

Liquid Gestures: A study of the behavior of gesture in painting

Melissa Gordon

Abstract

How do gestures in painting *behave*: both as material that is shaped through physical interactions, as well as understanding how the *behavior* of gesture is changed by the contexts of site, time, and the boundaries of what a 'presentation' can be.

This PhD investigates the implications for contemporary painting to posit that gestures behave in a *liquid* manner, with agency unto themselves, in that material and bodily understanding and reading of gesture in painting can and does change over and between the course of time and place, in relation to other objects, situations and histories. Can we understand the implications on the historic and contemporary role of authorship in painting, in relationship to the changing dynamic and inclusion of voices, bodies and histories by positing that it is the gestures themselves in paintings that are fluid and unfixed?

My approach has been to try to locate gesture in painting as something that *is found* as a movement between objects, moments and places. In doing so, this PhD has undertaken to understand the implications of imagining gesture as a potentially disruptive liquid form which can and does affect the containers of painting: canvases, exhibitions, institutions, histories.

I have undertaken my research through the creation of my own paintings that attempt to enact a liquidity of gesturing. My practice-led research uses the site of the canvas as a place for gestures to show that they are not static, concrete, still, solid; through installations of my own and others work that engage with mutable positioning of the site of the exhibition, and through material writing which utilizes voice to give a second, bodily 'mouth' to my painterly practice.

I contextualise these methodologies within a history of how gesture is read in art history: looking at discourses on staging, on corporeal mime, on feminist liquidity, on liveliness in authorship, formlessness in art history, modeling a thought in painting, and how voice functions in art objects.

This PhD seeks to present a new understanding of gesture, specifically in painting, as behaving *as* a liquid: and that the mutating and shifting liquid behavior of gesture, which projects agency and voice through time, can itself have the potentiality to change the shape-form of the various situations it finds itself in, rather than simply rehabilitating 'excluded' gestures into the existing 'solid' forms of art history.

Table of Contents

| | |
|--|-----|
| Preface | 4 |
| Introduction | 5 |
| I. Staging: The Cinematic Impulse Within Gesture | |
| - Collision 1916 & 2016: Locating gesture across time | 15 |
| - Exhibition as staging: the discovery of gesture as behavior in corporeal mime | 27 |
| - Between the frames: Agamben and cinema as the homeland of gesture | 3 |
| - Routine Pleasures: an exhibition of the movement between gestures | 44 |
| - Re-staging Collision: Potentiality of gesture and behavior | 49 |
| II. Visualising the Container: A Gesture is a Liquid | |
| - Experiments to 'capture' the movement of gesture | 53 |
| - Irigaray's Liquidity | 68 |
| - The Mechanics of Fluids: Exhibition and Model | 76 |
| - The Site of Painting: Flatbed and Formlessness | 92 |
| - Language Going out of Bounds: Material Writing | 101 |
| - A Gesture is a Liquid: Artist Book and Models | 104 |
| - Modeling Painting: Female Readymades | 107 |
| III. Voice, and the Speaking Body in Painting | |
| - A Conversation and 'Presence and Absence' | 116 |
| - Liveliness: The history of voice in painting | 117 |
| - The Discourse of Gesture, in a Social Network, In Aggregate Form | 119 |
| - Bodies and multiple voices: <i>Kakophony</i> and Unknowability | 123 |
| IV. Conclusion: The Potentials of Fluids | 131 |
| V. Appendix | |
| Luxury Goods, A Burning Desire (2016) | 135 |
| Female Genius: Vital Signs (2017) | 139 |
| A Gesture is a Liquid (2018) | 145 |
| The Embarrassment of SUCKCESS (2019) | 150 |
| VI. Additional materials (separate PDFs) | |
| 1. Girls Like Us Interview with Amy Sillman (2019) | |
| 2. Deep Communities: An interview with Chris Kraus (2015 & 2018) | |
| 3. Collision, Publication (2018) | |
| 4. Gesture and Event, Materials from symposium (2017) | |
| 5. Abstraction of the Body: Unedited review of Amy Sillman at Camden Arts Center, Texte Zur Kunst (2018) | |
| 6. Presence and Absence (2015) Published in May Revue | |
| VII. Bibliography | 161 |

Preface

I am a female painter who studied in the early 2000s and have consistently in my practice tried to piece together various histories in which female artists are not secondary but have run in and alongside a canon that has systematically excluded them. This arises out of a truncated history of artists that I learned after art school was not complete, and I have spent my adult artistic practice filling in various blank spaces. I originally set out in this PhD in 2015 to question the systemic evaluation of gesture; whose gestures are valued? Whose gestures are seen and whose are forgotten? Over the course of my PhD research, which stemmed from a studio practice interacting with a wide range of painterly, printmaking and installation materials, I began to focus on how gesture *behaves*: where do we locate gesture when we look at a painting? In the body or voice of the author? In its physicality (the material, scale or encounter)? In the 'performance' or 'modeling' of thought? I began to see, in my own experiments, that I could identify with gesture in painting as something *in-between*: in between time-frames of painting motifs, or actions on painting surfaces. This unfixed and unstable potential of gesture became my focus on locating how contemporary artists could read through long and 'alternative' histories of making with a toolbox of viewing outside of a fixed canon.

Expanding on what happens when we view a gesture as 'unfixed' has been the endeavor of this PhD. Through working with the loose and liquid material of paint, through making exhibitions that look at the way in which women artists were at the forefront of liquidity in abstraction, through developing bodies of painterly work that question the 'support' and container of how gesture is displayed, and through a body of writing that has developed in spoken and written form as a shifting and amorphous form over time to describe my research, this PhD brings together these strands into a document which attempts to unfold the experiments and trials I have undergone.

This PhD developed over time in the form of exhibitions, physical paintings, experiments with materials, talks, readings, events and conversations. I have reproductions of interviews, symposia, publications and reviews at the end of this document to give a wider context to all the activities that took place around this PhD. Throughout the text, I have included images of the exhibitions, works and experiments that I am describing.

As this PhD focuses on the possibility of gesture as a liquid to affect the shape-form of a container, throughout the text, I also imagine the possibilities of this in the larger world, a world which has begun to re-evaluate gesture and voice and representation in painting in recent years in wider political feminist, queer and Black Lives Matter context that surrounds this PhD. I hope that my research can add to these dialogues and provide a physical set of tools for thinking through the behavior of gesture in painting as something which could itself have agency, which has given, me, a female painter, a language through which to re-evaluate and re-engage with an alternative set of histories and dialogues wider and more exciting than what we already know.

Introduction

Context of the Enquiry of this PhD

My enquiry into gesture comes out of an interest in shifts that have been happening within the wider discourse of painting over the past decade. As a younger painter working in the early 2000s, I was keenly aware of painterly styles of representation of photography as being authored 'gestures' (Gerhard Richter, Luc Tuymans) and the notion of the 'social' situation of painting, as David Joselit wrote about in "Painting Beside Itself" in 2009 in *October* magazine¹. I was also at the time aware of my own lack of social network as a young female painter and starting in 2010 I began to actively cultivate a feminist discourse amongst female artists in various cities (New York, Amsterdam, London, Berlin).

I began to ask what the 'social' situation of women artists meant, and the social circles of overlooked, marginalised, and undervalued artists. What are those artists talking to, and how are their gestures engaging in a discussion? The recent years have seen a needed expansion of discourse in the art world around how to understand practices by those seen outside the canon. At the beginning of this PhD I wanted to question how we could think about, value and contextualise these practices not necessarily in direct relationship to a solid, centric canon of art history, but rather into a more complicated set of dialogues.

In the process of asking this question of how to enter a more complicated set of visual relationships between different voices, this PhD, which is based on my own painting practice as a place for experimentation and inquiries, became specifically focused on the question of how the *behaviour* of gesture in painting can be read or located.

The questions of this PhD arose directly out of a physical practice of painting: experimentation that happened and continues to happen in the studio but also in exhibition contexts, in talks and events, in artist books and interviews. Over the course of the PhD research time, I developed a writing practice which ran alongside my painting practice and intertwined with my paintings and art works. I have termed it "Material" writing because it is written in vignettes of a paragraph to a page, and re-assembled and re-shuffled for each iteration, like the material of a stand-up comedian. It also is used in the same way materials and motifs are in painting, re-peated and re-worked in different situations.

This PhD is borne out of the question: what do gestures in paintings *do*: to each other, to the exhibition context, and importantly what can they do if re-activated from history. If gestures are not passive traces of action, but rather can be understood to have agency in and of themselves: to actively transform both the painting surface, but also to transform the dialogue of and between paintings, then also how can we imagine a world in which gestures do not sit still in historic contexts, but rather become active agents transforming both history and contemporary shape-forms of art dialogue?

¹ David Joselit, "Painting Beside Itself." *October* 2009; (130): 125–134.

My methodology in this PhD oscillates between a painterly practice and research questions that continue to drive exhibitions and further painterly works. This practice-based PhD moves between multiple forms of creation: a set of questions about authorship and what it would mean to re-stage a one-hundred-year-old play by an early feminist, modernist artist which had never been performed led to a performance-as-painting exhibition. This led to questions on the staging of painting which were addressed in research into gesture and exhibition designs. This led to research questions into where gesture is found between paintings, then to a new body of work that tries to visualize gesture on the move. This steered me to research questions into feminist dialectics around fluidity, and which resulted in a curated exhibition focusing on female artists at the forefront of notions of liquidity in abstraction. This exhibition and design then led to bringing the notion of the space of 'hanging' into painterly works, after research into the complicated and overlooked female notions at the basis of the history of the readymade, done in primary research at MoMA library. In each case the research resulted in an experiment, a display, and a further question.

Alongside the painting and exhibition practice which is outlined in the main chapters is a writing practice, presented in the Appendix, which ran alongside, and into my methodology described above. The physical objects, installations and 'material' writing that are presented as the research of this PhD come from 'encounters with paint as an experimental process of discovery and trial and error with material, as well as the process of making paintings that consider their environment, relationships, and the mediation of how gesture can be projected through a surface. The central question throughout my PhD research outputs has been: how can I communicate the *behavior* of gesture within the surface of painting, the presentation and the description? How can I show that gesture moves like a liquid, behaves in an immeasurable manner, that it is projected in a movement that we understand in a cinematic, unfolding mode of movement?

My painting practice has also been located alongside a longer practice of mine in which I have organized feminist meetings, events, and published feminist texts, which generally engages in giving voice to other female artists and writers when possible. Increasingly, throughout my PhD, as my own writing began to take form, at first out of a desire to add to the context of feminist publications that I was editing and publishing, developed along the lines of the inquiry of this PhD on questions of gesture, gender, behavior, and the shape-form of artistic practices.

This PhD finds a variety of references that have been encountered through processes of making, looking and responding to theories and histories. Many references (as well as many works, experiments and exhibitions) have been edited out of the central PhD thesis in order to present a clear development of a specific enquiry into the behavior of gesture.

Throughout the PhD, I return to a set of writers who write about painting in its contemporary state, through the analysis of historic gestures. Isabelle Graw's writing is of particular importance, as I changed the focus of the PhD away from questions of value after reading *High Price* (2009), and instead became more drawn to her writing on how the notion of liveliness presents itself through the movement in paint, in her many essays on the topic. I have also referenced Yve Alain Bois and Rosalind Kraus' texts on painting and

more significantly on 'formlessness', which investigates the gestural form in the accrual of material. Bois' writing on modeling thought within painting is influential though not a main thread; instead the notion of painting as something that thinks, speaks and acts is brought into dialogue in the PhD with writings of David Joselit on social networks (and I do not bring in his ideas on aggregation although it poses an interesting alternative to a reading on unfixed gestures). Other writers on contemporary painting are present such as Adrianna Campbell who writes about the extended (digital and performative) nature of gesture, and Mark Godfrey on a particular form of 'unknowability' in contemporary female abstract painting.

Additionally, throughout the PhD I return to first-person accounts of painters speaking about their experiences of feeling 'in-between' and how they deal with the presentation of voice in their work, such as Amy Sillman, Louise Fishman, Charlene von Heyl and Laura Owens.

One essay in particular by Giorgio Agamben was influential in the development of my research and methodology, "Notes on Gesture" (2000). While Agamben's theories on form-of-life and 'Bare Life' are significant also to a wider scope of feminist thinking and labor, it is Agamben's clear reading of the Roman philosopher Varro on the distinction of gesture as something between making and acting (or performing), that ignited a new way of reading gestures that I had been familiar with in art history for many years, and led to experiments within my work to attempt to visualize these ideas in this PhD.

Further, this led to an interest in a particular set of feminist writers focused on liquidity, lineage and voice. In this PhD, I returned to the writings of Luce Irigaray who became a significant focus, as well as Christine Battersby's writings on the female medieval body and notions of genius. The writings of Helen Molesworth aided my thinking around curating the exhibition "The Mechanics of Fluids." The writings of Anne Carson on the role of voice in the polis helped me reflect on the role of voice that the more historical writers such as Graw were historically referencing, and the more current writings of Astrid Neimanis, though only mentioned in the conclusion, were present in thinking about the larger environment that feminist liquidity can address.

I also utilize interviews and manifestos by female artists such as Mary Heilmann, Charlotte Posenenske and Mierle Laderman Ukeles as a means to think through voices that may have been not heard for years can speak clearly to current concerns, as well as all being relevant to issues around the movement and perception of the behavior of gesture. First person research into the artist Mina Loy and her writings were graciously aided by the scholar Sandeep Parmar, whose writings not only were a key to getting started on this PhD but also who kindly met me and shared her own primary research.

Other figures such as Andrea Fraser and her writings on performance and enactment enabled a wider view of distinctions in the notion of behavior, and also writings by Craig Owens on Robert Rauchenberg and other artists, and historic writings by Clement Greenberg, Leo Steinberg, Brian O'Doherty and others provide specific contextualization throughout.

Some authors are not included in this PhD, which may have found their way in if my inquiry had taken a different direction. Donna Haraway's writings, though relevant to thinking outside of singular voice, and Judith Butler's writings on identity, though significant to questions of making, did not provide clear lines through understanding how gesture behaves in a painting. Griselda Pollock's writing on the canon is indeed present in my thinking, although this PhD aims to point away from revising theories of feminism focused on social conditions, rather to insert feminist thinking into new and different understandings of gesture itself. Other writers on gesture and history such as Walter Benjamin, or feminist writing on inclusion such as Linda Nochlin, all similarly diverted from the focus on how gesture itself behaves and can contain agency.

There were sections cut out of this PhD which focused more on intersectionality, on histories of artists that have dropped out (including first person research and writing by Martin Herbert and Sarah Leher Graiwer), on the notion of being 'marooned' as described by Fred Moten, and writings by Hannah Black on the position of artists of color as they again diverged down a path away from gesture as such in material and more towards identity and inclusion. The writings of William J. Simmons on 'Queer Formalism,' though not a central research to this PhD, provided an important dialectic to think through questions of how we can read old gestures anew.

It is important to note that well into my research time (late 2017) a sudden cultural shift occurred which had been brewing for some time, but which bore fruit of real change that is still happening now. When the Harvey Weinstein scandal broke, I was not at all thinking about the implications on painterly dialogue, but my supervisor at the time, Charlotte Cullinan, pointedly asked me to consider what my voice would be within this context. I had never considered how my voice could be added to a public discourse on feminism, but many of the discussions that I had had with other female artists over the years— discussions about inclusion, public and private persona, levels of political discourse in our work — suddenly became forefront within the art world. I also began to understand how this practice — of creating platforms, making space for conversations between artists and trying to engender a community of feminist discourse — as a longer strand of 'political' action that had been taking place in my work for almost ten years. It is through the vehicle of this PhD in which a feminist voice that runs alongside my practice of paintings and installations could be brought directly into contact with my painterly work, specifically through the voice of the 'Material' writing, which includes commentary, quotes, first-person dialogue, and inner thoughts.

Practice Sections of this PhD: Appendix and Additional Materials, Timeline

This PhD consists of:

- Introduction
- Chapters I-III and Conclusion
- Appendix
- Additional Materials

Chapters I-III

The three chapters in this PhD are broken into the main developmental stages of my research throughout my PhD research time.

Chapter I: Staging: The Cinematic Impulse of Gesture

The first chapter focuses on my attempt to 'stage' gesture in a number of exhibitions and begins and ends by describing and giving context to the 'enactment' of the 1915 Mina Loy play *Collision* in two versions. The chapter shows the movement of my original PhD enquiry away from the original question of how the value of gesture is determined towards an interest in the question of how gesture is 'staged,' or put on display for activation, and how gesture can be found between art objects, images, frames, etc. I describe how my thinking developed in the process of discovering more about the history of corporeal mime as a physical language of modernism to display labor, and how this display is not an acting-out but rather a 'being-in-mediality' of itself (a term defined by Giorgio Agamben to describe gesture which relates to the display of the activity of a form). I also describe the development of an exhibition titled *Routine Pleasures*. I explain how the installation displayed cinematic moves in and between the paintings. As well I discuss how the construction of a display environment for the paintings was made to emphasize the sense that gesture was being 'staged' both within the paintings and in the exhibition architecture that held the paintings. This is contextualized within a reading of Agamben's "Notes on Gesture" in which he identifies the cinematic nature of gesture.

Chapter One focuses on developing an understanding of gesture as something which arises from a movement, or a transition between states, places, frames, time, etc. This is intended to lay the ground for how my PhD enquiry developed to focus on the *behavior* and liquid quality of gesture.

Chapter II: Visualising the Container: A Gesture is a Liquid

In Chapter two, I begin by outlining a six-month period of experimentation in my PhD research time which focused on developing a method to 'capture' the liquidity of paint in a body of work titled *Make a Mess, Clean it Up*. This period of experimentation was brought into an exhibition context at a gallery in Belgium in 2016 where I overlaid the architecture of my apartment and my studio in metal stud walls and showed two bodies of work focused on the re-presentation of gestures: one 'expressive' and one 'routine.' I outline this to show both the material interaction which underpins the development of my PhD inquiry as well as the importance of the display design on developing the language by which the encounter with paintings is developed.

In the next part of Chapter two, titled *Irigaray's Liquidity*, I contextualise my interest in liquidity through the lens of the writer Luce Irigaray and her ideas around the non-singularity of the female form. This is both to situate my PhD enquiry within a longer trajectory of feminist thought, but also to address the being-in-language of a medium with which I would like to contextualize my inquiry into gesture, the self-touching and non-

singularity of gesture relating to Irigaray's reading of the female. Repeatedly throughout the PhD I return to the relationship between bodies and painterly gestures.

This is followed by a description of an exhibition I curated titled *The Mechanics of Fluids* at the Marianne Boesky Gallery in New York in 2018. This exhibition was an exciting way to think through historic practices, attempt combinations and try out my PhD research theories with real artworks and architecture. I attempt to explain both the selection of artists, and to describe the discoveries of complicated relationships to gestural and 'liquid' abstract histories I made in physically bringing the works together. I elaborate this discovery with writing by Helen Molesworth on her essay "How to Install Art as a Feminist," by addressing questions of female genealogies.

I then expand on the art historical discourses of "Flatbed" painting and Georges Bataille's notion of 'informe' (formlessness), as implemented by Rosalind Krauss and Yve-Alain Bois in their exhibition and catalogue *On Formlessness* (Zone Books, 1997). I explain how the notions of site, gravity and mess came to be a nexus or meeting point for my research into the liquid behaviour of gesture and the experimentation and development of new works titled *Female Readymades*.

I then describe the process of developing my Material writing which is in the Appendix. I then focus on an artist book I worked on in 2018 which was a space for experimentation around ideas of gesture, body, site, liquidity titled "A Gesture is a Liquid". This is followed by a description of how both the Material writing and the artist book developed into a new body of paintings titled *Female Readymades* which incorporate the idea of gravity alongside site.

Chapter III: VOICE, and the Speaking Body in Painting

The third chapter of this PhD is focused on the role of voice in painting and triangulates the question of who is speaking within painting to liquidity via the non-singular form of both voice and liquidity. I begin with a section in which I outline older feminist aspects of my practice in which I have given 'space' to other voices. I describe how this practice led to myself starting to write, and to talk about who is speaking in an art practice.

I contextualize the question of voice in this third chapter with an outline of recent writings by Isabelle Graw on the 'liveliness' of painting, which she says is projected through the idea that painting can 'speak.' I expand the idea that it is not just a brushstroke which 'enlivens' but also any cut/paste/insertion action as well. I address the notion of the 'Social Network' of David Joselit, in relationship to who gets to speak in these networks, and I try to pinpoint the fact that this discourse assumes a lack of a body, and I ask how we could update this reading of voice from the angle of those who have bodies that 'get in the way.'

I then end the chapter with a reading of Anne Carson's writing on voice and the way that women's voices have historically been excluded from the notion of public discourse or the 'polis' and that they also have 'two mouths', in that they have a bodily 'mouth' and a vocal 'mouth.' I end by questioning how those of us that have bodies that speak or make sound

(that is unpleasant to others as Carson describes it), can operate in this 'speaking' circle of painting.

IV: Conclusion: The Potentials of Fluids

In the conclusion, I begin with the writing of Astrida Neimanis on water, giving a context of our bodies to our environment, to both bring the possibilities of liquid gestures to the contemporary moment: a reckoning with nature and our inter-connected selves. I explain what I think I have discovered in this PhD, as well as what I hope can be the toolkit that readers can take with them from the PhD into the real art world experience.

V: Appendix

The *Appendix* consists of:

- Luxury Goods, A Burning Desire (2016)
- Female Genius: Vital Signs (2017)
- A Gesture is a Liquid (2018)
- The Embarrassment of SUCKCESS (2019)

The *Appendix* consists of four pieces of "Material" writing that are composites of an ongoing practice of writing that I undertook throughout my research period. The four pieces of writing represent an accumulation of notes, which are assembled and usually spoken in various edits. The writing presented here was the development of a material enquiry: each piece is a loose assemblage of a series of quotes, notes, thoughts, and references, but built in a way in which a story or speaking order is revealed. These textual material parts are ordered and re-ordered, shuffled, and re-used in each iteration in numerous talks, writings, etc. There are no clear boundaries between the four 'pieces' as parts are re-used and re-contextualized.

I also include a PDF which shows visual outcomes with two of the pieces of Material writing, one artist book which uses "A Gesture is a Liquid," and a four-part poster-as-artwork which presents "The Embarrassment of SUCKCESS."

VI: Additional Materials

The *Additional Materials* section provides examples of printed examples of writing and bodies of work which relate directly to the development and the context in which this PhD took place.

The *Additional Materials* section consists of:

1. *Girls Like Us* "Interview with Amy Sillman" (2019) (PDF scan of magazine)
2. "Deep Communities: An interview with Chris Kraus" (2015 & 2018) (PDF of pamphlet)
3. *Collision*, Publication (2018) (PDF of book)
4. *Gesture and Event*, Materials from symposium (2017) (PDF and link to symposium audio)

5. "Abstraction of the Body": Unedited and printed review of Amy Sillman at Camden Arts Center", *Texte Zur Kunst* (2018) (PDF of original and published TZK review)
6. "Presence and Absence," an essay on Dropping Out published in *May Revue 7* (2016).

1. I conducted an interview with Amy Sillman that was conducted in 2019 for *Girls Like Us Magazine*. In the interview I ask some of the questions around female practice that are raised in this PhD. Namely I wanted to ask Sillman about unknowability and female abstraction that Mark Godfrey has written about her work. In her response, she describes a painting practice trying to capture paintings *in process*.

2. "Deep Communities": This is an interview I conducted with Chris Kraus in 2015 on community and publishing. This interview was updated in 2018. The context of finalizing this interview was that Natasha Soobramanien, a writer who was also present for the interview with Chris Kraus in 2015, and whom was a member of the "Female Genius Night Club" residency at WIELS in Brussels in late 2017. This residency was an extension of correspondence with the writer Eva Kenny about concerns in this PhD and was also the space where I worked on *A Gesture is a Liquid*. The "Female Genius Nightclub" residency was the basis of a short essay/story by Soobramanien where she reacts to the book *After Kathy Acker* by Chris Kraus and considers notions of female genius. *Conversation #1* is the first in an ongoing series of short pamphlets that I have been making since 2018. It follows from a series of feminist magazines I published earlier (*LABOUR* in 2011 and *PERSONA* in 2013) with the writer Marina Vishmidt. These were followed by a large project titled *WE (NOT I)* in 2015 at South London Gallery and Artists Space. In this most recent iteration of feminist publishing, I wanted to focus on the relationships between practitioners. Each 'conversation' both produces content, but also presents a series of friendships and influences. It was important also for Natasha and me to update the interview with Chris Kraus not only because Kraus' career had significantly changed but also because of the shifting language in the public sphere around women and power relationships between 2015 and 2018.

3. *Collision*: I have included a small publication I produced with the curators Kirsty White and Marianne McQuay which aims to capture the conversations and process of developing both enactments of Mina Loy's play *Collision* (1915) in 2016 and 2018. The publication includes an introduction by Kirsty White on my practice in relation to the canon, and a description of the colloquium held in my exhibition at the Bluecoat titled "The Myth of the Modern Women" by Marie-Anne McQuay. The publication also includes an interview I did with the corporeal mime artist Rita Pulga, with whom I collaborated in both enactments. The publication also includes poems written by the poets Zoë Skoulding, Sara Wrangle, Joanne Ashcroft and Robert Sheppard who wrote their works in response to the installation left after the live performance of *Collision* in 2016. Mina Loy's play *Collision* is printed on the cover, as well as archival images of Étienne Decroux, the founder of modern mime. I include this to give greater clarity and context to the description of these works in Chapter 1 of this PhD.

4. *Gesture and Event*, WIELS Centre for Contemporary Art, 2018.

I include short biographies of the participants, the announcement and my introduction, and a link to the symposium (<https://vimeo.com/wiels>) in order to show how this symposium was developed (with the support of TECHNE) as a working project with WIELS, and was a very fruitful in expanding of the notion of gesture in my PhD. The symposium included presentations by Esther Leslie, who focused on how gesture is a means of both capturing identity and desire in a digital age, as well as a projection of romantic notions of the body historically. William J. Simmons gave a presentation focused on questions of “Queer Formalism” and whether it would be possible to identify stylistic and gestural connections between artists and histories who are interested both in the ‘in-between’ of gender and identity. In addition, the symposium included a presentation by Fulvia Carnevale on the hand-gestures of Italian feminists led by Carla Lonzi making representations of the vagina in public as an act of physical theatre and breaking down of vocal barriers., Isobel Harbison and Philip Ekardt.

5. “Abstraction of the Body: Review of Amy Sillman” at Camden Arts Center, *Texte Zur Kunst* (2018). I include this as an unedited and edited version. I include this to show the development of my writing and thinking around abstraction and situation, in the wider context of contemporary painting and gender politics.

6. “Presence and Absence”: this essay written in 2015 is included to give a wider context to my interest and thinking around authorship and artists who have dropped out.

7. A short film made in my second year of research in which I scan my studio walls. This is overlaid with the sound of my twin daughters ‘speaking’ to each other at the early stages of language, before words are formed. These vignettes are interspersed with shots of my studio surfaces over which is a tone related to a hearing test. At some point, some people will stop hearing the tones because their hearing cuts out at a certain frequency.

Overview of ‘submissible’ works:

There are four main activities that make up the research activities of this PhD and are spoken about at length in the main chapters of this PhD document.

1. Staging or enactment of the play *Collision* by Mina Loy (1915) on its centennial at the Bluecoat Gallery, the conversations and publication that surrounds this, as well as a re-enactment of the play in a different context nearly three years later in late 2018.

2. The experimentation, development, and production of at first small, then more architecturally engaged silkscreen paintings in a series titled “Make a Mess, Clean it Up” which were developed in direct relationship to my research and writing in this PhD on liquids and thinking on how gestures could be seen as liquids. This includes the experimentation, the production and the exhibition of this body of work in various contexts, as well as the writing that developed around it and was presented as live readings in several venues.

3. The curated exhibition *The Mechanics of Fluids* which I organized in the

summer of 2018 at the Marianne Boesky Gallery in New York. This showcases my ongoing development of exhibition contexts for painting as part of this PhD research, and resulting conversations (such as writing on and interviews with Amy Sillman), as well as the artist book *A Gesture is a Liquid* which was produced for this exhibition.

4. The body of paintings *Female Readymades* which were developed out of a period of experimentation with both various materials around this PhD as well as in conversation with the material writing, and which developed directly out of both the artist book *A Gesture is a Liquid* as well as research undertaken at the MoMA library as a funded TECHNE research trip to New York.

Chapter 1: STAGING: The Cinematic Impulse Within Gesture

Collision 1916 & 2016: Locating gesture across time

I began this PhD research with the question of how one could evaluate the 'value' of gesture, and I was particularly interested in revisiting gestures that had been overlooked in history, to see if I could piece together an alternative understanding of gestures that might be seen as 'minor' or 'secondary,' and to position them in a different manner.

I undertook a live staging-as-an-exhibition of the Mina Loy's play *Collision* from 1915 in 2016 at the Bluecoat Gallery in Liverpool. I then re-staged this work at the end of 2018 at the Swiss Church in London. The enactment of this play bookends my attempt during this time to define what the potential behavior of gesture could look like, in this case by bringing to life a real work from a female artist one hundred years prior.

Collision is an impossible play to perform, because it describes, in short, a complete dismantling of the stage set: the "incursive planes and angles of walls and ceiling interchange kaleidoscopically..." (Loy, 1915). It is a poem and stage instruction, futurist manifesto and script for a play all at once.

Mina Loy was a poet, active in the early years of modernism, and was, at the time of publishing her book *Lunar Baedeker* in 1923, already well traveled and had lived between Florence, Italy, Mexico, Paris and London after her studies in Munich at the Poetry Foundation. Her work is well known in poetry history for its dramatic, staccato and excessive digressions in visual form:

"Lunar Baedeker" (1923)

*A silver Lucifer
serves
cocaine in cornucopia*

*To some somnambulists
of adolescent thighs
draped
in satirical draperies... (Loy 1996, 81)*

When Loy wrote *Collision* in 1916 she was living in Italy, and purportedly romantically involved with the futurist Filippo Tommaso Marinetti. Loy was a Futurist herself, but the play (which, to my knowledge, had never been performed before) is, in my reading, a protest against singular authorship and the masculine image of the author. Perhaps Loy envisioned a mechanical stage, or, as I have always imagined: a new notion of an exhibition space. A space that transformed into a set, an exhibition, and an artwork itself.

Mina Loy

I

COLLISION

Huge hall—disparate planes, angles—
whiteness—central arc-light—blaze
Emptiness—
But for one man—
A dependent has shut the door—

MAN: "Back! Bang door! Succession—
incentive—ejection—idea—space—
cleared of nothings—leaves everything—
material—exhaustless creation!"

Stares blankly into arc-light—presses
electric button—shattering insistant
noise surrounds room—intermittently
arc-light extinguishes—vari-colored
shafts of lightning crash through fifty-
nine windows at irregular heights—the
floor worked by propellers—rises and
falls irrhythmically—the disymetric re-
ceding and incursive planes and angles
of walls and ceiling interchange kaleid-
escopically to successive intricacies—
occasional explosions irrupt the modes
of

DISHARMONY.

Man rushes floor—with gesture of vet-
eran mariner in hurricane—
As the pandemonium of sound and
motion increases—he calms—

MAN: "At last—vibration is intensified
to the requisite ratio—for every latent
conscious and sub-conscious impulse to
respond to automatically—completely—
virility ceases to be implicated in dis-
integrant autostimuli—leaving the
Nucleus free for self-activity—
Expansion—Extension—Intension—

CREATION—"

The vibrations accelerate to super-ve-
locity—reach the static—the light is
uniform—the planes uniplane—motion
repose—din silence—
The man rigid—his mind concen-
trated—

Out of the attained unison—a new
tremor produces itself—as it graduates
to the primary celerity—in a secondary
Inception—
the curtain falls—
the curtain falls—

Collision, Mina Loy, 1915 (Loy, 1996, 128)

I had originally found *Collision* in a book of Mina Loy's writing at an open shelf library in 2010, whilst looking for examples of early modernist women who might have been a key to the notion that modernism in its early days was 'feminine.' This idea that modernism itself was driven by or had important female forces is a myth to be further explored² but I have long wondered why the presence of woman in art in the 20th century has been considered in early modernism to be "marginal," or in mid-century "secondary," or in conceptualism as "feminist" and separate: what more complicated histories are at play? What if women did not play just supporting or side roles in the gestures of modernism?

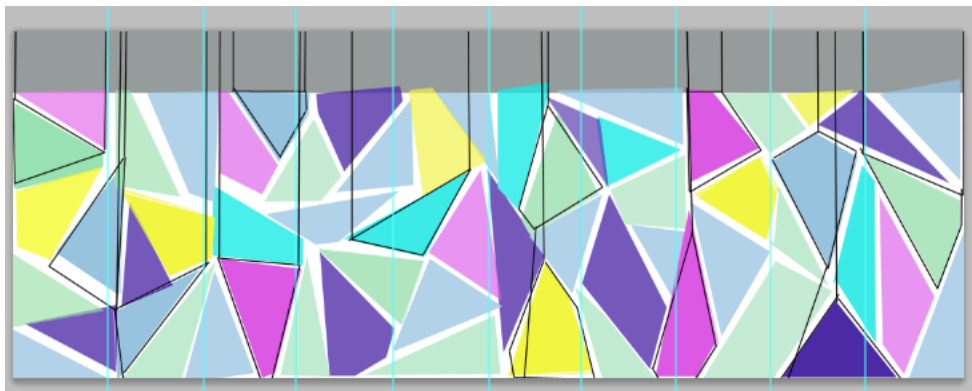
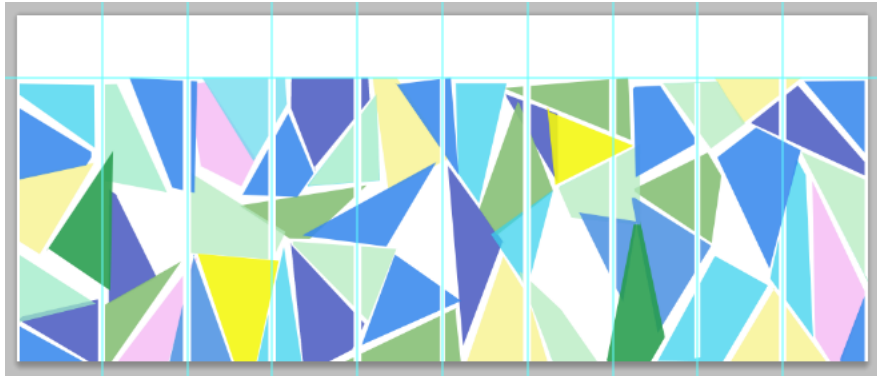
Two years before writing *Collision*, Loy wrote (but did not publish) her "Feminist Manifesto," which was undoubtedly in response to the "Manifesto of Futurist Woman" by Valentine de Saint Point (1912).

Loy wrote, in 1914:

Women if you want to realize yourselves—you are on the
eve of a devastating psychological upheaval—all your pet illu-
sions must be unmasked—the lies of centuries have got to go—
are you prepared for the Wrench—? There is no half-
measure—NO scratching on the surface of the rubbish heap
of tradition, will bring about Reform, the only method is
Absolute Demolition. (Loy 1996, 153)

I start here because I want to intertwine these sentiments towards the future with our current long view of modernism, with our current perspective on feminism, and to point to their long-term dialogue and interaction. To begin a study of gestures with a grounding not in the idea that women's gestures have been excluded, but rather, that their strong voices have been present and forefront, and have been shifting in relationship to notions of authorship over time.

