."

[81] Soren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety* (New York: Liverlight, 2014), 188.

one laugh can no longer be considered in opposition of what it is to *understand*.

Fig. 4J

Chapter Five: Conclusion

5.1 **Strange, and Will Never Become Familiar**

This thesis set out to understand what painting might be after the internet, a line of questioning predominantly inspired by my own practice as a painter. This led to seeking an alternative to existing painting discourses, as discussed in the introduction of this thesis, based on identifying art with medium (or with the post-medium condition), and without drifting towards more general categories such as 'post-internet'. Such paradigms are unable to come to terms with the sensuous of an artwork since they maintain a binary separation between object and concept, matter and meaning. Furthermore, the use of "post" (i.e. "post-truth", "post-feminism", "post-racial", "post-internet") is found to be irresponsible in the way that such terms imply an authority over what is. As discussed by Isabelle Stengers, such terms present themselves in the guise of a hard truth:

> bringing with it a very classical "we now know better, and too bad for the naïve, backward people who still 'believe' in…" This is the consequence of most academic "turns," the cheapest kind of truth, just good for the academic market.[1]

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[1] Isabelle Stengers in Stengers and Martin Savransky, "Relearning the Art of Paying Attention: A Conversation", *SubStance*, Vol. 47, No. 1 (2018): 130-145, 132.

Instead, this research has led to the concepts of *mattering* and diffraction as proposed by Barad.[2] These are not ultimate claims on truth, since in a diffractive account, one enters into questions that clamour in multiple directions at once, meaning that the quest for an essential and ultimate answer becomes irrelevant, turning instead towards how practices *matter*. This understanding formed the basis of the move from David Joselit's discussion of "networked painting" – paradigmatic of insides and peripheries – towards *networked materialities* in Chapter 2.[3] What the concept of networked materialities aims to make apparent is that art practices are formed by 'intra-acting from within and as part of the world in its becoming', whereby the present is understood as the emergence of mutually constituting entities, rather than as constructed of variably related identities.[4] Or put another way, the decisions of the artist are not made in a vacuum but are deeply embedded in different kinds of networks, as networked materialities, which provides relevance. To be clear, this is not a shared immutable background from which the artist chooses to intervene, rather it is "the *is*", pointing only to the generative differences that make a difference.

In the framework proposed here, artworks are material-discursive practices and not individual objects with inherent meaning. As such, this thesis has sought a way to discuss painting outside of the binary distribution

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[2] Cf. Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway, Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2007), 396.

[3] Cf. David Joselit, "Painting Beside Itself", *October,* Issue 130 (Fall 2009): 125-134.

[4] Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway,* 396.

of matter and immaterial concepts, in the understanding that language has become an 'opaque and genetic player'.[5] Despite this, for the longest time, I did not write about my own paintings. This was perhaps led by a concern about returning to reflexive readings based in authentic description or justification, which would only serve to produce what Haraway would refer to as 'geometries of sameness'.[6] However it become apparent that in terms of defending this thesis, and in order to more intensely engage with my own work, the researcher's job might be to find a way to account for their own work on their own terms. Or as Foucault put it, 'I have no intention whatsoever of speaking to you in general about Manet'.[7]

As such, the terminology of this thesis has not remained within the sphere of diffraction but offers new terms, not by way of definitive or absolute categories but as concepts that matter. As Barad writes: 'matter isn't what exists separately from meaning. Mattering is a matter of what comes to matter and what doesn't.'[8] These terms are inspired by the concerns of my own practice as well as my engagement with other artists and writers. These are terms which matter, and as such, as Stengers writes,

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[5] Mattia Paganelli, "Finitude, Possibility, Dimensionality; Aesthetics After Complexity", (PhD thesis: Birmingham City University, 2016), 31.

[6] Cf. Donna Haraway, "The Promises of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics for Inappropriate/d Others" in *Cultural Studies*, eds. Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula Treichler (New York: Routledge, 1992): 295-337. As Haraway writes: 'Reflexivity is recommended as critical practice, but my suspicion is that reflexivity, like reflection, only displaces the same elsewhere, setting up worries about copy and original and the search for authentic and really real.' Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (London: Free Association Books, 1991), 16.

[7] Michel Foucault, *Manet and the Object of Painting,* trans. Matthew Barr (London: Tate Publishing, 2009), 27.

