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Object-Images: The *Exposed Paintings* of Callum Innes and the Phenomenology of Non-Representational Painting

A thesis submitted to the University of Kent for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, July 2017

Abstract

This thesis seeks to explore the notion of non-representation in painting and consider our experience of such paintings in phenomenological terms. It is centred around an analysis of the *Exposed Paintings* by Callum Innes, made from 1993 to date, and employs the term *object-image* to examine how such paintings make a viewer aware of their material actuality or corporeality. It considers *object-images* in relation to the theory and practice of American art in the middle of the twentieth century as well as British painting and sculpture of recent decades. The main section of the thesis draws upon the writing of Maurice Merleau-Ponty to ask questions of our perceptual experience of non-representational paintings especially in relation to the idea of the reciprocity of viewer and viewed.

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Contents

Acknowledgements	3
Introduction	4
1 Towards a Definition of the Object-Image: The <i>Exposed</i> <i>Paintings</i> of Callum Innes	20
2 Objecthood Reconsidered: Object-Images in Mid-Twentieth Century American Painting	56
3 The Phenomenology of Exposure	114
4 Continuity and Critique: Object-Images in Contemporary British Painting	166
Conclusion	210
Notes	219
Bibliography	240

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Introduction

At an exhibition of Sean Scully's paintings in the Atheneum extension of Manchester City Art Gallery in 1997 I was struck by the physical presence of the works in that space, by the way that those paintings, partially obscured by pillars, without benefit of natural light and cramped under a relatively low ceiling nevertheless imposed themselves upon the viewer not just as images but also as physical objects. All paintings are objects, of course, but many of them, the majority perhaps, in some way conceal their objecthood, most obviously through employing illusionistic space. The form of this to which we are most accustomed, the tradition of perspectival illusionism, seeks to create a convincing space in depth that exists beyond the picture plane so that we are drawn into an illusion of space which distracts our attention away from the physical surface of the painting and the materiality of its medium. That recessive space is populated with represented forms that are modelled, using light and shade, to have a convincing three-dimensionality of their own, one that likewise lessens our awareness of a painting's physical surface or of the materiality of pigment disposed upon it. Nor is this persuasion away from materiality a simple matter of representation. Many of the paintings we term abstract evoke the kind of space-in-depth we might associate with representational painting and many of the forms in such paintings clearly derive from observed phenomena, are *abstracted from* representational depiction, so that such paintings share the emphasis on an illusionistic space of more overtly representational works. Contrary to this, these paintings by Sean Scully seemed to foreground their physical presence and the materiality of the paint on their surfaces and, as a result, seemed to have a different kind of physical presence, the first aspect of which being that they appeared to exist *in front of* the walls rather than opening up into spaces behind the wall.

A brief survey of the extant literature on Sean Scully reveals that the most dominant narrative around the artist's work is not to do with the object-like quality of the paintings so much as their painterliness. Scully is characterised as an artist principally engaged in a 're-humanisation' of abstract painting.¹ The specific manifestation of this return lies in a looser more gestural application of paint and it carries with it a connotation of more spiritual values, a more directly emotional involvement with qualities of surface and facture.² This reading requires that Scully's development as a painter is broken into two parts, roughly before and after 1981, so that the earlier work, clearly indebted to a generation of painters who developed in relation to Minimalism such as Agnes Martin, Ad Reinhardt and Robert Ryman, is seen as preliminary to the 'mature' work that follows. This distances Scully from the concerns with structure and literality that underlies much of the work of the Minimalists and goes some way to explaining why the artist's innovative contributions to altering the physical structures of paintings is given less weight than the expressive quality of his application of paint.³ Rather than being viewed as an artist making a particular contribution to the Post-Minimalist exploration of the materiality and object-like quality of paintings, he is viewed as a latter-day Abstract Expressionist, returning to the notion of the canvas as an arena of mediated self-expression. What this interpretative trope tends to leave out, I want to suggest, is that in making paintings that are not dependent upon a perspectival space, Scully is working with an alternative conception of what a painting *is*, one that is more concerned with the painting as a physical object that carries or contains an image.

This sounds simple but, as soon as we attempt to describe or define such a conception more closely, proves difficult. To begin with I do not want to make a simplistic distinction between representational and non-representational painting, not only because such a division depends upon being able to fix with certainty the nature of representation, or for that matter when it is absent, but also because the strategies for directing a viewer to the physical structure and materiality of a

painting which I wish to explore may well be present in representational works. These difficulties are compounded by the terminology which we use to describe different kinds of paintings. 'Abstract', as already suggested, not only contains the notion of a simplified or reduced form of representation but has been applied to so many varieties of expressionist and non-representational painting as to lose value as a descriptor, even if it is still the default term for deviations from traditional forms of representational painting. The *Preface* to the Tate Gallery's catalogue for the 1980 exhibition *Abstraction: Towards a New Art, Painting 1910-20* concisely sums up the many objections to abstraction as a term, not least from those responsible for making such works, and crucially separates the 'abstracted' from the *non-objective* or *non-representational*, but nevertheless opts for abstraction as its exhibition title in its 'broad sense.'⁴ The preface also highlights Jean Arp's objection to the term, which is that he did not 'begin with a subject and then refine or simplify his image of it: he simply made images that represented nothing else.'⁵ This *intentional* difference, which resides in the artist deciding not to begin from observation of the external world, if not actively avoiding forms which look like observed phenomena, is central to the kind of painting I wish to examine in this thesis and to which I will refer to as *non-representational*, this being the term which, in my mind, most clearly signals that intention. I will retain *abstract* in the broad sense which the Tate curators describe, covering that range of painting which spans the *abstracted* and the *non-representational*, but leave aside those many other terms which have been put forward as alternatives to non-representational, such as *non-objective*, *non-figurative* and *concrete*, either because they have too specific an association or because they confuse the issue unnecessarily.⁶

In this thesis I focus primarily on the paintings of Callum Innes and in particular a sequence of works begun in 1993 and that continue to date, the *Exposed Paintings*. In a similar manner to Sean Scully's paintings, the *Exposed Paintings* suppress perspectival depth, seem to exist in front of the wall and in various ways make a viewer aware of their physical structure. The spill of pigment that remains

on the sides of the stretcher in all of the *Exposed Paintings*, for instance, not only signals how the painting was made but forces us to take account of the sides of the painting as *part of the image*; forces us, in other words, to consider the *co-existence* of image and physical structure. Even though I am considering the *Exposed Paintings* as examples of non-representational painting, this co-existence of image and structure uncovers a problem with the term in that it conveys no sense of this aspect of the paintings, in fact really only defines such works by *what they are not*. What I am concerned to understand is a positive quality, a foregrounding of materiality, a mode of occupying space that seems to share our own perceived space and does not rely upon the imaginary zone of illusionistic space.

What becomes clear once one begins to consider such paintings is that there is no single term that defines such works, an omission that derives partly from the complexity of endeavouring to describe the way in which such paintings foreground their physical structure and materiality. Clement Greenberg's assertion that any mark made upon a surface will immediately take its place in pictorial depth might suggest that such a quest is futile, that all painting, from the first mark onwards, is destined to create an illusion of space but this is to disregard the many strategies that artists have found for suppressing that illusion and drawing attention to the physical properties of the work.⁷ I am not, in any case, suggesting that these paintings entirely avoid the illusion of pictorial space, but rather that our awareness of such space occurs alongside an awareness of materiality and structure: there is a simultaneity of these experiences which is best described by Richard Wollheim's term *twofoldness* so that they are not separable but rather a single experience that encompasses these qualities.⁸ In Wollheim's usage twofoldness refers to our experience of the depicted content of an image and its painted surface but in this context I am using the term to describe our simultaneous perception of pictorial space and the literal qualities of the painting as a physical object; not only its painted surface but the shape and depth of its support and even its manner of production.

I employ the term *object-image* to describe such paintings and suggest something of this twofold experience. In some respects this is similar to Michel Foucault's term *picture-object* with its emphasis upon the material properties of a painting, except that Foucault's primary concern is with the way in which such materiality is made manifest within a representational image, for instance in the paintings of Eduard Manet.⁹ Foucault sees this operation within Manet's paintings as a radical shift in Western painting and one that clears the way for non-representational painting but he is nevertheless more interested in how we can see this happening *within* representational paintings rather than working through its later consequences.¹⁰ It might also be useful to differentiate my term from Husserl's concept of the *image object*: in considering a painting, for instance, Husserl separates out three distinct aspects; the physical object, that is the canvas and wooden support and paint layer that makes up the painting; the image subject, which is what we see depicted in the painting; and the *image object* which is the image of the depicted subject as we see it in the painting.¹¹ To use Husserl's own example of the Berlin Palace, for example, we have to distinguish between two objects: the Palace as it is, in Berlin, that the painting directs us to; and the image of the Palace, having the scale and physical constituents of the image we see in the painting's surface.¹² The *image object*, Husserl continues, does not exist, neither outside nor inside consciousness.¹³ In this sense, it is almost the exact opposite of what I intend by *object-image* as will hopefully become clear. What Husserl's example makes clear, however, is the sheer complexity of trying to pin down what it is we are seeing when we look at a painting and for this reason I have sought to define the nature of the *object-image* as simply as possible, using the experience of viewing the *Exposed Paintings* as a kind of test case for other comparable paintings. Chapter One consists of this examination and arrives at a provisional definition: object-images are paintings that make a viewer as much aware of their corporeality as of the image that is in or on that object and whose surfaces are visibly modified.