² In addition to the prevalence of female figures in primary 'roles' in early modernism: Gertrude Stein, Djuna Barnes, and Mina Loy, there is an often over-looked media element to Loy's persona. "Who is this modern woman that people are always talking about?": according to an article by Margaret Gillespie, this quote was published in the *New York Evening Post* in 1917, and that Loy was perceived as a "modernist icon." The presence of many female figures is not secondary, but rather as characters, central to the development of the idea of modernism in public understanding. The understanding most likely emerges from the term 'New Woman' which developed in the late 1800s as a larger push for emancipation. In short, the sexually explicit shock of Loy's poetry caused media sensations that put her at the forefront of a discussion of what a 'modern' woman would be.



Digital designs for the stage 'set' of Collision (1915/2016) at Bluecoat Gallery, 2016
The stage was fractured into 59 shapes, some which hung on pulleys.

| | |
|---|---|
| <p>Mina Loy</p> <p>I</p> <p>COLLISION</p> <p>Huge hall—disparate planes, angles— whiteness—central arc-light—blaze Emptiness— But for one man— A dependent has shut the door—</p> <p>MAN: "Back! Bang door! Succession— incentive—ejection—idea—space— cleared of nothings—leaves everything— material—exhaustless creation!"</p> | <p>DOORS to performance space open at 7</p> <p>Setting: 10 fabric prints, covering the 15 meter long wall, are accordianed on the ground, attached to the lighting rig with ropes. The 10 frames with rope are also on the ground, in a pile, also attached to the rig with rope.</p> <p>The audience walks in to seating in bleachers down the side by the door. Lights are on normal. All they see are many black ropes going from the floor to the ceiling, and some standing angular frames.</p> <p>They will each be given a printed script/poster.</p> <p>MIME is standing center, middle front, holding a reflective surface over it's face/torso, a BRIGHT light is reflecting on that surface. MIME is wearing costume of stripes made from silkscreen- will be "part" of the installation.</p> <p>Doors shut promptly at 7.10 once everyone is seated. As soon as doors shut (SLAM), all lights except ARC LIGHT (bright spotlight on surface) go out, MIME yells from behind the reflective surface:</p> |
|---|---|

Stage notes, Collision (1915/2016), The Bluecoat, 2016



Rita Pulga performing *Collision (1915/2016)*, the Bluecoat, Liverpool (2016)

Loy did not remain a Futurist for long. In Sandeep Parmar's "Mina Loy and the myth of the modern woman":

The Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library holds a page of Loy's personal copy of the New York quarterly *Camera Work*, issue 45, in which 'Aphorisms on Futurism' first appeared. Throughout this page, Loy has pencilled the words 'modern' and 'modernism' over the words 'Future' and 'Futurism' respectively. " No date is given for these changes; it is likely that they were made sometime after 1916, following Loy's arrival in New York from Florence. (Parmar, 2008, 32-33)

This is an especially interesting note: a change of allegiance, perhaps due to where she was based, perspective, and an imagining of the future, of potentials. This seems like a very contemporary gesture to me: to witness an artist questioning what dialogue their work takes place within.

I kept the play *Collision* with me for five years, and then on the centenary of the play, in 2016, I staged it with a corporeal mime, Rita Pulga, who had studied at Theatre de l'Ange Fou Academy, in London. L'Ange Fou is a corporeal mime academy, which graduates around five mimes per year. It is considered a direct lineage of corporeal mime taught from Étienne Decroux: the 'inventor' of modern corporeal mime. This kind of mime is focused on the expression of thought through the body and is focused on mime as an exercise rather than an end result. This is 'modality' unto itself of corporeal mime was especially interesting for me to engage with in terms of the question of how gesture can be enacted through form, and to use the play *Collision* as itself a model for the gesture of creating a work itself.

I decided to use corporeal mime as a tool to work through questions of gesture in the play *Collision* (1915). Mime, as a wordless language seemed appropriate to engage with in a play with almost no dialogue. It also is a language of the body, which emerged around the time of Loy's writing, during the avant-garde of Modernism. I wanted to stage the play of Loy as a gesture: of re-inscription, of re-activation, but also to think about what staging would be most appropriate. Someone who is a 'worker' operating a 'system' or 'stage' making an 'exhibition' out of nothing: this seemed like the best way forward. The (silent) language of corporeal mime, which is focused on the machinery of the body and the un-languaged and even faceless communication of gesture, was in my mind an appropriate reference to bring to the Loy play.



Top: Rita Pulga performing *Collision (1915/2016)*, the Bluecoat, Liverpool (2016)
Bottom: *Collision (1915/2016)*, the Bluecoat, Liverpool (2016)



Rita Pulga performing *Collision (1916/2016)*, the Bluecoat, Liverpool (2016)



Collision (1915/2016), the Bluecoat, Liverpool (2016)



Collision (1915/2016), the Bluecoat, Liverpool (2016)

In the first iteration of *Collision*, which was held at the Bluecoat in Liverpool, in a theatrical setting of a black box with theater lights, the mime installed the exhibition in front of a live audience. The 'exhibition' or work itself consisted of ten panels of scrim, which had fifty-nine shapes cut out, which are references to the 'fifty-nine shapes kaleidoscopically moving' in Loy's play. Each shape was made by printing silkscreen lines: thick line rasters – sometimes overlapping each other – in various colors. Some shapes were missing from the backdrop, and these shapes hung as angular metal forms with lines of rope strung through. This emphasized the space and the kaleidoscopic-kinetic nature Loy describes. The overlapping of these thick lined surfaces caused 'collisions' of the eye, a shimmering moiré effect in space.

The performance began with the mime standing with a mirror reflecting a bright light as the audience took their seats, which ascended like bleachers from the lower stage. It began with the door slamming, then Pulga saying:

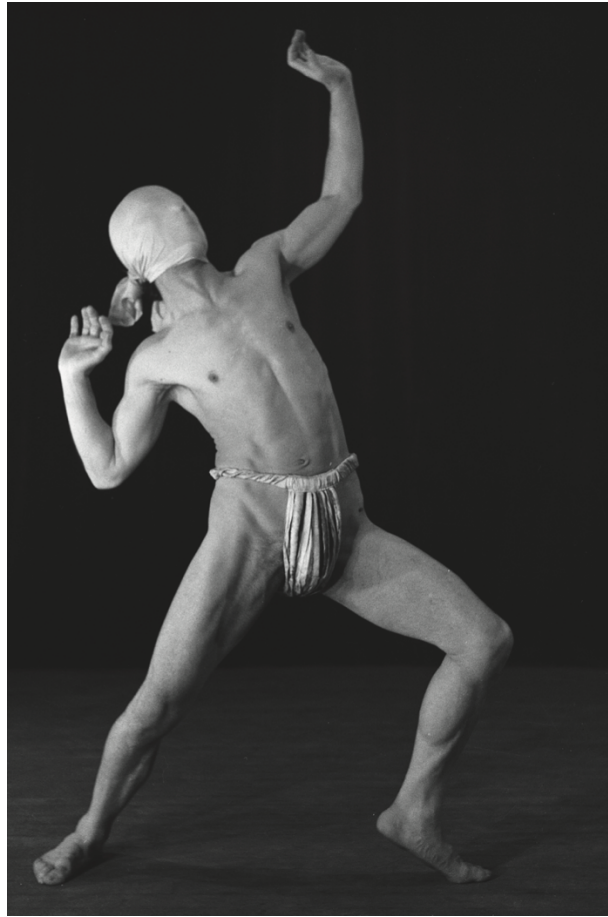
Back! Bang door. Succession—
Incentive—ejection—idea—space
Cleared of nothings—leaves everything
Material—exhaustless creation! (Loy 1915)

She then mimed pressing a button, which unleashed the music, and lasted about ten minutes during which the mime hoisted the panels which had been rolled on the floor with ropes on pulleys and tied them down to heavy sandbags. A live soundtrack of electronic music and bass played by Chris Evans and Morten Norbye Halvorsen, increasingly into a cacophony of sound. When the exhibition had been installed, Pulga shouted the second monologue of the play:

At last—vibration is intensified to the requisite ratio—for every latent conscious and sub-conscious impulse to respond automatically – completely—virility ceases to be implicated in disintegrant auto stimuli—leaving the Nucleus free for self-activity—

Expansion—Extension—Intension—CREATION (Loy 1915)

The mime stayed in position at the end until everyone left. A couple of weeks later, Pulga returned, and helped deinstall, live, un-performatively. The audience was allowed to watch from an overhanging balcony.



Etienne Decroux, *Les sports*, © Étienne Bertrand Weill, 1948

Exhibition as staging: the discovery of gesture as behavior in corporeal mime

During rehearsals for 'Collision', I became increasingly interested in the relationship between exhibition and performance as similar forms of staging of particular language of form. In discussions with Pulga, I was told that corporeal mime was intended to be 'the language of the modern age.'

In an interview I conducted with Pulga in 2018, I asked her to elaborate. She describes both the program of the inventor of modern mime, Étienne Decroux, and her training:

Étienne Decroux's intent was to programmatically break from the rules of "old pantomime." This is how I understand corporeal mime fits into this modernist environment... Decroux started his career at a theatre called the Vieux Colombier... It was in this theatre that many figures found a ground to bring forward their revolution in visual theatre such as Antonin Artaud and Charles Dullin. Decroux's technique was inspired by movements from Japanese theatre that were codified and symbolic. He tried to portray the very socialist idea of effort...when working and most importantly when thinking by isolating each part of the body into an articulated point of focus. In corporeal mime, working and thinking are perceived as a similar struggle, a portrait with a different display. (Pulga 2018, 12)

And on her studies:

I think the exercises devised by Decroux and then taught to us at L'Ange Fou mime school were exactly intended to train our bodies like a pianist does with its fingers by playing over and over a set of scale, by increasing the difficulty, to understand the limits of our body... The parts of the body that were isolated were the head, neck, torso, waist and the whole body or what is called the Eiffel Tower. You can combine the directions, the rotation and the depth to every possible combination. (Pulga. 2018, 12)

In this interview with Pulga, which I conducted after working with her in 2016 at the Bluecoat, and once previous at a performance at Auto Italia in London in 2011, I was curious to outline the parameters of what corporeal mime could teach me about the behaviors of gesture. Gesture in mime is broken down into the mechanical forms of the human body and assembled into a language which portrays the *effort* of creation.

Using corporeal mime to stage the Mina Loy play, a play which Loy was writing in order to imagine for herself the term 'modern' in art to come, was a place for me to begin to investigate not what the effects of early modern dance and poetry were to my practice but rather to attempt to define how I would look at how the gestures of female artists from early modernism could be viewed from the current perspective.

My question was: how have these gestures changed? What does it mean to re-stage a gesture from 1915 exactly one hundred years after it was written, using 'gestures' inscribed into action from that moment in time (corporeal mime)? Can we decipher the original intentions? Does the work change completely?

(In)Fallible Space (*For Melissa Gordon*)
Joanne Ashcroft

door BANGS

-- per-fect stretch of space --

hugs absence the very shape you

air colour & noise

her body *persists*

these harlequin quadrilaterals

in hypnosis muscularis

--spill velocity-- floating is

by ropes

secured by sand

raising drapes -- heaven & earth --

a-haze of

summer's day

(him at sea)

sliver's plurality

hand's window-dance

stirring

separately kites

persPective

--fleshness-- sky & field

sparks array scaling colour

--the end-- eyes still

a-glint
& ease

Joanne Ashcroft, *(In)Fallible Space*, 2016

After the performance of Collision (1915/2016) was held, live at the Bluecoat, the installation of silkscreened panels and hanging metal frames suspended with sandbags remained. Four poets, all inspired by Loy's writing, Joanne Ashcroft, Zoë Skoulding, Robert Sheppard and Sandeep Parmar were invited both to respond to the installation as well as for a discussion on Mina Loy's influence.

During the two weeks that the exhibition ‘hung’ in the theatre at the Bluecoat in 2016, I staged an event which brought together a number of poets, and scholars who had been inspired by Mina Loy. The poets Joanne Ashcroft, Robert Sheppard and Zoë Skoulding, invited by the Loy scholar Sandeep Parmar, attended the performance and each wrote poems in response to the performance and remaining exhibition. These poems are published in the pamphlet *Collision* (2016) and are available in the appendix of this PhD.

The event titled *The Myths of the Modern Women*, held in early 2016 at the Bluecoat, is described here by curator Marie Anne McQuay:

Gathered together on a Saturday afternoon in January 2016 by Parmar, author of *Reading Mina Loy's Autobiographies: Myth of the Modern Woman*, the four poets and academics Zoe Skoulding, Sara Wrangle, Joanne Ashcroft and Robert Sheppard breathed life into Loy, reading her poems alongside their own works inspired by her writing... This public reading and discussion at Bluecoat, Liverpool was set against the dazzling backdrop of suspended printed canvases and ropes, an installation entitled “Fallible Space” (2016) created by the artist Melissa Gordon. Raised and anchored during a live performance one week previously, the arrangement of what could be read both as stage set and an exhibition of paintings, was determined by the actions of a corporeal mime artist Rita Pulga... Gordon, like Parmar, is drawn to Loy’s propensity for capturing moments of transition, of newness... These transitions ricochet from last century to this... By intervening in Loy’s play one hundred years later Gordon reanimates the spirit of Loy while suggesting that authorial authority can be productively and playfully destabilized; reclaiming comes from enacting. (McQuay, White, eds. 2018, 3)

The event was a discussion on bringing the life, energy and unique language of Loy to a larger audience. I was asked to describe my intentions, and I described how I was interested in re-defining modernism as female: or to think how we could re-imagine modernism as female.

This was in line with my original question: how do we value gesture? But this question focused on value began to shift during the staging at the Bluecoat: I began to wonder how we visualize gestures, how this enactment of a gesture can bring a gesture to life: how does a gesture arise from stillness? This Loy play, sat silent for 100 years, how did even the gesture of enacting it bring ‘life’ to a gesture? How does doing this change an understanding of history itself?

///

Enacting the Mina Loy play *Collision* created physical gestures, and it was gestures that filled the air, like the ‘ENDLESS CREATION’ that Loy proclaims. This generative means of envisioning gestures, which comes from Loy’s own language, and which was discussed by the poets as something that Loy’s poetry inspires in generations of poets, began to gain my focus in my research at the time.

Mina Loy Remixed
Zoë Skoulding

The sound of an idea

*Poetry is prose bewitched, a music made
of visual thoughts, the sound of an idea.
More than to read poetry, we must listen
to poetry.* Mina Loy

While listening up I hear my husband
Mumbling Mumbling
Mumbling at the window
The glass rattling
As your indisputable male voice roared
Boomed as it seemed to me
But you who make more noise than any man
in the world when
you clear your throat
Deafening woke me
One little whining beast
Shut it up // Sing silence
The antique envious thunder
of Latin littérateurs
This gong
of polished hyperaesthesia
shrills with brass
blows out damnation and concussive dark
Upon a mouth organ
Listen! make celtic noises
The Normal Monster
who made euphonious
our esoteric universe
sings in the Green Sahara
Hurricanes / of reasoned musics
in the brazen shallows of dissonance
and impish musics
Your chiffon voice
creaks with the horror of echo
a prophet of Babble-on
shouts and mutters
to earless gutters
a dull-dong bell
thuds out admonishment
It is in my ears Something very resonant
Something that you must not hear
Something only for me

White

the eye-white sky-light
white-light district
a dead white feathered moth
White with soft wings
Clear of 'white marks mean money'
From the gritty road on the white wall
The scrubbed smell of the white-wood table
An old man / Eyeing a white muslin girl's
school
Greece has thrown white shadows
– a long white muslin curtain
whitened with avalanches
The white flesh quakes to the negro soul
White man quit his actin' wise
Pulls a weed white and star-topped
The wind stuffs the scum of the white street
White telling / Of slaking / Drinkable
Bleach /To the pure white
The steps go up forever / and they are white
And the first step is the last white
Whiteness / Of my / Emergence
And I am burnt quite white
And wills and words all white
White where there is nothing to see
But a white towel
And the white dawn
Unthinkable that white over there
—Is smoke from your house

Instead of inscribing gestures into a sphere of specific histories – for example, Modernism versus Futurism – it is the gestures themselves which generate language, as Loy’s action shows. *Collision* (1915), itself a staging for gesture, posits endless possibilities that Loy herself declares and points to as the fulcrum point of artistic endeavor are both the language and the visual possibility of the play.

Mina Loy herself crossed out the term ‘Futurism’ and replaced it with ‘Modernism,’ and this points to the fact that the intention of the artworks can be re-contextualized even during the lifetimes of artists themselves who make them. I began to ask myself; rather than how can we change the context (and value) of a (historical) gesture, can we begin to imagine gesture as something that has an agency unto itself?

The enactment of Mina Loy’s play *Collision* was the cornerstone of my PhD research. It helped me re-focus my original question of ‘how is a gesture valued’ to ‘where do we locate gesture?’ The understanding of Loy’s play as something which could be re-enacted, and changed each time, that the moves or instructions or situation of viewing could be radically altered each time, this made me begin to understand that gesture as we think of it, is not in and of itself ‘set.’ It can change. Further, through the reading of theorist Giorgio Agamben’s texts on gesture, it can be understood to be born of movement.

Between the frames – Agamben and cinema as the homeland of gesture

In “Notes on Gesture” (2000) by the theorist Giorgio Agamben, he begins by outlining the relationship between movement and gesture. He visualizes a study done by Gilles de la Tourette in 1886 of the human gait, in which a person, with the soles of their feet covered in red oxide powder, walks on paper, staining it with red footprints. This visualization is closely related to the Eadweard Muybridge studies of movement which coincided with Tourette’s. Agamben wants us to understand through these early scientific visualizations of movement that “the element of cinema is gesture and not image.” (Agamben 2000, 55)

Specifically, Agamben is pointing to an understanding of gesture that has its roots in Aby Warburg’s *Mnemosyne Atlas*. If Warburg’s ‘Atlas’ was a collection and collation of gestures, of “poses éternelles” showing similar animations and physical gestures (in painting, sculpture, folk art, photography), through time, through cultures, and using photography, the medium of documentary, as its *proof*, then Agamben is stating that it is the space in-between these cultural documents, between these photographs, between the distances of time and space that illuminates the gestures that Warburg studied. It is within Warburg’s cinematic *assemblage* that we can understand where gesture lies.

Gilles Deleuze has argued that cinema erases the fallacious psychological distinction between image as psychic reality and movement as physical reality. Cinematographic images are neither *poses éternelles* (such as the forms of the classical age) nor *coupes immobiles* of movement, but rather *coupes mobiles*, images themselves in movement, that Deleuze calls movement-images. (Agamben 2000, 55)

Perhaps it is useful to consider the difference between a gesture and a trace. A trace is the left-over mark of an action, a spilled wine on a shirt, a tire track screeching to a side of the road. A gesture is different, perhaps it implies that something has changed or moved. As

Deleuze describes his 'movement-images,' a gesture reveals or shows us the movement (of material, of bodies, of ideas), it brings the image of the change to us.

I was very interested in the idea that corporeal mimes were themselves 'movement-images,' and I was curious to develop a language that would link painting to the movements of corporeal mime.

At the same exhibition *Fallible Space* at the Bluecoat in 2016, I also installed a small project show of paintings, just down the hallway from the room where we enacted the play *Collision*. In this project show, I installed paintings from the series *Material Evidence*.



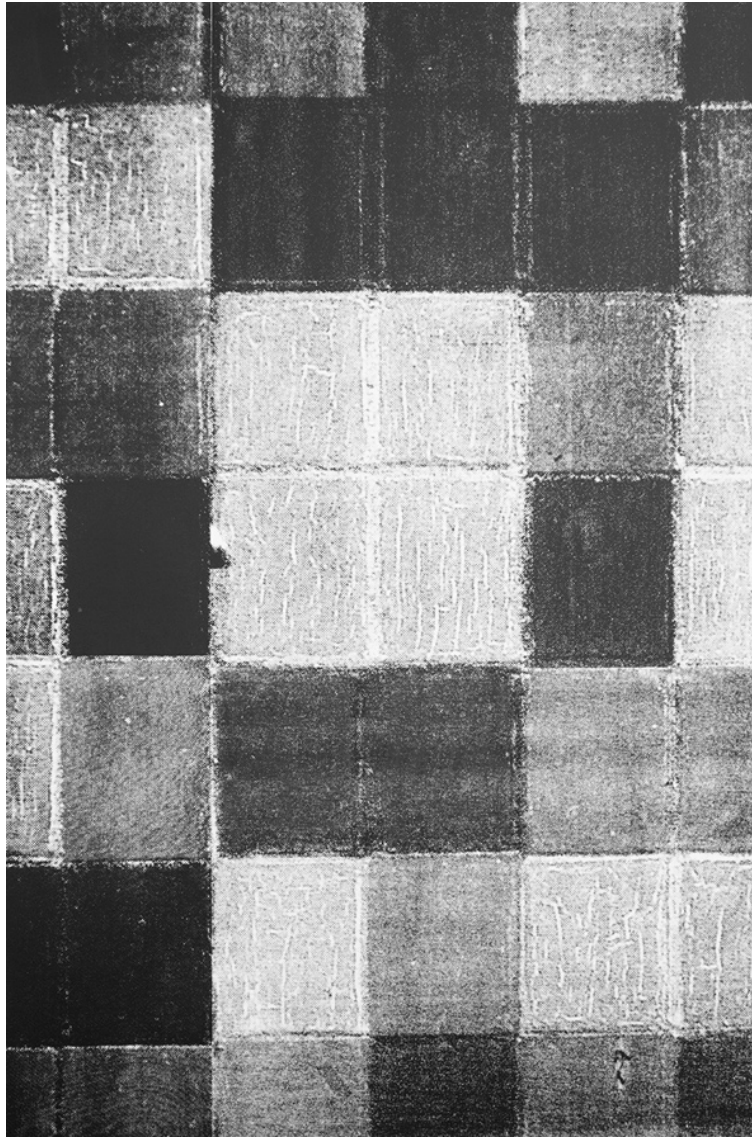
Aby Warburg, *Bilderatlas Mnemosyne*, Table 39 (recovered), 1929. Photo: Wootton



Material Evidence (Wall), 2013

I. Material Evidence

Material Evidence began as a series of paintings in 2013 and arose out of a larger painterly practice that focused acutely on details of gestures. In a show at Spike Island, in 2013, I had developed a series of works titled *Blow Up Modernists* in which I took zoomed-in pictures of damaged and cracked early modernist paintings from printed catalogues, then blew them up larger than life and silkscreened them in black and white: obfuscating the surfaces of historic paintings through the disintegration of its own surface, the disintegration of the printed rosette of the page and the loss of color: the turning of gesture into a document.



Blow Up Mondrian, 2013

It was out of this series *Blow Up Modernists* that I developed the body of work *Material Evidence*, as a means of turning this investigative eye towards myself, or my gestural actions, whilst at the same time revealing nothing biographical. I was interested in a wry wit or pun-like attempt to make critical abstraction. Rather than exhibit an edited 'decision' of how to accumulate paint on a surface, rather I present an 'image' of this accumulation, photographed, edited, cropped and zoomed.



Material Evidence (Table), 2013

Material Evidence is a body of paintings which are sourced from a photographic archive of my studio surfaces. I repeatedly photograph my own unconscious gestures in the studio, and this has formed an archive of thousands of images. These details, such as paint wiped on walls, paint spilled on the floor, paint mixed on table surfaces and buckets etc. are reproduced or re-enacted in paint on canvas. The paintings are not copies so much as mimicry of gesture in which other kinds of surfaces and gestures and paint accumulation takes place: they are not 'realistic' paintings as much as real paint applied in the representation of gesture. These paintings of gestures act as tongue-in-cheek abstract paintings, a 'picturing' of gesture, or a re-inscription of gesture from one site of the studio (an architectural surface) to another (the painting face).

Early in the series, I worked with the writer Marina Vishmidt, and she developed a beautiful analogy in which she described that the body of work envisioned the transition of moving from an icon to index and back again, and I think her pointing towards a movement in how we understand and read the gestures in the paintings helped me, as I began my PhD research, to think about how gesture might *behave* differently in different situations.

In Marina's writing, she describes the back-and-forth movement between cataloguing a gesture and reproducing it as a painting itself:

In the two paintings "Material Evidence (Table)" and "Material Evidence (Wall)", paint splotches on studio surfaces inject the old punchline of the abject un-meaning of the abstract expressionist canvas with a homely, gendered wit. It is the performance of an interior, but not a performance of interiority. A blunter play with the index-to-icon transit can be observed here: the mark of paint (index) is turned into a painting (icon), compressing in that transfer a whole history of canvas as index of gesture which becomes the icon of artistic genius. But, asks this image, what about the contingencies of housekeeping in the studio? Is a paint drip on some kinds of studio surface—canvas—any more expressive than dripping on others (wall, table)? What is this material evidence of? We could say it is nothing more than process, but that creates a tautology that eclipses the impact of the move, or, what makes it funny. Gordon calls the pieces "intentionally ridiculous," their mixing-up of horizontals and verticals jinxing the immanence of the picture plane to its historically-certified content. If the expressive splotch was part of an *expressive causality* (it embodied the spirit of its time—the irreducible subject that was its maker), the "Material Evidence" pair articulates a *structural* causality: it is produced by the woman artist, in her studio, dutifully, as an artwork – as proof of her right to be there. Detached from its generic premise of authenticity, like a bad translation in a service script, it labors to bring us nothing but joy. (Vishmidt 2014, 39-40)

In 2016, at the Bluecoat, I installed two diptychs of *Material Evidence* paintings: two works which were photographed from the same wall, in slightly different frames, like a film camera panning across a surface. Another two works were images of the same plastic bucket in which paint was mixed, but at different times. Herein started a notion of cinematic assemblage in the combination of paintings. The Warburg collection of gesture and trying to make sense of the function of gesture, which was a motivation in my earlier, singular *Material Evidence* paintings, was combined at the Bluecoat exhibition of *Collision* with the staging of the Deleuzian '*coupes immobiles*' (frozen movement) of mime, with the question of how a gesture mimics or comes from a cinematic root. I began to think of how the gesture might be found between the paintings, between the readings of a 'frame' of an unfolding movie.



Material Evidence (Wall Pan), 2016

For the exhibition *Fallible Space* at the Bluecoat I intended to 'stage' an exhibition. For both the exhibition installed by the mime during the live enactment of the Mina Loy play (an exhibition which arrived out of a live event, where the stage set became the exhibition itself) and the hanging of the *Material Evidence* which were 'cuts' of my studio surfaces (paintings arriving out of a re-enactment of a studio action and hung on a half-finished exhibition wall), I wanted to 'stage' an image of the thing itself (a painting, an exhibition).

In relation to the way of hanging my paintings generally as something that implies staging, I began to think that a 'movement-image' or *coupe mobile* would function like the frames of an animation assembling into an image of liveliness. What could the implication for painting be if liveliness, or the notion of vitality, something being literally about to come to life, can be located in a *recognition* and a cinematic *putting together* of gesture?

In these diptychs I described above, I saw their relationship to the mime-movement of gesture, where 'poses éternelles' become 'coupes mobiles' (the statue-like gestures became off-cuts of movement). The viewer's eye jumped between the paintings and there was an animation of the paintings, a cinematic frame cut that a brain constructed to show how the move from one image went to the next but kept the in-between present.

It was at this time that the notion that gesture lies in its *perception* of movement began to be a very important point to address in my PhD research. I was discerning this in large part through the process of producing paintings with a specific goal to draw attention to the space between them. This process is a means of distinguishing where a gesture lies from a

material trace of an 'event' such as mark-making. This process has led to a gradual understanding of gesture not as the mark (brushstroke), or the act that makes the mark (performance), but rather the perception of the transition that has happened between these two states, or two 'pictures' or 'frames' of a film.

What is a gesture? A remark of Varro contains a valuable indication. He inscribes gesture into the sphere of action, but he clearly sets it apart from acting (*agere*) and from making (*facere*). (Agamben 2000, 56)

The third stage of action is, they say, that in which they *faciunt* "make" something: in this, on account of the likeness among *agere* "to act" and *gerere* "to carry or carry on," a certain error is committed by those who think that it is only one thing. For a person can *facere* something and not *agere* it, as a poet *facit* "makes" a play and does not act it, and on the other hand the actor *agit* "acts" it and does not make it, and so a play *fit* "is made" by the poet, not acted, and *agitur* "is acted" by the actor, not made. On the other hand, the general [*imperator*], in that he is said to *gerere* "carry on" affairs, in this neither *facit* "makes" nor *agit* "acts," but *gerit* "carries on," that is, supports, a meaning transferred from those who *gerunt* "carry" burdens, because they support them. (Agamben 2000, 77)

Agamben's describes gesture as means in an end. It serves no purpose, other to reproduce itself, its materiality, and to do this through the medium of the human body as a vehicle.

"The gesture is the exhibition of a mediality: it is the process of making a means visible as such. It allows the emergence of the being-in-a-medium of human beings..." (Agamben 2000, 58)

Gestures are wrapped up in their medium, in the *movement* of their medium. The concerns that Agamben raises in "Notes on Gesture" (2000) had transformative implications during my research period, and on my work in general. It is through reading Agamben, I began to question what the behavior of a gesture is, in painting. Questioning how gesture can function within a mediality as a *behavior* helps me coincide the fact that paint has both material and bodily qualities that can be described as behaviors.

The behavior of paint can be first and foremost borne of its material qualities: oil paint in fact behaves quite differently from acrylic, or from vinyl Flashe paint; the addition of marble dust thickens and quickens a paint and can make it crack and crumble. What material paint touches and moves on changes its qualities. A body is always present in adjusting paint or material and this is read by the viewer as an action- even to let paint spill and dry. The physical ability of paint to 'picture' something is distinct from photography, as the medium of reproduction in painting, even if mechanical, must find its way through the physical qualities of a material which has its own behaviors.

But it was through reading Agamben that I began to envision that the behavior of gesture is something which might lie between states of material, between 'pictures' of paint becoming an image. As Agamben describes: "Cinema leads us to the homeland of gesture." (Agamben 2000, 56)

It was at this time, as someone who has watched as paint moves, evaporates, and inevitably changes (becomes matt, becomes thick, becomes dull), that I began to understand that gesture is also the movement of material between states, a transition which paint captures *in the process of taking place*.

It was at this point in my research period that the implications of locating a space in which the behavior of paint can be observed as *in between* (states, forms, times) has its logic in cinema, mimicking the process of the human eye putting single images together in our brain.

As Esther Leslie describes in *Liquid Crystals*, how our eyes and brains capture images in a series of small events, and do not pan across smoothly, mimicking camera action.

That we can move our eyes uniformly, that by a continuous motion like that of a telescope we can move our eyes along the skyline in the landscape or the cornice of a room, but we are wrong in this. However determinedly we try to do so, what actually happens is, that our eyes move like the second hand of a watch, a jerk and a little pause, another jerk and so on; only our eyes are not so regular, the jerks are sometimes of greater, sometimes of less, angular amount, and the pauses vary in duration, although, unless we make an effort, they are always short. During the jerks we practically do not see at all, so that we have before us not a moving panorama, but a series of fixed pictures of the same fixed things, which succeed one another rapidly. (Leslie 2016, 24)

I began to endeavor, after the exhibition at the Bluecoat, to make work that enacted, or staged this 'in-between' nature of paint. And to seek out wider references of other painters speaking about this particular quality of paint.

I found, in the language of contemporary female abstract painters' descriptions of gestures, sympathy with idea that gesture has a behavior in and of itself, and the notion that gesture in painting is something that sits between states. I was interested to discover that this is a language-in-development of contemporary (female) painters, a searching for the meaning or place of gesture, as distinct from style or authorship of gestural 'marks' inscribed onto a painting surface. I imagine these quotes below as examples of artists with an interest in capturing something in process:

maybe the last 5-10 years I have found myself asking another question more and more:
Where is the painting?

This comes out of a continued thinking and talking about painting as an almost hyper arrived penultimate readymade, A painting can never not be art. Unlike contemporary art which status is always in flux of time and space (it needs the Kunsthalle, the invitation, the website) its art status being specifically linked to context and discourse, -- Painting seems to never not be art even whether it is sitting on the shelf at the art supply store or in the dumpster. However, because of this special status, weaker perhaps because of its portability or intrinsic mirror like links to capital, circulation, etc., or stronger because of its imperviousness – it is most importantly BOTH.

We are constantly reminded – if it is working as art that Its location is not only with the auratic object but also always in the space around it, it is helping the institution become art institution, it is the gallery it supports, the lunch and the people attending the lunch, the talk about the painting or not. It resides in its own representations

And most importantly it FOR ME at this moment and in my thinking, it is BETWEEN these spaces, the physical spaces, the object and the space of discourse

BOTH
BETWEEN" (Owens 2018, 626)

In a recent interview that I conducted with the painter Amy Sillman in 2019, I asked her to elaborate on both the way the bodily interaction to paint as well as time, and she speaks about painting being transformation itself:

Melissa Gordon: In that sense, of addressing this anxiety or crisis, do you think doing this show (The Shape of Shape at MoMA) will change your painting process at all? In your show at Camden Arts Center in London what struck me was the way in which I read a breadth of painterly time in your paintings: painting moves existing in time and history and through and on top of time (some things felt very fast, light, plastic, some things were heavy, some gestures looked back and some looked forward). But now you are speaking more about a focus on a bodily reaction to things you encounter.

Amy Sillman: All I'm really interested in is this quivering moment where something changes into something else in the studio. Changing things completely. I'm looking for a painting that expresses the before *and after* of itself all in the same frame. I guess it's almost like something that cubists or futurists were trying for. A kind of shattered expression of time and existence? I always think about motion and worry about endings. My paintings have been looking really odd lately and I'm sort of trying to trust that. It's almost impossible to make a painting! (Girls Like Us 2019, 110)

And in an interview with Charline von Heyl about her practice of painting with *Border Crossings* Magazine:

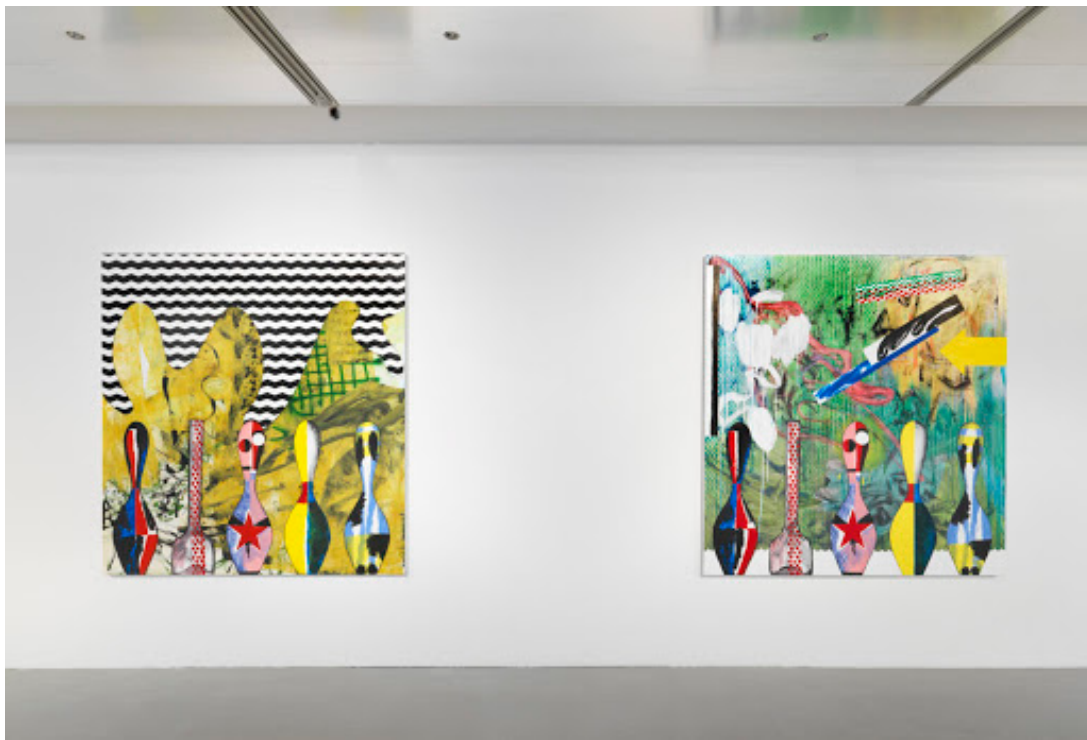
Charline von Heyl: Their deliberate construction allowed weird things to happen. It was both construction and destruction. Going through gesture is how you invent, and shape had already become gesture for me. Gestural expression for me is putting a shape into a canvas, but ultimately it's not interesting because it is just the mirror of a movement and an energy. I can use that only for a moment, as a start, in the painting. I build up the shape by destroying it and by laying another shape over it. By building the painting in overlapping layers I would get shapes that I could never have invented. That's what I wanted. There was an early desire to create an alternative mind-space in a painting. It turned out to be something that was nicely situated between the worlds... (von Heyl 2014)

Importantly, Owens, Sillman and von Heyl point to the position of the painting in its (temporal) placement at any time, and in *making*: they acknowledge the fact that painting, as both a material (physical) and conceptual practice is instable.