[8] Barad, "Diffracting Diffraction: Cutting Together-Apart", in *Parallax*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (2014): 168–187, 175.

they are 'detected at the same time as they are produced, and are found, as soon as they have been engendered, to have already been there "all the time."'[9]

Chapter 3 installed the concept of *the peculiar miracle*, to reframe discussions of figural painting towards questions of relevance and not of representation. The question then becomes:, how can one's practice contribute to constructing the present, and in what ways? Building on this idea, this chapter also offered the concept of *paintings that remember others*, to offer productive ways of discussing painting's relationship with its past, and allowing for a revaluation of the cliché, so maligned by Deleuze, as a productive material-discursive and creative problem, as evidenced by the practice of Michael Krebber. Chapter 3 also considered painting's relationship with technology as entangled and ongoing material-discursive arrangements, outside of traditional notions of dissemination. Laura Owens' work was discussed as an example of such an approach, whereby information can no longer be understood as moving from A to B but is iteratively remade through a process of *prolonging eroticism*. This is term, appropriated from Mike Kelley, understands thought to be always a matter of sensuousness as well as logic. This notion was revisited in Chapter 4.3 in relation to my own use of painting apps in the studio.

Building on these ideas, "Chapter 4: A giddiness born of rules" highlighted a discussion of the *sorry drip*, offering a reconsideration of error outside of causality by re-considering the role of chaos as ingrained within

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[9] Stengers, *Cosmopolitics, Vol.1*, trans. Robert Bononno (London and Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 57.

the order of our practices and not as an ontological limit. This contributes

to an understanding of art practice as a complex system that is undecidable,

emphasising the ways in which material (paint) *matters* outside of discussions

purely based on the will of the artist. Importantly, this helped to underpin

a notion of painting practice as a kind of humour, where what makes one

laugh can no longer be separated from what it is to understand. This

replaces traditional notions of absolute knowledge or mastery with a

humour of the problematic, which meets with Stengers' discussion of the

'truth of the relative'.[10] This is particularly useful for contemporary

painters whose practices are based in experimental modes and not defined

by traditional schools of thought of what painting should be. As such,

Chapter 4 offered a final concept, *making luck happen,* that attends to the

ways in which unpredictable order can arise from relatively few decisions

by triggering patterns of interferences among materials. Maintaining these

situations in the studio - as a kind of giddy attunement to practice -

therefore becomes epistemologically productive; the effects of these

interferences continue to emerge long after the paint has dried.

To conclude, what "Painting after the Internet: Networked

Materialities" offers is a diffractive account of contemporary painting, an

approach that can overcome the need for metaphysical a priori structures

and without recourse to an ultimate. This frees practices from discourses

which do not serve them, while retaining the urgency of problems raised

in discussions of the post-medium condition. Hence, this thesis offers the

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[10] Cf. Stengers, "Irony and Humour," in *The Invention of Modern Science* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000): 57-70.

notion that painting after the internet might best be understood as a kind of *giddiness*, or a process of laughing-with. Not because our practices are superficial or unimportant (quite the opposite), but because they are complex and radically material: mattering in ways which are unexpected and meaningful. This is a mode of understanding that 'take(s) the frivolity of life […] seriously.'[11]

This thesis is evidence of a research project that does not see the relationship of practice and theory as the coming together of separate strands but rather as one ongoing material-discursive project. That is, this research does not evidence the entanglement of practice and theory but is an example of one such entanglement. Fully embracing the giddiness of practice-based research has led to a breakthrough in my own thinking, dispelling the anxiety of the perfect painting embedded in the canvas like a precious stone waiting to be chipped away. Likewise, it becomes evident that there is no perfect idea out there, *already* in the universe, trapped inside an intellectual thicket and awaiting the researcher's discovery, and no "one perfect way" to write a thesis. Acknowledging this fact has been personally liberating and, importantly, creatively beneficial. This relates to Deleuze and Guattari's understanding that a book (or even a thesis) is not about external truths, it is 'not an image of the world'.[12] Rather, as Deleuze

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[11] Golding, "Breaking the [Honour] Code: ex-, post-, digi-facto. A Few Assumptions", *Parallax*, 5: 4 (1999): 26-37, 29.

[12] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Trans. Brian Massumi (London and Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 11.

writes: 'writing is a flow among others'.[13] Hence, one could argue that if the essential job of a researcher is to discover, such discovering is not the uncovering of an a priori reality but is the production of a new reality, as Barad writes: 'theories are not mere metaphysical pronouncements on the world from some presumed position of exteriority. Theories are living and breathing reconfigurings of the world.'[14] However this does not (and should not) mean that *anything goes* (supra: Chapter 4.2). Diffraction involves an accountability and response-ability for the practices we help create which involves paying close attention to the ways that they might matter and for whom. As Alberto Condotta writes: '[c]aring to a practice is not to turn one's back from the public sphere as to attend to one's private garden, it is to cultivate and offer the fruits of one's care knowing that not everyone will take up the offer but someone will.'[15] As such, I do not see the end of this thesis as a final point, but as an event that will continue to matter.