This definition attempts to encapsulate the way in which *object-images* have a physical presence before the viewer and *corporeality* is intended to convey something of that presence and its dependence upon physical characteristics of the painting. In particular, corporeality points towards those features of a work that somehow emphasize the physical structure of the support, the materiality of its medium or the manner of its production. This last point, which might initially seem contradictory, turns out in my own experience to be crucial in that *object-images* derive from those practices which seek to avoid representation as far as is possible, practices which then come to depend upon other strategies for finding and developing imagery. These strategies are based primarily upon the material properties of the medium, as they can no longer rely upon the techniques which derive from the mimesis of external forms or the framework for constructing a picture which such mimesis provides. As a correlate to having to find alternative ways of making, it seems to become necessary, at least in those *object-images* I consider here, to suppress the kind of recessive space associated with representational painting in order to retain the physical presence of the *object-image* before the viewer.¹⁴ Such paintings, I am asserting, are made through manipulating the physical properties of the paint and understanding how paint reacts to and behaves upon its support. In Callum Innes's case, these processes are largely based upon *dissolution*, whereas for an artist such as Alexis Harding it is the incompatibility of different kinds of paint, their chemical incompatibility, which lies at the centre of his practice. It is this centrality of the medium's materiality that generates the final part of the definition, that object-images are paintings whose surfaces are visibly modified.¹⁵

There is then a category of paintings that I am choosing to call *object-images* and which contain, in my view, properties that are not adequately described as *abstract* or *non-representational*, properties which add up to a form of physical presence in the actual space of the room which the

viewer inhabits. Such occupation is a matter of the object-like nature of these paintings and this philosophical question of how and whether a painting can be an object dates back to the earliest stages of abstract painting and beyond, having roots, in the modern period at least, in the successive challenges to academic painting in the late nineteenth century. For my purposes here I concentrate on an isolated period of time and geographical location later in the development of abstract painting and sculpture, America, or even more specifically New York, in the 1960's, when issues of literality and objecthood became central to the practice and theory of many artists and critics. The focal point for many of these debates was the writing of Clement Greenberg and it is in relation to Greenberg that I consider the question of why there seems to be no equivalent term for *object-image* proposed at the time. One possible answer, I suggest in Chapter Two, is the polarisation of the literal and the pictorial that occurred, largely in response to diverging currents of practice and the need to critically stake the ground for one or the other. This begins with Greenberg's gradual shift away from materiality and literality in his understanding of recent painting in order to stave off the possibility that painting might be superseded by the literal object, or the *arbitrary object* to use his own term.¹⁶ Greenberg could foresee the potential pitfalls of his own reductive logic, as painting divested itself of all that was inessential to its own medium, and his turn to *opticality* is in part to block that possibility and insist upon the pictorial as defence against the literal. This defence is taken up even more fully by Michael Fried who puts aside aspects of materiality – in his account of Jackson Pollock's painting *Out of the Web* (1949), for instance – in order to stress the necessity of the optical or pictorial.¹⁷ Both critics were in part responding to a very particular threat which came in the form of Minimalist sculpture and the writings of Donald Judd and Robert Morris.¹⁸ Judd takes up Greenberg's logic quite closely only to arrive at conclusions Greenberg wishes to avoid, that the literal or *specific* object is the natural outcome of Modernist painting. When this dispute is played out over Frank Stella's paintings from the late 1950's and early 1960's it becomes clear that both sides see such paintings according to their own purposes and impose upon them a *transitional* nature, one side seeing them as the final moves *towards* the literal object, the other as staring such

literality in the face and then *coming back* to the pictorial. Both views deny the possibility of the co-existence of the literal and the pictorial.¹⁹

The category of the *object-image*, through its insistence upon the co-existence of the literal and the pictorial in particular paintings – such as Stella’s stripe paintings – opens up the possibility of moving this debate away from its polarised positions. Through the operation of assessing artworks in relation to how they fit such a definition it becomes possible to trace underlying concerns that bind disparate works together rather than separating them through theoretical divides, opening up inter-connections that might previously have been obscured. The canonical texts in this debate, those of Greenberg, Fried, Judd and Morris, are also put under pressure and opened up to revised readings: the similarity of thinking that informs texts by Judd and Greenberg has been much remarked upon and this thesis takes up some of those re-readings, of Greenberg in particular, in an effort to draw out some of the implications of seeing works as *object-images*.²⁰ The author to whom I am most indebted in this regard is Rosalind Krauss who has taken Greenberg’s notion of *opticality* to task in numerous texts and who has endeavoured to re-assert the importance of both the materiality of the artwork and the physical response of the artist/spectator²¹. I have taken much from her texts on Jackson Pollock, Richard Serra, Eva Hesse and others in terms of understanding the significance of how these artists made their work and the phenomenological encounter with their finished pieces, as well as the intertwining of the pictorial and the sculptural since the middle of the twentieth century. I have also drawn from several texts written in direct response to some of Krauss’s insights, most particularly the work on abstract painting and sculpture undertaken by Bryony Fer, whose accounts of pieces by Jackson Pollock and Donald Judd have informed my thinking here.²² The sections below on Barnett Newman owe an even greater debt to Krauss’s colleague Yve-Alain Bois whose extended sequence of texts on that artist act as a paradigm for my own approach to Innes’s *Exposed Paintings* and has guided me to certain ideas about their physical presence.²³

In order to focus upon questions of materiality and structure in painting I have had to put aside the many ways in which *dematerialisation* has been seen as a feature of abstract painting, though I deal with some of these issues in Chapter Two. Clement Greenberg's notion of *opticality* points back to an interpretative tradition which has existed since the earliest experiments in abstract painting and which sees such painting as breaking down the literal and in various ways moving towards the evanescent, the non-material or the spiritual. I consider Mondrian's work in this context, not only to establish this counter-reading and the depth of its historical roots, but also to examine the way in which *it is often the same works of art* which generate these seemingly opposed interpretative accounts. I explore how the formal properties of painting can be perceived as belonging to a non-material sphere through a brief consideration of Wassily Kandinsky's text *Point and Line to Plane* which in turn leads to consideration of the close relationship between spiritual forms of transcendence and the endeavour to see painting in musical terms. If I deal with this opposition through only a couple of examples and leave aside most of that early history of modernist abstract painting it is because I want to avoid anything that resembles a history of the *object-image*, which would not have left the space to deal with individual works in sufficient depth.

This has consequences not only for how I view abstraction before the period of the 1960's but also after and once again I have kept a fairly narrow focus in order to explore the question of physical presence. In Allan Kaprow's account of Jackson Pollock's work he sees the most significant event to be what happens beyond the edge of the painting, or even between the edge of the painting and the limiting border of the studio walls, that area which bears the traces of Pollock's processes, the flung spatters and runnels of paint breaking out of the confines of the painting's rectangle and its deliberated image. Pollock's legacy, in Kaprow's essay, is exactly this breaking out, which he sees as a movement out of the confines of painting and into the wider spaces of 'life', a direction Kaprow

pursues through performance and happenings. John C. Welchman in his text "In and Around the "Second Frame"" describes how the practice and thinking of artists such as Allan Kaprow, Joseph Beuys and Joseph Kosuth shifts the critical focus of art activity away from painting, eroding the significance of the 'first' frame, the physical boundary which limits and defines the traditional media of painting and sculpture. This new form of dematerialisation has perhaps even greater consequences for how we perceive the art-object than the earlier shifts towards the transcendent and Welchman contextualises this as an engagement with a 'second' frame, the ideological and institutional framing of art, not a new phenomenon but one which gains a renewed impetus from the late 1960's onwards. In Welchman's terms, my interest in this thesis lies with those artists who resist this critical current and in the face of these challenges to the validity of painting remain within its confines, within the first frame and, by inference, also within the second.

I have kept hold of that first frame with some rigidity in this thesis, leaving out much that is interesting in terms of its gradual erosion and shifting boundary because my definition of the *object-image* depends upon a tension between the literal boundary of painting and the preservation of an image, between the physical structure of the painting and a pictorial space. Once that pictorial space is fractured, whether through a complexity of surface planes which nullify the ability to read an image or through the addition of actual objects to the picture plane, so that image becomes part of an assemblage, then I have tended not to include such works under my definition. This means leaving out such crucial paintings as Robert Rauschenberg's early assemblages and not dealing with Jasper Johns in any significant detail because I wanted to follow through a very particular thread of painting into contemporary practice. It also results in putting aside, for the most part, the tradition of the found object, the *readymade*, and the various ways in which object-ness has roots in Dadaist thought and practice.

These omissions bear some relation to another consideration in this thesis which is an insistence upon seeing materiality and the physical structure of paintings first and foremost in terms of the exigencies of studio practice rather than as manifestations of wider currents of thought. This may well be an interpretative limitation but, I would argue, it is one that serves a purpose in this context for whereas Krauss and others tend to employ their insights within a framework of thought that is essentially poststructuralist, I remain more tied to the specificity of the experience before the works. This thesis is written in something of an exploratory mode – which may explain inconsistencies that are brought about by ideas unfolding as it progresses – with the consequence that I did not know in advance where the experience of the physical presence of paintings was going to lead me. Whereas for Krauss phenomenology is a stepping-stone to an alternative version of modernism that subverts the teleological nature of Greenberg’s account and asserts a poststructuralist approach to artworks, for me it provides a framework for understanding some of the problems that are encountered when making or viewing non-representational paintings. Yve-Alain Bois’s account of Barnett Newman goes a long way to providing some of that framework but my own probing of the experience of viewing Callum Innes’s *Exposed Paintings* and those ideas which I focus in the term *object-image* made me want to return to some of the founding texts of phenomenology, in particular the writing of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, to see if they could provide a fuller account of the physical presence of such paintings.²⁴

To begin with this involves making connections between the viewing experience of *object-images* and the account of perception which Merleau-Ponty gives in *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945). Traditional representational painting works in ways comparable to the scientific paradigm – what Merleau-Ponty refers to as objective thought– in that it provides the illusion of being outside of ourselves. Such paintings, though often compared to windows, might more profitably be considered as miniaturised versions of the world miraculously contained in boxes and we, as viewers, are given

a privileged view, outside of space, outside of time, outside of experience.²⁵ The insistence upon corporeality that I see as one of principal characteristics of the *object-image* is a refusal of that privileged view and one of the immediate consequences of such a refusal is to re-situate the viewer within their own space and time. The *object-image* is encountered in actual space and, instead of providing information about the world already translated into information, is much nearer to what Merleau-Ponty calls the *phenomenal field* – the world as we encounter it through perception and before the raw material of that perception has been processed into working knowledge. The hardest thing, Merleau-Ponty asserts, is ‘to know precisely *what we see*.’²⁶ An *object-image*, in taking away the framework of perspectival depth and not providing the viewer with an obvious place from which to view the painting throws open some of these questions about what it is that we see, an experience that can be unsettling.