Why do these female painters each distinctly come to similar conclusions about a feeling of being, working or displaying an *in-between-ness*? Is it in any way to do with how voice is projected in painting, historically and contemporarily? Is being a female painter of abstraction or gesture a subjective position of identity that allows for a method or a particularity of articulation?



Amy Sillman: Twice Removed, 2020



Charline von Heyl, Exhibition at Captain Petzel, Berlin, 2017

In 2016, after the 'staged' show at the Bluecoat, I began to develop an exhibition that would explicitly address the notion of a movement of gesture, to visualize a cinematic behavior of gesture. To do this I thought about the relationships between the paintings and the scenography that brought them together, and in doing so, I recalled and took a movie on gesture: *Routine Pleasures* by Jean-Pierre Gorin (1986), as a starting point for my next experiment with painting and installation.



Still from *Routine Pleasures*, Jean-Pierre Gorin, 1986

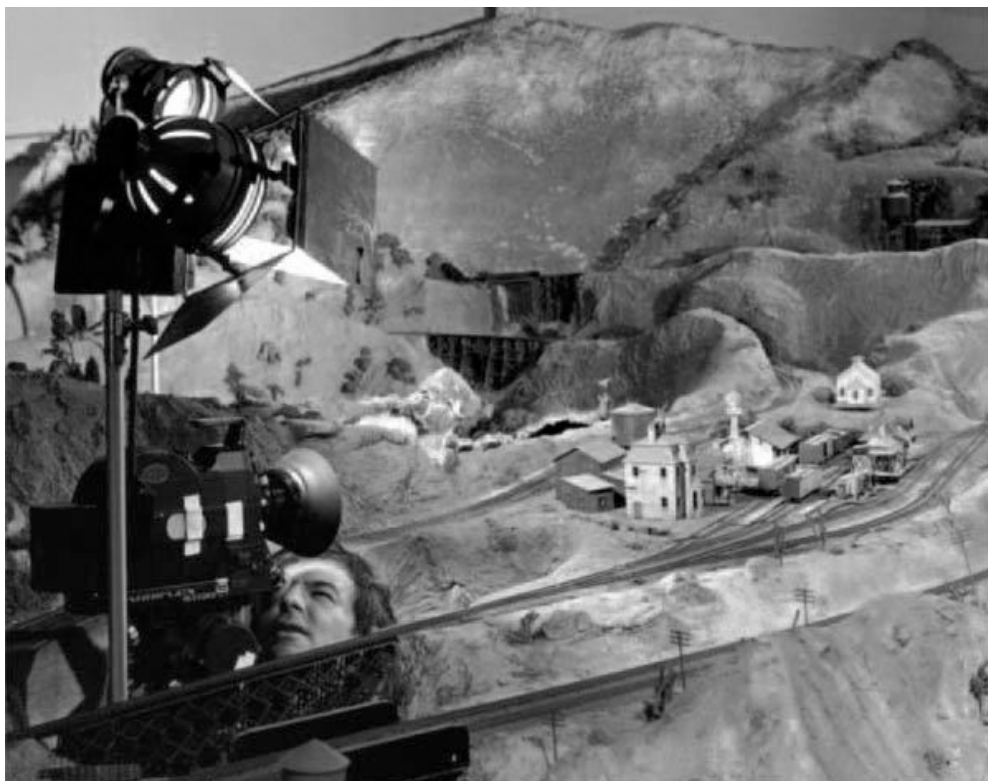


Manny Farber, *Have a Chew on Me*, 1983

Collection of the Orange County Museum of Art, Newport Beach, CA. Courtesy of OCMA and the Estate of Manny Farber.



Production still, *Routine Pleasures*, 1986. Featuring Farber's painting in the background. Copyright Babette Mangolte.



Production still, *Routine Pleasures*, 1986. Copyright Babette Mangolte.

Routine Pleasures: an exhibition of the movement between gestures:

In 2016, shortly after the first enactment of Mina Loy's *Collision* at the Bluecoat, I developed an exhibition of paintings titled *Routine Pleasures*, at the Vleeshal in Middelburg. In the exhibition, I built a 'set' or a 'staged environment' for several new and existing paintings from the series of paintings titled *Material Evidence*.

My intention was to examine the complexities of gesture, to unlock the power dynamics and secrets at play historically and the possibilities of gesture when it becomes unmoored from its strict physical nature as a brush moving paint and is wrapped up in the subjectivities of authors. When I began my PhD research I was concerned with locating where the *value* of a gesture arises from. The notion of value was blurred, though: was I asking about material value, social value, accumulated value? I began to understand, rather, that my interest was in the phenomenon that a gesture, as Marina Vishmidt describes in her writing, can in one instance be considered 'expressive,' and in another mundane. Rather than think that value *adds* anything to gesture, the behavior of value can be seen as something that moves in a liquid manner³ and could be one of many conduits through which to view how painterly gestures behave. The 'valuation' of whether a gesture is more or less expressive, or precious, or communicative, is a product of the fact that gesture does not stay in a static position. The fact that neither value nor gesture could be viewed as static (in time) became quite important in discerning what the potential of this reading of gesture could become in the art works I made for my PhD research.

Where is gesture located in a painting? Physically, painterly gesture is everywhere: but how can its readability be adjusted, or its focus be shifted so that the viewer becomes aware of the positioning of a gesture 'on display'? For the exhibition *Routine Pleasures*, I developed a wall structure, built with a standard, temporary wall system of aluminum studs which assemble together and are filled by plasterboard sheets. The standard system is used for most walls built in institutions and museums. One can cut the plasterboard to fill curves and cornices or use it to develop a desk or doorway. The plasterboard can be screwed onto the aluminum studs, then the cracks between the boards and screws sealed with a plaster mix, which is then sanded, and covered in paint. The boards come in standard materials that have color coding: pink is fire-proof, green is waterproof, blue is sound-proof, grey is basic.

The idea of building in visibly unfinished exhibition walls was to point explicitly to the fact that work was on display, and in a self-reflexive manner. It was asking the paintings to behave in a particular staged manner: the paintings were off cuts of studio surfaces and the walls off cuts of an exhibition. The provisionality of the structures, by being unpainted, unfinished walls, pointed to the relationship between the structure of the exhibition and the surface of the paintings. By then arranging the paintings in cinematic relationships (zooms, crops, pans), I was attempting to show gestures behaving through a visualization of time.

³ The word for 'cash' in French is '*argent liquide*' and this link between value and liquidity is not something I explicitly address in this PhD but it is to me a clear way to move from thinking about the how a gesture is valued to how a gesture behaves in a liquid manner.

For *Routine Pleasures*, the built interior of the Vleeshal, a medieval meat market, was left unfinished like a skeleton of an exhibition. At the entrance was a frontal wall to walk through to the rest of the space, with a desk on the right-hand side. Walking through, a long V-shaped wall approached you, making a small, impossible space to walk down on the right. I then arranged a number of free-standing walls that were cut-outs of the medieval architecture in the space: curves and vaulted arches which stood around as hanging devices.

The entire *Routine Pleasures* exhibition was a hanging *device*, and I began to play in this exhibition with the relationships between the paintings to develop a language around how gesture can be viewed both within each work as an 'image' of itself, but also then between each work as a 'move' from one place to another. I wanted each pairing or group of paintings to show a cinematic relationship: a zoom in from one painting into the other, a cropping, a rotation, a pan across a surface, a time-lapse showing how paint is applied in layers. I left the metal stud walls of the exhibition open in many parts, loosely plastered, and the backs and sides of the free-standing walls left open, like a Hollywood or theatre stage set. I wanted, through the hanging of groups of paintings on this 'staged' environment, to develop the notion that these paintings were to be encountered in a state of change: to underscore the changes happening *between* paintings, and for there to be a staged awareness to this encounter.



Routine Pleasures: Material Evidence (Zoom), 2016.



Routine Pleasures, 2016



Routine Pleasures, 2016

For example, in walking around a pink free-standing wall, one would see a painting of a grey floor with paint spilled on it. Walking to the back side, the viewer sees a duplicate image: the same wall shape, and the same painting of a grey floor, except the marks on the floor are rotated 45 degrees. Camera work, building work, assemblage: all of these gestures were locatable, and in direct correspondence with the title *Routine Pleasures*, an homage to the film of the same name by Jean Pierre Gorin (which we received permission from him directly to use, and also to screen his film one evening during the exhibition), which is a film about the gestures of the painter Manny Farber and a group of model train enthusiasts, maintaining a 'picture.'⁴



Material Evidence (Floor Rotation), 2016

⁴ *Routine Pleasures* is a film by Jean Pierre Gorin from 1986. It details, in a first-person narrative by Gorin, his move from France to San Diego in California and his newfound encounters with his colleague, the artist, painter and film-critic Manny Farber, and a group of model train enthusiasts, both of whom Gorin trails and films over a period of time. *Routine Pleasures* is a film about immigration, language, about the maintenance of a space (such as a studio or a model train railway) as a gesture unto itself. Gorin films Farber's paintings of his studio tables, that look like models unto themselves, as well as the various tasks and performance-like actions of the running of the model train set.



Material Evidence (Floor Rotation), 2016

In the development of the exhibition *Routine Pleasures*, I asked: do gestures exist between paintings? How can I make that evident in hanging them in a manner that shows cinematic relationships? If the eye moves from one gesture to another and reads the movement between, is the gesture of the painting the 'image' of the gesture on the painting surface? Or is it rather the bodily move of understanding the shift in the position of reading the gesture (a zoom, a crop, a pan, a time-lapse, a rotation)? Or perhaps both? Does overlapping the cinematic and material gestures help us locate where a gesture lies in painting?

The attempt at pointing towards this physical behaviour (the leap of the eye), within the exhibition named after the film of Gorin points to looking at gesture through a particular lens – the cinematographer. Like in Gorin's film of the model train set enthusiasts' insular world, and Manny Farber's topographies within his studio, I was using my own work to try to investigate how the behaviour of gesture can change through different lens'.

Re-staging Collision: Potentiality of Gesture and Behavior

My specific enquiry into gesture as a staging of action took place between the two enactments of Mina Loy's play in 2016 and 2018: in the first enactment at the Bluecoat in 2016 I was working with the notion that gesture lies between action and performance. This led to an interest at the exhibition *Routine Pleasures* to show gesture *between* paintings as much as 'in' them. In this way the paintings were both depicting gesture, as well as inhabiting a space of gesture.

In seeking references to this question, my supervisor Amanda Ure pointed me to the text "The Problem with 'Performative'" by Andrea Fraser.

When the term performative jumped from linguistics into literary theory, it promised to break down the boundary between doing, on one hand, and say, writing or representing on the other. When it developed in feminist and queer theory to describe the often compulsory and normative character of gender performance, it promised to break down the boundary separating self-conscious and specialised cultural performance from the often unconscious and overdetermined social and psychological aspects of gender performance. (Fraser 2015, 123)

The text by Fraser breaks down the term "performativity" into three clear categories: enactment, which itself has a relationship to psychology and "acting out" problems; straight performance which is involved in a mediality as such (dance being a movement of the body); and performativity, which delineates compulsory "performances" or "enactments" of cultural or gendered positions (which are inherited, learned and often more difficult to separate from habit).

Fraser's distinctions have been useful, in terms of both the development of my PhD research, as well as the physical development of a way of presenting work, as I began to understand that both the making of gesture in painting was an enactment of gesture (not a performance, and not a performative action but rather an "acting out" of a set of expectations), and that the staging of the work was another layer of enactment. That the exhibition itself was gestural.

The architectural elements of exhibition designs, which themselves have gestural qualities, and qualities of 'enacting' an exhibition also made me begin to question the role of the body – the maker – in relationship to these questions around the behavior of gesture. If gesture is unstable, then I began to imagine the potential of gesture to behave like a liquid, to move freely, to disrupt, and to also have a physical relationship to the modality of paint. In this way, I began to think of the exhibition as a 'container' for gestures. Works could be shown in different containers of exhibitions, and these containers changed the work, and were changed by the work within them.

For the 2018 iteration of Mina Loy's *Collision*, performed at the Swiss Church in London, I made four large free-standing grid shapes on wheels. The grids were in reference to the paintings I developed in 2018, which used a grid surface on canvas to be a surface on



Collision (2018), Swiss Church, 2018



Collision (2018), Swiss Church, 2018

which gestures could 'hang', but they also had a sense of gravity to them as architectural elements. These grids on wheels were surfaces to be moved around and to be hung on by mimes to 'enact' an exhibition.

I worked with two mimes: Pulga and a colleague of hers whom also graduated from l'Ange Fou, to install an 'exhibition' of painted wooden gestures the moving grids. We developed the piece over several days, improvising with the mimes' movements and their interactions with the physical, wooden cut-outs of gestures to script the choreography. I worked with the musician Morten Norbye Halvorsen to integrate sound: he played a chime which activated the mimes each time they had an interaction with a gesture. When they finished, they returned to the position 'Eiffel Tower' which is a neutral position for corporeal mime. Each action or movement of a (real, wooden cut-out) gesture began with the activation through sound and ended at a natural pace, once the (object) gesture had been placed somewhere. Slowly, the grids on wheels and the painted wooden gestures were moved, arranged, and hung by the mimes, and the gestures were assembled together into an 'exhibition', live, for an audience.

Because corporeal mime portrays effort or labor, I spoke with the mimes a lot about speed, weight, and effort. Mime itself is not a form of performance, it is not contemporary dance. It is like painting in that it is an enactment of gesture. Because it is based solely upon training the body to represent gestures, I wanted the mimes to show a gravity to the lightweight, fake painted prop 'gestures' they were carrying.

Agamben identified 'cinema as the homeland of gesture' because he defined the ignition of thought as a putting-together of information. This 'being-in-a-modality' of gesture is what the re-enactment of *Collision* at the Swiss Church was attempting – a mime artist carrying a representation of a gesture to 'enact' a hanging of an exhibition. Reading Agamben on both the cinematic impulse and the mediality of gesture was helpful for me in identifying how we perceive or see or understand gesture, but once I began to become curious about the behavior of gesture, my question turned away from defining or perceiving gesture, and towards the *potentiality of gesture*. I realized that the most exciting aspect of the Mina Loy play *Collision* was indeed its "exhaustless creation!" (possibilities) of gesture. I discovered that *re-enacting gesture as a structure for making a work* (re-enacting gesture as a way of painting, whether this ends up in the form of a performance or a painting or an exhibition) – was the direction of the research of this PhD. In order to do this, I turned my attention towards a feminist discourse on fluids – in order to think about what happens in this space 'in-between'⁵. If the in-between is a capturing of gesture in its state of movement, what other discourses on non-solid forms could I use to think about the behavior of gesture?

⁵ In the previous chapter I bring together a few references of female painters who speak about their painting practice as 'in-between' and not solid or set. It was through these encounters that I remembered the importance of Luce Irigaray's "The Sex that is Not One" (1979), and in fact my confusion with the language upon first reading it years ago. It was in fact the idea of searching for something unlanguageed that brought me back to Irigaray. What is this 'in-between,' what is the 'not one thing or another?' And through reading Irigaray I began to understand the importance of the un-definability of fluids as something that is in parallel to the question of how gesture behaves. If we understand gesture as un-fixed, then yes, it is not solid, its behavior is perhaps more like a fluid.



Collision (2018), Swiss Church, 2018



Collision (2018), Swiss Church, 2018

Chapter 2: Visualizing the Container: A Gesture is a Liquid

Experiments to 'capture' the movement of gesture:

My PhD research extended beyond stagings and exhibitions, and located itself within a long-term set of physical experiments in which I attempted to materialize my thinking around gesture, in painting, as something that could convey movement. In doing so, I was attempting to enact or visualize gesture as something that moved between states and places. These trials elucidated my understanding of the liquid nature of gesture.

In a photograph of my studio from late 2016, one can see that I was working on several different registers of gesture at the same time. Next to paintings of details of my 'unconscious' gestures on my studio surfaces are paintings on plastic to mimic a palette; an experiment of 'washing' a surface on plastic by a rubbing of a wall to make wallpaper. I was attempting different experiments to 'capture' the movement of gesture as a subject of painting.



Studio view, 2016

I was using silkscreen – a photographic stencil process – to develop a technique that captured the movement of paint or liquid. The basic process of silk-screening is to have a 'positive' object which sufficiently blocks light to 'capture' an image. For example, one can place a circle of black paper on a surface, and expose the (coated, light-sensitive) screen, and you will then have an open area of the screen where the black circle was, through

which you can print ink onto a surface (paper, canvas, etc.). Light has hit and exposed the area around the circle and hardened the emulsion which will prevent the ink from going through and printing the rest of the screen.

But when making a silkscreen one also must be aware of 'contact': how well the film (the object blocking light) is sandwiched between a flat surface (the glass of the exposure unit) and the flat screen that has photographic material. Light curves around objects, and so if the 'contact' is not sufficient, the image cannot be exposed, or its edges will blur as light curves around it.

At this time, in late 2016 and early 2017, I had recently acquired an abandoned silk-screening unit that I could use in my studio. And during the research time of my PhD, I started thinking that I could expose real things – real gestures – directly to silkscreen rather than make 'images' of them first in paintings. Indeed, silkscreen could perhaps expose these (perhaps unseen) gestures that I was looking to locate 'between' (paintings, moves, material).

I started moving paint around on a plastic surface, in a way to mimic the way that paint is cleaned off silkscreen surfaces, or water is used to wipe surfaces, or a mop moves soapy water around on a floor. I also was taking photos of the process of cleaning my silkscreens in the process of experimenting: thinking about how I could convey this more liquid or transitional state of paint in the works. I was taking photos of the gestures of cleaning at home, to see the movement of my body in these gestures.



Silkscreen, 2016

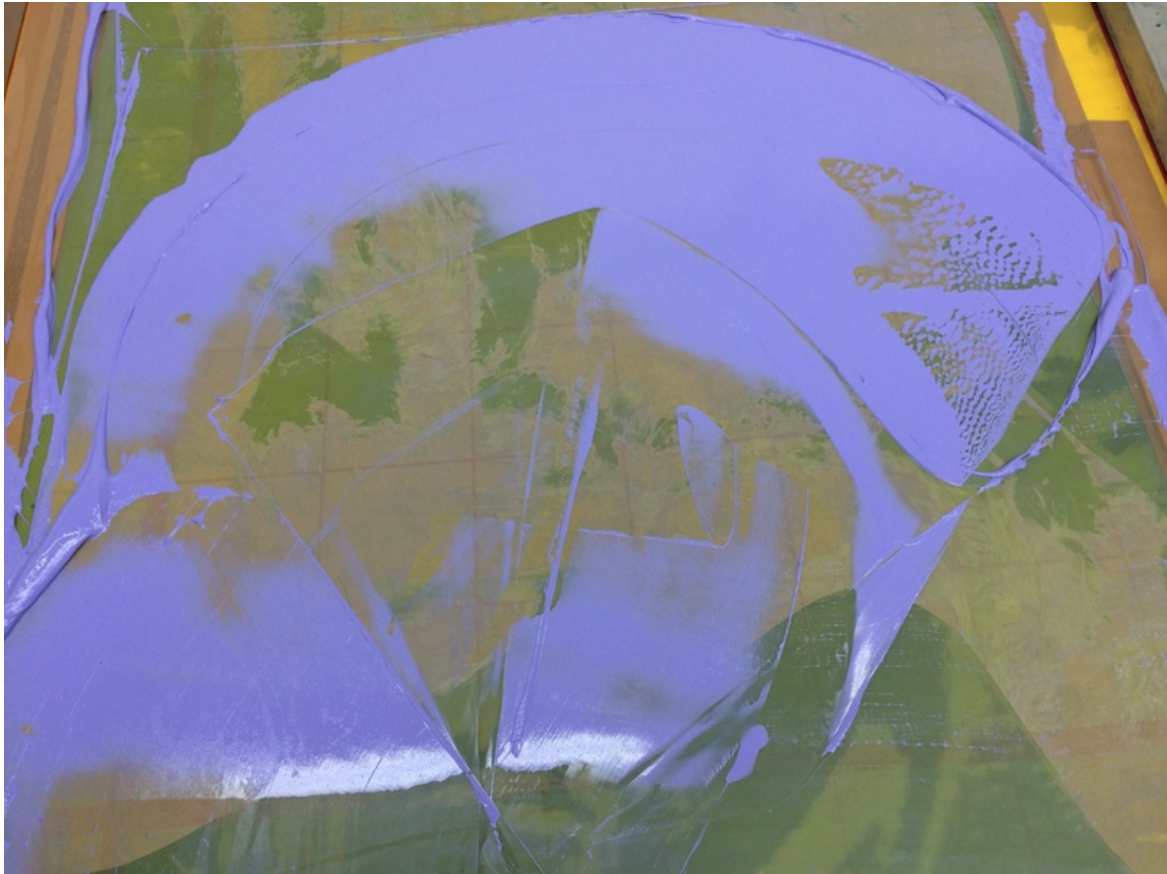
This period of experimentation lasted around six months. I was trying out various materials to expose, as well as different exposure times and materials to print on. The main question for the experiment to 'capture' gesture was how to make visible or expose the movement of material, and I tried a number of different solutions, liquids and materials to try to do this:



Make a Mess, Clean it Up, 2017

I greased paper with dots printed on it, thinking the gesture of moving the liquid would translate into an image; this failed. I tried varnishing pieces of paper, I tried printing out gestures and exposing those: all failures. I tried scanning water. I tried painting with mops and brooms on canvas, but these did not 'capture' any gesture, they just made mud on a surface.

Eventually, I came to a process by which to 'expose' the gestures of the movement of the body through a long trial and error of materials, exposures and supports to print on, and inks to make sure that the print looks saturated, like a painting. In the end, to make the body of work *Make a Mess, Clean it Up* (which were originally titled *Joke Gestures*), I pour thick oil-based floor paint on plastic, and I wipe it up with sponges, brushes, mops or brooms. When I am 'cleaning' with the material, I cannot see anything, it looks like a large white mess. When the paint is dry, I cut the plastic up and expose it directly to the silkscreen surface. It is only when the light is pushed through in the exposure that the movement is 'caught' – revealed like a photograph being developed.



Printing, 2017

I gave birth to identical twins in mid 2015, and my life in 2016 was a series of gestures: in the morning I would clean the house of all the messy spots of food and gunk, then go to studio and paint mess, clean up, then come home and clean up some more. I began to be curious about when gestures are levelled: as Vishmidt asked in her description of the *Material Evidence* paintings, when is one gesture more 'expressive' than another? Surely when we move our bodies there is an expression involved? I wanted to 'freeze' the material of paint in its liquid state to show this expressiveness.

In the first exhibition in which I presented *Make a Mess, Clean it Up*, titled *The Gesture is a Joke* (2016), I 'washed' surfaces that were the size of the silkscreens I could expose in my studio: A0. I printed the 'cleaning' gestures on thin muslin, so that the details of the print came through, and that light could move through the canvases too – they operated like screens. For the exhibition *The Gesture is a Joke*, I built a specific architecture with the standard aluminum system: an overlapping of the floor plan of my flat and studio within a large gallery space, creating a maze or prison like environment in which to encounter both the *Material Evidence* paintings and the new *Joke Gesture* paintings. An exhibition of two acts of maintenance, leveled and presented together.



A Gesture is a Joke, Deweer Gallery, Belgium, 2016



A Gesture is a Joke, Deweer Gallery, Belgium, 2016



Make a Mess, Clean it up, 2016



A Gesture is a Joke, Deweer Gallery, Belgium



A Gesture is a Joke, Deweer Gallery, Belgium

While installing the exhibition, I became interested in the specific spaces: to bring in your small studio or small apartment to a large gallery feels strange, the transition makes a very well-known space foreign. How to also capture elements of architecture, or why just 'clean' a rectangle of space, why not clean a more specific surface?

After the exhibition, I started to think about the specificity of a surface or space on which something is 'cleaned'. I put plastic down and cleaned my kitchen countertop and my bathroom floor: I wanted to make evident that this process was happening in a specific place. In the process of doing so, I realized that paint, like water, goes to an edge, it flows where it can, and I wanted the work itself to also evidence or show this – the fact that paint expands and moves like liquid.



Make a Mess, Clean it up (Kitchen Countertop), 2017



Make a Mess, Clean it up (Bathroom Floor), 2017

In 2017 started doing large cleans – the size of entire floors. I laid meters and meters of plastic on floors and poured buckets of paint and mopped it around on the entire surface. These large works are still printed on raw canvas, and instead of being stretched, they are hung loose, and they move and adjust, hanging on and around edges and walls. They hang like tapestries; their form is also not set and can be adjusted according to the architecture on which they hang. They take one element of architecture (a floor), and they transpose the image of it to another architectural surface (a wall). In the first large scale work in this series *Make a Mess, Clean it up*, I cleaned the entire floor of one room of an exhibition by Rita McBride at WIELS Centre for Contemporary Art. I then silkscreened it life-size (combining around 40 screens) and hung it back up inside the exhibition space, as a wall-hanging that also interacted with installations of her works.



Make a Mess, Clean it Up (Rita's floor), WIELS Centre for Contemporary Art, 2017

It took experimentation to make the 'clean' look seamless, including learning to make elaborately cut shapes in the 'positive' plastic painted shapes to piece the large prints together: these curves and whirls fall into the shapes of the print itself.



Printing *Make a Mess, Clean it Up*, 2017

McBride's class of students from Dusseldorf Academy, in September 2017, helped sew the first large work together before being hung, and it was through this generous help of the students and the install team at WIELS that I could realise the sheer physical assemblage and hanging of this work.⁶

While making this large 'cleaning' work, I began to think about the way that gestures move and change according to their situations. How their behaviors change. I also became very interested: are the gestures in these *Make a Mess, Clean it Up* works recording a liquid form of gesture for posterity? Why am I trying so hard to keep the medium looking 'liquid'? Are, indeed, my efforts worth the process of the work? Are they visible?

⁶ We also hosted the *Female Genius Night Club* residency at this time at WIELS, at which I wrote the material for 'A Gesture is a Liquid' which is included in the appendix of this PhD. The *Female Genius Night Club* was a four-day residency with three nights of a bar with screenings, readings and events. The students of Rita's class ran the bar, and the public was welcome to come. During the residency period, participants came together to talk about their work, feminism and their relationship to the notion of genius, which was a problematic and interesting place to begin conversations.



Installing *Make a Mess, Clean it Up (Rita's floor)* at WIELS, 2017



Installing *Make a Mess, Clean it Up* at WIELS, 2017

The notion of action and flatbed painting, (two terms which are modernist techniques of painting that move our understanding of a 'picture' of painting away towards a 'surface') are very present in the process of both thinking and making in this body of work. Each work is physically too large to encounter at once, and they are hard to hang while making them. They are made flat, both the 'cleaning' on plastic and the printing on the canvas. They are action paintings, then reproductions of that action – which itself involves further labor.

Action, though has different connotations than labor, and perhaps that is where the 'joke' lies in the work, is that the effortlessness of creating 'mess,' the muck of abstraction and material, is countered by the labor of the reproduction.⁷

The process that creates the body work is meant to record a specific moment: to capture when the paint is fluid, when the process is fluid, and to capture when and how gesture can be fluid. Through doing this, I began to adjust the container in which we would normally view a painting. The paintings cease to be a rectangle, and instead the paint spreads and seeps far outside the bounds of the 'support' (the stretcher, the frame) of the canvas. It

⁷ For example, printing the work that was hung at WIELS took almost a month of labor to produce, using almost 40 independent silkscreens all puzzled together on a huge piece of canvas.

covers entire areas. It could continue, endlessly. It stops when it meets walls, closets, and doors.

My main discovery in the development of the works *Make a Mess, Clean it Up* and the hanging of the works in exhibitions, was that gesture is the *understanding* or reading of the transformation of material into form or composition. I had to make the action of cleaning on a table or countertop or floor readable through the process of making; to just mop paint around would not look like the movement of a mop on the floor.

I started experimenting on this body of work by thinking: gesture is located between things; it is not a stable element. I then began to ask, if gesture is something that is located between moments (in time, in space), then how has the 'in-between' behavior of gesture been visualized in other contexts? And what does this have to do with immaterial labor and capturing my own endless laboring? As Vishmidt wrote in her essay "Structural and Expressive" (on the *Material Evidence* paintings), the question is which gesture is 'routine' and which is expressive. What is the relationship between maintenance and the notion of 'vitality' or life-like qualities of an artwork?

In my material writing practice⁸ I describe these decisions as related to questions of making and motivations that arise in the "Manifesto for Maintenance Art" of Mierle Laderman Ukeles:

Paint is also a liquid, obviously, but it's often thought of as a surface that is applied and fixed onto a 'picture'. How to maintain the liquid-ness of a liquid in a painting? Is this an act of maintenance? Making a mess in a studio in order to enact a 'liquidity' of paint, then having to clean up?

Maintenance is a drag; it takes all the fucking time (lit.) The mind boggles and chafes at the boredom.

The culture confers lousy status on maintenance jobs = minimum wages, housewives = no pay.

clean your desk, wash the dishes, clean the floor,

wash your clothes, wash your toes, change the baby's diaper, finish the report, correct the typos, mend the fence, keep the customer happy, throw out the stinking garbage, watch out don't put things in your nose, what shall I wear, I have no sox, pay your bills, don't litter, save string, wash your hair, change the sheets, go to the store, I'm out of perfume, say it again—

he doesn't understand, seal it again—it leaks, go to work, this art is dusty, clear the table, call him again, flush the toilet, stay young."(Laderman Ukeles 1969)

In Mierle Laderman Ukeles "Manifesto for Maintenance Art" (1969), she is not advocating for the status of maintenance work per se, but rather is pointing out that art gets dirty, and someone must dust it. She wrote a powerful critique of the illusion of a sublime-like encounter with an art object.

⁸ The body of writing which is included in the appendix of this PhD started as a essays that I thought at the time would form the chapters of my PhD. They became places for assembling notes, comments and references. I then would assemble and re-assemble the different vignettes of writing into various talks and presentations, and I began to think of the writing as 'material.' Specifically I am interested to think of it as something that relates to the 'material' of stand-up comedians. Short parts of stories or descriptions are ordered and re-ordered into longer narratives.

MANIFESTO!

MAINTENANCE ART

Proposal for an exhibition "CARE"

MIERLE LADERMAN UKELES
© 1967

I. IDEAS

- A. The Death Instinct and the Life Instinct:
- The Death Instinct: separation, individuality, Avant-Garde par excellence; to follow one's own path to death—do your own thing; dynamic change.
- The Life Instinct: unification, the eternal return, the perpetuation and MAINTENANCE of the species; survival systems and operations, equilibrium.
- B. Two basic systems: Development and Maintenance. The sourbal of every revolution: after the revolution, who's going to pick up the garbage on Monday morning?
- Development: pure individual creation, the new, change; progress, advance, excitement, fight or fleeing.
- Maintenance: keep the dust of the pure individual creation; preserve the new, sustain the change; protect progress; defend and pricing the advance; renew the excitement; repeat the fight.

MIERLE LADERMAN UKELES -2- MAINTENANCE ART

show your work—show it again
keep the contemporary/museum groovy
keep the home fires burning

Development systems are partial feedback systems with major room for change.
Maintenance systems are direct feedback systems with little room for alteration.

- C. Maintenance is a drag, it takes all the fucking time (it). The mind boggles and chafes at the boredom. The culture confers lousy status on maintenance jobs = minimum wages, housewives = no pay.
- clean you desk, wash the dishes, clean the floor, wash your clothes, wash your toes, change the baby's diaper, finish the report, correct the typos, mend the fence, keep the customer happy, throw out the stinking garbage, watch out don't put things in your nose, what shall I wear, I have no sex, pay your bills, don't litter, save string, wash your hair, change the sheets, go to the store, tin out of perfume, say it again—he doesn't understand, seal it again—d beans, go to work, this art is dusty, clear the table, call him again, flush the toilet, stay young.
- D. Art:
- Everything I say is Art is Art. Everything I do is Art is Art. "We have no Art, we try to do everything well." (Business saying).
- Avant-garde art, which claims utter development, is infected by strains of maintenance ideas, maintenance activities, and maintenance materials.
- Conceptual & Process art, especially, claim pure development and change, yet employ almost purely maintenance processes.
- E. The exhibition of Maintenance Art, "CARE," would zero in on pure maintenance, exhibit it as contemporary art, and yield, by utter opposition, clarity of issues.

MIERLE LADERMAN UKELES -4- MAINTENANCE ART

museum director, baseball player, sales"man," child, criminal, bank president, mayor, moviestar, artist, etc., about."

-what you think maintenance is;
-how you feel about spending whatever parts of your life you spend on maintenance activities;
-what is the relationship between maintenance and freedom;
-what is the relationship between maintenance and life's dreams.

2. Interview Room—for spectators at the Exhibition:
- A room of desks and chairs where professional (?) interviewers will interview the spectators at the exhibition along same questions as typed interviews. The responses should be personal.
- These interviews are taped and replayed throughout the exhibition area.

- C. Part Three: Earth Maintenance
- Everyday, containers of the following kinds of refuse will be delivered to the Museum:
- the contents of one sanitation truck;
 - a container of exhaled air;

MIERLE LADERMAN UKELES -4- MAINTENANCE ART

museum director, baseball player, sales"man," child, criminal, bank president, mayor, moviestar, artist, etc., about."

-what you think maintenance is;
-how you feel about spending whatever parts of your life you spend on maintenance activities;
-what is the relationship between maintenance and freedom;
-what is the relationship between maintenance and life's dreams.

2. Interview Room—for spectators at the Exhibition:
- A room of desks and chairs where professional (?) interviewers will interview the spectators at the exhibition along same questions as typed interviews. The responses should be personal.
- These interviews are taped and replayed throughout the exhibition area.