This also applies to my artistic practice. This research has been less concerned with how to make "good painting", which would still prescribe

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[13] Cf. 'A book is a small cog in a much more complex, external machinery. Writing is a flow among others; it enjoys no special privilege and enters into relationships of current and counter-current, of back-wash with other flows-the flows of shit, sperm, speech, action, eroticism, money, politics, etc.' Deleuze, "I Have Nothing to Admit", *semiotext(e),* Vol. 2, No. 3 (1977): 110-116, 114. Also: 'Artaud puts it well: all writing is so much pig shit—that is to say, any literature that takes itself as an end or sets ends for itself, instead of being a process that "ploughs the crap of being and its language"'. Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia,* trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 134.

[14] Barad, "On Touching – The Inhuman That Therefore I Am", *Power of Material/Politics of Materiality*, edited by Susanne Witzgall and Kirsten Stakemeier (Berlin and Zürich: Diaphanes, 2015): 153-164, 154.

[15] Alberto Condotta, "Diffractive Care and the Careful Accounting of It" in *Data Loam: Sometimes Hard, Usually Soft: The Future of Knowledge Systems,* eds. Johnny Golding, Martin Reinhart, and Mattia Paganelli (Berlin and Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2020), 378-400, 399.

art as a kind of consensus built on common criteria, but has been focussed more intensely on what an experience *makes important,* that is, being open and accountable for the consequences of a practice for those to whom it makes a difference.[16] This has little to do with justifying or defending art practices and nothing to do with the artist staying true to their vision. Rather it has everything to do with an attachment to the fringes of a situation, of dwelling on it, and considering how we may continue to *pull at its strings* (sticking with Haraway's analogies), which resists the kind of broader examinations which would snip these threads into a more easily recognisable shape.[17]

In concluding this thesis, it would be remiss not to mention the Covid pandemic, which wreaked a certain level of havoc on this research project. The ongoing challenges of the pandemic, including the subsequent closure of the studios at the Royal College of Art (and at one point, an inability to buy paints and art materials) meant that at points of this research the scope and the frequency of practical work was severely restricted.[18] That being said, the ability to face such difficult situations meant maintaining 'a small plot of new land at all times'.[19] Hence the works that were produced for this PhD project, although not without their challenges, have been far

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[16] 'And the immoral idea par excellence then becomes the one that claims to be innocent, destroying nothing more than illusions.' Didier Debaise and Stengers, "The Insistence of Possibles: Towards a Speculative Pragmatism", *Parse Journal.,* Issue 7 (Autumn 2017): 12-19, 17.

[17] Cf. Haraway, "Playing String Figures with Companion Species", in *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016): 9-29.

[18] The small paintings 1A, 1B, 2A, 2B, shown on pages 31, 32, 63, 64 respectively are some of the giddier results of working from my home desk during the height of the pandemic.

[19] Deleuze and Guattari *A Thousand Plateaus,* 161.

stronger - that is, more *giddy* - than those made at any other point, making this period the most fruitful period of my artistic practice so far.

It may well be a truism that artists have a kind of superstition about examining their own creative processes. Perhaps in the mindset that if one stops too long to think about it, it might stop working. As Philip Guston wrote:

> You can wreck your painting that you believe in by over-examining it - dispel its magic - its spell lost. […] Advice to myself: leave it alone. It should be able to live by itself. [20]

However, throughout the course of this research project the notion that I could leave my practice alone has become questioned. Painting cannot live by itself, not because it requires the viewer to act as a 'faithful witness', or as an interpreter or activator of the work.[21] But because *it is our intra-actions which matter*, in the strongest possible sense of the term. To think otherwise would amount to what Barad calls a 'fantasy of distance'.[22] Understood in this way, artists need never hit a wall whereby they explain their practices away, since whilst there remains a curiosity regarding how they might matter, our practices will continue to emerge. Furthermore, the closer one gets, the more complex they become, which is the same as saying that the more you study it, the more there is to learn. As Guston wrote: 'work is strange, and will never become familiar.'[23]

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[20] Philip Guston, *I Paint What I Want to See* (London: Penguin, 2022), 259.

[21] Stengers, *The Invention of Modern Science*, 127.

[22] Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 395.

[23] Guston, *I Paint What I Want to See*, 259.

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