The potentially disorientating effect on the viewer of this uncertainty is the starting point for several accounts of Agnes Martin’s paintings and I examine three such texts, by Kasha Linville, Rosalind Krauss and Michael Newman in order to pursue the implications of the viewer having to move around a painting.²⁷ I take my lead from the notion that Martin’s paintings offer completely different viewing experiences depending upon where they are viewed from, so much so that any single reading of the work is destabilised. Whereas Krauss and Newman develop this idea into an examination of signifying systems and a Lacanian notion of identity respectively, I want to keep this insight closer to its originating point in Merleau-Ponty. It seems to offer a clear example of embodied perception, the way in which, according to Merleau-Ponty, we think and understand through our bodies rather than only our minds. Just as no one sense can be isolated in our perception, likewise no aspect of our bodily experience can be separated out and our understanding comes through our motor skills, through what we are capable of doing in any given environment. A climber ponders a rock face and knows, through previous experience, how to negotiate its various

fissures and planes, with a knowledge that is *in their body*.²⁸ I am suggesting a viewer ponders a painting in a similar way and brings to bear their own internalised bodily experience, whether that is in terms of making marks upon surfaces or finding in the painting before them echoes of their own bodily movement through space. *Object-images* are especially effective in calling forth this internalised bodily knowledge because they do not create an artificial space that we can regard in disembodied fashion but, in their corporeality, in their occupation of the viewer's space, force the viewer into an engagement with their physical properties and with the physical procedures of their making.

Considered in this light the zones and surfaces of an *Exposed Painting* become equivalents for bodily sensations and such pictorial qualities as recession in depth evoke a comparable sensation as experienced in our own body. We only understand what we are seeing in terms of our bodily experience so that if an area of the painting *reaches back* or *turns in space* or *imposes itself*, then these qualities are known to us through how it feels to move in space *within our own bodies*. External perception, to employ Merleau-Ponty's words, 'is immediately synonymous with a certain perception of my body,' just as bodily perception 'is made explicit in the language of external perception.'²⁹ There is a form of *reversibility* between ourselves and what we perceive of the external world, an idea which is given fuller expression in Merleau-Ponty's final work *The Visible and the Invisible* and that culminates in his concept of *the flesh*, a term he employs to describe our embodied occupation of the world.³⁰ The *Exposed Paintings* not only provide an encounter in actual rather than illusionistic space that might make us aware of how we grasp the external, the 'real', perceptually, they also inscribe such reversibility upon their surfaces: in the process of *exposure* that produces the image of an *Exposed Painting* we are given surfaces that are both present and absent, which reveal a previous state as much as a present actuality. The transitional stages thrown up by Agnes Martin's paintings when viewed from varying distances are visible on the surface of an

Exposed Painting and produce a similar indeterminacy in our attempt to interpret, or even perceive, them. They dramatise the coming into determinacy of perception and offer what Merleau-Ponty calls a *second visible*, a re-translation of our own bodily engagement with the world: paintings in this sense are a kind of carnal map, an attempt to give form to our own sense of *being* in the world.³¹

It is this direct reading of *object-images* through Merleau-Ponty's model of perception, especially in its later more poetic and allusive phases, as well as its reverse, the potential for re-thinking Merleau-Ponty through applying his ideas to this kind of non-representational painting that I put forward as the most distinctive aspect of this thesis. How we might view Callum Innes's *Exposed Paintings* in this context and putting such analysis alongside a consideration of Rachel Whiteread's sculpture is my starting point but, if the reader accepts the validity of the category of the *object-image* and the usefulness of viewing it in relation to embodied perception, then alternative readings of abstract painting and contemporary practice become possible. Such a venture must include testing these ideas against some of the current critical models for thinking about abstract painting and the final chapter considers the object-image in relation to Hal Foster's notion of *simulacral abstraction*.³² If in making *object-images* artists are attempting to approach the real, to make paintings that foreground their own materiality and structure, then *simulacral abstraction* would seem to suggest almost the opposite, paintings that are distinctly lacking in the 'real' or, through their appropriation of the signifying systems of abstract painting, undermine the significance of an experiential encounter with artworks. The *simulacral* depends upon systems of signification and regarding paintings as a kind of information, whereas the *object-image* is concerned with the experiential, a difference that is comparable to being *within* the critical tradition of abstract painting or *outside of* that tradition. The *simulacral* is a form of critique, inhabiting modes of painting in order to reveal their ideological underpinnings and operating from a vantage point that requires or at least purports to have a greater degree of knowledge about the operations of such ideologies.

One of the problems of making such a division – between the critical tradition and the simulacral – is being able to tell the difference in individual works, especially as the efficacy of the simulacral in some ways depends upon its convincing appropriation of codes of signification originally employed without irony or deconstructive intent. In this thesis I explore this issue through an examination of several contemporary British artists but it is the work of Torie Begg that throws up the most telling questions. One of the principal readings of Begg's work sees it mainly in conceptual terms, aimed at producing awareness in the viewer of their own cognitive processing of potential meanings and centring its significance in the viewers' responses rather than the works themselves.³³ However others have countered this with interpretations that take account of technological systems, both in Begg's practice and in the imagery and installation of her work.³⁴ My personal reading and conjecture here is that Begg's practice might be viewed in terms of her simulation of the *act of painting itself*. If this suggests that the act of painting can in some way be emptied out, that a mode of applying paint can be undertaken with differing degrees of engagement ranging from an intense identification with the medium to a complete sense of detachment, it also re-positions the physical act of painting more closely to the thinking that initiates that act. Bearing in mind Merleau-Ponty's account of understanding through motor-skills and the closeness of knowledge to what we are able to do in any given environment I go as far as to suggest that *painting is thinking*: that as an artist makes a painting they are also finding the thought of that painting, just as, when speaking, we are formulating thought.³⁵ The simulacral, in this case, is expressing thought that has already been formulated through the appropriation of its given form.

If the category of *object-images* is intended as an addition to what Hal Foster calls the critical tradition of abstract painting then it follows that one of my purposes in this thesis is to re-assert the significance of that tradition and defend it against some of those critiques which derive from

poststructuralist theory. For the most part this is implicit in my discussion of forms of non-representational painting but I take up this stance more explicitly in the concluding thesis comments which situate the direct engagement of artists such as Callum Innes with previous modes of abstract painting in opposition to those forms of contemporary practice which are based upon critique and deconstruction. I connect this opposition in visual art to one which operates in the discipline of philosophy between phenomenological and poststructuralist approaches and to the latter's relativism, its undermining of any defined position which leads towards an 'end of philosophy', just as cultural theory has often proposed an 'end of painting'.³⁶ This forces attention onto the way in which contemporary artists are dealing with some of the same issues of representation that have preoccupied earlier phases of abstract painting and stresses the continuities in such painting rather than putative endings. The intention and thesis rationale is then to contribute to that debate around the nature and value of abstract painting and suggest that, as a critical tradition, it still has much to offer.

Chapter One

Towards a Definition of the Object-Image: The *Exposed Paintings* of Callum Innes

Chapter One seeks to understand the way in which certain forms of painting seem to have a physical presence which differs from that of representational paintings and will offer a preliminary definition of such paintings. It takes as an example of such painting Callum Innes's *Exposed Paintings*, partly because they offer a clear example of the kind of presence I am interested in but also because Innes made a dramatic shift in his work away from representational painting towards a form of painting that very quickly emptied out of recognisable mimetic forms: this transition offers a tabula rasa and provides a starting point for an analysis of object-images. I begin with a simple question: What kind of paintings are the Exposed Paintings? It is tempting to accept a simple answer, they are non-representational paintings, but this immediately seems to throw up more questions, even the possibility that representation, in some form or another, cannot be avoided. It also does little to explain, or describe, what I consider to be an essential quality of the Exposed Paintings, which is their presence as physical objects, as paintings that somehow exist in the same space as ourselves. I consider his early series and pay particular attention to the manner in which various commentators have found an imagery in those paintings that still seems to refer to the outside world and more especially to what we loosely describe as nature: the forms and processes of the natural world. I compare these early sequences of work in order to consider the degree to which Innes exerts control over the evocative content of his paintings and how the first Exposed Paintings deliberately repress that content: I suggest that what is gained through such a repression is a stronger sense of the paintings' actuality, both in the materiality of their medium and in the physical structure of canvas upon stretcher. I turn to Wollheim's notion of twofoldness to throw light on how a viewer

might perceive such works and have, as a single experience, an awareness both of pictorial space and physical actuality – the illusion of pictorial depth and an experience of the materiality of the painting – and put forward a definition of the object-image as a way of thinking through these qualities in the Exposed Paintings. This leads me to consider how such pictorial issues are important in the subsequent development of the Exposed Paintings and I deal in some detail with their early phases and how the artist manages to retain their physical presence as object-images whilst opening up the works to the kind of mark-making that operates in his other works. These questions are intimately bound up with the processes of production of the Exposed Paintings so I turn to various accounts of Innes at work and the paintings themselves to reflect in more depth upon how they are made and how the artist's manipulation of the physical medium runs alongside, indeed is part of, the directing of the viewer to the paintings' actuality.

I am standing in front of Callum Innes's 2012 *Exposed Painting Green Lake* in the main gallery of the Whitworth in Manchester. As with all the *Exposed Paintings*, the title is simply descriptive of the process of making and the name of the pigments employed, though until this moment I have never come across Green Lake. There is little value in trying to describe this green, less in attempting to pin down the shift in hue between the various areas. A rectangular area of canvas was painted with Green Lake, then, after a certain length of time, a layer of black was painted over it. Again, after allowing for the paint to partially dry, half of that area was gradually dissolved using turpentine. In most paintings, apparently, Innes brushes the turpentine from bottom to top of the canvas, allowing it to run back down, and the greens of this canvas are shot through with vertical rippings, evidence of how the turpentine carried pigment down and off the canvas, but exactly how he achieves the vertical edge of the dissolved zone, or varies the residues that are left, is a more complex question.¹ Innes is very good at seeming to lay bare his methods whilst not quite revealing the details.² In a 1996 text about Innes's work Mel Gooding describes his process as *painting* and *un-painting*.³ In this

case the two layers of colour are painted then half of their area is un-painted, creating an un-painted area where once there was paint, but also another area, where dissolved paint has run down over white primed canvas, what I shall call a *stained* area. In *Exposed Painting Green Lake* the un-painted area is lighter, one might be tempted to say luminous, whereas the stained area is several shades darker and the two are divided by a thin line of pigment. I have no idea how this line is produced. The side of the stained zone that abuts primed canvas has a plume of colour that comes from turpentine refusing to remain within the confines of a vertical line, a spillage beyond the stained zone that is one of the most consistent features of the *Exposed Paintings*. Another spill leaves dark stains of pigment on the sides of the stretcher to the side of and underneath the green zones. Beyond this point, it is difficult to describe the relations between different zones of the painting without becoming confusing, an odd circumstance given that the *Exposed Paintings* seem at first to be models of clarity and simplicity.