- C. Part Three: Earth Maintenance
- Everyday, containers of the following kinds of refuse will be delivered to the Museum:
- the contents of one sanitation truck;
 - a container of polluted air;

Mierle Laderman Ukeles, *Manifesto for Maintenance Art*, 1969

I found reading Mierle Laderman Ukeles very helpful in that she points to the behavior of gesture itself as repetitive, linked to maintenance, and not necessarily always an act of distinctive 'creation.' Often it was through material experimentation and repetitive actions and a lot of cleaning and maintenance that the research of this PhD progressed.

The transition of my research question – from asking where a gesture is located in a painting to being interested in the notion that gesture *behaves* as a liquid – happened in the process of developing the body of work *Make a Mess, Clean it Up*. The impetus for this body of work was to investigate gesture from a different angle, to think of how to produce a painting from a different vantage point related to ‘action’, ‘support’, ‘reproduction’. Instead of re-painting gestures of material in the process of becoming paintings (as in the *Material Evidence* series), I wanted to create gestures that enacted a behavior of the material of paint. I wanted to *capture* the gesture of moving paint around.

As the body of work developed, I began to think of the large *Make a mess...* works as architectural surfaces on which other artworks can be hung. This overlaps with other hanging strategies that I have been developing throughout this PhD research such as building unfinished skeleton walls that are images of other spaces and creating rubbings of spaces which are turned into wallpaper and hung elsewhere. The rubbings are indexical marks of the spaces themselves: a turning-visible of a white wall, a remnant of something that will disappear. In this instance below, I rubbed the canvas-covered wall of a Kunstverein in Lübeck, which had been built in the 1930s and was about to be renovated for the first time. The rubbing is the only record of the original walls.



Derivative Value, Kunstverein Lubeck, 2016

The process of this transition from painting space to the architectural space of painting also initiated a question for me: what is the edge of a painting? The support is a structure, and a

container for gestures. But gestures could happen on any surface, at any size. The container for painting (for gesture) is any supporting system. I tried to make that evident by making the *Make a Mess...* works large and unwieldy and about a specific space, and then hung like wall treatments or tapestries, on which other gestures could hang or interact. I began to think of paintings as containers for liquid gestures.

Can the liquid notion of gesture be shown or evidenced both through the movement of material as well as showing the container that the material pushes up against? The support of painting: literally the space on which a painting happens, can also reference a specific site, where action happened. This could point to the idea that the role and reading of gesture in painting too does not stop at the edges of the canvas; it too moves beyond the material and is how the painting is understood in different contexts.

In making the work *Make a Mess...* I thought through the reasoning of Agamben: gesture supports (enables?) an understanding of something (a movement, an intention). It does not act or perform this understanding or make it. It demonstrates how it happens. I began to understand that the distance of 'showing' the physicality of paint (not just doing it, not just pouring paint on a canvas, and cleaning it up with a sponge, but rather enacting that action so that the process is revealed, and the movement is pictured), enabled the physical transition from thought to form.

Whilst experimenting on how to develop work which exposed or showed my interest in the *document* of an action, this developed into a further question: how does a physical gesture enter into language?

Lately I've been thinking that a painting happens all over the place.
What if a canvas is just in the way? (Gordon in 'A Gesture is a Liquid, in Appendix)

I sought out the language of liquidity in the feminist philosopher Luce Irigaray to pursue this question. I came to Irigaray's work in 2016 and 2017 – returning to it after reading it many years ago – with a newfound appreciation for the material quality of her writing. Her writing embodies the unfixed nature of meaning in the way that I was interested in seeking out language to describe the unfixed behavior of gesture.

Irigaray's Liquidity

What are the potentials of fluids? This is something I have repeatedly asked myself: in making paintings, in installing exhibitions, in writing, in reading, in all the experiments and trials I have done throughout this PhD.

Early in my research, I began, through a number of experiments and exhibitions, to understand the potential in thinking that a gesture happens in and between works: a gesture on a canvas cannot be separated from the context in which it is produced (an action, a situation, a site, a place), nor from the context in which it is seen (in relationship to other works, sites, architecture).

After the first year of my PhD research I wrote in an essay "A Gesture is a Liquid":

I'm going to liquefy all material to see how it dissolves. A painting happens all over the fucking place.
What if a canvas is just in the way?
Americans call it the support.
But nothing is goddamn solid anymore.

This changed a number of times to:

Lately I've been thinking that a painting happens all over the fucking place.
And what if a canvas is just in the way?
Americans call this the support
But nothing is goddamn solid anymore.

In short, I began to imagine that gesture, in painting, is happening all the time and everywhere.⁹ The notion of the support in painting is a cropping, framing, and material concern. What size or scale (the scale of portraiture, of still life, of history painting, of 'Action'?) determines how much of the 'scene' of a painting is seen, and through what projective lens (zooming in, making smaller, life-size, encountering a body or face larger or smaller than life size, encountering a gesture blown up or at the size of a brush stroke). The support can be, in effect, any place or surface as we have encountered through "expanded" painting such as the works of Katharina Grosse (color sprayed on the wall), Julie Mehretu (drawings on architecture), and more recently Jessica Warboys (paintings made by the sea).

In my work *Make a Mess, Clean it Up*, of which the research and production is central to this PhD, I was asking how can I show the potential of liquids? I began by 'cleaning' small surfaces, moving paint around on a piece of plastic the size of a silkscreen (A0: 84 x 110 cm), to be exposed directly and translated into a 'painting' surface. I decided to make several cleaning pieces in which I 'mopped' real spaces – my bathroom floor, my kitchen counter – and 'cleaned' these surfaces (put plastic down, poured paint, and moved the paint around with mops), then exposed them to silkscreen and assembled them into prints that showed the life-size silhouette of each space. There are holes for where the sink and stovetop were, a shape where the toilet and sink hit the floor. I wanted to portray a liquid seeping everywhere, flowing until it hit the walls and forms that stopped it.

I then expanded the work to cleaning entire rooms and hallways. In the exhibition *Something Stronger Than Me** (2017) at WIELS in Brussels, on the invitation of Rita McBride, I 'cleaned' an entire room of her exhibition, then hung the image of this back up as a piece of architecture, with which her guide-rail fences and other collaborative works

⁹ I should note that this was written not long after the election of Donald Trump, and I think that when I am speaking about instability, it also relates to feeling that as someone raised in America, that the literal ground was moving. The support in painting, as I was taught at a traditional, materially-based art school in the US in the late 1990s and early 2000s was indeed a solid thing: even at a moment of expanded painting practices such as Margaret Kilgallen which I saw in the first Whitney Biennial I went to, the wall itself was a structure or support: the support had a connotation of something supportive, strong. And I was thinking about painting off, or lacking a support, a base, completely. But also, I began to think that indeed painting happens way beyond the painting, and what we see is often just an off-cut of a larger practice, space, or process of gesturing.



*Something Stronger Than Me**, WIELS, Brussels, 2017

installed in front. In the exhibition *The Mechanics of Fluids* which I curated at the Marianne Boesky Gallery in summer 2018, I produced a large work which 'cleaned' a hidden hallway between two gallery spaces. I then installed a work of Charlotte Posenenske (entitled *Series D*) on top of the work, with a diptych by Lisa Oppenheim.



The Mechanics of Fluids, Marianne Boesky Gallery, 2018

Throughout my research I have returned to questions of the support in painting – and the architecture that holds it. I have attempted repeatedly to give a sense of instability and moveability of the architecture of the exhibition space. Furthermore, I have developed work that attempts to point to the breakable notion of the container or support of painting, as if the paint itself is determining the edges. In the exhibition *The Mechanics of Fluids*, I attempted to give historic context to a long feminist praxis which has had this notion of potentialities, liquidity, and determined destruction of the framed support as its central aim. This idea of a solid ‘frame’ is central to historic notions of painting, as Brian O’Doherty describes in “Inside the White Cube” (1999):

For this process the stability of the frame is as necessary as an oxygen tank is to a diver. Its limiting security completely defines the experience within. The border as absolute limit is confirmed in easel art up to the nineteenth century. (O’Doherty 1986, 18)

I was introduced to the writing of Luce Irigaray by the art historian Sue Tate in 2008, with whom I have organized a series of feminist events in the past. I had been aware of Irigaray as a philosopher who had spoken about the notion of women being woven through and into the blank spaces between the lines of history. I had re-examined Irigaray’s writing in relationship to the re-staging of *Collision* by Mina Loy, to give context to my search for the female (or female-identifying) figure being present but absent throughout recent modern histories.

However, in re-reading Irigaray’s *The Sex that is not One* (1977) I was struck and fascinated by her medially driven philosophy: her language which itself was an attempt to convey the notions of ‘immeasurability’ she was speaking about. This ‘immeasurability’ stands in relationship to her ideas that the female is not singular, and that the mechanics of liquids themselves pose material possibilities for understanding what is to Irigaray, an unlanguageed and impossibly undefined notion of women in philosophy (as beings).

Fluid—like that other, inside/outside of philosophical discourse—is, by nature unstable. (Irigaray 1977, 112)

What does this instability represent, or what can it represent, in a painting that explicates notions of bodily movement (without showing them)?

In Irigaray’s texts, she examines the notion of the female, both the intrinsically present body of the female and the meaning and value supplied to the female as an agent who cannot find itself in a singular form.

The *one* of form, of the individual, of the (male) sexual organ, of the proper name, of the proper meaning... supplants, while separating and dividing, that contact of *at least two* (lips) which keeps woman in touch with herself, but without and possibility of distinguishing what is touching from what is touched. (Irigaray 1977, 26)

Irigaray’s notions of “the predominance of the visual, and of the discrimination and individualization of form” as being “particularly foreign to female eroticism” (Irigaray 1977, 25-6), and the constant self-touch or self-regard of women is posed as an ‘other’ to a

predominant system. She continually presents a lack of name, meaning, form (something to be counted), she forms a language in which women represent a non-singularity.

Whence the mystery that woman represents in a culture claiming to count everything, to number everything by units, to inventory everything as individualities. She is neither one nor two. Rigorously speaking, she cannot be identified either as one person, or as two. She resists all adequate definition. Further, she has no “proper” name.” (Irigaray 1977, 26)

For the sake of this PhD, and in my research, this potential at “indefinability”, finds itself, formally, in the projection of this non-singularity into the radical potential of fluids.

At this point, I must make clear a distinction in what I mean in as a relationship between gender and fluidity.

Fluids are form and non-form at the same time. This is what Irigaray identifies as a physical model for the female to emerge from non-language, non-discourse.

The discourse of gender fluidity finds itself in: to be not completely one nor the other and/ or to move between states. To find oneself between, to present oneself in different forms in different circumstances – as in the Gethin in *The Left Hand of Darkness* by Ursula K. Le Guin (1969) – according to personal-political situations and sites. While gender fluidity is a political and contemporary *force* on the container of the canon in our current moment in art history, and as something that also finds itself in a rich history of gender-defying roles which upset the systems they find themselves in (as Irigaray’s writing also explicates), I would like to emphasize my interest in the formal qualities of liquids as such, as being both formless and of material. Gender, the notion of women, the androgyne, the one who has two voices, who moves between and the voice that emerges from non-language and who speaks both with a body that cannot be invisible: these are all potential agents of liquid forces on painting and authorship but enter into painting discourse through a distinct and alternate history of politics.

The research involved in this PhD is focused on examining the potentiality of gesture in painting: if it can be imagined to be non-singular, non-stable and moveable, like a liquid; for it to change itself according to the container that it is found in.

It is already getting around – at what rate? in what contexts? in spite of what resistances? — that women diffuse themselves according to modalities scarcely compatible with the framework of the ruling symbolics. Which doesn’t happen without causing some turbulence, we might even say some whirlwinds, that out to be reconfinned within solid walls of principle, to keep them from spreading to infinity. Otherwise they might even go so far as to disturb that third agency designated as the real—a transgression and confusion of boundaries that it is important to restore to their proper order. (Irigaray 1977, 106)

This reading of gender as something which itself, as material perhaps, has the potential to “spread to infinity” is an exciting idea, and shares connections with the “exhaustless creation!” of Mina Loy. But what is also important in Irigaray’s writing is the question of boundaries: liquids move around where, in what spaces? What stops them, what slows them down, what frameworks are they not fitting in? What disruption can happen within

“solid walls of principle”? In short, what is there to prevent a complete mess – a carton of milk overturned and endlessly spreading, a rise in sea level flooding Venice November 2019, or the multiplication of a tiny new virus, rotting and destroying the solid infrastructure of capitalism and the smooth movement of its goods and exchange.

Irigaray uses the mythic notion of the “Leaky Vessel”¹⁰ not to analyze the historic conditions of gender, but rather to utilize gender as a material with a behavior and a potential to materially create new realities (being both physical because of the potential to grow life, but also in a sense of creating new forms of understanding of oneself):

...the issue is not one of elaborating a new theory of which woman would be the *subject* or the *object*, but of jamming the theoretical machinery itself, of suspending its pretention to the production of a truth and of a meaning that are excessively univocal. (Irigaray 1977, 78)

This notion of jamming the machine – stopping, in fact, the ongoing production of difference – is important to note that Irigaray is speaking here of a world which is itself on the move. She is not a philosopher of static situations; rather, the machinery is wrapped up in the production of language, the production of meaning. This is an inherently different reading to a large number of feminist texts which indicate that, historically, women, LGBTQ people, and post-colonial and non-western subjects have been excluded and must be repatriated into the land of the white, western patriarchy.

Instead, Irigaray proposes that the production, the ongoing, never-ending production of these values must itself be addressed. One can see this fantasy on the other end of the spectrum from feminist politics of liquidity: in the movie *Fight Club*, and the subculture of fight clubs – which many say have an uncanny connection to incel groups – the climax of the film is that *Fight Club* takes down the global debt system. This fantasy also exists in *Mr. Robot*, an updated made-for-TV post-utopic version of *Fight Club*. The outcome of any ‘outsider’ or ‘death of the author’ fantasy, especially those located in middle-class white male circles, is to ‘jam’ the machinery for an ulterior, moral, motive, to re-shape capital production to become the dominant player.

When Irigaray says “jamming the theoretical machinery”, I think she is concretely pointing towards the production of *meaning*, and an ongoing attempt to jam it, not a symbolic ‘death of the author’ which simply fantasizes about new orders of capital. Of course, capitalism and capital also produce meaning, but value is distinct from meaning, at least in the language of Irigaray as I am pointing towards here. The notion that Irigaray raises that fluidity and the duality of women points to a possibility of *no univocal system* does underscore the contemporary notion of intersectional politics and identities.

I have begun to imagine the machinery itself, the gallery and auction system as containers with specific shape-forms. In fact, all the systems of dissemination and distribution can be thought of as containers: museums, Kunstvereins, book fairs, websites, magazines, artist-run spaces, events, studios, etc. Things can be poured from one container into the other, and the containers themselves can change, like the fake walls of exhibition design, on a

¹⁰ The Leaky Vessel, through reading Anne Carson I have understood as a metaphor for females and especially female speech.

constant rotation of metal studs and plasterboard walls. This is evidenced by the design of Christopher Williams's exhibitions at Whitechapel and MoMA, which included walls that were deconstructed and used as packaging material to then be reconstructed into exhibition architecture.



Christopher Williams, *The Production Line of Happiness*, Whitechapel Gallery, 2015

Another implication of the verb “jamming” is linked to the notion of the “gag” as Giorgio Agamben talks about at the end of his essay “Notes on Gesture”. The gag is the opposite of production, the negative of saying.

However, because being-in-language is not something that could be said in sentences, the gesture is essentially always a gesture of not being able to figure something out in language; it is always a *gag* in the proper meaning of the term, indicating first of all something that could be put in your mouth to hinder speech, as well as in the sense of the actor's improvisation meant to compensate a loss of memory or an inability to speak. (Agamben 2000, 59)

I see Irigaray as laying out a theoretical space of women *as a gag*, which produces space for thinking about femaleness as distinctly non-linguaged (or un-language-able?), not just existing in comparison to maleness. For me, this model works in the contemporary art world because it presents a space in which objects do not need to be speaking to a specific, original, “non-other” position:

Which means that the masculine would no longer be “everything.” That it could no longer, all by itself, define, circumscribe, circumscribe, the properties of anything and everything. That the right to define every value—including the abusive privilege of appropriation—would no longer belong to it.” (Irigaray 1977, 80)

This points to space for potentials: potential new speech, which I believe Agamben also points to, potential new relationships, new behaviors.

I must also make a note now which addresses the distance that has opened since I began asking myself these questions in 2016. In October 2017, the MeToo movement erupted; in March 2017 the Whitney Biennial polemic with Hannah Black and Dana Schutz was published; in 2018 questions around inclusion in the art world began to take speed alongside Black Lives Matter activism. We have since seen a complete re-hang of MoMA, a ground shift in inclusion in the art world, as well as a massive political drive towards change in people's lives through activism. The notion that I was pressing for in my research, which was, and is, that *if* one can imagine that a gesture behaves as a liquid, it means that the way that gestures are understood, and even their form, and definitely their representation, can be recontextualized according to the different 'containers' that they are found in. Like the movement of paintings out of the houses of the nobility and 'Wunderkammer' collections to national institutions, from institutions that housed folk and 'high' art together, then divided into the Académie Royale and then the development of the private salon after the fall of the Academy, and the salon to the gallery, and the gallery to the biennial, from the biennial to the aggregate forms of dissemination and Instagram and onwards – we are constantly evaluating the gestures of artists inside the context within which they are speaking to and about. In this sense, we can imagine that the idea of the 'container' can be important to understand the shifting ground we live in: how are containers changing, in which speech and gestures are still circulating?

I'd like to point out that what I imagined about the potential and instability of gesture in 2017 suddenly has become reality: many decades of stale and meritocratic processes of value, judgement and care have suddenly shifted and are being evaluated. This is an exciting development.

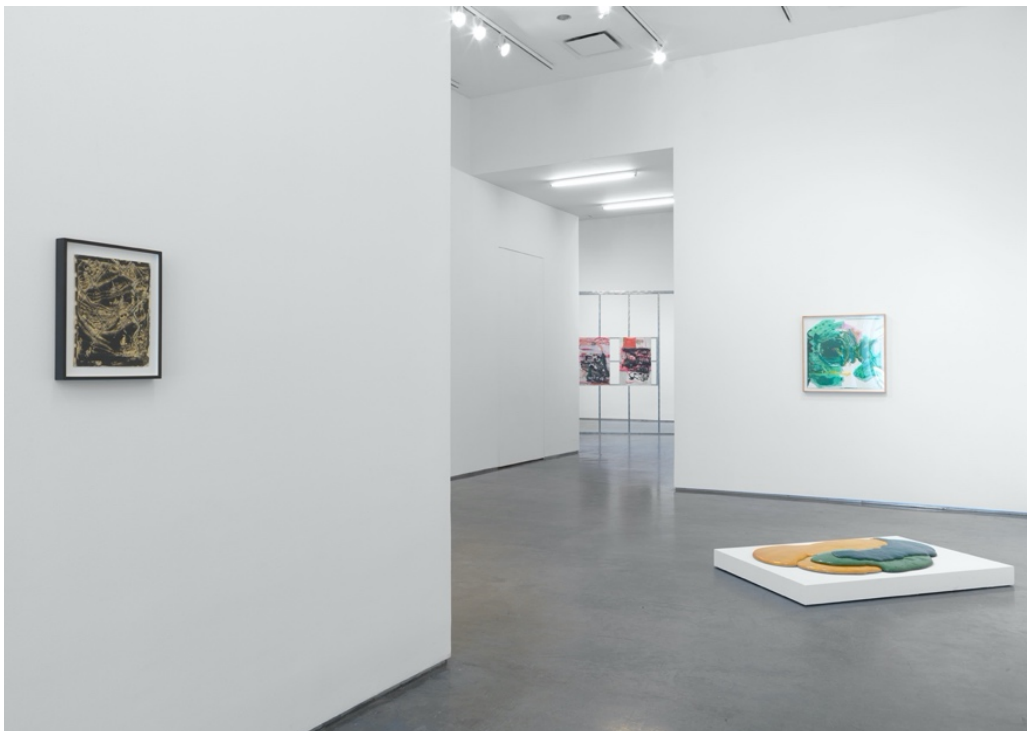
In the next section, I will outline how I worked with historic and contemporary artworks, as a curator and the maker of a "support structure"¹¹ in order to evaluate how the understanding of gesture, in a painterly sense of the making of physical moves that leave a trace of an event, can be mutable. In making an exhibition which attempted to narrate a history of mid-century to contemporary female practices that were at the forefront of notions of liquidity in abstraction, I was hoping to show that by changing the container through which we view gestures, we can find new narratives, connections, similarities, genealogies. No clear historic lines were drawn, instead, new threads from surrealism, to action painting, feminist performance, and contemporary positions in painting and photography were drawn, in order not just to re-evaluate individual practices, but to build a new, shared lexicon of gesture through history.

¹¹ Celine Condorelli, *Support Structures*, 2009

The Mechanics of Fluids: Exhibition and model

The *Mechanics of Fluids* was a group exhibition that I worked on over the course of a year in 2017-18 and a clear example of my main research question being addressed in material conditions: *What are the implications of understanding and reading gestures in both art historical and contemporary painting when we understand gestures as non-fixed agents that change in time and place?*

I was approached to curate a group show, and I decided to focus on liquid gestures made by female artists. I wanted to organize an exhibition which highlighted the fact that women artists have been working at the forefront of 'liquidity' in abstraction throughout art history. I thought of it as a chance to research a history of abstraction by women artists, but that this perhaps 'specific' history within abstraction has its own references which might relate to a historic canon but also have other independent relationships which are one of many potentialities.



The Mechanics of Fluids, Marianne Boesky Gallery, 2018

Left: Elisa Breton, middle: Lynda Benglis, behind: Helen Frankenthaler



Lynda Benglis, University of Rhode Island, 1969. Photograph: Henry Groskinsky



Helen Frankenthaler, 1969. Image from the Ernst Haas estate.

The development of the exhibition *The Mechanics of Fluids* (searching for the works, and designing the exhibition architecture) was a concrete means to try out my research around liquidity. I used an exhibition superstructure, and was able to work with art works of other artists to envision a dialogue around material, gender, and the staging of works as a way to evaluate how gesture can behave.

I began the exhibition by considering the writing of Helen Molesworth from the book “Modern Women: Women Artists at the Museum of Modern Art” on the complicated relationships between female artists and generations. I attempted to make a show that showed how certain lineages of gestures could be traced between works. I was also thinking about Luce Irigaray and the notion of the non-singular position, as something that points to potentialities that are un-linguaged.

In her essay *How to Install art as a Feminist*, from “Modern Women” (2010), Molesworth describes the hard-won gains of feminism in the art academy: historic women artists recovered, women teachers in art schools, feminist studies, and some women included in the ‘canon,’ but, she says:

In other words: I feel fairly confident that I know how to write an essay as a feminist, less sure I know how to install art as one. (Molesworth 2010, 499)

Molesworth goes on to describe that in the genealogies of women artists (perhaps because of the lack of museum hanging tracing these genealogies and perhaps due to wider commercial and critical forces):

Genealogies for art made by women aren't so clear, largely because they are structured by a shadowy absence. (Molesworth 2010, 504)

In organizing *The Mechanics of Fluids*, I wanted to give rise to a new language, not to a re-insertion or to a re-contextualization, or even to a ‘feminization’ of abstraction, as Molesworth points to in her essay:

Far from feeling compelled to decry de Kooning "the misogynist," Sillman, in her paintings, suggested that in de Kooning one might find a feminized practice of painting in which abstraction is ineluctably linked to the decorative in a nonpejorative way. (I'm thinking of his paintings from the 1970s, the pastoral, frothy, and almost rococo ones, with palettes of rose, cream, and silver). (Molesworth 2010, 501)

I wanted to show a complicated network of influence and friendship: this to me is something that is highly lacking in feminist discourse and forms the basis of the structure of art history: not psychological ‘familial’ relationships that Molesworth discusses, but rather, friendships and alliances.

What kind of ‘looking’ do the art works do to each other? How do they ‘talk’ to each other? And about what?

I began with certain historical positions: Helen Frankenthaler, Lynda Benglis and Charlotte Posenenske. I pursued contemporary practices: Josephine Pryde’s photographs (I initially approached her about exhibiting her *Relax* series, originally exhibited at Reena Spaulings), and Eileen Quinlan – her 2017 photographic series using shower glass as something to press her body up against like a photogram.

I was surprised, in the studio visits and gallery visits that I conducted to try to secure work for the show, by the breadth of the practices that I encountered, and that the overall structure of many female practices dealt with liquidity. I realized that liquidity as a theme was rather a central tenant to many of the practices I was pursuing.

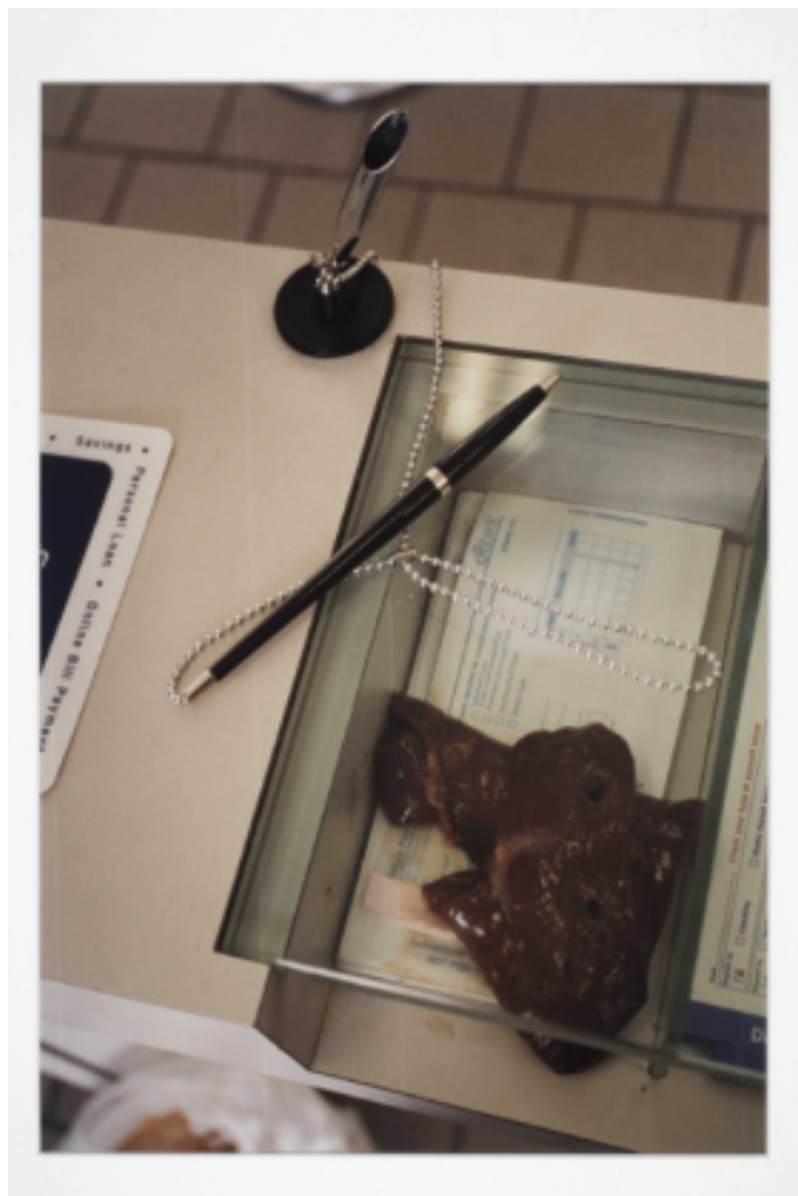
Over and over, I found that series and subjects in Pryde’s work focused on liquids or metabolic states. In the end we decided on photo from the series “I may have the weak and feeble body of a woman, but I have the liver of an ox” (2006), and “Becoming Inspiration” (2012). I hung these alongside Quinlan’s work in which she was photographing herself in

the shower and then taking the polaroid negatives and treating them like experimental objects in baths, degrading and capturing the liquid nature of the medium of gel or emulsion. That these two women are friends is perhaps not beside the point. That all the women in the show are, to some extent, involved with each other, and support each other's practices, is important. They did not initially participate out of an intention to show friendships, as before beginning the exhibition I did not know all the connections between people, but rather the result implies shared interest, subjectivity, and an aesthetic conversation.



Left: Josephine Pryde, *I may have the weak and feeble body of a woman but I have the liver of an ox*, 2006. Right: Eileen Quinlan, *Good Enough*, 2013

As I developed the exhibition, I became interested that many gestures of the artists moved fluidly between mediums: these women artists were upsetting the material boundaries of a medium, literally through using the medium in a fluid way or creating the 'effect' of fluidity: Lynda Benglis' pour piece begins as liquid paint (actually a resin foam) and lives on, looking like a sculpture. Charlotte Posenenske's work appears to be a minimalist sculpture but is in fact a modular system at radical odds with the value system of her peers: (*Series D*, 1969), are pre-fabricated metal elements which are for sale at the price of their production. The photographic-based practice of Eileen Quinlan uses the processes of developing negatives or the mechanics of scanners to create a painterly photographic surface. The painter Jaqueline Humphries translates images of old paintings into digital stencils, which layer a painterly gesture with a digital representation. All the works involved moving between mediums, or modes of re-presentation, and using situations of image-making fluidly.



Josephine Pryde, *I may have the weak and feeble body of a woman but I have the liver of an ox*, 2006



The Mechanics of Fluids, Marianne Boesky Gallery, 2018. Below, Lynda Benglis, above, Helen Frankenthaler



Josephine Pryde, *Becoming Inspiration*, 2010



The Mechanics of Fluids, 2018. Left: Jaqueline Humphries, middle: Laura Owens, right: Amy Sillman



The Mechanics of Fluids, 2018. Back: Mika Tajima

I designed a displaced system of architecture on which the works hung. I took architectural elements from the gallery and turned and shifted them around in the space. This 'fluid' system I designed on which the works hung were made of moments in the gallery architecture that were displaced. I wanted to portray that gestures affected the architecture, that they affected history and that they affected each other. Unexpected relationships arose through seeing photographs as paintings, paintings as images, drawings as surfaces, surfaces as sites.

Specifically: I took the architecture of the next-door gallery and I 'dumped' in on a 45-degree angle through the two spaces, so as you walked in, on the left you saw a sliver of a stud wall emerging (on which hung the Pryde and Quinlan works), then as you walked back into the main space, a large L-shaped wall dissected the space. I additionally made a large *Make a Mess, Clean it Up* piece (from 'cleaning' the hallway between two galleries, the 'backstage') and I hung that around a corner and installed work, including a Charlotte Posenenske *Series D* in front of and on it. On one wall, I made a wallpaper which was made from a rubbing of a back wall, a brick wall with pipes and radiators, which then had Eileen Quinlan's 'scan' photos installed on it.



The Mechanics of Fluids. Back, Melissa Gordon, *Make a Mess, Clean it Up*, front, Charlotte Posenenske, right, Lisa Oppenheim.



The Mechanics of Fluids, 2018, back: wall rubbing, front: Eileen Quinlan



Make a Mess, Clean it Up, 2018, with Scan Painting, 2018



Model of *The Mechanics of Fluids*

My research question developed through this project as it helped me understand the notion of a dissolve between mediums – within art works individually – as something central to and driving through many practices both interested in feminism and liquidity. The initial goal was to put female art practices first and foremost in a history of liquidity in abstraction.

I do not think that gender is a defining category in relationship to how gesture is categorized. Instead, I was interested in the fact that the artists in the exhibition understood their materials as unfixed, as unfinished in each piece. That the works all displayed a notion of not being one thing or another (objects that were both engaged with physical gestures, but also notions of capturing a moment in a photographic sense), objects that were not ‘fixed’ in one form and actively seeking not to be fixed. Works and practices that were seeking out movement and representations of movement and transition. That these were all made by women, over the course of eighty years, speaks to some potentiality I feel this PhD is looking to define or to allow to happen.

As a brief inventory of works: in the first anteroom there was a small piece by Elisa Breton from the 1940s: a painting made by pressing and blotting paint between surfaces, in this case gold paint on the embossed cover of a chocolate box. A beautiful piece: I had seen it by chance at a friend’s house and we borrowed it for the exhibition.

After this was a Lynda Benglis’ ‘pour’ piece from the 1970s (a light-weight foam which looks like solid color floating on top of itself). Then, above this, a woodcut by Helen Frankenthaler (borrowed from Frank Stella’s collection): a woodcut showing both mastery of the medium as well as appearing fluid and liquid even though printed from a solid block. To the left, on the thin stud wall, was the photograph by Josephine Pryde, “I may have the weak and feeble

body of a woman but I have the liver of an ox”, which is from a series of photographs she made in the early 2000s, where she took an ox liver into banks in Berlin and New York and threw the liver around and photographed it. Next to this was a work from the series titled “Good Enough” by Eileen Quinlan. This body of work was made at a moment when her children were young. She photographed herself pressed against the panes of a panel of shower glass (her only time alone), and the title references Winnicott’s notion of the ‘good enough’ mother. ¹² Quinlan plays with the negatives using chemicals and physical manipulation, which dissolve the image in a painterly wash.



Eileen Quinlan, *Good Enough*, 2018

As you walked between two gallery spaces, I hung a rarely-seen abstract painting on paper by Charlotte Posenenske, a small work which seemed to be working out a sculptural form through paint.

¹² Quinlan’s nudes... were born of an insurgent desire to continue making art under the time-constrained, inspired circumstances of new motherhood. As her world shrank, her bathroom became a studio where identity, sexuality, mortality, and the domination of women’s bodies could be confronted. The glass shower wall... acts as both a limit and an imaging surface where Quinlan’s compressed, abstracted body is rendered.

-Press release by Campoli Presti, 2017, found <http://www.eileenquinlan.com/2017>

Going through into the large room straight ahead, pinned to the metal stud wall with magnets, were four new Amy Sillman drawings, which included some of her first experiments with silkscreen. To the left was another Josephine Pryde work titled "Becoming Inspiration" which was made by using a high-speed camera to capture the movement of ink-dyed water on speakers. To the right was a rubbing wallpaper that I had created, and two large photographic works made by creating painterly effects on scanners by Eileen Quinlan.

Straight through the stud wall and on the back of the gallery was a large work by Jacqueline Humphries, the first in her latest body of work which was created by taking an existing painting, and then turning this painting into a 'code' of dots and parentheses – a kind of computer language which turns images not into JPGs or pixels or dots, but into colons and punctuation marks. She then paints on a canvas and has a large stencil made of the 'translation' of the painting. She then pushes thick (6mm thick) oil paint through the stencil, creating a shimmering, semi-photographic, gestural surface.

To the right of this was a small painting by Laura Owens, which included silkscreens of painted gestures, with googly eyes glued to the surface.

To the left, in front of my large *Make a Mess, Clean it Up* piece, I designed and installed a large piece in Charlotte Posenenske's *Series D*. The exciting thing about Posenenske's work is that when you – anyone – would like to exhibit it, you get a series of six small model forms, and from these forms you design any shape you would like (or series of shapes). There are warehouses in Berlin and New York that house all the existing forms, and you can exhibit any combination of pre-existing shapes. The condition is: you cannot clean or repair them; the use and movement and fingerprints must remain. There is no accumulation of value in these actions: to purchase a Posenenske is to buy the newly fabricated pieces, at cost. *Series D* is from 1968 and shortly pre-dates her famous Drop Out manifesto in which she declares that she is not so much interested in art works as systems. Shortly after, Posenenske left the art world, and she began working as a sociologist involved in factory workers rights: factory workers she had been working with to produce her metal 'readymades'.

In correspondence I had with Dr. Brunn, Posenenske's widower and estate manager, we discussed the treatment of material in Posenenske's *Series D*:

Dear Melissa Gordon,

I am happy that the installation is okay. The different surface of the elements is indeed an important aspect in Charlotte's series D. Older pieces have sometimes figures of the craftsmen on the surface who didn't realize that the tubes are thought to be art. Perhaps you don't know that I myself am busy to curate exhibitions under certain themes. So about „reduction“ and now about „backstage“ , which means the rear side of an artwork, where you may see all sorts of technical aspects – i.e. dates of the exhibitions, of the shipping, remarks of the dealer or the craftsmen. Charlotte did not only allow people to touch the installations or even move it, what is possible with the so called revolving vanes, but also chose on purpose cheap materials like cardboard or steel sheet which she wanted to vanish in the course of time. This is another important aspect of her concept against the traditional notion of art to be untouchable and made for eternity. Her main idea was the

continuity of her installations, so to be understood as fragments - an idea against the traditional notion of an artwork to be a perfect whole.
Many thanks for the images.

All the best for you and your show, Burkhard Brunn

Von: Melissa Gordon []

Gesendet: Freitag, 29. Juni 2018 10:21

An: Dr.Brunn <>

Betreff: Re: Images of Mechanics of Fluids

Dear Burkhard,

The installation is surprisingly stable! It was quite straightforward to put together, and felt that it.. was supposed to come together easily. The sandbags in the bottom are keeping it stable, and we made sure it was straight and there are screws going through the top into the wall. It does not move at all.

Yes, the patina of touch on the objects is something I didn't expect but feels very important- and was something that was kind of raised in the discussion of the history of female artists being written in the show... Sorry I'm thinking aloud but its an aspect of the work I hadn't considered before and was so nice to discover in putting it together and installing it. I didn't know that people can touch it- I've seen photos of other works being re-arranged by the audience, but of course the aspect of the installation being evident and that relationship is so interesting, to not make it perfect each time, not polish it like an object on display.

I am really in admiration of how the generosity and way the work is circulated and shared by the estate is so enabling of the practice over so many years...

No art is not made in heaven! Its made concretely on the ground. What a lovely thought.

I've attached a couple shots of people installing the work- that I couldn't help but try to document a bit.

I hope the exhibition at the Dia goes well, and all is well with you and you have a nice summer,

My kind regards

Melissa

(Personal correspondence 2018)

This letter with Dr. Brunn illustrates the advantage of working through a question in the manner of organizing this group exhibition, which mirrors in a way my working practice throughout my PhD research. Learning that one could *not* erase the fingerprints on the metal *Series D* by Posenenske, something which is not readily seen in reproductions of her work, but which stands out as a tarnish on the surface in person quite strongly, was a surprising and exciting new relationship that opened between her notion of gesture and others in the show, as well as the 'cleaning' work of mine on which I hung her work. In short, the works foregrounded touch in a way I had not known until hanging them.

Also in the exhibition, installed on my large *Make a Mess, Clean it Up* piece on raw canvas was a diptych by Lisa Oppenheim, a series of photos of clouds that are exposed by smoke. Lastly, there hung a diptych by the artist Mika Tajima: soft color fades on plastic made by painting the back of Perspex shapes.

As a curator or organizer of this exhibition, I was engaged in encouraging the art works and mediums and processes to bleed into each other (in a practice but also between practices).

In asking myself, can I locate gestures behaving in a liquid manner, historically? In this process of discovery, I believe that I discovered gestures by artists in which the gesture was not to become emblematic through a style like a photographic 'effect' or graffiti-like 'tag' (I'm thinking of the 'signatures' of Josh Smith, of Christopher Wool, of the 'blur' of Gerhard Richter or the 'soft lens' of Luc Tyumen's as quick, almost cheap emblems of process), but gestures that rather are embedded as part of a process that is revealed, that is shown to be *in process*.

This notion of 'in process' is something prevalent within the history of painting. In the next section, I will try to both locate the way in which the flatbed and notion of 'formlessness' can offer historical contexts for gestures and material practices that are not solid or liquid in form, and also try to identify a differentiation from them and the 'in-between' nature of gesture that I am addressing in this PhD.

The Site of Painting: Flatbed and Formlessness

So...that's what I do.
I work in between the cracks"
(Sillman 2012, 106)

I have notated earlier a few points where painters are speaking about being 'between': what goes between? What *moves* between? Being between-form implies a notion of formlessness, of being able to 'fit' in tight spaces, in empty zones.

The historic notion of flatbed painting is a means of producing a painterly surface flat, on the ground or table, whilst not looking at it up on a wall. This mode of painting usually comprises processes that are too liquid to stay on a surface, or are printed or made by pressing onto or laying or throwing or dropping something down.

In developing the exhibition *The Mechanics of Fluids*, I became interested in looking into the history of gestures in painting which reveal processes (rather than 'picture' something explicitly as an image), and in the relationship between performance-like actions and processes that happen through a body.

Yve-Alain Bois wrote a number of essays on painting in the 1980s and 1990s including the eponymous essay "Painting as Model" in which he speaks of painting as a means of thinking through an idea in form. This essay (and the book it is published in) has been a background influence to this PhD as is the essay "Grids" by Rosalind Krauss, but it is important in this section to look more closely at a joint text by the two critics on the notion of formlessness.

In the book *Formless, a User's Guide* by Yve-Alain Bois and Rosalind Krauss, which was also an exhibition titled *l'Informe: mode d'emploi* at the Centre Pompidou in 1996, the authors use Georges Bataille's term '*informe*' (formless) as a model by which to understand a break between form and content in modern art. Bois and Krauss describe that reading artworks through the lens of the formless breaks the dichotomy of form and content, and instead proposes an *operation*: a means of making which itself has content in the shaping of a formlessness of material.

Rather, with regard to the *informe*, it is a matter instead of locating certain operations that brush modernism against the grain, and of doing so without countering modernism's formal certainties by means of the more reassuring and naive certainties of meaning. On the contrary, these operations split off from modernism, insulting the very opposition of form and content - which is itself formal, arising as it does from binary logic- declaring it and void. (Bois and Krauss 1997, 16)

In the press release the curator-critics describe the elements they wish to call attention to: horizontality, base-materialism, and entropy. Bataille describes the *informe* in 1929 as "*l'informe est une opération qui consiste à déclasser, au double sens de rabaisser et de mettre du désordre dans toute taxinomie, afin d'annuler les oppositions sur quoi se fonde la pensée logique...*" (The formless is an operation which consists of downgrading in a double sense of both demeaning and making a disorder of taxonomy in order to cancel the oppositions on which logical thought is based. (My translation))

They describe the in-between of form as a *process*: "The formless is an operation." (Bois, Krauss, 18) The artworks associated with this exhibition and statement were at the time radically assembled: Rauschenberg and Dubuffet, Robert Morris and Lucio Fontana, Robert Smithson and Alberto Burri. There is a sense throughout the works referenced and reproduced in the essay that the authors concern is to do with the *affection* of material through process. Time, accumulation, piercing: the gesture is not simply a brushstroke, but rather the residue of an operation.

This can be further contextualized within the framework of the over-arching practice and writing of Yve-Alain Bois who in his book *Painting as Model*, describes painting as a form-object of thought.

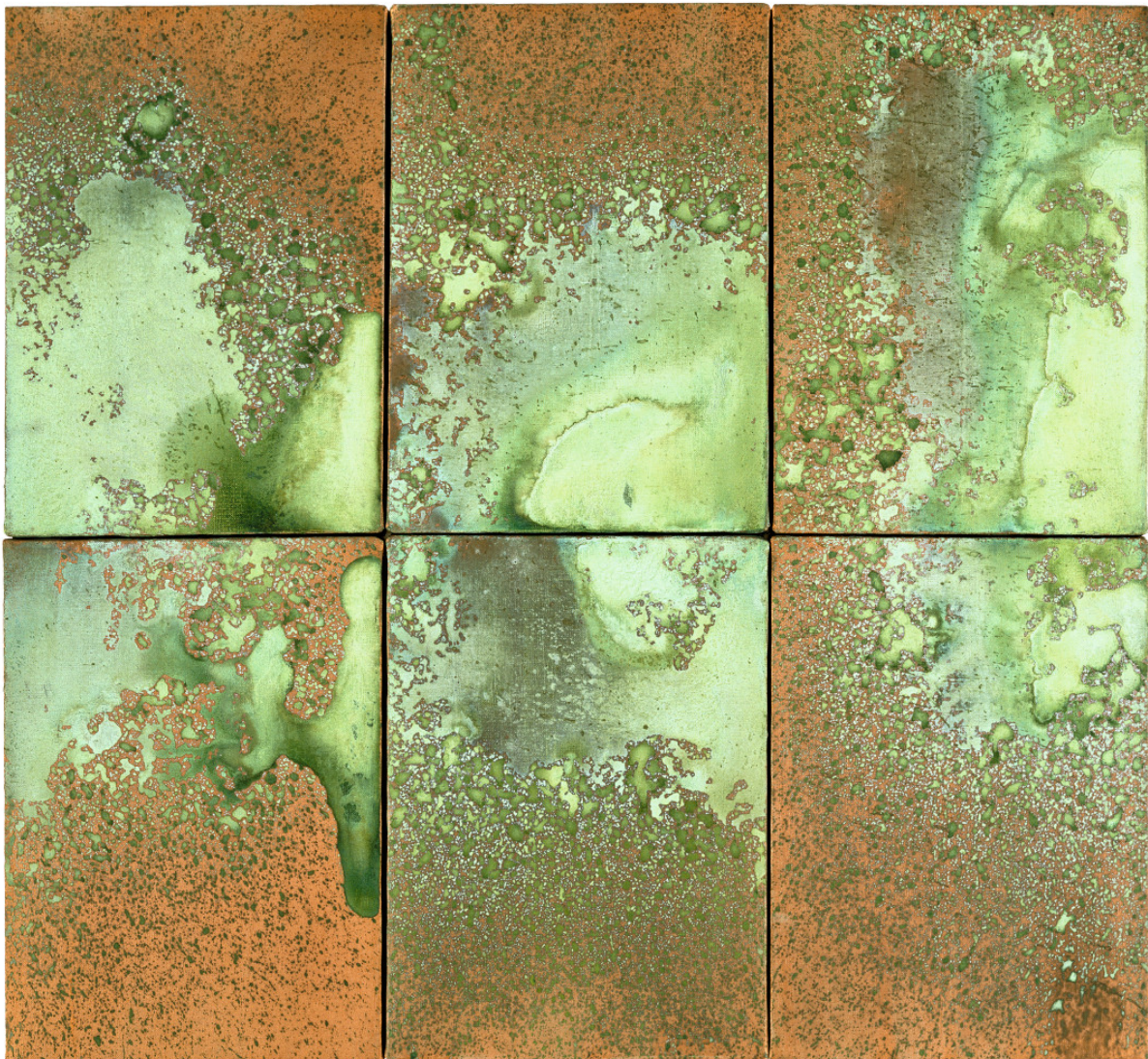
What does it mean for a painter to *think*?—this is the old question to which Hubert Damisch has returned in connection with the art of this (last) century...Not only what is the role of speculative thought for the painter at work? but above all what is the mode of thought of which painting is the stake? Can one *think* in painting as one can dream in color? (Bois 1990, 245)

So, in this mode of thinking, not only do gestures reveal a process or a procedure, but they also point to a thought: they reveal or outline or bring form to a thinking process.

Central to the argument of the *informe* of Bois and Krauss is the gesture or operation of Flatbed painting:

We began with the *horizontal* since the operational nature of the *informe* is the most obvious. Which is a state of being, captures the dynamic nature of the operation. It would be more accurate... "lowering from the vertical to the horizontal" or "horizontalization." The rotation implied by this lowering is one of the strategies put to work in the most insistent way by Bataille. (Bois and Krauss 1997, 25)

Flatbed painting refers to a means of describing a kind of painting in which the production site of the act of painting is flat or on the floor. This has historically been part of a dialogue in which the window of a picture plane was replaced by a site, a situation, *on* which actions took place, and was then either turned up to the vertical plane two view, or, as in the "Piss Paintings" works of Andy Warhol, left on the floor to act simultaneously as a map and an image.



Andy Warhol, *Oxidation*, 1977–78

The writer Leo Steinberg coined the term Flatbed in 1968 to describe a particular body of work, with its main referents being Jackson Pollock and Robert Rauschenberg:

I borrow the term from the flatbed printing press— ‘a horizontal bed on which a horizontal printing surface rest’s (Webster). And I propose to use the word to describe the characteristic picture plane of the 1960s—a pictorial surface whose angulation with respect to the human posture is the precondition of its changed content.

It was suggested earlier that the Old Masters had three ways of conceiving the picture plane. But one axiom was shared by all three interpretations, and it remained operative in the succeeding centuries, even though Cubism and Abstract Expressionism: the conception of the picture as representing a world, some sort of world space which reads on the picture plane in correspondence with the erect human posture. The top of the picture corresponds to where we hold our heads aloft; while its lower edge gravitates to where we place our feet. (Steinberg 1972, 61)



Caspar David Friedrich, *View from the Artist's Studio, Window on the Right*, 1805-06

The Flatbed painting is the diametric opposite of the ‘window’ painting, which can be best exemplified in the multiple paintings of his studio window by Casper David Friedrich (1805-06). If we are not looking out, at a vista, where are you looking? Down: and its relationship to dirt, ritual, degradation, and lowness is intrinsically linked to notions around Flatbed and horizontality in painting.

Bois and Krauss explains how the Flatbed operates in modernist painting:

Even if one no longer speaks of painting as a “window opened onto the world”. The modernist picture is still conceived as a vertical section that presupposes the viewer’s having forgotten that his or her feet are in the dirt. Art, according to this view, is a sublimatory activity that separates the perceiver from his or her body.” (Bois and Krauss 1997, 25)

The turning of the picture plane from vertical to horizontal in its production presupposes a shift in how art is viewed: a shift in the axis, as Bois and Krauss call it. Rauschenberg’s work is central (perhaps due to his process as a silk-screener) to the impulse to constantly move objects between the flat and the vertical. The ‘lowering’ Bois and Krauss speak of also implies a lowering of art, of the art subject, as is seminally resembled in *Bed* (1955) by Rauschenberg:

Perhaps Rauschenberg’s profoundest symbolic gesture came in 1955 when he seized his own bed, smeared paint on its pillow and quilt coverlet, and uprighted it against the wall. There, in the vertical posture of ‘art,’ it continues to work in the imagination as the eternal companion of our other resource, our horizontality, the flat bedding in which we do our begetting, conceiving, and dreaming the horizontality of the bed relates to ‘making’ as the vertical of the Renaissance picture plane related to seeing. (Steinburg 1972, 97)



Robert Rauschenberg, *Bed*, 1955

This turn or shift in the axis of the picture plane foregrounds the body of the artist. Let us not forget that Rauschenberg was himself involved with dance and performance. At the basis of many practices of 'horizontalty' is a performance: an action taking place on a site. Whereas we have this art-historical reading of Pollock by Bois and Krauss, which does in effect point out that the horizontalty of his picture plane erases any 'isomorphic space'... as in, it erases the 'real imagined world':

It was the rotation to which Pollock submitted verticality that shook art up in an irreversible way...he was the first to underscore the horizontal, of the support as the essential element of his work process (there is no vertical runoff, the isomorphic space of his paintings is not oriented to the erect body of the human observer), abandoning the paintbrush and thus the anatomical connection that made it an extension of his hand, Pollock delegated a part of his process to matter itself, His traces took form through a combination of gesture and gravity, and both would vary according to the viscosity of the pigment. (Bois and Krauss 1997, 28)

It is also important to remember Pollock's own statements about performance and the flatbed:

I enjoy working on a large canvas. I feel more at home, more at ease in a big area. Having the canvas on the floor, I feel nearer, more a part of the painting, this way I can walk around it, work from all four sides, and be in the painting. Similar to the Indian sand painters of the West. Sometimes I use a brush but often prefer using a stick, sometimes I pour the paint straight out of the can. I like to use a liquid, dripping paint. I also use sand, broken glass, pebbles, string, nails or other foreign matter. A method of painting is natural growth out of a need. I want to express my feelings rather than illustrate them. Technique is just a means of arriving at a statement. When I am painting I have a general notion as to what I am about. I can control the flow of the paint. There is no accident. In that there is no beginning and there is no end. Sometimes I lose the painting. (Pollock 1950)

In Hans Namuth's film of Pollock from 1950, there is an uncomfortable reduction in the possibility of the site: a collapse between the psychic space of the artist and the site of the canvas.

We view Pollock through a piece of glass. The camera is pointed up from under the glass and he is dripping paint on the glass, a cigarette hanging out of his mouth. This is a complete fiction because first: Pollock is performing for the camera, not for the painting. Second, there is no painting, it's just a piece of glass, the support is gone. In the telling of the story by the New York Times author Sarah Boxer in 1998:

The figure of Jackson Pollock -- action painter, dancing dripper, sullen rebel -- was formed in Hans Namuth's camera. Namuth's camera helped make Pollock famous, Namuth's camera was blamed for Pollock's demise and, after Pollock died in a car crash in 1956, Namuth's camera tried to catch the artist in his coffin. (The funeral home didn't allow it.)

Pollock built a wooden platform to hold the glass. And Namuth crouched under it to "record the loops of liquid paint as they fell," as Barbara Rose, an art historian and critic, wrote in an essay in "Pollock Painting." As Pollock painted on the glass, the paint covered up his view of Namuth beneath him, but in the film it was just the opposite: Pollock's face and figure were gradually veiled by his own paint.

At last, the marathon photography session ended dramatically on a cold November day in 1950. Namuth and Pollock were winding up their work. Krasner was inside the house preparing a feast to celebrate the end of the filming. Pollock was tense. As the 1989 biography "Jackson Pollock: An American Saga," by Steven Naifeh and Gregory White Smith, tells it, Pollock was sick of putting on his paint-spattered boots again and again for the camera, shaking an object out of one boot again and again, getting ready to paint again and again, and asking Namuth again and again: "Should I do it now, Hans?" He was ready to blow.

When Pollock and Namuth came in from outside, blue from the cold, the first thing Pollock did was pour himself a tumbler of bourbon. It was the beginning of the end. Pollock had been sober (some say) for two years. Soon Namuth and Pollock got into an argument -- a volley of "I'm not a phony, you're a phony." Then Pollock tore a strap of cowbells off the wall and started swinging it around. (Boxer 1998, 1)



Jackson Pollock photographed by Hans Namuth in 1949



Film by Hans Namuth of Jackson Pollock, 1950

Instead of pretending to paint for the camera, painting likes to keep ahold of its potentials:

Indeed, the value of modern painting lies not in its meanings or even its actions, but rather in its unlimited potential for staging means and actions. (Joselit 2016, 11)

But also, and interestingly for this PhD, the operation of the *informe* is not just wrapped up in the shift in the axis of viewing paintings, the turn towards understanding the bodily nature of the artist and viewer, but also locates itself in *mess*, in something uncontrolled and uncontained, something without language:

From 1951 until his first “Combine Paintings”, Rauschenberg’s work is one big celebration of nondialectical, inarticulable waste. (Bois and Krauss, 59)

I find this interest in the ‘inarticulable’ an interesting aspect of the *informe*: when we move authorship out of the ‘sublime’ body, and bring it to the real, an awkward and uncomfortable shift happens: what about a body that fails? What about failure, disintegration, disappearing?

Steinberg described Rauschenberg’s typical picture surface as “dump, reservoir, switching center.” Krauss also characterizes Rauschenberg’s art in terms of place: Discussing the “equal density” which disparate images acquire in *Small Rebus*, she is “Struck by the fact that the surface of this painting is a *place*, a *locale*, where this kind of equalization can happen.” (Owens 1994 76)

Implicit in this understanding of the ‘locale’ of a painting is the idea of a venue, a place where something happens. What, then, do gestures enact in this space or place, and how also, importantly, do *bodies who are themselves seen as ‘sites’* enact something in these venues?

To return to Agamben. In his essay “Notes on Gesture” (2000), he tells us: “Cinema leads images back to the homeland of gesture.” (Agamben 2000, 56)

Upon first reading this, I thought of the work “Automobile Tire Print” (1953) by Robert Rauschenberg, in which Rauschenberg famously asked his friend John Cage to drive his Model T Ford through a tray of ink and then along a long piece of paper.



Robert Rauschenberg, *Automobile Tire Print*, 1953

Here, the operation of the *informe* meets the cinematography of gesture: an unfolding of an event as an image that carries on – carries on going, carries on in time, carries on unfolding (presumably until the ink runs out, like when a film runs out of stock).

Flatbed painting and work which uses the operation of the *informe* shift the emphasis of the axis of the viewing of the picture plane: a flattening, turning, a feeling of falling down or laying down, an acknowledgment that there is gravity, and touch, as Dr. Brunn described in the intentions of Charlotte Posenenske, not to erase the touch.

But also, that there is a body who makes this touch, who also deals with gravity, who is imperfect:

Just having a body is a daily comedy. From the control tower of the head, one gazes downward, always downward, upon this ‘loose baggy monster’ that we find ourselves in, this laughable casement that is the body below, as ankles swell, farts are emitted, rolls of fat jut out, the penis does its own thing. Shit happens and then you die. (Sillman 2015)

I have used this notion of Flatbed painting in my various experiments and more recent paintings to understand how a painting surface could have and display gravity. This has been an important discourse in understanding how to imply that a body is present in the creation of gestures, but also that the canvas itself is a site or a situation upon which things happen. The flatbed and *informe* are a crux point at understanding how voice (and female ‘bad’ voice which will be addressed in a later section) meets a space where a body enacts something which stays, through time and space, in the process of becoming. This thinking has also been evidenced in a body of writing that has run alongside my physical work.

Language going out of bounds: Material Writing

I have described the process of research and discovery around questions of the behavior of gesture in my painting and exhibitions during my research period. This began with the staging of the Mina Loy play *Collision* in early 2016 and shifted to a question of how gesture is located between paintings in several installations of paintings representing gestures in the spring of 2016. This developed into material experiments and the practice of capturing the liquid movement of gesture in the body of work *Make a Mess Clean it Up* in 2016 and 2017, and then the development and exhibition of this work and its contextualization within the curated exhibition '*The Mechanics of Fluids*' in 2018.

Throughout this time, alongside my process of experimentation with material, I also was developing a body of writing, which mirrors and becomes involved in the process of making works themselves.

The writings are in four parts and are included in the appendix as independent works. This section of the PhD explains their making and contextualizes them within the outputs of my PhD. In addition, it will explain how the writing itself is practice-based research and experimentation that led to the development of my final PhD output, as well as developed into a series of paintings, which I will focus on in the next section.

In 2016 I was invited to do a reading at a small exhibition space called Montague Space, in London and I used it as an opportunity to start assembling notes and verbalizing thoughts and reactions that were coming up during my research for this PhD. In the text that came out of this, "Luxury Goods: A Burning Desire" (2016) I describe how I get heartburn when thinking about notions of value. I try to make a connection between the body of someone in capitalism, and an interest in how value moves around. I address con men, and the writing of artist Cady Noland on the relationship between psychopaths and the art world. I use Frederick Jameson's essay on postmodernism as a ground in which to question how art works and everyday objects are obsessed with (and presented as) luxury goods.

In the process of writing, I assembled notes, quotes and references, and comments. I read this piece aloud in London in 2016 and realized that the breaks and asides that I had been writing were quite close to an inner voice and represented a non-linear way of thinking that related to the material of both research and painting.

I continued writing in a long form set of notes. During my PhD research time I wrote four pieces, but the content of each piece bleeds into the others. Each iteration: live readings, parts of artist talks, and sections of publications, have their own form, and are assembled from various conglomerations of notes and comments.

I began to think of all the material that I was gathering as 'material' akin to the way that stand-up comedians describe the sections of presentations that they work with. There are certain combinations that arrive at 'punchline' like moments, with gaps and jumps which itself mimics to me the jump and gap between painting that recognizes gesture.

The writing is accumulated in the appendix of this PhD. It follows the development of the main question of my PhD throughout my three-year research time. It begins with questioning in “Luxury Goods: A Burning Desire” the relationship of aesthetics to capital. Then in “Female Genius: Vital Signs” I am questioning how we address the way in which authorship is understood as well as the linguistic history of both the term ‘genius’ and ‘embarrassment,’ both of which have historically bodily references.

At the end of 2017, I hosted a three-day residency at WIELS in Brussels, in relationship to the exhibition *Something Stronger Than Me**, titled *Female Genius Night Club*. This was developed in conversation with the writer Eva Kenny, who developed a quiz for the club titled “Are you a Female Genius?” (2017). In our discussions, Kenny and I wanted to utilize the fictional character of a ‘Female Genius’ in a polemical way to spur conversation and debate.

Female Genius Night Club operated as a three-day period of working time for about seven artists, and then turned into a series of public events and spaces for presenting new work in the evening, around a bar hosted by the Akademie class of Rita McBride. It was a social space, based around a fictional character (a Female Genius), that also provided a platform for artists and writers (including Natasha Soobramanian, Jessica Wiesner, Fiona James, Anna Zacharoff and Dana Munro), to develop work.

During this residency, I began writing the essay “A Gesture is a Liquid” in which I began to compile the notes I had been gathering during the previous year during my developing research into liquids and notions of the behavior of gesture. The essay contextualizes some thoughts during the production of a large, purple *Make a Mess, Clean it Up* (which I exhibited for the first time on a large scale during the *Female Genius Night Club*), and tries to find a direction for the notes of my PhD research.

A few months later, I was invited to give a talk at Dorich House, in London, and then a few months after that at Sparta, in Düsseldorf, and I used both opportunities to address the ‘stand up’ nature of the essay “A Gesture is a Liquid.” I took my notes, and re-formed them, around a political, polemical set of concerns which also addressed the audience directly about questions of immigration, nationhood, and a growing division in feminism.

The *Female Genius Night Club* took place just around the time of the Harvey Weinstein scandal and the development of the MeToo movement. It was a huge ground shift in the way that content was addressed, and at the time I was grappling with how my voice in the various ‘outputs’ of my PhD would begin to address the massive changes under way.

The two ‘stand up’ deliveries, one of which exists on the website www.alivingarchive.com, were trials and experiments to attempt to deal with personal and emotional relationships to politics, around me.

This model of speech has been an important development on my writing and on my work. I will describe in the following section how the ‘modeling’ of the material of writing, which is essentially a material form, both physical and vocal, of dealing with the notes I took during

my research for this PhD, became important catalysts in the development of painterly work which came out of the research.

The final essay, for which I had been assembling notes over several years, came out of the opportunity for a talk at the Witte de With in 2019. I was asked to give a talk in relationship to the exhibition *An exhibition with an audio script by Sarah Demeuse and Wendy Tronrud, as well as a soundtrack by Mario García Torres in collaboration with Sol Oosel* which took place at the Witte de With in Rotterdam¹³, from January to May 2019.



The Embarrassment of Suck, 2019

The curators and writers of the show, Sarah Demeuse and Wendy Tronrud, had quoted an essay I had written about the gesture of dropping out in 2015 titled *Presence and Absence* (published in 2015 with *May Revue*), and I was invited to elaborate on this.

I had been wanting to contextualize my research into the gesture of dropping out, which began in 2013, and which I have written about several times about the ‘participation’ of artists within the art world, and how practices of artists who had dropped out had instead of ‘exiting’ the art world, rather had expanded notions of authorship, over time.

I combined these notes with a series of notes on embarrassment that I had wanted to address, since beginning the discussion with Eva Kenny in 2013, and publishing some of her writings on embarrassment and questions of quantity. I wanted to deal with how these two things could be re-evaluated in terms of thinking about the behavior of gesture as movable, unfixed and liquid. The liquid, move-able mediality of the writing material in the appendix is important for the process of this PhD, as its form is unfixed, and accumulative, and shifts and changes according to places and times. Like gesture itself, which also contains these

¹³ The Witte De With has changed its name to the Kunstinstituut Melly in 2020

qualities, the writing can be seen from different angles, be repeated, and shape-shift depending upon the context, both physical but also temporal, in which it is encountered.

This material also found a form in the artist book “A Gesture is a Liquid,” which was a stepping stone to series of paintings titled *Female Readymades*, which gather questions on the behavior of gesture, on history, on voice, writing, gravity and liquidity as a site to continue and further the investigations begun in this PhD.

A Gesture is a Liquid: Artist Book and Models

In late 2017 I was approached by the designer Daniel Rother to make an artist publication together. As I had recently published the catalogue *Painting Behind Itself* (Revolver, 2016) and I was developing new work and working on the exhibition *The Mechanics of Fluids*, I thought it would be interesting to approach the collaboration with the idea not to use finished works, but rather to assemble working material.

At the time, I was – in line with my research for the PhD – experimenting and trying out new process. My question was: how can I show a metabolism in painting? How can I show that a gesture moves through a body, the body being a body of a painting as well? How can I show how gesture behaves? What are behaviors of gestures?

The experimentation took on different avenues, but in short, I began to model small paintings. I began assembling material as experiments with notions of liquidity. I began to understand the painting surface as something on which a multitude of information can be assembled and modeled, and that gestures can be presented on several different registers.

I started modeling¹⁴ works that pointed to notions of liquidity or metabolism: digital drawings of intestines, which I then painted on or painting on plastic on top of them. I printed out photos that I had taken of my hands at the end of a studio day, covered in paint, and I let my children paint on these photos. I erased ‘blank’ Photoshop pages, making intestine like white negative spaces on a black and white checkerboard. I scanned medicines or packets of things that I had put in my body such as contact lenses and Ibuprofen. I scanned paint on plastic, and squished it in the scanner, alongside the medicine. I collected terms from financial dictionaries that related to bodies: Burn rate, exhaust price, fat chance, and I printed them out in specific fonts, and cut them out, letting the peeled skin of the words hang down. I assembled cut-outs of pieces of clothing, of painting parts, of paintings on plastic. I also started working on small paintings flat on tables in the studio as spaces of experimentation – how to evaluate, like an index, how gestures come together or are readable on a painting surface.

¹⁴ A note on modelling: I make life-scale paper prints of different grids and surfaces in my studio which cover entire walls. On those paper prints I hang real objects: books, ropes, chains, pieces of clothing, documents, paper cut outs, letters, small abstract paintings etc. I move these around, assemble and treat the surface like an investigation or a model for creating a painting later on. This process of modelling is an important aspect of the paintings as they both deal with ‘real’ objects and their representation but also as a continual process of making, of having the painting surface represent a thought process, which occurs both as an arrangement of objects and the representation of that arrangement. This links for me to the idea in “Painting as Model” (1991) by Yve-Alain Bois that painting *models* thought (does not represent, or clarify, but works it out in process).



Scan Painting with Anadin, 2018



Model of digital intestines, 2018

For the artist book, I also began assembling information on a gridded surface in my studio. I printed a grid to cover a wall and started assembling objects on that, to make a model for the book. I was interested in the projective nature of modelling paintings and that the grid also referenced a projection: of scale, and that a model moves from imagination to real.



Model of Painting, 2017

I began to think that if the painting itself, in its physical form, is a container for gestures, then also gestures can *hang* on the painting. I was interested in the collapse of the architectural space in which paintings hang, onto the painting surface. The painting would show that it was a container, it would display gestures, it would assemble content and material and it would be a hanging device itself. It was like turning a flatbed painting up.

It made sense to think about turning these models on which I was assembling information into paintings. I hoped that my research into gesture as something that behaves as liquid could be brought into discourse with the notion that the body too, is a container of liquids. The body affects gesture, it produces gesture, and it must then have an ontological relationship to the material creation of gesture. How to make this evident? How to show a

body that has produced something, without picturing it? I was hoping to point, like in the *Female Genius Night Club*, to an absent author who was bringing these elements together.

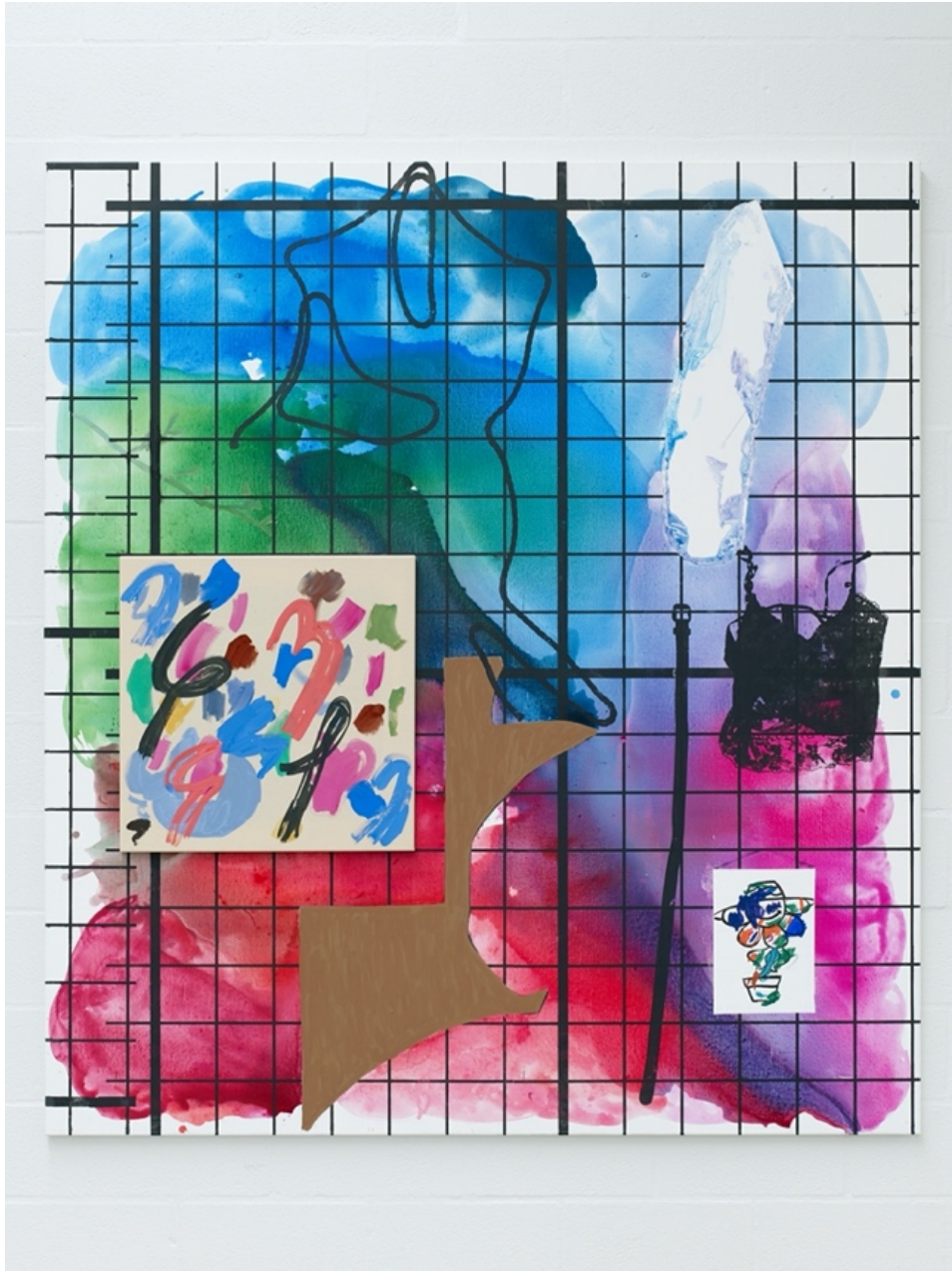
Modeling Painting: *Female Readymades*

In this final body of work presented in this PhD, I want to link the understanding of gesture in painting as *in movement*, and mutable, to a history of how language and re-forming history is present in the historic gesture of the Readymade. In this body of paintings, which were developed out of the artist edition “A Gesture is a Liquid,” the space of each painting can be imagined to be hanging structures, similar to the exhibition displays that I have designed for my own and others works.