‘This description may have been dry reading but that is what’s there.’⁴ Donald Judd’s characteristically terse and unapologetic address to the reader in relation to Barnett Newman’s paintings holds good for Innes’s work, as does his sardonic conclusion to a description of Newman’s *Shining Forth (To George)*, 1961; ‘It’s a complex painting.’⁵ Coming from Judd, it underlines a crucial quality in Newman’s paintings that is appropriate in considering the *Exposed Paintings*, which is the way in which simple elements are combined to produce something of great complexity. *Exposed Painting Green Lake* ends up as an image that has five zones or areas: one which is painted, one which is un-painted, one which is stained and two that are the initial primed canvas. What’s more, that final image reveals the process of its own making, at least to a degree, and we can decode the horizontal marks of application and the vertical ones of dissolution. Marco Livingstone, in considering how a viewer might decipher the various layers of an *Exposed Painting*, talks of being able to imaginatively *un-make* the painting, take it back to bare canvas, to its point of origin.⁶ There

is a sense, however, in which the paintings resist such un-making, for there always seems to be a gap between what we know of their making and what we actually see: in *Exposed Painting Green Lake*, for instance, there is a ghostly square, slightly darker, within the un-painted zone, that, even if we know how it was brought about, nevertheless defies easy understanding or simple reversal. It is only because we can see in the *Exposed Paintings* a set of relatively simple elements that we can understand the complexity of their combination: Richard Shiff demonstrates a similar point in relation to Donald Judd's *Stack Pieces*:

Each of Judd's repeating, multiple-unit "stacks" of boxes that project from a wall demonstrates his point about wholeness and complexity, because no two units within such a work, even when morphologically identical, can be experientially identical. From any actual position of viewing, each unit will look and feel different from the others. It takes the simplicity of repetition to demonstrate this complexity within a culture dulled by too much art and criticism.⁷

Shiff's point about the way in which Judd's work, through simplicity and repetition, manages to draw our attention to the complexity of our perceptual experience and his contrast of such awareness to an over-reliance on labels and conceptual frameworks in our interpretative approach is echoed in much of the literature on Innes and reflects the fact that his paintings require our close attention. If Innes himself worries that viewers might think he is doing the same thing over and over, it is partly because of the tendency to reduce visual art to the information it contains, rather than the experience it provides.⁸ In the context of the *Exposed Paintings* our experience is gained over time and is as much to do with familiarity with the *sequence* as it is with individual works and perhaps also requires awareness of those other, parallel, series of works that he produces. Innes might not

make modular works in the manner of Judd but the form of near-repetition between paintings leads to a similar appreciation of the difference between morphological and experiential identity. Innes's paintings as a whole represent a singularly consistent exploration of pictorial concerns, unified both by a determination to mine as deeply as possible certain formal possibilities and the common factor in almost all of his mature work of a fundamental process, that of the dissolution of an applied layer of paint. Innes is much like Bridget Riley in the rigour with which he extrapolates possibilities from his own paintings, so that a viewer is able to see the developmental stages between works, the nature of the pictorial problems addressed, the ingenuity and subtlety of solutions found, and he would no doubt share her enthusiasm for Igor Stravinsky's formulation that:

My freedom will be so much the greater and more meaningful, the more narrowly I limit my field of action and the more I surround myself with obstacles. Whatever diminishes constraint diminishes strength. The more constraints one imposes, the more one frees oneself of the chains that shackle the spirit.⁹

That limiting of the field of action began for Innes around 1988/1989, whilst on a residency in Amsterdam. Up until this point, he had been making representational paintings, mythologically orientated compositions which he compares to Steven Campbell and Adrian Wisniewski.¹⁰ Away from his own studio and the artistic environment of Edinburgh he began to conceive of a different type of work, inspired partly by an exhibition in Amsterdam of Lucio Fontana's paintings and drawings:

Fontana's work showed me that you can do something simply, and yet it can still work on so many levels. It has such clarity to it, and I love the drawings probably more than the

paintings. Fontana's work opened the door for me, going right back to that drawing of a leaf I did that kicked everything off.¹¹

That leaf, a small drawing done from memory, Innes transferred onto corrugated cardboard so that the lines of ink, whilst defining the edges and details of the leaf, spread away from that form and pool in the card's grooves.¹² The materiality of the ground and the liquidity of the medium suddenly become important factors in the making of the image, up to a point replacing what has previously been the 'touch' of the artist's hand, a shift that Innes immediately followed up in a series of drawings on card made without an initial representational form. More crucially in terms of his subsequent development it also led to the *Untitled Cento* paintings (1989-90), executed in oil paint on an oiled paper.¹³ These are the first works that depend upon the dissolution of a layer of paint, a process almost ubiquitous in his work from this point on. The *Cento* paintings not only establish a central process in Innes's work, they also set the templates for several of the early series, the starting point for the *Identified Forms* (1990 onwards), the *Repetitions* and *Formed Paintings* (1991 onwards) and the *Exposed* and *Agitated Verticals* (1992 onwards).¹⁴ Almost immediately, in other words, Innes found a method of making work and specific formal characteristics that have served him ever since, for the concerns of these early series, indeed the series themselves, continue to date, hence the consistency and tightly-knit interrelations of his body of work. If *From Memory* and the *Cento* paintings mark a move away from the tight control of the hand towards a much greater engagement with materiality and process, they also reveal a changing attitude towards representation. I have already used *representation* to signify that work which depends upon the depiction of observed phenomena, such as the work Innes made prior to 1987, and I use *non-representation* in an equally specific way, to describe work that aims not to depict any such observed phenomena, but as soon as we come to regard the *Cento* paintings we become aware of the difficulties of such definitions. Richard Cork vividly describes how one of the 1989 *Cento* paintings,

subsequently used on the cover of the exhibition catalogue at the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) in 1992, is made through processes of dissolution and yet:

Far from ending up with a tabula rasa, he stopped erasing once a pale oval had emerged from the darkness. It bore a vestigial resemblance to a head, and in this respect could be seen as the last, ghostly remains of the figures that had populated Innes's earlier work.¹⁵

These ghostly remains are to prove tenacious. Despite the *Cento* paintings being 'in one sense uncompromisingly abstract', Cork goes on to see forests, prison barriers, tempestuous downpours, wild growths, rain-spots and constellations in them.¹⁶ This is not too dissimilar to the 'microscopic or telescopic views, neurons rushing to a connection or comets flying through empty space' that Eric de Chassey detects, though deChassey is careful to outline how Innes seeks to suppress such associations.¹⁷ In calling such paintings *non-representational* I am not seeking to deny that such readings are possible, even likely, but rather to clarify something of the artist's intention and also to suggest something about our habitual manner of looking. It seems that we cannot simply turn off *representational seeing* and that, no matter how rigorously an artist seeks to avoid calling up in the viewer's mind objects or phenomena from the external world, there are no guarantees of success.¹⁸ In terms of intention, whilst in no way wanting to restrict how we might read paintings to their maker's aims and ideas, I think it is worth remembering that most of the series Innes makes depend wholly upon the dissolution of areas of a monochrome field: none of their imagery is deliberately contrived but arises as a kind of by-product of the way the paintings are made. In deChassey's words, Innes doesn't 'start from images but works towards them.'¹⁹ In an important sense the final image is not preconceived but is arrived at through the process of making the painting and, in particular, through allowing the physical behaviour of the medium to produce unexpected nuances

of form. Innes is not observing external forms and then deliberately contriving some form of mimetic mark-making, rather he tests processes and allows for the dissolution of the paint layer to be more or less evocative, not so much of forms as processes:

This effect is not one of design, of premeditated interrelations of structures on the plane, but of the trace and record of an energetic interplay which has happened in time, like the marks of a current left visible in estuarine sand, or water-worn striations on the exposed rocks of a river canyon.²⁰

It is the *Monologue* paintings, initiated in 1991, that most clearly demonstrate Gooding's observation as the entire field of paint has been dissolved in such a way as to leave irregular traces of pigment, undulations of tone that inevitably seem to mimic the striations produced by processes of erosion and accumulation in nature. In *Monologue No.2* (1991) Innes sought to repress such associations by leaving an undissolved strip of paint along the right hand edge of the canvas whose flat colour prevents our reading of the remainder of the image as illusionistic space, but it is an unusually awkward effect and not one that the artist has had much cause to repeat: subsequent *Monologues* involve the dissolution of the whole area of applied paint and Innes turned to an exhibition strategy to discourage viewers reading them too readily as natural forms, showing them alongside paintings that are 'less directing'.²¹ What the *Monologue* paintings make clear is that an area of paint dissolved in anything like an irregular fashion will produce a set of marks that seem to occupy an illusionistic space and that the evocation of such space leads the viewer to read those marks as representing identifiable forms. Clement Greenberg coined the phrase *homeless representation* to describe paintings which, though ostensibly *abstract*, so clearly conjured the kind

of recessive space found in representational painting that they could not help but evoke the kinds of things that might occupy such space: bodies, things, landscapes.²² In the critic's own words:

I mean by this a plastic and descriptive painterliness that is applied to abstract ends, but which continues to suggest representational ones.²³