Each painting is modeled in real life by assembling groups of objects and materials pertaining to questions around gesture, around bodily movement of form, as well as accessories of bodies, cut-outs and negative shapes of gestures. The materials are assembled on large surfaces hung on the wall of my studio which have been silkscreened with a grid (and more recently printed with real chain link fencing or images of perforated steel), and there these objects are hung, demonstrating gravity on these surfaces. These live hangings become models for paintings, in which layers are blocked, paint is applied both behind and in front of the ‘boundary’ of the grid. Real objects are exposed to silkscreen and printed to life scale – printing ‘real’ things on the paintings also give a sense of scale, which is important in terms of evaluating how gestures behave: the grid is also a non-scale measurement. What is being enacted on these paintings is the modeling of gesture and the assemblage of information around gesture and the body that is making it.

Many of the gestures that are made on the paintings are rehearsed on either plastic sheets that are hung on the model paintings, or on small test paintings before being painted on the large works. These test paintings are also then mimicked or themselves hung on top of the canvases. Real objects are hanging through the canvases or glued on top, such as electric cigarettes and purple suspenders. Digital erasures and shapes that reference digital erasures repeat throughout the series. How could I paint these digital gestures as being as real as the real gestures but also being digital and not being painterly or representing a representation of an object? What is the difference between a real object or a readymade surface and then a representation of that object?

I was working with many different materials, both in the models of paintings and the real paintings themselves. I primed the canvases with a gesso I developed which had marble dust mixed in, sanded and re-applied so that the surface was smoother and more absorbent, so paint would pool on it and soak in easier. I used marble dust to mix with paint and make it very thick. I used chalk to create surfaces on parts of the canvas that imitated painting on glass. I worked with Flashe paint and different acrylics and mediums.



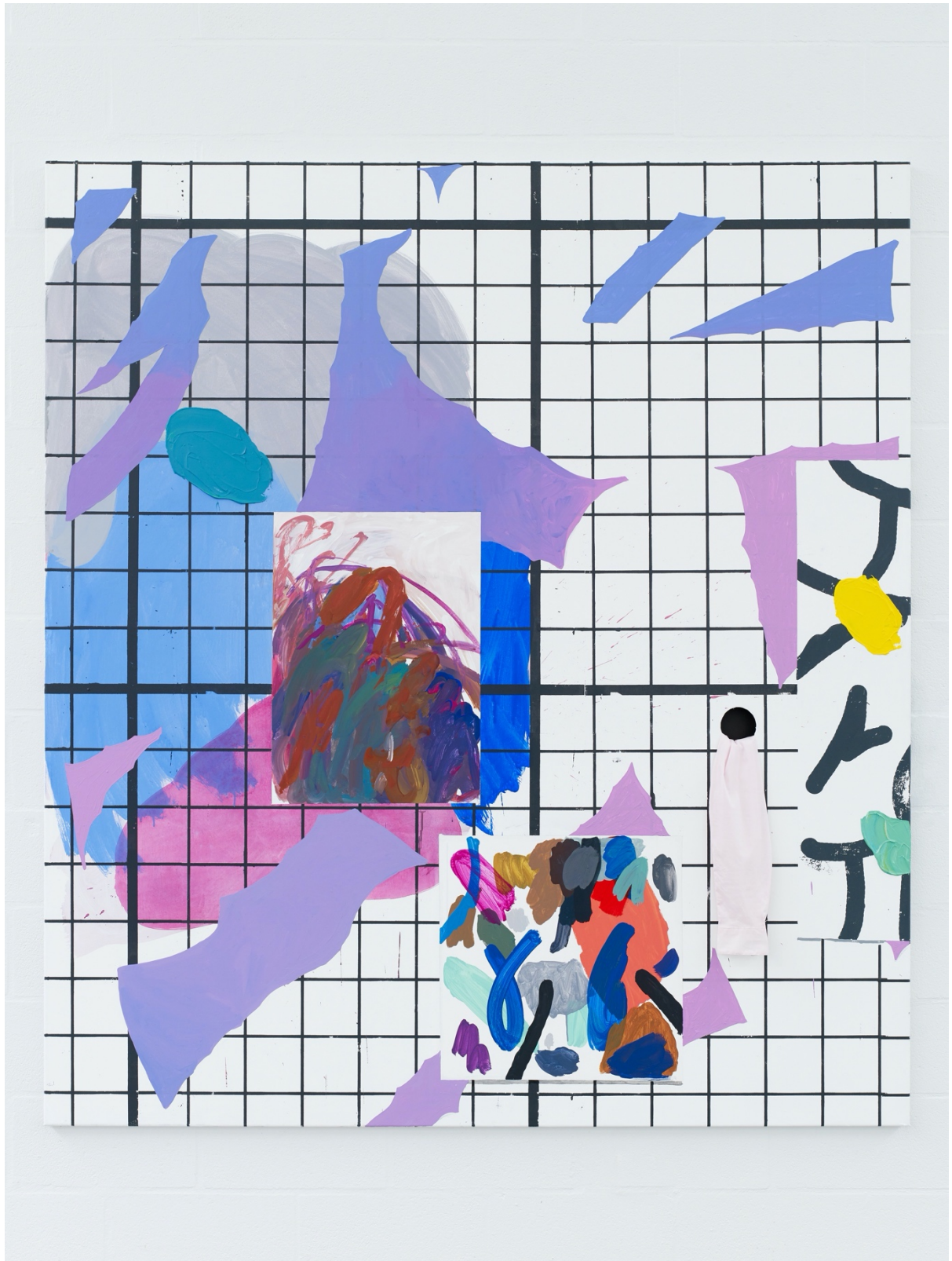
Female Readymade (Rope, belt, Attie's drawing, wood shape, intestine, painting), 2019

In the process of developing this work, I greatly expanded my material knowledge and gave a wider vocabulary of painterly 'moves' I would make. I also began cutting holes and shapes out of the canvas to see behind or through the body of the painting. I wanted to show limbs or intestinal forms, flaccidly falling from the surface of the painting. In each work there are elements that are 'real' such as the belt and the ropes and chains etc. that are exposed directly to silkscreen.

I was trying to show, in several ways, the unsolidity of paint itself, and using the paint also to imply that gestures are real and fake, have gravity perhaps, are modeled and rehearsed. I have worked on many test paintings which have become spaces for small abstract paintings to start appearing and being hung within the larger paintings. I was thinking about how one develops a language of abstraction and using the surfaces of the paintings to address this, as a space to work this out in a live format.



Female Readymade (Pollock's shed, photos of Janet Sobel, Letter from Mark Rothko, keys, wire cutters, Blow Up detail of Pollock painting and of Sobel painting, chain, smoking gun, p.218 of 'American Type Painting', gestures), 2020-2021



Female Readymade (Intestines, Mabel's painting, sleeve, hole, test painting, large erasure), 2019



Female Readymade (Two holes, tights, vase, Baubo, Hermaphrodite Aphrodite, Siren, Cassandra, Furies, notes from Anne Carson, still from 'Not I', fence, rope), 2021



Female Readymade (Elsa 1917/2017, Rope, Hat of Rose Selavy, large erasure, Duchamp's models of the Fountain (1933), Elsa performing, Perserverence Makes me sad, sweater, evidence 1917), 2020

In earlier bodies of work, in painting series and installations, I was interested in showing how notions of abstraction and gesture could literally be contained in the move between paintings, the move in how the body moved between paintings. The cinematic tendency of this was embedded in both the work and the moves between the work: we imagine its making; we think about how it unfolds like a film. More so, gesture in the works began as something that had the potential to exist *between* things. Between images, between states, between mediums...

The first finished painting I did in this body of work was for a group exhibition at Eastside Projects in Birmingham. I was given a very free reign to deliver a large-scale painting that would fit into the unusual architecture of the space. I got the measurements of the metal jumbo-stud that was used to build a new interior surface in the space, and I used the measurements of this stud to make a silkscreen surface of a wall on which paintings hung. The painting was the image of the space, with both real and impossible gestures on top.



Fat Chance, 2017

Each of the works developed individually, and took on an environment themselves, such as a physical rubbing of a door or a large spill of paint contained on the canvas. I titled the works *Une Femme Pendue* plus an inventory of the different gestures in the painting. I have later changed all the titles of the works and the series to *Female Readymades*.

The title *Une Femme (or Femelle) Pendue* came from research into Duchamp that I undertook as part of my PhD research in 2017, when I went to New York to look in the MoMA library archives. I discovered a little-known photograph of Duchamp in his studio in 1917, where he is sitting underneath the “Fountain” (1917) hanging in his doorway, which is referred to as ‘*Une Femelle Pendue*’: a hanging female thing.



5. Duchamp's apartment/studio, with *Fountain* suspended, c. 1917. (cat. no. 4)

as the American Independents Society prepared its debut.¹⁶

I was interested in the fact that all Duchamp's early readymades (perhaps all of them if “Fountain” is not included) were objects that were originally ‘hanging’ in space. Revisiting the history of the Readymade is a way of understanding how a fixed ‘container’ – the 20th centuries largest art historical ‘move’ in which a ‘readymade’ is a critique of the value systems of art production – can in fact be viewed as a completely different form when its own history is unpacked more clearly. When we understand that, in fact, the ‘Readymade’ is a constructed gesture, a historically re-visited action (there are no exhibitions, catalogue photos, essays or public depictions of the Fountain (1917) between 1917 when the photograph by Alfred Stieglitz is published in *The Blind Man*, and the early 1930s when after

Duchamp was asked to show the Fountain for the first time in the International Surrealism exhibition of 1938 by Andre Breton. Duchamp showed a different Fountain also hung above a doorway. It was only after this that he began to model small versions of the original Fountain. Just before Duchamp's death in 1964 the replicas of the Fountain as we know them were made and sold in an edition of sixteen.

What might we learn from this possible history of an accumulated gesture? In fact, my trip to the MoMA library to research the provenance of Fountain was in fact to try to uncover whether Baroness Elsa von Freytag Loringhoven did indeed submit the fountain. As with many crimes, I could not assemble the evidence to prove that this happened, but there are multiple levels of circumstantial evidence. Whether von Freytag-Loringhoven, or the artist Janet Sobel who was making 'drip' painting before Pollock are the 'original' authors of these seminal gestures is sadly beside the point. I will not go into the details of my research on these and other characters such as Marlow Moss, but I will point to one piece of evidence in the many, many undocumented moments of the 'primitive' accumulation of female artists gestures.

In Partisan Review in 1955, Clement Greenberg published the essay "American-Type Painting" which was an overview of his genius predictions of the importance and emergence of the 'overall' as a commanding formal force in Abstract painting. He describes on p.218 how Pollock made his breakthrough in the 'the overall' with the sensational discovery of the 'drip,' but Greenberg tells a small aside first.

...but Pollock... did his own first "all-over" pictures in the late summer of 1946, in dabs and ribbons of thick paint that were to change at the end of the year into liquid spatters and trickles. Back in 1944, however, he had noticed one or two curious paintings shown at Peggy Guggenheim's by a "primitive" painter Janet Sobel (who was, and still is, a housewife living in Brooklyn). Pollock (and I myself) admired these pictures rather furtively: they showed schematic little drawings of faces almost lost in a dense tracery of thin black lines lying over and under a mottled field of predominantly warm and translucent color. (Greenberg 1955, 218)

Were Janet Sobel and Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven not given correct credit for their 'gestures' because they were stolen, or would those gestures never have been listened to in the first place because of their 'outsider' status? Because their voices were not able to speak or be heard in certain spaces? Regardless, their gestures still speak through time.

In my *Female Readymade* paintings, I am trying to assemble the evidence, in a painterly language, along with humor and playfulness. I attempt to point to an unfixed position of gesture, its moveable, its mutable. Ways of painting and dimension and depth are not solid or repeated. I copy paintings of my children, I pour, blot and spatula on paint, I include research texts, poems, and recently even have been including works or gestures by other artists or voices. This is done with a genuine interest in making a painting surface on which multiple histories, and multiple voices are present. In the final chapter of this PhD I will focus on the role of voice in painting as a way to show how the understanding of gesture as liquid can begin to physically change the containers in which we 'hear' authors and voices.

Chapter 3: VOICE, and the Speaking Body in Painting

A conversation to know if there is a conversation to be had, and 'Presence and Absence'

The role of voice in painting is a dominant force in the perception of gesture. Throughout history, it has been understood that voice is projected through gestures. These gestures arose from a closed polis of contemporary discourse around painting, in whatever age. I will begin the section on how voice and gesture can be re-thought, by beginning with a description of how I attempted to create my own polis as an artist from which discourse could arise that I could find myself conversing with voices and bodies of my contemporaries, in platforms they had not been given to speak before.

Early in my PhD I began to develop a practice of 'material' writing (which can be seen in the Appendix), which arose out of a longer practice of publishing. Previously, in 2010, I initiated a series of female artist meetings titled 'a conversation to know if there is a conversation to be had.' These meetings, which took place in New York, Berlin, Amsterdam and London over 2010-11, acted like consciousness-raising groups for female artists. For each meeting I openly invited a wide range (in fact as wide as possible) of working female artists to come sit together for one full day to discuss what might arise. At the time, the notion of feminism and feminist practice were viewed as historic vantage points: the exhibition *WACK!* had taken place at the MOCA Museum in LA in 2008, and had sparked a renewed interest in, and perhaps showed a more radical side to historic feminist art, but in fact one of the most interesting consensus that was reached in each meeting was the fact that most female artists identified as feminists but *not* as 'feminist artists.'

Each 'conversation' was a full-day, open door hosted event in each city, and we 'took over' a semi-private space (Dexter Sinister in New York, Raven Row in London, Salon Populaire in Berlin, and the Kunstverein in Amsterdam). There was no set agenda and the conversations emerged, awkwardly at first, then took speed and developed a body of overlapping dialogue that addressed similar concerns: the question of 'feminised labor' in the art world – the lack of fees and support for artists despite curators and others getting paid wages for art production, which I do think contributed to a wider dialogue around the necessity for artist fees which has seen a political push at least in Europe and North America in the past ten years. Also questions of persona, self-presentation, subjectivity, value, and collectivity were discussed.

This project or praxis was an attempt, in the initial meetings, and in the feminist publications that followed, and projects which also span into sections of this PhD, to give space to unheard voices.

In relationship to a project within this larger praxis titled *WE (NOT I)* which I hosted at South London Gallery and Artists Space in 2015, I developed a talk titled "Presence and Absence" which was published in *May Revue* in 2016 (in the appendix).

It begins by stating

Increasingly as an artist I have begun to feel my own voice becoming disembodied from myself. Who is it that is 'speaking'? It is strange to envision oneself as a construct, a concept, outside of your own body, but that is exactly what is perceived by others: an accumulation of objects, made by a non-entity with a vague persona, skewed and squared by gestures and contexts.

I begin by positioning my questions around voice in relationship to gesture within both a longer feminist praxis of laboring to create space and platforms for voice, but also from a vantage point as a maker, a painter, who arrived at the beginning of this PhD with genuine questions about how and who gets to speak in the creation of work.

These questions find themselves within a slightly longer set of concerns around authorship and voice: painting has a long history of the relationship of voice to gesture, where voice, body and material find a nexus in painting through the notion of gesture. So, how does looking at and thinking about the history of voice help understand the potential of gesture being unfixed or not solid?

I will begin with a series of readings of criticism around contemporary painting arising from *October* and *Texte Zur Kunst* publishing in recent years, and I will move into discussing the role of voice in relationship to authorship and gesture.

Liveliness: The history of voice in painting

The concept of painting as an object that can speak, or projects speech has a long trajectory of thought throughout art history. In Isabelle Graw's recent writing, beginning with the symposium on painting organized at Harvard University in 2014, and the subsequent book titled *Painting Beyond Itself* (2015) (the title itself being an aside to the transformative essay "Painting Besides Itself" (2009) by David Joselit), through to her recent *The Love of Painting* (Sternberg, 2018), she has consistently put forward the notion of painting as something which contains "vitalist projections."

Often, the context and the consequence of Graw's projection of vitality (the notion that a painting produces the sense of being alive or entering into a discourse) in painting comes from her interest in the way the value of a life's work is literally contained within the canvas, in the Marxist sense of a consumer object which contains the labor value of the producer. But for this PhD, the implication of exploring the notion of "vitalist projections" in painting history is to establish and explore the notion of there being, whether behind, beside or within each painting, a voice: a voice that is grounded in a body; a body that is grounded in an identity of some form.

Interestingly, much of the discourse around the "liveliness" of painting is to do with a disembodied voice, regardless that it is the actions of bodies that fabricate the notion of speech. Other discourses explicitly deal with the voice in relation to the physical body from which it emerges. But the appearance of the author *through* voice in Graw's writing allows for an opening which we can follow through to understand how previously *unheard* voices can affect gesture itself.

The disembodied voice in painting is a transmutation of an action or activity into a material gesture. This persists in art historical readings of painting from Manet's "Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe" (1862-63) to now¹⁵. The first sentence in David Joselit's essay "Reassembling Painting": "a mark in paint registers the passage of force through matter." (Joselit 2015, 169), calls immediately to mind Graw's quote that for the French historian Hubert Damisch painting reveals "traces of activity" via brushstrokes (Graw, 79). The brushstroke is the entry point into understanding how a painting projects speech, but I would like to briefly expand the definition of the physical stroke to a wider set of painterly tools: if Roy Lichtenstein's images of brushstrokes present a graphic representation of imaginary material on the move, it is the *notion* of how material arrives on the canvas that can be rendered into a brushstroke.

As Adrianna Campbell describes in her article *Dash, Fragment, Bracket* (Campbell 2016) material working encompasses a range of activities:

The "material turn" in painting (and photography) in the last decade is a swivel away from rule-driven and conceptual practice and towards a renewed emphasis on tangible elements — line, gesture, plane, spatial abstraction, framing, integration of image with substrate, and evidence of process. This pivot represents a response by artists to the proliferation of "homeless" JPGs and GIFs, the disconcerting immateriality of the digital age, and the challenges they pose to our understanding of space. (Campbell 2016)

Graw clarifies that for Damisch who "characterized the brushstroke as an indicator of subjectivity in painting" (Graw 2015, 79), his implication is a subjectivity that means "...that painting has its "own discourse" and its "own narrative." (Graw 2015, 80). Painting speaks to itself, or perhaps painting speaks in the dark or in an echo chamber. Graw points to the long history of the internal (and elite) discourse within painting: "this view that painting has a life of its own and can therefore "think" or "speak" is prevalent among many French art historians, from Louis Marin to Georges Didi-Huberman." (Graw 2015, 79-80). It is interesting to note that in much of her writing about the presence of the life force of the author in painting, speech and life are interchangeable: in one instance voice might proceed life, in another life gives rise to voice. In another quote, the inverse of the last, painting is "a discursive object that speaks to us and therefore appears to be alive." (Graw 2015, 86)

What is not mutable in the understanding of painting as a medium projective of voice, is the fact that the end-product, the flat surface of a painting, like a sponge, literally absorbs the life-force of the artist. The life of an artist has been the subject of painting history for hundreds of years, and recently is seen as part of the visualization of gestures in terms of

¹⁵ When material decisions in painting start to exist outside of the demands of the "picture". From encyclopedia Britannica on the painting: That same year the jury of the Salon rejected his *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe*, a work whose technique was entirely revolutionary, and so Manet instead exhibited it at the *Salon des Refusés* (established to exhibit the many works rejected by the official Salon). Although inspired by works of the Old Masters—this large canvas aroused loud disapproval. His critics were offended by the presence of a naked woman in the company of two young men clothed in contemporary dress; rather than seeming a remote allegorical figure, the woman's modernity made her nudity seem vulgar and even threatening. Critics were also upset by how these figures were depicted in a harsh, impersonal light and placed in a woodland setting whose perspective is distinctly unrealistic.
<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Edouard-Manet/Mature-life-and-works#ref720996>

'social discourse.' In the next section I discuss how viewing gestures can be seen differently if we take into account bodies that present themselves and are not invisible.

The Discourse of Gesture, in a Social Network, In Aggregate Form

The notion of painting 'speaking' within a forum (which can be understood as a site or a place where people meet, like the Greek polis, or an opening, or the edited content of a magazine) is an important aspect of how modern painting is understood. A visual example of this could be Gustave Courbet's "The Painter's Studio" from 1855. Much has been written about the economics of the courts and societies from which paintings, painters, and styles have emerged, but what of the social networks that have borne these? Many of the "isms" of the modern avant-garde (Dadaism, Surrealism, Cubism etc.) were based on social networks or small groups of people in solidarity or in competition with each other. In Courbet's painting we see his peers looking at and talking about him in the act of painting. He makes explicit who he is speaking to, what he is speaking about (ignoring the naked woman behind him, an allegory of the 'Academy'), and who financed his ability to speak (included in the painting is his patron, Alfred Bruyas). The independent exhibition of this work, organized by Courbet and Bruyas in defiance of the 1855 Paris World Fair's *Exposition Universelle*, can be seen as the forebearer to the beginning of artist-led exhibitions which were harbingers of modern art (such as the Salon des Refusés of 1863). The social relationships of painting, made evident, are an essential part of the modern and contemporary painting surface.

The notion of a social network which is made explicit within the painting and the painting practice (and personas) around painting was outlined by David Joselit in the essay "Painting Beside Itself" in 2009 (October, 2009).

Certainly, painting has always belonged to networks of distribution and exhibition, but Kippenberger claims something more: that, by the early 1990s, an individual painting should explicitly *visualize* such networks." (Joselit 2009, 125)

Joselit positions painting of the 1990s onwards as giving meaning to painting through the notion that this social network is being evidenced through the movement of a body, rather than a "visualization" or literalization of networking:

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... (Jutta) Koether approaches the problem in a different way. Instead of attempting to visualize the overall contours of a network, she actualizes the *behavior of objects within networks* by demonstrating what I would like to call their transitivity. The Oxford English Dictionary gives one definition of "transitive" as "expressing an action which passes over to an object." (Joselit 2009, 127-8)

Joselit is explicitly saying that the action of the artist within a network transfers directly the notion of "networked conversation" to the art object. A similar transitive behavior is at play here, in the networked painting, as the vocal painting: a translation of the situation, the social placement of the artist, through their body, into the art.

The flavor of *Exquisite Corpse* (by Stephen Prina) is thus dramatically different from *Lux Interior* (by Jutta Koether), but they share the same project: to visualize the transitive passage of action from a painting out to a social network (or body), and from this network back onto painting. (Joselit 2009, 130-31)



Jutta Koether, *Lux Interior*, 2009

Here, Joselit is making clear that he intends a flattening of the understanding of the “invisible” body of the artist and the network. An artist becomes transitive, or has the possibility to move meaning between places, whether metaphysical or real, like physically carrying and affecting objects across invisible borders: Walead Beshty’s Fed Ex boxes (2005-2014) of empty glass, smashed and stacked.



Walead Beshty, *Fed Ex Boxes*, 2005-2014

The effect on painting, as per usual with discourses of the shift of authorship away from the artist per se, is to open up the multitude of possibilities for authors who, in effect, are positioned correctly *in order for speech to be heard within a specific discourse*. There are further implications for understanding how voices from bodies that are not normally allowed or welcomed into the social space, how they are heard, and how the notion of their transitivity must be addressed to understand their effect on gesture itself.

Transitivity is a form of translation: when it enters into networks, the body of painting is submitted to infinite dislocations, fragmentations, and degradations. As Kippenberger suggested nearly twenty years ago, these framing conditions cannot be quarantined. Painting is beside itself. (Joselit 2009, 134)

The author of a painting, even if present, is absent from the surface of a painting through these “dislocations, fragmentations, and degradations”. The ingenuity of the film of Jackson Pollock by Hans Namuth frustrates this tension, creating a pleasurable encounter of the material of painting and the author of painting *at the same time*. This document, regarded as seminal in revealing the motivations of modern painting to a wider American public in the 1950s, is also memorialized in the movie *Pollock* as a triggering, enraging and humiliating experience for Pollock. Interestingly, it is the projective qualities of film which see through the gesture to the person. To do so, the painting Pollock is producing for the camera is a sham, a con: a facsimile. The physical space of the glass that Pollock painted on, has, ironically, not entered into the “discourse of painting” because it is not a Pollock painting at all.

What is the difference between a trace and a gesture? This was a question I had written down on a slip of paper to be given to the artist William Kentridge in a question-and-answer

session with students at the Summer Academy Salzburg, in 2017. “Who wrote this?” his head shot up, almost awakened out of the slumber of his own voice.

The artist leaves a trace, and the absence of their body, perhaps, enforces the power of the projection of life: “Indexical signs possess the power of a pointing finger...they forcefully point to the absent author who seems to be somewhat physically present in them.” (Graw 2015, 80).

Put more specifically, as Graw explains, a painting points to a person more so than it points to itself. The painting does not make itself: even László Moholy-Nagy was present at the making of the *Telephone Paintings*, the notion of distance was applied in retrospect.¹⁶ (But inversely the distance he created in perpetuating the myth of “de-authorization” pointed to him as an author even more forcefully).

In other words, the index is usually regarded as the anti-subjective device that undermines authorship. I will claim a different indexicality for painting...its indexical signs establish...a physical connection...not to an object but to the one who left his or her marks. (Graw 2015, 92)

The problem that arises in this discourse of painting as something which projects a voice, *through its transitive motion of a body* is to do with the notion of invisibility. Put in the best way I have ever heard, during a five-day long series of discussions during the project *WE (Not I)*¹⁷, in discussing the exhibition *Invisible: Art about the Unseen, 1957-2012* at the Hayward Gallery in 2012, a female artist remarked (I am paraphrasing, and unfortunately do not remember who was speaking): “Of course the exhibition is all straight white men, they are the only ones who get to be invisible.”

The notion of a voice existing *without* a body *does not exist for the majority of the population*. Politicized subjects cannot transcend their bodies: women, people of color, trans and LGTBQ people have bodies on which violence is enacted on a global scale. Would they want their voices to become disembodied?

In the more recent essay “On Aggregators,” (2013) David Joselit proposes that an aggregate form of authorship can break through stale repetitions of conceptual moves in individual art works, allowing for new, more dynamic forms of authorship to develop: non-singular, and collective.¹⁸ I would like to propose that this form of ‘faceless’ authorship, a group or duo or collective that has no ‘proper name’ behaves more in a corporate model of personhood, and exemplifies the difference between a person who might be ‘identifiable’ by their gender, race or place of origin that often cannot be dissolved into a body-less personhood. In the next section, I will look into how voice of those that do not speak ‘clearly’ can be understood in different manners, and what the effect on ‘hearing’ gesture in painting could be.

¹⁶ “...in April 1923, Moholy had *Construction in Enamel 2* and *3* made at a local enamel factory. He would later claim to have ordered them by describing them over the telephone, exaggerating both his distance from the manufacturing process that produced them and the degree of technological mediation involved.” MoMA placard for *Telephone Painting*.

¹⁷ WE (NOT I) was a series of events, discussions and presentations held at Raven Row and South London gallery in April 2015 and Artists Space, New York in October 2015, which I co-organised with Marina Vishmidt.

¹⁸ Examples of aggregate forms of art making such as Slavs and Tartars and E-flux are used.

Bodies with Multiple Voices: KAKOPHONY and Unknowability

If voice is projected from a painting, as something that holds and embodies, and supports the life-force of the artist that has created it, then what are some of the historical situations in which voice has been codified? Perhaps looking at these moments in history when certain voices were given certain status, can help establish how patterns and behaviors of gestures are also codified?

In Anne Carson's essay "The Gender of Sound" (1994), she investigates the question of how voice affects how we judge someone, how we make sense of not just what they are saying, but what we project onto *how* they are saying it. Language, according to Carson, is never neutral.

It is in large part according to the sounds people make that we judge them sane or insane, male or female, good, evil, trustworthy, depressive, marriageable, moribund, likely or unlikely to make war on us, little better than animals, inspired by God. These judgements happen fast and can be brutal. (Carson 1994, 119)

The projection of context onto voice is an important aspect to consider in regard to thinking about what kind of voices are projected in painting, through gesture: voice arises in certain situations, and is itself materially a tool for communication. When someone is screaming, we hear panic, even if we do not understand the source. The context within which we read these cues gives us an understanding of what we should 'listen' to.

In both the writing of Anne Carson, specifically about the role of voice in Ancient Greece, and the writing of Christine Battersby in her book *Gender and Genius* (1981), which examines Roman and Medieval notions of genius, the writers describe an ancient, holistic understanding of internal bodily functions connected intrinsically with outer appearances.

Thus, the (Shakespearean) English term 'genius' was associated with male sexual and generative powers as the Latin *genius*, which originally meant 'the begetting spirit of the family embodied in the paterfamilias.' (Battersby 1981, 27)

But it was only certain voices that could produce physical benefits (known as voice therapy to heal bodily ailments): "(Vocal) therapy was not on the whole recommended to women or eunuchs or androgynes, who were believed to have the wrong kind of flesh and the wrong alignment of pores for the production of low vocal pitches." (Carson, 120)

In fact, the notion of voice as embedded in a body relates also to notions of form in these histories too. As Carson describes, women in ancient Greece represented that which was formless, needing man to 'civilize' them. Women's bodies, and women's voices, had no form unto themselves, but rather represented the negative: of man, of language, of order:

(In Aristotle's "The Pythagorean Table of Opposites")...we find the attributes curving, dark, secret, evil, ever-moving, not self-contained and lacking its own boundaries aligned with (the?) Female... (Carson 1997, 120)

It might be interesting to note at this moment, that many gestures, historically, in painting, have been conceived of as a misbehavior. Some examples: “Erased de Kooning” by Robert Rauschenberg (1953), when Rauschenberg rubbed out a Willem de Kooning drawing. “Les Demoiselles d’Avignon” (1907), a shocking effacing of female forms. “SELL THE HOUSE SELL THE CAR SELL THE KIDS” written in one of Christopher Wool’s early word paintings titled “Apocalypse Now” (1988). In much of the writing by Carson and Battersby, I have instead encountered the idea that misbehavior for women exists outside of moral dialogue. We must make a distinction here between misbehavior, which is the disruption of a dialogue, and another kind of misbehavior which is ascribed to women, which includes speaking *in the first place*.

“Silence is the *kosmos* (good order) of women.” (Carson, quoting Sophocles, P.127)

Silencing women’s voices historically is seen as keeping order. If women speak too much, it releases disorder, it creates commotion and distraction. Women’s voices communicate emotion, communicate outside of normal avenues.

Putting a door on the female mouth has been an important project of patriarchal culture from antiquity to the present day. Its chief tactic is an ideological association of female sound with monstrosity, disorder and death. (Carson 1997, 120)

Women’s voice, the female sound, as Carson describes it, are to be regulated, because they pose a danger to civilization. They disrupt and disturb the polis, the place of democratic exchange: Carson describes the specific rituals in which Greek women were allocated space and time to make noise: funerals and festivities, tightly controlled and contained.

This presents itself as a lack of female voices in discourse, and voices that have been erased throughout history. This lack of articulation is something that the philosopher Luce Irigaray writes about in the 1970s when she says “In other words, the articulation of the reality of my sex is impossible in discourse, and for a structural, eidetic reason. My sex is removed, at least as the property of a subject, from the predicative mechanism that assures discursive coherence.” (Irigaray 1977, 149)

The idea that women’s bodies and voices do not enter into ethics (a discourse of ideas), but must be contained by a morality (a set of rules to govern bodies and voices), is explicit in a quote of Freud that Carson cites:

Freud formulates the double standard succinctly in a remark to a colleague: “A thinking man is his own legislator and confessor, and obtains his own absolution, but the woman...does not have the measure of ethics in herself. She can only act if she keeps within the limits of morality...” (Carson 1997, 126 note 26 states Letter to E. Silberstein cited by Grosskurth (1980), 889)

Furthermore, the female voice and the female body has a potential to leak outside of the clear boundaries of the moral rules.

The translator and historian of ancient Greek culture, Carson expands the myth of the Danaides to a wider projection of how something that should be kept inside, finds its way

out: “Woman is that creature who puts the inside on the outside. By projections and leakages of all kinds – somatic, vocal, emotional, sexual-females expose or expend what should be kept in.” (Carson 1997, 129)

The notion of a female form as something liquid, as something that breaks out of form, and is formless, is linked to the idea that Carson elucidates which is that the female body in ancient Greece has *two* mouths.

The forms and contexts of this representation (the leaky jar of female sexuality) have been studied at length by other scholars including me, so let us pass directly to the heart, or rather the mouth, of the matter. It is an axiom of ancient Greek and Roman medical theory and anatomical discussion that a woman has two mouths. (Carson 1997, 131)

The implication of this on the question of voice in painting, in the context of this PhD, is transformative: what happens when a painting is made by a subject that does not have a singular voice? When their body itself has a voice, as is implied in the Greek and Roman theories of female bodies?



Baubo figurine, no date

A mouth is an opening, a place where something comes out, it opens wide. Women’s bodies also open wide when they give birth, in a near-death experience. Openings are scary, and the notion of a mouth has castrating and terrifyingly violent suggestions.

But equally scary is the notion of the body speaking for you, without your brain being in control of it. This notion calls back the idea of the rituals surrounding female voice, treated like animal voices that are emitted from bodies rather than human mouths. Carson also makes a clear relationship between these rituals and the “katharsis” of talking that was developed in early psychological studies, based around theories of the “talking cure” by Freud and Breuer: a cure for hysteria, in mainly female cases.

It is interesting still to think of what a long history the role of voice has: as something which can be holistically embedded in a body: that voice can heal us, that the things we make can project our voice and contain it, that voice passes between generations.

Freud mentions shyly in a footnote to *Case Studies on Hysteria* that Josef Breuer had to suspend his analytic relationship with Anna O. because “she suddenly made manifest to Breuer the presence of a strongly unanalyzed positive transference of an unmistakably sexual nature.” Not until 1932 did Freud reveal (in a letter to a colleague) what really happened between Breuer and Anna O. It was on the evening of his last interview with her that Breuer entered Anna’s apartment to find her on the floor contorted by abdominal pain. When he asked her what was wrong she answered she was about to give birth to his child...Even the talking cure must fall silent when both female mouths try to speak at the same time.” (Carson 1997, 134-5)

This is a concrete story that does not help us unravel what the sound of two mouths can be in painting, but rather it points to the systematic abuse in the silencing of people who are speaking outside of positions of power. (Historically this story has been discredited, and in most of my research it appears Anna O. was recorded as ‘imagining’ the pains of childbirth).

In speaking about her series *Angry Paintings*, Louise Fishman, in a talk at the New York Studio School in 2017 says the following:

When I got involved with the women’s movement and the gay and lesbian movement, I abandoned painting and I decided that I wanted to have all the options to do whatever came my way, instead of following a tradition that was very male, I decided to make whatever I wanted to make...Sometime in the 70’s I got included in a Whitney Biennial, and it brought up the most incredible rage in me... I don’t want to go into it too much, but I found myself unable to do anything but make these paintings about my anger and the anger of all the women I knew, my friends, my colleagues, Marylin Monroe... And it was my putting myself in their shoes in a way, thinking about what their anger was like. And a lot of times it was pretty accurate. (Fishman)



Louise Fishman, *Angry Marilyn*, 1973

In Fishman's body of paintings, something that does not project but literalizes and *gives voice* to female bodies. The bodies are, like the traditional body of the author in painting, absent. Their first names are written, we can assume that "ANGRY LOUISE, serious (sic) RAGE" is Fishman herself. "ANGRY PAULA" is a number of Paula's, "ANGRY MARILYN" is Monroe, who herself, it is theorized, was silenced, or murdered.

In a gestalt-like twist, Fishman makes 'real' and speaks to her anger, and the process of doing this is described by her as a confrontation:

My CR (Consciousness Raising) training and my female artists' groups led me to realize how oppressed we all were. My rage filled the air around me and I understood that I had no choice but to respond to that rage in the only way I could—with the word ANGRY, and with my own name next to it in a painting. The effect was startling and frightening to me: like suddenly taking on what had been an undercurrent theme in my life, something that had never really surfaced. It was under there: a smoldering rage waiting to explode and destroy the world, everything I was, and understood. I made a decision to make an angry painting for my then partner, and then for each of my women friends, and finally for women who had inspired me, that I loved, etc. I wanted them all to stand in front of the painting with their name and the word "ANGRY" to experience the frightful and empowering recognition of anger's central role in our lives. The suppression of rage was crippling us – separating us from our true power in the world.

We all shared living in oppressive patriarchal societies; as females, then and to this day, we are defined and reduced by standards of inequality, and often totally erased from history!
(Fishman 2017)

Fishman's paintings are an early example of feminist painting in which the two voices of a female subject, a painter, become evident. They also pose a positive outcome when both mouths are used: the mouth of the subject-position, the mouth of the author-position.

Over time, there is a history now of these double voices. In the resurgence of interest and value placed on feminist practices, and practices of older female artists, from both western, post-colonial, and non-white positions, a language of these doubled voices develops.

Also, increasingly, there is an interest in the 'ghost author', the unrecognized collaborator, as a way to address systemic suppression of voice in the art world. In the recent exhibition *Who's Werner?* at the Kunstverein, Amsterdam (2019), there is a display of practices where one person, a collaborator, a fabricator, produced work for an artist. The exhibition seeks to address the unstable relationship of collaboration and authorship.



Who's Werner?, Kunstverein Amsterdam, 2019

And so *Who's Werner?* does not only reveal many misconceptions that exist around how a work is made, it also exposes the structures that keep those misconceptions intact. Because, as this case sadly proves: a study of (artistic) collaborations and authorship, inevitably unveils larger problems of "place," equality of partnerships, gender and race. (Foqué, 2019)

The exhibition includes a description of the practices of Elle Burchill (an artist who edited many of Jonas Mekas' films); Margot Sandman (a painter and illustrator who worked on a number of Ian Hamilton Finlay materials); and Norman Laich (a painter and sign painter who was employed by a number of artists in LA, most notably and extensively by John Baldessari). The most frustrating example is the architect Denise Scott Brown, who recorded in real time her frustration with the mechanisms of valorization inherent in the authorship system.

From the *Who's Werner?* press release, Yana Foqué, the curator, quotes Denise Scott Brown, the wife of Robert Venturi:

In an essay titled "Sexism and the Star System" Scott Brown writes:

...in mid-career, I married a colleague, and we joined our professional lives just as fame...hit him. I watched as he was manufactured into an architectural guru before my eyes and, to some extent, on the basis of our joint work...

(...)

By the time we wrote *Learning from Las Vegas* our growing experience with incorrect attributions prompted Bob to include a note at the beginning of the book asking that the work and ideas be attributed not to him alone and described the nature of our collaboration—his request was almost totally ignored. A body of theory and design in architecture apparently must be associated by architecture critics with an individual. (Scott-Brown 1989, 237)

Joint authorship, collaboration and attribution are all part of a larger conversation currently happening in the art world which is starting, overall, to address questions of authorship. The gestures of the authors, such as Denise Scott Brown, are there to be seen, to begin their process of activation at any moment, they are not truly 'disappeared' because the gesture has an agency unto itself.

The Author, when believed in, is always conceived of as "the past of his own book: book and author stand automatically" on a single line divided into a before and an after. The Author is thought to nourish the book, which is to say that he exists before it, thinks, suffers, lives for it, is in the same relation of antecedence to his work as a father to his child. In complete contrast, the modern scriptor is born simultaneously with the text, is in no way equipped with a being preceding or exceeding the writing, is not the subject with the book as predicate; there is no other time than that of the enunciation and every text IS eternally written here and now. (Barthes 1972, 145)

This idea of the 'eternal' author is different when thinking about revisionism, but there is also a *potential* in the 'noise,' in the confusion that is derived from having two mouths (or multiple moments when you are 'speaking'). The notion of '*Kakophony*' that Carson speaks about translates literally as: bad sound. In the history of gestures, in painting, being bad has never been a problem, it has been more a question of who is *heard* being bad, and who gets to be bad and who gets punished. So perhaps we can approach this quote from Carson in a way to unpack what could be a positive and exciting potential of disruption: *kakophony* as the basis for a disruption of a codified speech, and to be able to use confusion and perhaps embarrassment as positive tools:

"It is confusing and embarrassing to have two mouths. Genuine *kakophony* is the sound produced by them." (Carson 1995, 134)

This quote of Carson points explicitly to one of the most problematic questions at play in regards to how we begin to understand gesture when it becomes unmoored and unhinged from various, solid forms of art criticism: how does one make sense, if making sense or being 'clear' is not the point? When does noise cross over into art: does it need historic predecessor or references? Does *kakophony* have order or logic? I imagine it as the sound of twin children and the entire room speaking at you at the same time. Which in fact, closely mimics a cultural landscape in which emails arrive, Instagram 'likes' appear, the phone rings, the water pipe bursts, the curator cancels the show, and the election is rigged all in the same instant.

It is important at the conclusion of this PhD to point out how much has changed and become un-solid in art contexts since I began my research in 2016, even as social situations have ground to a halt due to the novel coronavirus pandemic in 2020. The full implications are yet to be seen, but it is interesting to note an increased awareness and attention to practices that relate to a wider spectrum of histories, to artworks coming from bodies and locations that have been under-represented, and to an increased awareness of the voice in relation to gestures. Regardless, it is important to end this PhD not with predictions but rather to look deeper into the possible implications, both historically and contemporarily for art practices, in understanding gesture as something that is not solid and is definitively increasingly being seen as 'relational' and *on the move*.

CONCLUSION: The Potentials of Fluids

The question of how we can read the relational nature of gestures in painting, as a way to put the main question of this PhD into practice:

What are the implications on understanding and reading gestures in both art historical and contemporary painting when we see gestures as non-fixed agents that change in time and place?

Our current time and place, at the moment of handing in this PhD in July 2021, is radically different than when I wrote the proposal for this PhD research. MeToo has created a radical shift in the perception of female bodies: the silence around widespread sexual abuse has shifted, in some place. Inclusion of artists of widespread backgrounds and positions has pervaded discussion in the art world. And there has been a global pandemic which has created a reconciling not only with lifestyle and the conditions of work and travel, but also led to a further understanding of the inter-connected nature of our bodies.

I began reading Astrida Neimanis on the plane as I fled Oslo on March 13th, 2020, at the outbreak of Covid 19. On one of the last flights out of the country, I understood as soon as I began to read her writing that it was an update of Irigaray's thoughts on liquidity in a contemporary moment of interconnected nature.

The passage from body of water to body of water is never merely metaphoric, but rather radically material. The watery condition of being literally flows into, out of and from beings themselves in a multiplicitous hydrological cycle of becoming—evolutions of gestation, repetition, differentiation and interpermeation. (Neimanis, 164)

In Neimanis' writing, there is an awareness that material itself has its own politics, its own way in which it affects things around it. She also points to the fact that material is embodied within bodies that have political concerns, differences, and languages. This is important to keep in mind as we think about how material gestures move forward from this moment.

In addition, Neimanis makes a point to address the notion of female versus woman or trans body which is important to develop a language of in relationship to the question of 'liquid' gestures and bodies, as it is not simply through the reading of gender (as Irigaray focuses on) that we are able to identify strategies and ways of addressing how gestures can evade boundaries. It is important to point out that trans, queer and non-gender binary bodies have been influential for years in the development of a more liquid understanding of authorship (Genesis P-Orridge for example), and I would like, as I come to the conclusion of this PhD to point away from an essentialist understanding of gender, in terms of finding potentialities within the discourse of feminist writers, and I would agree with Neimanis when she says:

Posthuman gestationality is a facilitative mode of being, *but one that is not necessarily tied to the female human...* From this desire flows my rather queer reading of Irigaray, perhaps against her own intention. Water seeps into Irigaray's work, stealthily making it strange. (Neimanis 2012, 69)

Gender is a concern of the body that makes gestures, but it is a context, a container, like any other, that is subject to change, to disappear in its current form and change over time (will

we really care if a painter was male or female in one hundred years? Will we need to?). What other criteria will we use?

How do we, in this contemporary world, become part of a larger matter? A larger, messier art history, a more fluid and moveable set of gestures 'at play'.

Through my research time I have learned how locating where gesture lies, what it does and identifying what its potentiality over time and space can be is far more important than codifying or defining what it is doing in relation to its immediate environment or to a stiffer line of histories. It has become important for me not to think about gesture as something that can be re-inserted into an existing history, but rather, to embrace something that is far more unknown, abstract, and to trust in a wider set of relational tools that gesture opens up for artistic practices.

For many years, I understood gesture in painting as something which spoke to an institutionalized polis of thinkers. I thought: how does a gesture, inscribed in the time of its making, engage in a discourse of gestures that preceded it and might post-date it? Repeatedly, as a female practitioner, I encountered practices and moments and gestures that I related to across time and space, and I searched for the 'sense' of these authored moments in larger movements, in side-histories such as 'feminist art,' and in notions of overlooked artists that existed alongside but secondary to other, more known practices.

While this thinking may appear at this current moment slightly antiquated, I would like to point out that in the current sea-change of new voices being included in art trajectories, it is quite recent to think of authors speaking 'out of bounds' of longer, more concrete histories of gesture and conceptual strategies. My hope is that my research and this PhD sets forth a development which questions the basis of these expectations for gesture, and builds a structural toolkit in which gestures are never evaluated as not 'belonging,' because the question is: to what space, to what dialogue? What have gestures *done* to these situations? What *will* they do?

This toolkit, which I believe can be used in painting strategies, in feminist and queer strategies, and in strategies of the presentation of artworks and practices, is borne of longer histories that have questioned these structures. There are many individual practices, and moves, such as artists whom have dropped out, that pose alternative game-sites for the exploration of material. There are multiple histories, especially feminist curatorial strategies, that attempt a re-identification and alternative set of histories in which gestures operate outside the canon.

Instead, what I am proposing in this PhD is a more radical toolkit to take up: that the gestures of artists themselves have the potential to change the structures, containers, and situations in which we encounter and experience art works per se. It is not a question of being outside or inside, or how the work looks or in what context it is represented, but rather, a completely different recipe for viewing art practices, which places the agency of gesture as is gestation point, unhinged and behaving in a widely relational manner. That authorship itself is potentially de-coupled from a gesture.

In recent works, I have been including the gestures of other artists on top of my paintings and installations. In a work that I will exhibit at Towner Gallery, in Eastbourne in 2021, I will screen Jean Painlevé's film *Liquid Crystals* (1978) on top of a painting made with a large liquid spill. In another show I will print a wallpaper of a grid with fake objects hanging on it, which will be the site or 'net' on which Alice Channer will install works. What if our works can touch each other more concretely? How to make visible the liquid nature of gestures?

To end, I will recount a recent trip to a gallery to see an exhibition of Vivian Suter's paintings. Her practice was overlooked for decades, and now is spreading and seeping around the world, released from of her South American studio which was stacked full of paintings hung simply in long rows in storage, left outside to weather for decades. Paintings painted fast and loose and not thrown out or ignored after years in storage, some moldy, and some faded.

Paintings hang on top of, in front of, above, below and next to each other. Their thin muslin quality waves in the breeze created by moving bodies or wind. Hung simply with wire, not hidden, and unstretched, one can see that many are painted horizontally, 'flatbed', with thin washes, barely staining the canvas. The overlap of shapes is activated by the architecture, the humans that walk through them. Look sideways – that's the only way to see some of them, like on a clothing rack. You cannot leaf through, so you must arrange your body to look in, to glimpse something. Simple shapes and colors, forms and gestures, assemble across space. Nothing is necessarily planned, nor are certain formalities or intentions communicated. Like a garden, things grow, move other things out of position, wither, and become invisible again.



Vivan Suter, *Wolf's Hour*, 2021

APPENDIX

Vivan Suter, *Wolf's Hour*, 2021

Material Writing:

Luxury Goods, A Burning Desire (2016) Female Genius, Vital Signs (2017)

A Gesture is a Liquid (2018)

The Embarrassment of SUCKCESS (2019)

A Gesture is a Liquid, Artist Book (2018-19) (separate PDF)

The Embarrassment of SUCKCESS, poster (2019-20) (separate PDF)

LUXURY GOODS, A BURNING DESIRE (2016)

Presented in various forms at:

Montague Space, London, 2016 Vleeshal, 2016

Luxury Goods bring grievences, or in Italian American what is called “Agita”, which translates bluntly as heartburn but which also applies to a kind of general, but coming from the gut sense of agitation. Recently, I’ve been noting how a certain sense of agita comes along with luxury goods, and how they bleed investment culture into all parts of our lives: I keep hearing the following infinitives, in different contexts, and the pure obtuseness of their consequences that underpin our everyday life baffles me: to invest, to trust, to *deliver*.

In Silicon Valley slang, you, or we all, have what’s called a *burn rate*, which means basically how fast you shed money, as an institution and, so I guess also, as an individual. Thinking about this on daily terms, there are things put into motion every day in order to burn: I have to feed the body with caffeine, nourishment and alcohol, and every calorie has a price. I may relax but I feel like I’m still burning, and in fact I am: consuming energy, bandwidth, paper, landfill.

In thinking about the term Burn Rate on the process-end of production in making art, I recently re-read Fredric Jameson’s “Postmodernism” (and the part of the title oft forgot) “or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism.” Because capitalism is the fastest moving game in town, I thought I’d look back to see the architecture of our most recent, seemingly innocent encounter with goods and culture, which might somehow frame our current moment better.

It’s a sweet read, from 1992:

What has happened is that aesthetic production today has become integrated into commodity production generally: the frantic economic urgency of producing fresh waves of ever more novel-seeming goods... now assigns an increasingly essential structural function and position to aesthetic innovation and experimentation (Jameson 1992, 56)

A time when the aesthetic was autonomous from an economy?

I recalled, like a flashback, reading an essay my friend Angie sent me over a year ago called the Confidence Man¹⁹, as I pushed my twins around the park when they were weeks old. Round and round I went, life at its very core destroyed by sleep deprivation, coincidentally just meters away from Edgar Allen Poe’s residence in London, whom the essay begins by giving credit to for creating the character of “The Diddler,” ie., the confidence man- otherwise known as a con man.

¹⁹ Greenberg, Gary. “The Confidence Man, In which the possibility that psychiatry is a diddle is discussed, with particular attention tot he placebo effect and the talking cure“, *The Believer*, Summer 2015.

The confidence man is an American tradition: a traveling salesman who arrives to sell what in the end turns out to be a mere fantasy. He preys on people's trust and takes what he can from people's 'con' fidence in him.

The 1857 book "The Confidence Man-His Masquerade" by Herman Melville follows the character and the structure of the Diddle- in the new Yorker essay Angie sent me the author lists this fantastic group of characters from Melville's book, on a boat together:

The passenger is right about this army of diddlers, except for one detail: the many scamps among the passengers- a doctor peddling herbal remedies, along with a stock trader, an employment agent, a philosopher, a man in rags, a couple of well-dressed men--- will prove in the end to be the same man, who, in his various disguises, raises wind from stem to stern, diddling passengers out of their money, their health, their dignity- and, above all, out of their trust in their own judgement. (Greenberg 2015)

And

"What the Confidence Man (in all his forms) offers his marks... in short.. is that the future is sure to be better." (Greenberg 2015)

The second definition of a diddle is a waste of time, perhaps an intentional waste of time. How strange- as a waste of time is an entirely subjective quantity. But this second meaning perhaps also implies that all you might get from a good con, is the feeling of being swept along in the fiction of the moment: belief in what turn out to be lies, which feel good at the time. You've lost something, but you still have the fantasy.

In thinking about how the con in confidence has become embedded in capitalism now, I would like to contextualize the text I gave to the Reading Room (at Montague Space) by Cady Noland, entitled *The Metalanguage of Evil*, her entry into the Documenta 9 catalogue in 1992.

In trying to decipher the motivations of the essay *The Metalanguage of Evil*, one uncovers a text attempting, I believe, to make a powerful critique of the art world and art market, predating a discourse around institutional critique and globalization, and staking out extreme positions on cause and effect, which is explored through the role-play of a 'psychopathic' relationship. Noland begins her essay by describing that there is a "...meta-game available for use in the United States. The rules of the game, or even that there is a game at all, are hidden to some." (Noland 1992, 410) The essay carries on describing in an oblique manner a relationship between X and Y, in which X is constantly, in a Tom-and-Jerry-like scenario, continually trying to "con" Y.

The game is a machine composed of interconnected mechanistic devices... A con or a snow job is the site at which X preys upon the hopes, fears, and anxieties of Y for ulterior motives and/or personal

gain... These machinations exist a priori of X or Y as an indifferent set of tools and could conceivably be picked up by anyone and used against anyone else. (Noland 1992, 410)

There's an underlying interest in the role of images in the text, and the images' relationship to capital:

On a larger, corporate level, the information hunt is called market research. (Noland 1992, 411)

Information gathering is seen throughout the essay as a way for X to win at the game, to garner as much context into which he can entrap Y. Noland envisions a dystopic version of our contemporary culture of information gathering- our devices and apps delivering a constant stream of revenue generating data to corporations. But who is the psychopath in Noland's text? Perhaps it is the drive of investment capitalism itself:

The psychopath shares the societally sanctioned characteristics of the entrepreneurial male (Noland 1992, 411)

It was after reading and discussing *Towards a Metalanguage of Evil* that I discovered in a conversation with an older female artist friend that Noland's work "Oozeworld" had the highest selling price of a work by a living female artist, ever (sold for 6.6 million dollars at Sotheby's in 2012- and again recently for Bluewald for 9.8 million at Christies in May of 2015. It must be noted; 58.4 million is the current record sale for an artwork by a living man- Jeff Koon's Orange Dog as of 2017). After the sale of "Oozeworld", when another work by Noland "Cowboys Milking" (1990) was brought to auction at Sotheby's by Marc Jancou, Noland denied authorship of the piece, citing damage. Then in May 2015, Noland disavowed the purchase of the work "Log Cabin", citing inappropriate materials used for restoration, thus raising a moral dilemma around the validity of the authorship of the work.

In the denial of authorship of "Oozewald", Noland invoked the Visual Artists Rights Act of 1990, otherwise known as VARA, which states that artists hold the original moral rights to their work, regardless of ownership or copyright. In a Nov. 9, 2011, e-mail Noland's lawyer sent to Sotheby's on the evening before the scheduled auction, Noland insisted that "Cowboys Milking" was damaged and demanded that Sotheby's not sell it because "her honor and reputation [would] be prejudiced as a result of offering [it] for sale with her name associated with it," (Rodney, 2015)

What you see, or what you buy – is not always what you get. Are Noland's deletions of capital the inverse of a luxury good, or the ultimate critique of the art object as luxury good? Either way, its giving A LOT of people in the art world Agita.

My interest in Noland sparked a larger interest in the female character of the Drop Out, and I often try to make a distinction when I talk about Dropping out between

what is seen as a 'negative' act, and the idea that the Drop Out is a character that creates negative space: they show you the edges of the field you are playing in in the space they vacate.

So what is the field in which we operate, when negating authorship to wipe millions of whatever currency off the face of the earth, which didn't exist in the first place. I.e. Pure profit (Negative Burn), shows us about the game board we stand on? If we think about the other art-as-luxury good object, Jeff Koons' "Orange Dog," a mirrored blown up balloon-dog, how can the spectre of the confidence man not loom? Can there be such a thing as a negative con?

Going back, what might be interesting still in the Jameson essay, in addition to stating that Postmodernism abolishes peoples relationships to a radical past, is his notation of a move in the cultural field from depth (of feeling) to surface (of understanding): "But there are ... significant differences between the high modernist and the postmodernist moment, ... The first.. is the emergence of a new kind of flatness or depthlessness, a new kind of superficiality in the most literal sense.." (Jameson 1992, 60)

Now, 25 years later, I might say there has been a move from flatness to distance: the flat surfaces around us are out of reach, or project out-of-reachness, and the distance between a burning desire and unattainable goods/ideas point to the creation of all aspects of our lives into luxury goods, even the most basic needs like homes, sleep, food, politics: we have machines of insatiability, with endless scroll, that are never satisfied inputting into our burning bodies. A few years ago a very wealthy woman confided in me that everyone she knew was struggling, no matter how rich they were. And weirdly, I don't think she was bullshitting. What you take in is never as much as you burn.

I wanted to end by showing a film that I saw recently at the MoMA by Bruce Conner that very much moved me: it's a one minute 16mm film of his time in Mexico searching for magic mushrooms with his wife and Timothy Leary, and focuses mainly on looking closely, and frantically at surfaces: it reminded me of what an original attempt at Dropping Out was. Its set to the Beatles song "Tomorrow Never Knows", and sadly doesn't exist at all online, which means its been actively removed by either the MoMA or the Beatles or both. I wanted to pose it as a way to think about the surface as something that rather to be desired, asks only to be looked at- not for pleasure but for the experience of trying to create not a fantasy but an alternative reality.

FEMALE GENIUS: VITAL SIGNS (2017)

*Presented in various forms at: Kunstverein Amsterdam, 2017 Dorich House, 2017
Female Genius Night Club, WIELS, Brussels, 2017
Female Genius Night Club, Sparta, Dusseldorf, 2018*

In the 2014 biopic on Marlene Dumas in *The New York Times Magazine*, the author begins by stating: “One measure of genius is *the life force*- what Harold Bloom has dubbed, referring to Samuel Johnson, “Falstaffian vitalism.” (Messud 2014)

The article implies that Dumas is a genius because she has the characteristics of traditional genius: vitality and energy, Falstaffian bravado. But hers is “an exemplar of a heretofore all-but-unheralded form of genius, one specifically female. She’s open, giving, relational, fluid.” (Messud 2014)

///

Eva, what do you think, shall we begin our discussion on Female Genius with the idea of Vitality? The vital signs, vitality, and vitriol of Female Genius, hmm? What happens when a Female Genius gets a migraine?

///

Funny enough I sat down this morning with my second coffee and a blank Microsoft word document, and to my right on top of the stack of books lay the yellow *Painting Beyond Itself*, which you recommended to me just as we were about to go to print with my catalogue which we named after your similarly titled essay “Painting Behind Itself”: I think your title is funnier in terms of dealing David Joselit’s essay “Painting Besides Itself”, but still.

And- look at this (amazing)- Isabelle Graw’s essay in her *Painting Beyond Itself* is titled “The Value of Liveliness”, and it’s all about vitality, here’s a quote:

This view that painting has a life of its own and can therefore “think” or “speak” is prevalent among many French historians...I would argue that we are dealing with vitalist projections here...Painting is able to trigger such vitalist assumptions because of its specific language, or more precisely because of its specific indexicality... (and) once (these indexical signs) appear in the context of painting they forcefully point to the absent author who seems to be somewhat physically present in them. (Graw 2016, 80)

So, in short, a painting projects the vitality, or the life-force, of the author, through the historic condition of painting. But interestingly, Graw also points to the longer history of liveliness and value:

As a topos of appraisal, liveliness has an “astonishingly long and continued history”. The production of life and liveliness was elevated to the status of an ideal that painting and sculpture labored to achieve well into the nineteenth century. (Graw 2016, 76)

///

So, what do you think of this- that the valuation of art focused on embodying the liveliness of – life, the world, nature, etc. *by* the artist and this segued naturally in Modernism into the valuation of the work of art itself, through and of the author, to be vital, or to *store* the vitality of life itself?

Makes you think of the holy grail, right, or some myth of the fountain of youth? What about Joan of Arc, was she a genius, I heard they burned her just enough for her clothes to come off and to show everyone that she was “just” a woman. Though this seems overly perverse, even for the English.

///

But YOUR title: Painting BEHIND Itself, is about this absent author who remains physically present. As I remember, it came about as you were telling me about an unfinished essay you were writing on the coincidence that what is considered the first abstract painting in history consists of marks painted on top of, and obscuring, a female figure. In fact, the painting “Mme Kupka Amongst Verticals” shows literally, as you say, the *disappearing* of the female figure into Abstraction. It is the perfect example of the impression of vitality (the female figure), being obscured by the vitality of the authors mark-making. In this case, her husband is painting her out.

///

Does our Female Genius play with this presence and absence that Graw speaks about? You speak of Mme Kupka as staring out from behind the screen of abstraction: “In other words, what this comparison hopes to show is that in this early and officially endorsed abstract painting, the female figure is not separated from and anterior to the abstract marks on the canvas, but is substantially involved in their production. What it means for Madame Kupka, however, is that she is not really there at all.” (Kenny 2016, 11)

Is our Female Genius like a Genie appearing and disappearing with smoke and screens?

///

Hey Mel! I'm looking back through our emails to see what the question was! Like for me the question started with an absence -- as it was in your work -- looking for an equivalent character or persona that, no matter how dated it might be, (the genius, the master painter) continues to prevail in common currency. So, when you start to look for it you find that it's an archetype that just doesn't exist as a specifically female presence in history. It's not so much a question of saying there ARE master female painters and female geniuses, tending in your argument towards building a similar construct to the male version, as much as asking why in the development of these archetypes has there been so much reliance on exclusion. When I started thinking about this, I googled female geniuses, because it's such an

overblown ridiculous cliché, only to find that the term hardly exists in the positive sense: there was only one book from the 80s and a host of articles saying there's no such thing. Which is when you led me to Battersby's book on gender and genius. It's also partly because in my research on great modern female artists the institution that cropped up the most was the mental institution! So, there's a way in which the same things that are validated in great men of art or letters (or science to a lesser extent) is characterized as mental illness in women, which is largely what Battersby writes about. Anyway the quiz takes a number of these biographies (Isa Genzken, Yayoi Kusama, Jean Rhys, Lisa Dwan etc.) and makes a serious joke out of their personal lives and the way their work is evaluated to a certain extent along the lines of how well they're able to take care of themselves or others, how modest they are, how realistic their ideas or fantasies or dreams are etc. etc. it's a list of ways of being taken out of the game in a way. Xx Eva

///

OK yes, the game. Let's get to that, but first, let's go over the root of this term, "Genius," especially how Christine Battersby writes about it in *Gender and Genius* because I think it sums up the vitality thing too.

///

(This whole question of vitality goes back to the root definition of the term "Genius", especially how Christine Battersby writes about it in "Gender and Genius", which is how this whole discussion between us started, right?)

///

Here's Battersby on old genius, or Roman geni.

For the patrilineal Romans, genius was 'a simile for the male seed, which from the father begets the son and from the son goes on to continue the race'. This seed was not simply mundane (physical) sperm; it was a seed that was ripened in the bodies of heroic male ancestors, and in the soil that had been cleared and planted by generations of males, Genius was a sort of genetic coding that entitled a male to property, lands, rights and power over women and slaves. (Battersby 1989, 57)

///

So, genius is a fluid, what? How embarrassing: so, a Geni is linked to a Jinn, a genie as in genie in a bottle, a trickster; it's also linked to 'gene' or genealogy, of course, to the term 'genial' and, my favorite: a bad temper. In my family they say our temper has been passed down through our Sicilian blood, like a feeling of heat and boiling: a flashpoint.

///

Hey hon no problem I will edit and make clear this is a developing discussion between us.

*This week has been a TOTAL CLUSTERFUCK,
Virtual hug*

Here's the essay I've been working on that I'm going to read, this sets the stage for talking about the game of genius, the burning body and liquidity of gestures I think, xx mel

///

Eva, in something I wrote recently called *Luxury Goods*, I talk about con men and confidence. What does confidence have to do with our Female Genius? Confidence is the story we believe in, and belief is I guess what we instill our confidence in.

It makes me think of the question you pull out about my work in your essay "Painting Behind Itself": who gets to be abstract?

///

Who *does* get to be abstract? As in who gets to be off-point, random, bad-tempered, who gets to be not-giving-a-fuck, lying, you-don't-have-a-clue, I was just joking, until I'm not, then it's not funny at all? Duh?

///

The inverse of confidence is the con. And the inverse of abstraction is *literalness* or making sense.

///

How do we instill value in a mark which is the embodied form of an artist? How do we have confidence in this mark, this author? How does a Female Genius insert herself into the conversation of the vitalist projection of objects and ideas? Who gets to be funny and not serious? Who gets to make fun of themselves because it doesn't imply self-criticism or anxiety?

But what if the vitality of the gesture is inscribed not so much through the character of the artist onto a surface (like a fluid moving through a vessel), but rather the unfolding of events, or imagined narrative, that the artist shows us (like the washing of a surface)? Does the Gene of genealogy rare its head?

///

In Helen Molesworth's essay "How to install art as a feminist" (2010) she expands on the conundrum of the genealogies of female and feminist artists in that quote: "*Genealogies for art made by women aren't so clear, largely because they are structured by a shadowy absence.*" (Molesworth 2010, 504)

One model she suggests is that women artists find the gestures of their often absence predecessors outside of a timeline, and that they seek "*attachment rather than separation,*" (Molesworth 2010, 505) and that there is a lovely relational quality between female artists, and that this "releases women to deal with their fathers and encounter their siblings on equal terms." (Molesworth 2010, 505)

But what this argument ignores is that women's gestures are still less valuable than men's, and it does nothing to address the primitive accumulation of women's gestures into art history.

//

In the essay "Notes on Gesture" (2000) the theorist Giorgio Agamben (2000) tells us that "Cinema leads images back to the homeland of gesture." (Agamben 2000, 56)

What is a gesture? Asks Agamben. It is something which is 'inscribed' into the sphere of action but is neither acting or making- it is neither production nor performance. Not the mark or the act that makes the mark.

So, in reading Agamben, I began to understand gesture as the flickering of firelight animating a cave painting of jumping animals, the stills of film juddering together to make movement. I am understanding gesture as the imaginative jump in our heads which believes in the action that created the physical trace of the event.

it is as if a silent invocation
calling for the liberation of the image into gesture
arose from the entire history of art. This is what in ancient
Greece was expressed by the legends in which statues
break the ties holding them and begin to move (Agamben 2000, 56)

How then, can gesture ever be simply material? Or a material good? ///

The highest price ever paid for a work by a female artist is currently 9.8 million dollars for Bluewald by Cady Noland, sold in May 2015.

In November 2011, the night before a Sotheby's auction, Noland disavowed ownership of her work Cowboys Milking (put on auction just after her record auction sale months previous), thus effectively erasing millions of dollars from the world. There is no trace of the erasure, though, because it was completely imaginary. Those, say 6 million dollars never existed, and they never will exist. It is perhaps one of the biggest cons in art history.

///

If money is how we judge success, and if success, in whatever form it takes, is how we install the title 'genius' upon a character, then is our Female Genius the inverse of investment?

///

///

*ok Mel -- this can be a very *kein stress* process :) Eva*

///

Fluids are, as Luce Irigaray speaks about in the *Sex that is not one* (1977), immeasurable and uncontrollable.

I'd like to read her whole first paragraph of "The 'Mechanics' of Fluids":

Is it already getting around-at what rate? In what context? In spite of what resistances? That women diffuse themselves according to modalities scarcely compatible with the framework of the ruling symbolics. Which doesn't happen without causing some turbulence, we might even say some whirlwinds, that ought to be reconfined within solid walls of principle, to keep them from spreading to infinity. Otherwise they might even go so far as to disturb that third agency designated as the real- a transgression and confusion of boundaries that it is important to restore to their proper order (Irigaray 1977, 106)

What if our Female Genius is a container for liquid?

///

The gesture is fluid. It IS Fluid, adjective *and* noun.

I'm interested in the uncontrollability and immeasurability of fluids.

Our female Genius is also fluid, but not in a 'it's cool, things are casual, my schedule is moveable' kind of way. Fluid in the way she fills the cracks, she's been there, she is there, she will be there.

//

So, what do we do with this female genius? It's a bitch of a problem.

A GESTURE IS A LIQUID (2018)

Presented in various forms at:

Gesture and Event, symposium, WIELS, 2018 Opening of Mechanics of Fluids, New York, 2018

Let's take the pulse:

*our brains, block the sound of our hearts
from our ears
so we don't*

*feel the gush
of our own materiality*

//

A gesture is a liquid. It IS a liquid, adjective and noun.

Lately I've been thinking that a painting happens all over the fucking place. And what if a canvas is just in the way?

Americans call this the support,
But nothing is goddamn solid anymore.

//

Some notes on liquids:

Liquids are abstract un-forms, rushing to fill space, existing not specifically here or there, but homogenously across any expanse. They spread out, slide down, drip, seep, feel WET.

They push uncontrollably outwards, are messy and immeasurable; liquids are material that *behaves*. They can be measured through their speed, conductivity, and viscosity as much as by volume. Their meaning is to *move*.

What is this *flow*?

"It is already getting around- at what rate? In what contexts? In spite of what

resistances?" (Irigaray 1977, 106)

Luce Irigaray in her chapter "The 'Mechanics' of Fluids" in the book *The Sex that is not one* outlines the idea of the female as a liquid, in that: "women diffuse themselves according to modalities scarcely compatible with the framework of the ruling symbolics." (Irigaray 1977, 106)

What?

OF THE RULING SYMBOLICS

Irigaray speaks of the “precedence” given to solids, and to also the potential of liquids to “jam” the works of the theoretical machine, an infection or ‘affectation’ of the surface that it finds itself walled up against.

I am talking about FORM here. (I mean what, like, specifically?)

THAT

... it allows itself to be easily traversed by flow by virtue of its conductivity to currents coming from other fluids or exerting pressure through the walls of a solid; that it mixes with bodies of a like state, sometimes dilutes itself in them in an almost homogeneous manner, which makes the distinction between the one and the other problematical; and furthermore that it is already diffuse “in itself” which disconcerts any attempt at static identification...” (Irigaray 1977, 111)

This gooey, sticky shit (liquids and gestures) stuck between the gaps
Is formless (and plural itself)

Formless and excessive

Throughout my entire life I’ve been told that “pleasure” to quote Irigaray one last time- is “the black-out of meaning” (Irigaray 1977, 114)

As in my pleasure, invalidated, because it remains in the realm of pleasure, and never goes to the realm of experience.

Pleasure as a liquid, oozing and spattering whatever gets in its way. It’s here there and everywhere, not linear (does not go from A to B but is between A and B).

Paint is also a liquid (and a pleasure), obviously, but it’s often thought of as a surface that is applied and fixed onto a ‘picture’.

How to maintain the liquid-ness of a liquid in a painting? Is this an act of maintenance?

///

Maintenance is a drag; it takes all the fucking time (lit.) The mind boggles and chafes at the boredom.