Whilst Innes's *Monologue* paintings do not have the kind of volumetric modelling found in Willem deKooning's work, the chief target of Greenberg's characterisation, nevertheless they have a painterliness that fits Greenberg's description. Attempting to avoid representation is not simply a matter of ceasing to base forms upon direct observation, it is also a matter of the kind of space that a painting contains and, by allowing the *Monologues* to evoke such an illusionistic space, Innes encourages a reading based upon natural forms, or at least, as Gooding suggests, *natural processes*.²⁴ There is a relationship here between the processes that Innes employs to make the paintings, a changing of the material constituents of the medium through dissolution, and the underlying processes that create natural phenomena: erosion, accretion, attrition. The result of this relationship are paintings that, though they seemingly employ an abstract vocabulary and are not derived from preconceived forms, nevertheless are evocative of natural processes and forms.²⁵ Greenberg's *homeless representation* suggests representational forms that have lost their place in a stable environment, but what he describes by the term might almost be the other way round, a suitable environment, a pictorial space that is no longer occupied by *clearly representational depiction*. Innes is by no means the first artist to explore this terrain and I shall consider in some detail the clear precedent that exists in the work of Barnett Newman in the opening section of the next chapter, but in some respects each artist must find their own solution to the problems thrown up by moving away from a representational mode of painting. Leaving aside for the moment the

question of why Innes wants to do such a thing, we can see in the other early series his endeavour to suppress, or at least limit, the evocative content of his paintings. In the *Identified Forms* paintings turpentine is run up through the initial layer of paint in narrow channels that end in roughly oval areas of dissolution that resemble smears or ruptures in that field. Despite the fact that we can clearly see how these smears have been made, the way in which the paint field has been rubbed away to create their forms, they nevertheless strongly evoke observable phenomena, as deChassey describes above. Here is Richard Cork's response to the one of the paintings:

Even when he calls a painting *Six Identified Forms*, the phosphorescent eruptions glowing on an otherwise black canvas resist any attempt to relate them securely to natural phenomena. Although they bear a resemblance to flares climbing a nocturnal sky, we are reminded at every turn of the rubbing, staining, streaking and erasing deployed by Innes on the surface of this ruminative image.²⁶

As the title suggests, Innes is exploring *how* we identify forms and the ambiguity that exists between the material presence of marks upon canvas and our reading of such marks as forms existing in an illusionistic space. The *Identified Forms* paintings are as 'directing' as the *Monologues*, even though only small areas of the paint layer have been subjected to dissolution and if Innes is to move away from such evocative works, towards something less representational, then he must find ways of suppressing illusionistic space. He begins to do this by making his areas of dissolution more regular and by fitting them more closely to the literal shape of the canvas: instead of irregular areas of dissolved paint as in the *Monologues* or irregularly spaced forms as in the *Identified Forms*, Innes employs lines nearer to the vertical and more evenly spaced across the canvas surface. We can see the results of this ordering in the *Formed* paintings (1991 -) and then even more forcibly in the

Repetitions (1991 -) which are composed of evenly spaced vertical lines across the width of the canvas. In a work like *Repetition (Grey/Violet)* of 1995 the random shifts and diversions of the runnels formed by the liquid turpentine as it finds its way down through the paint layer become evident to the viewer exactly through their contrast with the suggestion of order, of regularity, that informs the image.²⁷ There is still a residually shallow space evident in these works, but the regularity of those verticals stops that space from opening up into depth and keeps our awareness more closely allied to the canvas surface and the physical nature of the dissolved paint layer.

The same is true of a painting like *Formed Painting No.2* of 1991, likewise based upon a succession of vertical lines dissolved out of the brownish red of the paint's surface: what is most striking here is the delicate radiance of the erased lines, for the pigment of the initial layer has broken down into a range of reds and yellows whose combined effect is almost golden.²⁸ The unexpected richness of colour *within* various pigments that is released upon the dissolution of a paint layer is a crucial aspect of Innes's paintings, not because it signifies any form of natural phenomena but simply because of the wealth of possibilities that are unlocked through the manipulation of materials.

This process of repressing the potential for a landscape/nature reading continues with the *Agitated* and *Exposed Verticals*, which reduce the repeated verticals of the *Repetitions* to a single line dissolved into the paint field: process and materiality are here even more forthrightly stated, the drastic reduction of pictorial incident re-directing a viewer's attention towards the material facts of the canvas, the depth and texture of the paint layer and the way in which the single vertical has been inscribed, or rather erased, upon it. I am not suggesting a progression towards some form of non-representation so much as a spectrum of possibilities that has, at one end, the suggestive imagery of the *Monologues* and at the other paintings which endeavour to severely limit such

readings. *Exposed Vertical* of 1992 is a single centrally placed vertical line that has been dissolved from a field of black that covers the canvas; not only is the image clearly not derived from observing external phenomena, but any sense of recessive space has been reduced to a minimum, limiting the possibility for reading the painting as a representational form.²⁹

I would argue that such a painting is non-representational in the sense I have outlined previously, in that the artist has not worked from an armature of representational content and has endeavoured to suppress forms which might evoke observed phenomena. There is no sense in which *Exposed Vertical* is abstracted from something – a much reduced version of a landscape – but rather is intended to be an image that exists in its own right, rather than a referent for something beyond itself. It is not like Theo Van Doesberg's sequential paintings that gradually render a cow down into 'abstract' shapes and therefore calls into question the model of abstraction which that sequence proposes. As the examination of Callum Innes's paintings thus far has revealed, however, there are difficulties with applying the designation of *non-representational* to these works and even more so once we come to a consideration of the *Exposed Paintings*. The most substantial problem lies in the way in which such a term forces us to consider such paintings *in terms of representation*, even if only in the negative sense of stating *what the paintings are not*, when what might be required is to say what they are. As with all such labels, there is also something of a levelling effect, the suggestion that all paintings within the category are essentially the same and, in this case, defined chiefly by not being representational. Amongst other things, this does not begin to account for the different kind of *presence* that certain paintings, such as the *Exposed Paintings*, strike me as having.

The first *Exposed Paintings*, made in 1991, consist of an area of paint that covers the entire frontal surface of the canvas, bisected by dissolving away the paint to one side of a central vertical line: the

resulting canvases have two zones that are exactly equal in surface area, one that is painted, the other un-painted. The vertical bilateral format, strongly reminiscent of works such as *Onement 1* (1948) by Barnett Newman, further inhibits any representational reading, not only through the severity of its symmetrical composition but also by resisting any sense of horizon, of a laterally expanding space. *Exposed Olive Painting No.2* of 1992 reveals its process of production with a clarity and forcefulness that seems to reflect back onto the other series. As viewers, we are repeatedly drawn back to the *edge* between the two zones which, under close examination, reveals the subtle irregularities of the dissolution of a layer of pigment, the action of the solvent carrying away its material substance under the force of gravity, an irregularity made all the more striking through contrast with how the painting appears from a distance as a drastically reduced piece of hard-edged abstraction; any lingering notion of the painting as formal exercise is further dispelled by the residue of pigment on the side of the stretcher alongside the un-painted area, visible from any kind of an angle to the painting and manifesting a more obviously painterly mode of production. When our attention returns to the canvas surface, we cannot help but be aware of its physical properties and the contrast between the layer of Olive paint and its faint residue on the un-painted area, staining the weave of the canvas. *Exposed White Painting No.6* of 1993, exactly the same compositionally, replaces the solidity of the olive paint with the airiness of white, though what might be potentially regarded as blankness is here translated into opacity, into a block of colour that exists in relation to an opposing area of canvas that seems equally physically present, stained with the residue of the removed white pigment.³⁰ The process of removal seems at once to underscore the material presence of the remaining painted area and, through staining, emphasize the weave and physical substance of the canvas ground.

These early *Exposed Paintings* take the processes of dissolution that Innes has developed across all the series and apply them to a more rigorously geometric and simplified composition. They mark a

significant shift in his practice, a turning point even, that is evident in the centrality the *Exposed Paintings* subsequently take in the artist's output. This position of importance is perhaps because it is in the *Exposed Paintings* that Innes's exploration of a kind of painting that depends upon a direct physical action upon the canvas, somewhat in the manner of Fontana, is most evident: Innes may not physically penetrate the canvas as Fontana does, but his processes of removal are like a kind of shallow carving out, working into an initially pristine stratum of substance that is steadily eroded and taken away. There is an almost sculptural sense of the activity of painting, a dealing with the physical properties of materials that becomes evident when one sees photographs of Innes's studio in which immaculate paintings are surrounded by large spattered pools of removed pigment, testament to a quantity of turpentine and removal of paint that is perhaps significantly larger than one might imagine.³¹ These processes are more evident in the *Exposed Paintings* exactly because they are less evocative, less prone to a representational reading, than the other series: by simplifying and ordering his composition to this degree and aligning it with the rectangle of the literal stretcher Innes is able to isolate elements of process and manifest them on the canvas surface. By taking out as much of the *representation* as he can, Innes is able to guide our attention to the materiality of the painting: the central vertical line, with its minutely wavering irregularities, and the two surface areas that it divides alert us to the physical making of the painting and the spill of pigment on the side of the stretcher provides the viewer, consciously or otherwise, with the fact that *the painting was executed on its stretcher*, that it could only have been made in its present object-like form. Our perception of the *image* in the painting closely aligns with our awareness of its nature *as a physical object*. In some way we have a simultaneous sense of the pictorial space of the image and the actual dimensions and structure of the physical object.