The culture confers lousy status on maintenance jobs = minimum wages, housewives = no pay. clean your desk, wash the dishes, clean the floor, wash your clothes, wash your toes, change the baby’s diaper, finish the report, correct the typos, mend the fence, keep the customer happy, throw out the stinking garbage, watch out don’t put things in your nose, what shall I wear, I have no sox, pay your bills, don’t

litter, save string, wash your hair, change the sheets, go to the store, I’m out

of perfume, say it again—he doesn’t understand, seal it again—it leaks, go to work, this art is dusty, clear the table, call him again, flush the toilet, stay young.

(Laderman Ukeles 1968)

EVERYTHING a liquid touches is a CONTAINER.

A FORM is defined by what a fluid material touches/ pushes up against/ presses. Liquids are hot or cold, sticky or slick, and they are shoved around by objects, walls, pipes: repressed by the architecture of shapes.

Shored up. Harnessed,
But ready to burst through at any moment.

In this way, surfaces are also containers. DEEP BREATH
//

I'm going to diverge and follow a new conduit.
But imagine you're on a boat with me, we're taking a right turn from the main river, but the water behind us, and in all directions, is, as it is in all the world, a both single and plural homogenous mass – existing both in the past and the future, both here and there at the same time.

//

My body is a furnace for oxygen and organic material. I am also an ocean, in that systems of liquids are forced around the container of my limbs and skin. Its barely held together. I am pushing out of myself at all moments. Gravity plays a part in my function.

In *Formless: A User's Guide* Yve-Alain Bois states:

Even if one no longer speaks of painting as a “window opened onto the world”. The modernist picture is still conceived as a vertical section that presupposes the view's having forgotten that his or her feet are in the dirt. Art, according to this view, is a sublimatory activity that separates the perceiver from his or her body. (Krauss and Bois 1997, 25)

What if you're stuck in the mud, eh?

My interest in enacting liquidity is to upset the hierarchy of gestures that might be

considered *above all that* daily shit.

Just having a body is a daily comedy. From the control tower of the head,

one gazes downward, always downward, upon this 'loose baggy monster' that we find ourselves in, this laughable casement that is the body below, as ankles swell, farts are emitted, rolls of fat jut out, the penis does its own thing. Shit happens and then you die” (Sillman 2015)

Sillman often speaks about her paintings as being filmic, having within them a series of film stills, decisions and moves. This embodies for me the most exciting aspect of liquidity: that the liquid movement between states is where a gesture lies in painting.

“The gesture is the exhibition of a mediality: it is the process of making a means visible as such. It allows the emergence of the being-in-a-medium of human beings.” (Agamben 2000, 58)

///

In Giorgio Agamben’s text “Notes on Gesture” (2000) he states: “The element of cinema is gesture and not image.” (Agamben 2000, 54). He describes gesture as the physical and magical understanding and projection of the space between film stills, and then goes on to state that all art objects contain this movement in them. Could this be a way of understanding intention as a force on matter?

“A mark in paint registers the passage of force through matter. Such trajectories evade mimetic representation...” (Joselit 2016, 169)

What is a gesture? Asks Agamben. It is something which is ‘inscribed’ into the sphere of action but is neither acting or making- it is neither production nor performance. Not the mark or the act that makes the mark.

So, in reading Agamben, I began to understand gesture as the flickering of firelight animating a cave painting of jumping animals, the stills of film juddering together to make movement. I am understanding gesture as the imaginative jump in our heads which believes in the action that created the physical trace of the event.

“it is as if a silent invocation calling for the liberation of the image into gesture arose from the entire history of art. This is what in ancient Greece was expressed by the legends in which statues break the ties holding them and begin to move” (Agamben 2000, 56)

How then, can gesture ever be simply material? Or a material good? //

Visual representation matters, indeed, but not exactly in unison with other forms of representation. There is a serious imbalance between both. On the one hand, there is a huge number of images without referents; on the other, many people without representation. To phrase it more dramatically: A growing number of unmoored and floating images corresponds to a growing number of disenfranchised, invisible, or even disappeared and missing people. (Steyrl 2012)

//

Is it to do with representation, the absent body of the artist, in which we deal with the liquid boundaries of the self?

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick wanted to make way for queer to hold all kinds of resistances and fracturings and mis-matches that have little or nothing to do with the sexual orientation. “Queer is a continuing moment, movement, motive – recurrent, eddying, troublant,” she wrote. “Keenly it is relational, and strange.” She wanted the term to be a perpetual excitement, a kind of place- holder—a nominative, like Argo,

willing to designate molten or shifting parts, a means of asserting while also giving the slip. (Nelson 2015, 41)

How, in the end, do we dissolve into each other? Through love, through assimilation, through joint bank accounts or joint interests. How do we envision the liquidity of our gestures?

The climate of sight changes from wet to dry and from dry to wet according to one's mental weather. The prevailing conditions of one's psyche affect how he views art. We have already heard much about "cool" or "hot" art, but not much about "wet" and "dry" art. The viewer, be he an artist or a critic, is subject to a climatology of the brain and the eye. The wet mind enjoys "pools and stains" of paint. "Paint" itself appears to be a kind of liquefaction. Such wet eyes love to look on melting, dissolving, soaking surfaces that give the illusion at times of tending toward a gaseousness, atomization or fogginess. This watery syntax is at times related to the "canvas support."

The world disintegrates around me.

-Yvonne Rainer (sent to me as a screenshot from Instagram by Amy Sillman)

THE EMBARRASSMENT OF SUCKCESS (2019)

Presented in various forms at:

KASK, Gent, 2019

Petit Cercle Bruxellois, Institute de Carton, Brussels, 2019 Funny Peculiar Symposium, University of Manchester, 2019 The Embarrassment of SUCKCESS, FKA Witte de With, 2019 Staedelschule, Frankfurt, 2020

Frans Masereel Centrum, Belgium, 2020

In the run-up to her eviction from her Grand Street loft (possibly in 1972), artist Lee Lozano began writing a large number of 'pieces' in her small private notebooks: *No Parties Piece*, *No Eating Out Piece*, and more famously her *General Strike Piece* and *Boycott Women Piece*. There is no formal write up of *Dropout Piece*, rather, at the tail end of the notebooks (which she worked in from 1967 to 1970), Lozano acknowledges that the 'action' is already underway when she writes, "*Dropout Piece* the is the *hardest* work I have ever done." (Applin 2016, 77)

In "Lee Lozano, 68, Conceptual Artist Who Boycotted Women for Years", art critic Roberta Smith's 1999 obituary for Lee Lozano in *The New York Times*, she describes the edge that Lozano walked off in the execution of her work: "In the mid-1960's she also began to execute a series of life-related actions (she didn't like the word performance) that tested, among other things, her stamina, her friends' patience and the conduct of everyday life." (Smith 99)

//

An instruction is a basic component of conceptual practices, and one that nominally involves a command to an 'other': a friend, a machine, a worker, an intern. The body in much conceptual work is present (for example in Chris Burden's artwork 'Shoot' (1971)) as the one person who would *dare* do it. Lozano, though, inverted this: she instructed herself in actions, and dared everyone else to *put up with it*.

In the writer Sarah Lehrer Graiwer's wonderfully researched book *Dropout Piece* (2014), she notes this entry to Lozano's notebook just before her eviction:

LYING ON BED SMOKING, EMPTYING MIND, LISTENING TO RACHMANINOV IN DIM (CITYPOOR) LIGHTBULB A FEELING OF PEACE COMES OVER ME, OF JOYOUS FREEDOM, OF IM DOING WHAT I WANT, OF I DON'T HAVE TO DO ANYTHING UNTIL I FEEL LIKE IT (...) DROP OUT FROM WORLD, NO CALLS NO WORK NO OBLIGATIONS NO GUILT NO DESIRES, JUST MY MIND WANDERING LAZILY OFF ITS LEASH. THIS EVIDENTLY IS THE ONLY WAY TO TAKE A REST. (Lehrer-Graiwer 2014, 74)

//

Let's take a deep breath (Bend over, breathe slowly coming up, arms hang down, let the gravity work)

Breathe

Breathe

//

Lozano's note feels especially pertinent in this contemporary moment: How can I rest in and amongst what is now called 'work' as an artist? And how can I do so when I'm expected to be *on* all the time, even in relaxation mode?

With the expectation that an artist shouldn't work TOO hard...

(Relaxed Pose, Eyes off in distance)

//

In an essay I wrote titled "Presence and Absence" (2015):

Increasingly as an artist I have begun to feel my own voice becoming disembodied from myself. Who is it that is 'speaking'? It is strange to envision oneself as a construct, a concept, outside of your own body, but that is exactly what is perceived by others: an accumulation of objects, made by a non-entity with a vague persona, skewed and squared by gestures and contexts.

In the essay I speak about four female artists: Cady Noland, Lee Lozano, Charlotte Posenenske and Laurie Parsons. I describe them as literally walking off the edge of the art world: revealing the edges of the playing field that they were confined to at the time.

I am not interested in the obscurity or curiosity of Lee Lozano, Charlotte Posenenske or Laurie Parsons. I do not believe the myths that they were 'not able to hack it' or 'hung the apron up.' Perhaps they were smart enough to 'wash their hands' of the situation they found themselves in, but regardless each of their gestures expanded the role of authorship because their actions existed outside of the playing field of art. The act of dropping out was simply the natural conclusion to their work: they took their practice to the extreme of authorship, then followed through.

//

Dropping out is a gesture of walking out. A strike. A Human Strike.²⁰ Dropouts walk out off the edge of the world in which they exist at the time: off the map, off the grid. As a character, for others to see, the Dropout acts outside the bounds of the playing field of contemporary art, and by doing so, reveals the shape-form of the container: when the boundaries that hold these gestures become immaterial.

//

²⁰ Claire Fontaine "The Human Strike Has Already Begun", Mute, 2013.

What is this shape-form, container, of gestures?

//

It takes a shift in perception to consider dropping out as an act or a gesture instead of a circumstance. To do this requires the removal of an artist's biography from the understanding of their work. This is often hard when many women artists, especially those that have 'exited' the art world they were living in to go into exile are shrouded in mystique (Agnes Martin, Sonya Delaunay, Jo Baer, Joan Mitchell.)

Let's be clear: dropping out was unfashionable for all these women. Terms like 'failure,' 'disturbed,' 'forgotten,' 'sad,' 'drug-addict' were used.

Post-partum, I feel it in my stomach, the dark hole that has always been there. *It makes me so sad I can't tell you.*

Let's not *ignore* the moment in time we live in in relationship to this:

Forgotten or undervalued female artists can encourage a sense of 'discovery,' a cat and mouse play: the finding of hidden histories as gems that we, in the art world are trying to uncover like truffle pigs. If we, though, consider, that historically the condition of drop out was common and expected for female artists, the conundrum of presence and absence becomes a bit more fraught, especially in a re-evaluation or re-valuation of these women 'rarities.'

Why this sudden valuation of that which must be FOUND?

Female artists! Come out from under there! Stop hiding under your chairs! Curators and gallerists, they can't find you down there!!

//

In the heart-wrenching article "The Canvas Ceiling," a review by the writer Claudia Roth Pierpont— that is in the October 8th 2018 issue of *The New Yorker*, with the cover showing a silencing red hand over the mouth of a female face, exactly one year after the Harvey Weinstein scandal 'broke'— there is a description of the group of female painters; Grace Hartigan, Helen Frankenthaler, Joan Mitchell, Elaine de Kooning and Lee Krasner; who were present in and partners of the New York School group of painters, together at the opening of an exhibition of De Kooning's *Women* paintings "...In 1953—in a fancy midtown gallery that did not show women painters— [they] blithely offered their own observations: "That one's you. That one's me..." (Roth Pierpoint 2018)

//

In the process of writing about gesture recently, I've been imagining gestures as liquids, especially gestures that evade a neat stacking, like so many Amazon boxes in underpaid ununionized warehouses. Gestures as liquids moving between things. I begin to imagine what happens when these gestures become TOO MUCH, when they start pushing out, forcing things around.

//

Originally, the term ‘embarrassment’ implied an excess or overabundance. And the shame that evolved to contain the fear of such leaking.

To ‘embarrass’ the gesture.

To block or obstruct the movement of something on the move.

But what is this *force*?

When pressure, stress, weight, and velocity come into play.

In Mina Loy’s poetry, in Lynda Benglis’ sculptures, in Josephine Pryde’s photographs, sex, fluids and movement take precedence. An ejaculatory joy of fluidity, critical in its excess.

Slap the floor with something rubbery, slap my legs?

“A mark / in paint / registers / the passage /of force / through mat/ter.” (Joselit 2016, 169) (*My breaks*)

And perhaps through time?

//

Let’s go back to the moment I saw Mary Heilmann’s paintings for the first time. They shot me down like a bolt to the head, which was followed closely by an acute sense of sadness.

That night, one of the last that I lived in Berlin in 2008 I sat down and wrote: “Perseverance makes me sad.”

In a June 2016 article in *The Guardian* the journalist Jason Farago wrote about Heilmann:

In case it’s not evident, Heilmann knows a lot of people in the art world. But after years of underexposure for her own work, the US artist is finally enjoying a welcome career surge in her eighth decade... This attention is belated validation of Heilmann’s talents. Spend time in her light-filled studio in New York, however, and you’ll soon discover she was never out of the picture. (Farago 2016)

Mary Heilmann has been around, yes, but that doesn’t mean she hasn’t been subjected to the “endless low-level harassment” as one female painter once described it to me, as shown in this interview with Ross Bleckner (yeah, who?),

RB: Yeah. You were showing at Holly Solomon Gallery. And what was funny about your paintings is that they were simple—squares within squares, kind of quasi-minimalist, brightly coloured—everything was slightly off register, even the shape of the canvas itself, right? The square would be lopsided.

MH: I don't think so, not on purpose anyway. The interior square—

RB: Well maybe the interior square set up a perception that made me think of it as being slightly ... goofy. (Bleckner and Heilmann 1999)

//

Early one morning last May, I left a friend's house to go to work, to teach. Walking to the Finsbury Park tube station, under the bridge past the fences that stood where the recently evicted, mainly female homeless community had been, I saw a large poster of Pina Bauch with the words "SHE PERSISTED." No, I thought, NO. I refuse persistence. I refuse the valorisation of waiting your turn.

We should appreciate older female artists for their brilliant practices and lives, we should acknowledge those that have been left out. I shall not celebrate their acceptance as an end unto itself. Instead, I demand a change must happen to the container itself; their gestures must burst the walls, and as the philosopher Luce Irigaray implies, go everywhere.

//

The notion of woman as a 'leaky vessel' is addressed in the final essay in the writer Anne Carson's book of poetry *Glass Irony and God*. Focusing on the role of women's voices in the *polis* in Ancient Greek writing, it is just full of wonderful examples of the fear and—interestingly—the *loneliness* that female voices produce for men. She describes these sounds:

Madness and witchery as well as bestiality are conditions commonly associated with the use of the female voice in public...there is the heart chilling groan of the Gorgon...(which is) "a guttural animal howl that issues a great wind from the back of the throat through a hugely distended mouth. (Carson 1995, 120)

(Note the amazing 'quantities' in that description.)

The Furies...high-pitched and horrendous voices...the deadly voice of the Sirens and the dangerous ventriloquism of Helene...the incredible babbling of Cassandra...and the fearsome hullabaloo of Artemis as she charges through the woods...the seductive discourse of Aphrodite which is so concrete an aspect of her power that she can wear it on her belt as a physical object or lend it to other women...Iambe who shrieks obscenities and throws her skirt up over her head to expose her genitalia... the nymph Echo... described by Sophokles as 'the girl with no door on her mouth.' (Carson 1995, 121)

Carson talks of the upper and lower mouth ascribed to women. At one point she describes how psychologist Joseph Breuer withheld a publication on his case studies of hysteria and "the talking cure", when he found one of his case studies, Anna O., contorted in the pains of childbirth (with his child), upon opening the door to commence their last meeting.

Carson then says, "It is confusing and embarrassing to have two mouths. Genuine *kakophony* is the sound produced by them." (Carson 1995, 135)

It is *this* history of voice that I keep in mind when I think about the question ‘who is speaking,’ in relationship to painting and gesture. Most especially, this sense of “two mouths” in relationship to the projection of ‘the author’ onto a painting.

//

In much of the writer and editor Isabelle Graw’s recent writing on painting, she examines the phenomenon of painting as “lively,” in so far as it projects life and thus speech, or speech and thus life.

In Graw’s essay “The Value of Liveliness: Painting as an Index of Agency in the New Economy” (2016), she asserts that subjectivity is transmitted through a brushstroke which reveals “traces of an activity to the eye.” (Graw 2016, 81) It is the ‘signs’ of a painting “evoke the ghostlike presence of the absent author.” (Ibid.) Painting becomes “...a discursive subject that speaks to us and therefore appears to be alive.” (Graw 2016, 86) Speech, in this instance, is associated with the body of the painting, a replacement for an absent author whose body is not an *issue*.

//

In art historian Helen Molesworth’s essay “How to Install Art as a Feminist” from 2010 she describes the complicated relationships at play in female artistic practices. “Genealogies for art made by women aren’t so clear, largely because they are structured by a shadowy absence.” (Molesworth 2010, 504) Is this a different kind of way to disappear behind the canvas?

//

Dear Eva,

Your title: “Painting BEHIND Itself” is about an absent author who remains physically present, though hidden. As I remember, it began when you told me about a piece of writing you had started about what is considered the first abstract painting in history. This painting, ‘Mme Kupka Amongst Verticals’²¹ consists of marks painted on top of, and obscuring, a female figure. In fact, the painting, you say, literalizes the disappearing of the female figure into Abstraction. It is the perfect example of the impression of vitality (the female figure), turning into the vitality of the authors mark-making. To quote you, “In other words, what this comparison hopes to show is that in this early and officially endorsed abstract painting, the female figure is not separated from and anterior to the abstract marks on the canvas but is substantially involved in their production. What it means for Madame Kupka, however, is that she is not really there at all.” (Kenny 2016, 11)

//

²¹ Mme Kupka Amongst Verticals” is a painting by Frantisek Kupka held in the MoMA collection, from 1910-11. It is said to closely pre-date one of, if not the first completely non-figurative painting.

In much discourse on contemporary female painters' terms such as 'unknowability' (Molesworth) and 'unquantifiability' (curator and writer Mark Godfrey) prevail:

This lineage raises the question of whether we can locate a feminist position in this approach to abstraction. Molesworth, for one, has already pushed for the term unknowability in a 2013 essay on (Amy) Sillman: "For me, feminism is a critique of power and mastery, and most of all it's a warning about how the combination of mastery and power has, historically, led to violence. One result of this questioning of power is that unknowability emerges as a kind of virtue... (Godfrey 2014)

//

Who gets to be abstract?

Who *does* get to be abstract? As in who gets to be off-point, random, bad-tempered, who gets to be not-giving-a-fuck, lying, you-don't-have-a-clue anyway, I was just joking, until I'm not, then it's not funny at all: duh?

//

I am a female painter. I have two mouths, I guess, and so I must speak twice about the same things and my speech is confusing.

//

There is an assumption that if you are not successful you are stupid or unlucky.

That if you are poor then you are lazy or ill-suited.

Judgement is built into our systems of appraisal and approval.

In personality tests you are asked: Do you empathise with others? Do you think you are better than others?

Do you?

Does the art world encourage people to think they are better than each other? Is it built on that model? Since when did this capitalistic tendency *infect* this community? Is it to do with the pressure to 'suckceed'?²²

//

The team at Studio Olafur Eliasson consists of about ninety people, from craftsmen and specialized technicians, to architects, archivists and art historians, web and graphic designers, filmmakers, cooks, and administrators. They work with Eliasson to develop, produce, and install artworks, projects, and exhibitions, as well as on experimentation, archiving, research, publishing, and communications. In addition to realizing artworks in-house, Eliasson and the studio work with structural engineers and other specialists and collaborate worldwide with cultural practitioners, policymakers, and scientists. The studio

²² "I WILL NOT SEEK FAME, PUBLICITY, OR SUCKCEED". Lee Lozano in Leher-Graiwer, Sarah. "Dropout Piece" Afterall Publishing, London, 2014. P.76.

hosts workshops and events in order to further artistic and intellectual exchanges with people and institutions outside the art world.²³

At the start of 2015, Koons's studio employed more than 100 painters, some of which were tasked with working on his "Gazing Ball" series, which features blue orbs alongside reproductions of Old Masters paintings. But, according to a 2017 *Artnet News* report, "lackluster" sales for works from the series, which has been shown at David Zwirner and Gagosian galleries in New York, forced the studio to scale back its operations. In late 2015, around 30 employees were laid off. The following year, the blog Art F City reported that Koons's studio had let go of 15 employees amid attempts by its workers to form a union.²⁴

//

A fief, in medieval times, was an item—usually property with unpaid workers attached to it—granted in exchange for a fee, usually consisting of allegiance, homage or service.

//

In 2017 I went to go see the exhibition of small paintings of cocks and cunts from the early 1960's by Lee Lozano at Hauser and Wirth Gallery. I was struck by the strong sense that these works had been in storage, somewhere, for a long time. They were arranged, strangely, from small to large (being very small to about the largest being A4 sized). Lozano, fully aware of scale (as in her *Waves* series), must have made these privately, and then someone must have held on to them for decades after her work was moved around (and much of it lost) in the early 1970's. They were installed as embarrassing pictures. They painted Lee Lozano as someone furtive, mad, seeming to uphold a take on the artist who in fact was so astutely aware of the psychology of contemporary artistic dialogue and endeavoured large ground-breaking paintings. These small, early works of Lozano were installed next to a show of Ida Applebroog paintings, as if to underscore the point about mental health. When I approached the young woman at the desk to ask about the Lee Lozano *Notebook* for sale—an exact to-scale facsimile with the handwritten words "PRIVATE BOOK 1" on the cover—she excitedly tells me that all the notebooks are being made into facsimiles, for sale to the public, and that should I have any interest, all of the notebooks are scanned and available for research in the offices of Hauser and Wirth, anytime!

I'm a failure. No, I am. You might laugh or not think so, its ok. I've just actually realised this.

Someone I loved dearly passed away recently. They were a complete drop out. They had no job, they had no money, no home really. They refused to participate in a

²³ <https://olafureliasson.net/studio>

²⁴ <http://www.artnews.com/2019/01/15/moving-offices-hudson-yards-jeff-koons-studio-lays-off-employees/>

pressurized system. They refused not to be alive each day. Until they weren't anymore.

I've realised that if I don't start living without the expectations of success, I'm going to be a failure in so many other ways.

//

The Dropout is a negative character, in the sense of creating negative space around something. Pulling back a surface, erasing your own gestures, holding back information, making holes that move into other dimensions, confusing the sense of the real because the real does not include you.

I took the Dropout pill to see a freedom of movement. A radical thing: something with no value to exchange, no information to cull, just a gesture, for all that's worth.

//

When Lozano is evicted, she begins drop out piece (and this is an entry into her diary):

I HAVE NO IDENTITY
I HAVE AN APPROXIMATE MATHEMATICAL IDENTITY
(BIRTHCHART.)
I HAVE SEVERAL NAMES
I WILL GIVE UP MY SEARCH FOR IDENTITY AS A DEADEND INVESTIGATION.
I WILL MAKE MYSELF EMPTY TO RECEIVE COSMIC INFO.
I WILL RENOUNCE THE ARTISTS EGO, THE SUPREME TEST WITHOUT WHICH
BATTLE A HUMAN COULD NOT BECOME 'OF KNOWLEDGE'.
I WILL BE HUMAN FIRST, ARTIST SECOND.
I WILL NOT SEEK FAME, PUBLICITY, OR SUCCKCESS.
IDENTITY CHANGES CONTINUOUSLY AS MULTIPLIED BY TIME. (IDENTITY AS
VECTOR.)

//

Let's not forget that Lee Lozano did not leave New York City after being evicted from her loft (in 1972 most likely) and starting the *Dropout Piece*. According to writer Sarah Lehrer-Graiwer's book *Dropout Piece* (2014) she stayed in the city until the free lunches at Max's Kansas City ended ten years later in 1983. She hung out at CBGB (opened in 1973), she affected an aesthetic along with Patti Smith and the Ramones (I can't help but think of the commodification of this aesthetic by MTV only a few years later.) She danced, she posed, she drifted along "JUST (HER) MIND WANDERING LAZILY OFF ITS LEASH." (Lehrer Grawiwer 2015, 74)

A Gesture is a Liquid Artist Book

This artist book clearly shows the working process I developed to bring together my research into gestures that I was undertaking along with the experimentation of developing paintings from small models and experiments with paint, often on the computer or on A4 paper, and then in larger, real-scale models for larger paintings. I include this to give greater visual context to the description of this process as well as to give a context to the development of the body of work *Female Readymades*.

(Separate PDF)

The Embarrassment of SUCKCESS poster with Witte De With²⁵ in Rotterdam.

This printed object both shows the process of modelling paintings in the body of work *Female Readymades* as well as includes and shows the 'Material' nature of the final essay in the appendix *The Embarrassment of SUCKCESS*. I had begun work on these notes when in 2018 I was asked to deliver a talk at the WDW in Rotterdam on the topic of dropping out. The talk I gave was then turned into a four-part poster which was mailed out to people in February 2020.

(Separate PDF)

Additional materials (separate PDFs)

1. Girls Like Us Interview with Amy Sillman (2019)
2. Deep Communities: An interview with Chris Kraus (2015 & 2018)
3. Collision, Publication (2018)
4. Gesture and Event, Materials from symposium (2017)
5. Abstraction of the Body: Unedited review of Amy Sillman at Camden Arts Center, Texte Zur Kunst (2018)
6. Presence and Absence, May Revue #9, 2015
7. Surfaces, short experimental film (2017)

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Applin, Jo, "Hard Work: Lee Lozano's Dropouts," *October* 156 (October 2016): 75-99.

Agamben, Giorgio, "Notes On Gesture" in *Means Without End*, 48-59. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000.

Battersby, Christine. *Gender and Genius*. London: The Women's Press, 1989. Barthes, Roland. *Mythologies*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1972.

Bleckner, Ross and Heilmann, Mary. "Mary Heilmann by Ross Bleckner." *BOMB Magazine* # 67 (April 1, 1999): accessed 15 July 2021 <https://bombmagazine.org/articles/mary-heilmann/>.

Bois, Yve-Alain. *Painting as Model*. Cambridge: October Books, MIT Press, 1990.

Boxer, Sarah. "CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK; The Photos That Changed Pollock's Life." *New York*

Times (December 15, 1998): Section E, Page 1.

Campbell, Adrianna. "Dash, Fragment, Bracket." , *Even* Issue 5 (Fall 2016): accessed 15 July

2021 <http://evenmagazine.com/dash-fragment-bracket-andrianna-campbell/>.

Carson, Anne. "The Gender of Sound" in *Glass, Irony and God*, 120-136. New York: New Directions Paperbook, 1995.

Carson, Anne. *Men in the Off Hours*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000. Crimp, Douglas. "Pictures." *October*, Vol. 8 (Spring 1979): 75-88.

Farago, Jason. "Interview: Artist Mary Heilmann: the Californian surfer still making waves in her 70's." *Guardian* (June 6, 2016).

Fishman, Louise. "Always Wild at Heart," interviewed by Inge Pett, *Yeast Art of Sharing*. (February 17, 2017): accessed July 15, 2021 <http://www.yeast-art-of-sharing.de/kunst/always-wild-at-heart-an-interview-with-louise-fishman/>

Foque, Yana. *Who's Werner?* Amsterdam: Kunstverein, 2019: accessed July 15, 2021 <https://kunstverein.nl/2019/11/11/whos-werner/>.

Fraser, Andrea. "The Problem with "Performative," in *Performance or Enactment* (2015): accessed July 15, 2021:

<https://noreadingaftertheinternet.files.wordpress.com/2015/03/andrea-fraser-performance-or-enactment.pdf>

Freeman, Jo (Joreen). "The Tyranny of Structurlessness". *The Second Wave*, Vol.2, No.1, 1972.

Godfrey, Mark. "Statements of Intent: The Art of Jacqueline Humphries, Laura Owens, Amy Sillman, and Charline von Heyl. *Artforum* Vol. 52 No.9 (May 2014): accessed July 15, 2021 VOL. 52, NO. 9 [HTTPS://WWW.ARTFORUM.COM/PRINT/201405/STATEMENTS-OF-INTENT-](https://www.artforum.com/print/201405/statements-of-intent-)

THE-ART-OF-JACQUELINE-HUMPHRIES-LAURA-OWENS-AMY-SILLMAN-AND-CHARLINE-VON-HEYL-46327

Gordon, Melissa. "Abstraction of the Body: Amy Sillman at Camden Arts Centre." *Texte Zur Kunst* Issue No. 112 (December 2018): 208-222.

Gordon, Melissa "Presence and Absence." *May Revue* Issue #16 (October 2016): 12-19.

Gordon, Melissa, Sillman, Amy. "Interview with Amy Sillman." *Girls Like Us* # 12: Biography (2019):106-112.

Graw, Isabelle, Ewa Lajer-Burcharth (Eds.). *Painting beyond Itself, the Medium in the Post-medium Condition*. Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2016.

Graw, Isabelle. "The Liveliness of Painting," in *Painting Beyond Itself*, 79-102. Berlin:

Sternberg Press. 2016.

Greenberg, Clement. "American Type Painting." *Partisan Review* Vol. 22 No. 2 (Spring 1955):

Greenberg, Gary. "The Confidence Man, In which the possibility that psychiatry is a diddle is discussed, with particular attention to the placebo effect and the talking cure." *The Believer*, Issue 112 (Summer 2015): accessed July 15, 2021.

Herbert, Martin. *Tell Them I Said No*. Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2016.

von Heyl, Charlene. "Too Little and Too Much, All the Time," interview by Robert Enright and Meeka Walsh, *Border Crossings*. Issue 131 (September 2014): accessed July 15, 2021 <https://bordercrossingsmag.com/article/too-little-and-too-much-all-the-time>

Irigaray, Luce. *This Sex Which Is Not One*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977. Jameson, Fredric. *Postmodernism: Or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. New York:

Verso, 1992.

David Joselit. "Painting Besides Itself." *October* 130 (Fall 2009): 125–134. Joselit, David. "On Aggregators." *October* 146 (Fall 2013): 3-18.

Joselit, David. "Reassembling Painting," in *Painting 2.0. expression in the information age: gesture and spectacle, eccentric figuration, social networks*, 169-181. Munich: Delmonico Books, 2016.

Joselit, David. "Marking, Scoring, Storing and Speculating (On Time)," in *Painting Beyond Itself*, 11-20. Berlin: Sternberg Press. 2016.

Kenny, Eva. "Painting Behind itself," in *Painting Behind itself*, 3-11. Berlin: Revolver Press, 2016.

Kraus, Rosalind, Bois, Yve-Alain. *Formless: A User's Guide*. Cambridge: Zone Books, MIT Press. 1997.

Laderman Ukeles, Mierle. "Manifesto for Maintenance Art 1969!," self-published, 1969: Accessed July 15, 2021
<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5d67edcebc9230001022a12/t/5eb5c7c199a7f767ae768754/1588971457098/%5BFILE-+MAINTENANCE+ART+MANIFESTO+1969.pdf>

Lehrer-Graiwer, Sarah. *Lee Lozano Dropout Piece*, London: Afterall Books, 2014.
Leslie, Esther, *Liquid Crystals: The Science and Art of a Fluid Form*. London: Reaktion Books, 2016.

Loy, Mina. "Two Plays: Collision." *Rogue* (August 1915). (page unknown, original publication).

Loy, Mina. *The Lost Lunar Baedeker, Mina Loy*. Roger L. Conover (Ed.). New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1996.

Loy, Mina. "Feminist Manifesto (1914)," in *Lost Lunar Baedeker, Mina Loy*, 153. Roger L. Conover (Ed.). New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1996.

McQuay, Marie-Anne, White, Kristy, (Eds.). *Collision*, Manchester: Cornerhouse Press, 2018.
Messud, Claire, "Marlene Dumas." *New York Times* (

Molesworth, Helen. "How to Install Art as a Feminist," in *Women Artists at the Museum of Modern Art*, 499- 513. New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2010.

Neimanis, Astrida. "Hydrofeminism: Or, On Becoming a Body of Water," in *Undutiful Daughters: Mobilizing Future Concepts, Bodies and Subjectivities in Feminist Thought and Practice*, 85-97. Henriette Gunkel, Chrysanthi Nigianni, and Fanny Söderbäck (Eds.). New

Nelson, Maggie. *The Argonauts*. Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 2015.

Noland, Cady. "Towards a Metalanguage of Evil," in *Documenta 8*, 410-413. Kassel : Weber & Weidemeyer GmbH, 1987.

O'Doherty, Brian. *Inside the White Cube : The Ideology of the Gallery Space*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.

Owens, Laura. "Picabia," in *Laura Owens*, 626. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018.
Owen, Craig. *Beyond Recognition: Representation, Power, and Culture*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994.

Parmar, Sandeep. *Reading Mina Loy's Autobiographies*. London: Bloomsbury, 2014.

Parmar, Sandeep. *Mina Loy and the myth of the modern woman*. London: University of London Press, 2008.

Pollock, Jackson, video by Hans Namuth: accessed 15 July. 2021:
<https://www.sfmoma.org/watch/jackson-pollock-paintings-have-a-life-of-their-own/>

Posenenske, Charlotte. "Statement," *Art International* 7 (May 1968): 50. The text is dated February 11, 1968.

Pulga, Rita. "Melissa Gordon Talks to Rita Pulga," interviewed by Melissa Gordon, *Collision*, 12-13. Manchester: Cornerhouse Press, 2018.

Rodney, Seph. "The Art of Cady Noland as Poison Pill." *Hyperallergic* (July 21, 2015): accessed July 16, 2021 <https://hyperallergic.com/223591/the-art-of-cady-noland-as-poison-pill/>

Roth Pierpont, Claudia. "The Canvas Ceiling." *The New Yorker*, (October 8, 2018).

Scott Brown, Denise. "Sexism and the Star System," in *AA Words Four: Having Words*, 79-89. London: Architectural Association Publications, 2009. Originally published as "Room at the Top? Sexism and the Star System in Architecture," in *Architecture: A Place for Women*. Ellen Perry Berkeley and Matilda McQuaid (Eds.). Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989, 237-46.

Sillman, Amy. "Shit Happens." *Frieze d/e*, Issue 22 (December 2015-January 2016): accessed July 16, 2021 <https://www.frieze.com/article/shit-happens>.

Sillman, Amy. "Process," in *Painting—The Implicit Horizon*, 95-112. Maastricht: Jan van Eyke Adkademie, 2012.

Simmons, William J. "Notes on Queer Formalism." *Big Red and Shiny* (December 16, 2013): accessed July 15, 2021 <http://bigredandshiny.org/2929/notes-on-queer-formalism/>

Smith, Roberta. "Lee Lozano, 68, Conceptual Artist Who Boycotted Women for Years." *New York Times*, (Oct. 18, 1999): Obituaries.

Steinberg, Leo. "Reflections on the State of Criticism." *Artforum* Vol. 10 No.7 (March 1972): 61-98.

Steyrl, Hito. "Spam of the Earth, Withdrawl from Representation." *E-Flux Journal* #32 (February 2012): accessed July 15, 2021 <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/32/68260/the-spam-of-the-earth-withdrawal-from-representation/>.

Tillman, Lynne. "Lynne Tillman on Jean-Pierre Gorin." *BOMB Magazine* # 23 (Spring 1988).

Vishmidt, Marina. "Structural and Expressive," in *Melissa Gordon: Material Evidence*, 37-45. Berlin: Sternberg Press and Spike Island, 2014.