Rather than calling such paintings simply *non-representational* I want to propose a category that goes some way to suggesting this alignment of the image with the physical structure of the painting,

that of *object-images*. These are paintings *that make a viewer as much aware of their physical structure as of the image that is on or in that object*. The simultaneity that I have in mind between our awareness of the physical nature of the painting as an object and the image that exists on the surface of that object depends upon something comparable to Wollheim's notion of *twofoldness*. Gombrich considers a viewer's awareness of the surface marking of a painting and its depicted content to alternate.³² Wollheim sees this dual perception as a single experience.³³

...and the two aspects are distinguishable but also inseparable. They are two aspects of a single experience, they are not two experiences. They are neither two separate simultaneous experiences, which I somehow hold in the mind at once, nor two separate alternating experiences, between which I oscillate – though it is true that each aspect of the single experience is capable of being described as analogous to a separate experience.³⁴

In our viewing of *object-images* we are not given an alternating awareness of the object-like nature of the painting and the image upon its surface, but have rather a single experience that encompasses both. In Wollheim's account of *twofoldness* what melds into that simultaneity of perception is our awareness of the painted surface of the canvas and its depicted content, its illusion of form. We do not alternate between, for instance, an awareness of the men and women depicted in Titian's *Concert Champetre* (1510) and the painting's surface qualities but rather have a single experience that encompasses both: the illusion of figures in a garden and our sense of the painting as a surface covered in coloured pigments is simultaneous, wrapped into *twofoldness*. It is this simultaneity that allows for what Wollheim calls *seeing-in*, the perceptual process that facilitates our seeing of illusionistic forms in flat two-dimensional areas of colour and line, what Andrew Harrison describes as a sort of projective visual imagination.³⁵ Wollheim concedes that we can separate out

these experiences in so far as they might be described, or perceived, as *analogous* to a single experience – so we might consider the *Concert Champetre* as if it were *an actual scene* being played out before us – but to do so is to immediately lose our experience of the painting. In an earlier example of seeing a boy in stains on a wall, Wollheim asserts:

In seeing a boy in a stained wall I may very well concentrate on the stains, and how they are formed, and the materials and colours they consist of, and how they encrust or obscure the original texture of the wall, and I might in consequence lose all but a shadowy awareness of the boy. Alternatively, I might concentrate on the boy....and thus have only the vaguest sense of how the wall is marked. One aspect of the experience comes to the fore, the other recedes.... Twofoldness is lost, and then seeing-in succumbs to an altogether different kind of experience.³⁶

Seeing-in provides Wollheim with a tool for unlocking the *stylistic* qualities of paintings, allowing him to focus on the way that the *equivalence* between marks and areas of paint and depicted forms leads to a wide range of expressive and metaphorical possibilities. In Titian's *Concert Champetre* (1510), for instance, he sees a correlation between the young man's hair and the trees behind him, a similar translation into painted mark, which enables him to elaborate a reading of the whole painting as metaphORIZING the body.³⁷ What the example also reveals, however, is how much Wollheim's understanding of *twofoldness* is predicated upon *representation* (though Wollheim would employ the term *figuration*) and that *surface* in this model is actually nearer to *surface as marked by the artist*, for it is not so much the dried daubs of oil paint upon the ground of the canvas that Wollheim is involved with here as *Titian's manipulation of the medium*. *Surface*, in Wollheim's account, encompasses both these senses and carries a certain ambiguity, not allowing for any separation out

of the raw materials of that surface from the artist's manipulation of those materials into depicted form, a problem that Paul Crowther engages with in his essay on "Twofoldness."³⁸ This poses problems before works such as Barnett Newman's which seem to contain no representational forms and therefore, in Wollheim's terms, offer no opportunity for *seeing-in*:

Arguably correct perception of such a painting, or perception that coheres with the fulfilled intention of the artist, is not characterised by twofoldness.³⁹

There is, however, in both Newman's mature paintings and in Callum Innes's *Exposed Paintings* a form of twofoldness, for there is still a perception of pictorial space that is complex, involving as it does our simultaneous sense of the material quality of the surface and its opening out into the space of the image. What becomes twofold, I suggest, is pictorial space and physical actuality.

To begin with, I am differentiating *pictorial* from *illusionistic* space: the latter is the space that, up until the end of the nineteenth century at least, has been traditionally employed in paintings to contain depicted forms and derives chiefly from a perspectival model of seeing. *Pictorial* space is that which is created simply by marking a delimited surface: any mark upon such a surface, as Greenberg states, inevitably produces a sense of *depth*:

The heightened sensitivity of the picture plane may no longer permit sculptural illusion, or *trompe-l'oeil*, but it does and must permit optical illusion. The first mark made on a canvas destroys its literal and utter flatness, and the results of the marks made on it by an artist like Mondrian is still a kind of illusion that suggests a kind of third dimension.⁴⁰

There is no avoiding such pictorial space, not even in the rigidly orthogonal schema of a Mondrian painting and, therefore, *complete flatness* is unattainable within the traditional formats of painting, as is *complete literality*. From the first markings upon the canvas an artist must deal with the pictorial space which results, in what Greenberg describes as *optical illusion* as opposed to the *sculptural illusion* or *illusionism* of traditional perspectival painting. To put this another way, whilst an artist employs traditional *formats*, such as pieces of paper or stretched canvases, there will always be an *image* in the sense of a visual experience demarcated by the limits of that format and separate to our perception of everything beyond those limits. This delimiting, as Greenberg repeatedly insists, is crucial.⁴¹ By making efforts to severely limit the *representational* content of paintings, as Innes does in a work such as *Exposed Olive Painting No.2* of 1992, artists have produced paintings that seem to have a different kind of *presence*. When we enter a roomful of such paintings we are immediately aware of their physical presence, their *actuality*, in a way that is profoundly different to a roomful of representational paintings: in the latter case, the sense we have of their physical presence as structures that have upon their surface an image is mitigated by their illusionism, so that many representational paintings, at least from any kind of distance, contain an element of persuasion away from physicality and towards the illusory space of what they depict. The oft-used description of representational paintings as *windows* testifies to this quality. *Object-images*, in contrast, reverse this equation and persuade us of their material presence much more forcibly. We do not look through *Exposed Olive Painting No.2* but *at* it.⁴² It is this sense of the painting's actuality, of its occupying the actual space that it demarcates rather than dissolving that space into illusion that I wish to point towards with the category of *object-images*. Such paintings are not literal objects, but their physical structure takes on a greater significance than in traditional representational painting. It is these two aspects of the painting, its insistence upon physical presence as an object and its nature as an image, containing pictorial space, that are compressed into *twofoldness*.

The complexity of such twofoldness is clearly demonstrated in Mel Gooding's 1996 text about Innes's work *Looking at the Paintings: Two Meditations* in which Gooding is primarily interested in the material presence of the paintings, what he at one point calls their *actuality*.⁴³ Initially he is keen to stress that our sense of the paintings as objects may well under-pin how we perceive the image but is nevertheless secondary and that for him aspects of the paintings such as the spill of pigment on their sides are accidental and incidental, lacking the 'deliberate and systemic' quality of what lies on the canvas surface. What is important is that image 'ends at the canvas edge, and is coterminous with the rectangular plane.'⁴⁴ He offers an initial tentative description:

The distinction between image and object is important: we are looking at images created on supports prepared to the requirements of particular techniques.⁴⁵

A few paragraphs on, he qualifies:

On the sides of the stretched canvas are the inevitable traces of the operations that have created the image: these are aspects of the object.⁴⁶

A little later, as if these earlier statements have not quite satisfied him, he states:

Let us be clear then, about what it is we contemplate: a material object in which stable structures of given geometric shapes have been subjected to carefully deliberated procedures involving the interaction of unstable substances.⁴⁷

It is as if, as the text proceeds, Gooding is becoming gradually more inclined to grant greater significance to the object-like qualities of the paintings, offering here a definition that hints at an entirely material thing, an object that has 'structures' rather than an image that incidentally reveals aspects of its own materiality. He re-states once more:

The painting we encounter in the world is a material object carrying an image; it is a complex phenomenon compounded of art and nature, accident and design.⁴⁸

Finally, after a lengthy and eloquent account of temporality in the paintings, he tries again:

It is the object as a three-dimensional entity in real space, its surfaces tangible and visibly modified, that we encounter in the first place. The accidental markings on the canvas side are insistent reminders of the painting's actuality.⁴⁹

I take these remarks of Gooding's out of context not to misrepresent his argument, but to take note of the importance for Gooding of his sense of 'encounter' with these paintings and the difficulty of formulating the nature of their address. What makes that encounter so difficult to describe, or to define, is our dual perception of the paintings' object-like nature and the image they present and the

impossibility of separating out those aspects in our experience of the works. If, as Wollheim asserts in relation to twofoldness, aspects of this experience are 'capable of being described as analogous to a separate experience,' then to do so is at the cost of *perceiving the work as a whole*.⁵⁰ We can consider aspects of objecthood in the *Exposed Paintings* as separate qualities, or we can concentrate only upon the image, but in both cases we will lose what it is to experience the works in their totality. Gooding's final description in the essay is, it seems to me, that of an *object-image*: we encounter the painting as a three-dimensional entity in real space, not primarily as an illusionistic image and this actual presence is further enhanced by the fact that we can see its processes of production, the tangible and visible modifications of its surfaces.

With this notion of the *object-image* in mind, it is possible to see the early *Exposed Paintings* as presenting a particular problem to Innes in terms of how to proceed. If, to make an *object-image*, an artist has to severely limit the representational or evocative forms employed, then there is, it seems to me, an almost directly proportional gain in physical presence, in our sense of the *actuality* of the painting. I would conjecture that this is the primary motivation for most artists in making such work, often stated in terms of a desire to have the painting look *as if it made itself*, a notion that Innes sometimes evokes in relation to his own work:

What counts above all is to achieve the visual effect of something that exists in and by itself. Each painting has to be as autonomous (the old dream of abstraction) as any element in nature. From the start, Innes has wanted his work to reach 'this detached point, where things seem to have just happened of their own accord', so that 'when the viewer or even [the artist himself] approach it, [the painting] looks like it has developed by itself.'⁵¹

With the early *Exposed Paintings* I consider that Innes reaches this 'detached point' more fully – to employ the terms I have been using, they are more realised as *object-images* – but this is achieved through the drastic reduction of compositional form in such a way as to lessen, as far as possible, the evocation of observed phenomena and thereby also the kind of recessive space such forms occupy. This suggests that if Innes wishes to retain the physical presence of the *Exposed Paintings* he cannot allow back in the evocative mark-making that he has so effectively purged from the paintings. Equally he wants to avoid any sense of the dry formal exercise, for Innes has always been forthright about his desire to make paintings that have *content*.⁵² If, at this critical point in his career, Innes could look to the precedent of Barnett Newman's response to a similar dilemma, the making of *Onement 1* in 1948, he leaves little doubt as to what he perceives to be one of the potential pitfalls of that response:

There is something about Barnett Newman's paintings that is so complete, yet the paintings are at that point where they could quite possibly fail. The failure in them has nothing to do with whether or not they are bad paintings. I just think that in the late 1940s and early 1950s, Newman pushed things right to the edge where you could almost read them as being schematic or diagrammatic....They contain within them an idea of where the painting could go and where it might fail.⁵³

I want to examine the idea of 'failure' in more depth at the beginning of the next chapter in relation to Newman's paintings, but for the moment I wish only to consider that this possibility exists not only as a form of *lapsing* into illusionism, but also that a similar kind of lapsing might occur into the 'schematic or diagrammatic': in some way, the material presence of an *object-image* can be

undermined by the way a *diagram*, for instance, directs the viewer to an experience *outside* of the painting just as surely as illusionistic depiction. The apparent solution that Innes discovers to this dilemma is elegant, simple and in retrospect seems inevitable, but only because it so clearly resolves the issue of retaining the utmost physical presence whilst opening up the sequence to a more complex set of possibilities. It involves not covering the entire canvas surface with the initial paint layer but rather a rectangular area of that surface so that, to begin with, there are two zones on the canvas, one painted and one as yet untouched. Innes then dissolves away a part of that rectangular painted zone from a vertical line situated not centrally but at any point across its width. The result is a painted area, an un-painted area adjacent to it, a stained area beneath the un-painted one and an area of untouched (and unprimed) canvas adjacent to the staining: a characteristic feature of this phase of the *Exposed Paintings* is the spill of pigment that begins at one of the bottom corners of the painted area and demarcates one edge of the stained area, impinging to varying degrees on the untouched section of canvas. Once again, what is difficult to describe in words without confusion is instantly understandable before the works themselves: before *Exposed Painting, Olive* of 1994, for instance, the process of making and the resultant relation between the various areas is immediately apparent; the painted area of dark olive pigment is just off square, of roughly the same proportions as the canvas as a whole, bordered by an 'L' of unprimed canvas, the vertical section of which is stained from un-painting; this staining, darkest towards the bottom edge of the canvas, has produced a gently billowing curve of pigment that springs from the bottom left-hand corner of the painted area, as if the whole weight of the dark rectangle is seeping out and down. This simple painting, produced through such straightforward means, has a magisterial quality, a density of feeling that emanates from the clarity of its formal structure. I have stolen the adjective, I discover, from Richard Cork's account of the painting:

In *Exposed Painting, Olive*, a magisterial canvas which particularly impressed me.... the horizontal oblong of dark pigment could hardly have looked more assertive. It appeared to exude an almost sculptural solidity, and possessed an air of absolute geometric finality....Next to the horizontal block, though, Innes ensured that a vertical stream of vaporous pale brown bloomed on the canvas. The motion of water was evoked, and profound pleasure could be derived from its rigorous sensuality.⁵⁴

Cork pins down the effect of the canvas to the tension between the dissolved area and the painted rectangle, the strong sense of 'sculptural solidity' of the latter and the evocative qualities of the former, which once more trigger associations with natural process and movement. It seems as if Innes has found a way of re-introducing such imagery without losing any of the presence of the painting as 'a three dimensional object in real space' and that is primarily because the compositional format of these *Exposed Paintings* acts as a way of suppressing any illusionistic reading of the work as a whole.⁵⁵ The pleasure Cork experiences in viewing the sensual marks left by the run-off of pigment and the way in which they *manifest* such processes as the flow of water is immediately put into relation not only to his perception of the solidity of the painted rectangle, but also to the other areas of the canvas surface and, indeed, to the run-off on the side and bottom of the stretcher. It is as if the evocative content of the *Monologue Paintings* has been contained within a structure which will not allow for any sense of a single illusion but insists upon different registers of space and representation *within the same work*. What might seem like a simple technical innovation in terms of not initially covering the entire canvas surface turns out to have opened up an enormous set of possibilities for the paintings, a set of potential variations that Innes has been elaborating ever since. This basic format acts as a constant and, as the sequence progresses and our familiarity with the permutations grow, so we become sensitised to their nuances and the subtlest of changes between individual works. We look back at the earlier *Exposed Paintings* from the vantage point of our

experience of the series to date. We become much more aware, for instance, of the quality of *unprimed* canvas in these earlier phases, of the earthy shades of canvas that give these paintings a particular quality, for often the staining of the un-painting still retains the materiality, the weave, of the canvas, just made fractionally darker. Sometimes, as in *Exposed Painting, Blue Violet* of 1996, there is a yellowish tinge to the sizing, which here throws into even greater relief the contrasting plume of violet pigment that spills downwards, losing hue and definition as it does so until it fades to the canvas colour seemingly at the precise edge of the painting: the soft undulations of 'colour' in the unprimed canvas contribute greatly to the luminous beauty of this work, with its dark rectangle that releases the unexpected intensity of violet.⁵⁶

The relationship between the colour of the painted area and that of the unprimed canvas is altered in each painting by other variants, such as the size of the painted area in relation to the canvas as a whole, with its obvious corollary in terms of how much of the canvas is untouched/un-painted/stained, but also the amount of residue that Innes allows to remain on the canvas and the way in which that pigment has behaved during dissolution. In *Exposed Painting, Grey* (1994) paint covers almost all of the canvas surface with only narrow bands of canvas to the side and beneath, so that we become conscious of the painting's nearness to a monochrome field, but at the same time aware of how *different* from such a field this is: at the bottom right hand corner of the grey is a delicate irregular line of pigment that slants inwards, sending minute tendrils of paint in the same direction; there is only the faintest residue of the grey on the un-painted/stained areas, so that this spill of pigment acts not so much to separate these areas from the untouched one, but rather as a form in relation to the expanse of paint above, which in turn becomes vast in comparison; such a contrast depends upon the conscious decision to make the painted area fill so much of the surface, but also upon the *unpredictable* nature of the spill of pigment, for it is exactly the minute seepages of paint into canvas weave and the delicate line that remains which provide the painting with this

sense of scale.⁵⁷ *Exposed Painting, Cadmium Red Pale* of the same year is more modest in size and its painted area covers less than half the canvas but the assertive quality of the red makes it tempting to read reticence into the grey: what is immediately striking in this work is the spill, which here is more of a smudge, unusually short and quickly tapering out in a manner reminiscent of the *Identified Forms* paintings; if the grey painting has the suggestion of expansive space, then this red insists on its materiality and the spill has something of the accidental smear about it, as if it has been rubbed from the rectangle almost by mistake. These are, of course, subjective responses, but the *Exposed Paintings*, with their widely differing physical qualities, seem to evoke moods, to have very individual atmospheres about them.

Alongside these paintings Innes also continues to make *Exposed Paintings* that have only two vertically divided zones, though not bilaterally composed, as well as further forays into his other series, but it is this more complex form of *Exposed Painting* that comes to dominate his practice. Their format provides the basis for a sustained and rigorous exploration of a limited set of formal possibilities that prove enormously fertile for Innes as each phase of the *Exposed Paintings* gradually transmutes into the next: there are marker posts in the sense of particular moments when Innes introduces a significant innovation, perhaps none more important than starting to use primed canvas sometime in 1997, but these markers are part of a continuous evolution of the series, points of orientation rather than breaks in continuity. The shift to primed canvas, for instance, immediately produces a group of paintings that not only have a more sharp-edged quality but also leave a rectangle of untouched (though primed) canvas above the painted zone, as we can see in *Exposed Painting, Paynes Grey Deep on White* of 1997.⁵⁸ In this painting, the un-painted/stained zone has a different quality to those areas in the earlier works executed on unprimed canvas and even though it is produced using the same process of dissolution it no longer seems as concerned with *erasure* but rather more with a form of *presence*: Innes has left a relatively even layer of pigment on the canvas

surface, a greater amount than previously, producing a rectangular area of muted grey of comparable size to the dark painted grey, holding its own against that more solid block; the dissolved paint has an even texture reminiscent of soft fabric and seeps beyond its boundaries, not only along the edge of the stained area but also at the top, breaking what should be an even line with the painted zone. This last irregularity makes a huge difference for amongst other things it imbues the un-painted/stained area with a greater sense of autonomy, a separate identity to the painted zone with the suggestion that it might be placed *on top* rather than *removed from* the original layer of paint, an effect which requires the bare section of canvas above. What makes the painting even more unusual is the vein of paint that runs from the bottom right hand corner of the painted zone but within the area of staining, so that dissolved paint seems to have seeped beyond it, producing a double edge: this is exactly what Innes hopes for, I suspect, in terms of ‘things happen[ing] of their own accord’.⁵⁹ It is almost impossible to imagine *contriving* this thin runnel of paint and the effect it has upon our sense of the rectangular area it partially demarcates. It seems to exist beyond human agency, to be outside of what we might *conceive* in exactly the same way that the operations of nature are, a quality that is all the more startling for its appearance *within* the clearly contrived structure of the painting as a whole.

A considerable aspect of the impact of the *Exposed Paintings* derives from the tension, as Richard Cork suggests, between the solidity of the painted area and the vaporous or liquid qualities of the un-painted/stained zone, but what is essential in the latter case is our feeling of that part of the painting *making itself*. There is involved in this a different relationship to the medium than that found in representational painting in which the primary concern of the artist is to manipulate the medium in order to find *equivalences* for observed phenomena; whilst the artist may be more or less conscious of the physical substance of the medium and exploit to greater or lesser degrees those properties in order to add *expressive* qualities to their depictions, nevertheless they must exert

sufficient control to produce recognisable forms. The template for their actions is provided by the depiction of form, the seeking of equivalence. When we consider Innes's methods of dissolution it seems clear that this is not the case. He is allowing form to *emerge* and his handling of the medium is far more to do with acquiring an understanding of how certain materials behave under particular conditions, most frequently how oil paint responds to the action of turpentine. His practice takes on the form of a series of experiments, testing different grounds, types of paint, quantities of turpentine, modes of application, combining various chemicals under conditions of gravity; it is this quasi-scientific aspect of Innes's practice that Gooding emphasizes in his efforts at precise definition and phrases such as 'carefully deliberated procedures involving the interaction of unstable substances.'⁶⁰ The studio becomes something of a laboratory.⁶¹ Such a mode of working can obviously contain a large element of unpredictability and Innes is a harsh editor of his own work, ruthlessly destroying paintings that do not satisfy him and capable of sacrificing successful ones when it suits his purposes.⁶² He is looking, then, for particular qualities and only a certain percentage of his output will survive. What those qualities are, as far as can be put into words, depend upon the balance in the final work between the imposed structure and the unexpected and unpredictable behaviour of the paint. It is those unimaginable nuances of form, such as the vein of pigment in *Exposed Painting, Paynes Grey Deep on White*, which make a painting exceptional. As Paul Bonaventura puts it in an interview with Innes:

With the Exposed Paintings, in particular, I am constantly struck by the tension between the absolute control involved in setting up the painting, and the loss of control involved in its dissolution. You initiate the scenario and influence its maturation, but that maturation involves a degree of unpredictability. I would argue that the fundamental subject and meaning of your work resides in the viewer's experience of this tension, however unconscious.⁶³

Innes's manipulation of his medium, then, allows for a degree of loss of control, though not a complete renunciation: indeed it is clear that each painting adds to a store of intuitive knowledge that allows the artist to predict more fully the outcomes of his processes and 'influence' the behaviour of the medium with increasing assurance as the sequence develops;

It's softness. The softness in that green. Not the trail, but the softness, and that started to occur when I was taking the green off, and it surprised me that it was occurring. But now I know how that works, I can use it again and next time it won't be an accident. The process becomes directed.⁶⁴

Innes learns, in other words, how to increase the chances of bringing about those serendipities of effect in the final paintings that seem to defy any kind of deliberate conception or contrivance and provide that sense of tension against the ordered structure of the painting as a whole. The contrast with representational modes seems to be not just a matter of technical manipulation, but to do with the ways in which *handling* reveals the artist, for it is exactly that sense of the *medium revealing the artist* that Innes apparently wants to avoid. There is a suspicion not just of the kind of *mythic* representational painting that Innes himself engaged with in the early eighties, in which the personality of the artist is *dramatized* in self-reflecting scenarios, but also and perhaps more significantly of the idea that certain *gestural* ways of mark-making are revealing of their maker's personality or in some way capable of containing emotion.

Daniel Sturgis, in his introduction to the exhibition *The Indiscipline of Painting* which he curated in 2011, connects a widespread avoidance of 'direct and self-expressive handling of paint' with 'a strand of contemporary anxiety that regards the gestural and the idea of self-expression as being in some sense contrived.'⁶⁵ Where Innes differs from many of the painters in that exhibition is in his desire to avoid the hard-edged or graphic, the 'schematic or diagrammatic', but he nevertheless evinces the same impulse to remove himself, his personality, from the surface of the painting. If identity is involved at all, it is in the guiding sensibility that over-sees the paintings' production, as Eric deChassey describes:

'But it should be emphasized again that this personal identity is not a direct projection of the artist's self in the painting: it doesn't come through expressionist brushstrokes but through contrived and distanced means, through choices and decisions (including the destruction of a large amount of what is produced) that the viewer can assess by looking closely at the finished work (the brushstrokes, when obvious, never appear as indexes of the subjectivity that was once there and created them). These decisions are metonymies of the depersonalised self...'⁶⁶

This process of removal of the artist's self, so that the marks made upon the canvas no longer speak of the artist's subjectivity, is the necessary counter-point to our sense of the painting's actuality, as crucial as the suppression of representational form, for the moment we read into a mark, such as one of deKooning's dragged and scraped brushmarks, the supposed *feeling* of the artist-maker then we are effectively removed from the *actual* and transposed to the *metaphorical*. Here is the connection between Innes's painting processes and the attributes of the *object-image*: that in giving himself over to the physical behaviour of his materials Innes can avoid the personalised gesture and

thus retain the physical presence of the paintings even whilst allowing for a greater resonance of evocative qualities. This necessarily dictates how the *Exposed Paintings* are made, the way in which Innes moves from one painting to the next through the sequence, for in not seeking to manifest aspects of his own personality or new thematic content in each work the artist is able to respond to material aspects of the paintings, to find paintings through a series of gradual alterations in their process of production. Whilst painting, Innes *immerses* himself in the physical properties of the medium in a way eloquently described by Fiona Bradley:

Turpentine, his favoured agent of destruction, works against oil paint at a particular rate, the physicality of which is inscribed into each painting. The movement of turpentine against paint is also the movement of artist against canvas, and as the turpentine either washes exuberantly across the paint, or eats painstakingly into it, Innes might be said to be conducting, keeping time, providing the temporal and spatial armature within which and against which the paint and the turpentine play.⁶⁷

What this description does is to suggest the way in which the boundary between the artist's consciousness and the behaviour of the medium can be broken down, so that there is no clear dividing line between pictorial decision and, in this case, the behaviour of paint and turpentine. The fluidity of this situation is mirrored in an actual fluidity, the motion of paint and dissolving liquid:

The artist has spoken about a crucial moment during the making of his paintings when the whole surface of the canvas on which he is working starts to move and flow. This may well be a point of actual movement, when the paint and the turpentine are in flux, but it also

seems to express a more conceptual moment, when the painting begins to know where it might be going.⁶⁸

This is to reverse our usual understanding of the relationship between the *conception* of a work and its *realisation* in a physical medium. It is generally assumed that an artist, or at least a painter, has some kind of an idea which is then more or less translated into a physical painting: instead of this, Innes is clearly finding the image through the behaviour of the medium and his extreme *attentiveness* to its alterations upon the canvas surface. In relation to Richard Wollheim's understanding of a medium, Carolyn Wilde considers this kind of reversal with regard to *style*, seeing it as 'a method of looking that is publicly constituted through the materials of the art'.⁶⁹ She goes on to broaden the scope of this idea:

The first [claim] is not simply that creative thought is intrinsically a process of thought imaginatively projected in terms of some specific medium, but that in being actively directed within a medium, the possibilities and constraints of the material itself moderate and redirect the working the process.⁷⁰

Here the medium becomes more than simply the means for the realisation of an idea and at the very least such an idea is reformulated in the process of working with materials. This reformulation becomes in Innes's painting an *explicit* aspect of the work. In the *Exposed Paintings* we can see how the materiality of the medium is fundamental to form, how the ideas that lie behind each painting have come to be *manifested* in its final appearance. If, as Maurice Merleau-Ponty suggests, speaking is not the *externalising* of thought but rather *thought coming into being*, then thought only finds a form as we speak.⁷¹ These paintings demonstrate a similar principle with regard to what Wilde calls

creative thought; it is only during the process of their making that such thought comes into being. I would by no means limit this idea to *object-images* or even non-representational painting, but I would argue that something of the directness of the thought coming into being through the manipulation of the medium is especially apparent in the *Exposed Paintings*. Innes's shift to such a manner of working and his discovery that processes of dissolution could unlock such creative thinking to an unprecedented degree in his work is what lies behind the longevity and fecundity of the *Exposed Paintings*: in many respects the paintings generate themselves, not only in the way that individual works can be strongly suggestive of those to follow but also in the richness of possibility that emerges from *recognising* the central importance of materiality in the painting process. The *Exposed Paintings* as a body of work reveal an unfolding of permutations and variations that are grounded in a constant exploration of the physical properties of the medium. Beyond the year 1997 this unfolding, if anything, accelerates as Innes produces an ever greater number of *Exposed Paintings* that exploit a wider range of processes and physical characteristics of the medium. The shift to primed canvas, for instance, is quite possibly the catalyst for the *multi-layering* of colour that Innes begins to explore shortly after, applying two, three or even more layers of colour to the canvas, with partial drying times in between, before commencing to dissolve those layers with turpentine. *Exposed Painting, Charcoal Black/Red Violet on White* (1998) reveals the richness of possibilities that this technical change opens up for the artist: as with *Exposed Painting, Paynes Grey Deep on White* of the year before, there is a rectangular section of primed but untouched canvas at the top of the painting and the un-painted/stained area has a considerable presence, with a great deal of pigment left on the canvas surface compared to earlier *Exposed Paintings*; the layering of the two colours has, however, produced some notable differences, not only the subtlety of colour that runs through the un-painted/stained area, but more dramatically the dividing line that has been produced by having more of the red violet remain than the charcoal black, producing a ghostly twin to the painted zone. Innes has also left a good deal of the black on the canvas, but mainly beneath that dividing line, imbuing the stained area with an atmospheric set of striations that are bordered

by a dark irregular edge that comes into crisp focus next to the dazzling white of primed canvas. In the final painting there are four roughly equivalent almost square areas beneath the untouched canvas at the top whose interrelations are complex and subtle, beyond 'the grain of language' in terms of how we perceive their contrasts, commonalities and the delicate edges that demarcate the transitions, so that we are forced to reach for metaphors to attempt to describe what we are seeing. Once we have examined the various zones of the painting, however, we come back to its presence as a single entity and the remarkable cohesion that seems to exist between its various areas, the sense we have that they are all of a piece.

Exposed Painting, Paynes Grey/Yellow Oxide/Red Oxide on White (1999) takes up some of these qualities and adds a richer, warmer base of colour: it reverses the format of the earlier painting, makes even clearer the division between un-painted and stained zone and floats the vertical runnels of Paynes Grey pigment even more diaphanously *over the top of* the delicate red/yellow bands of dissolved paint.⁷² In places the Paynes Grey has left small islands of pigment, as well as accumulating along the bottom edge and these irregularities confer an unexpected sense of solidity on the stained area, as if it were flaking away like metal. Such associations, in my mind at least, are far from stable as the various spaces of the painting interact and alter, but what interests me here is the way that this painting takes its cue from the earlier work and, in turn, opens up other possibilities. This is not a linear development, leading from one to the next, but *cyclic* and involves a constant process of consolidation, innovation and re-visiting of previous work. In 2000, for instance, Innes returns to unprimed canvas for a group of *Exposed Paintings* which differ from earlier unprimed canvases in that they employ the band of untouched canvas at the top of the painting; a surprising result of this move, a sense of the painted zone *cutting into* the 'U' shape around it, is rapidly explored in versions done on primed canvas. This is to simplify and to suggest that Innes is only involved with one formal aspect of a work at a time, which is clearly not the case, not even to

the extent of thinking of them primarily in formal terms, but it is one way of speaking about the *Exposed Paintings* and approaching the density of inter-relationship between paintings. The various series cross-fertilise and the *Exposed Paintings* in particular reflect back the on-going concerns of other works. The concentrated exploration of colour that the artist undertakes in his watercolours, for instance, has surely influenced the increasing range of hues that appear in the *Exposed Paintings*, especially from the time he begins to work on primed canvas, a richness of colour that gives way, early in the new century, to an extended exploration of black pigments. To give some idea of the difficulty of mapping these relations with any clarity one only needs to turn to the interview conducted with the artist in 1996 in which he reveals that he has already begun to *apply* areas that look like they have been dissolved.⁷³ We might think we know how these paintings are made but their appearances can certainly be deceptive.

It might be conjectured that to properly understand how some of the features of the *Exposed Paintings* are produced, such as the thin dark line between the un-painted and the stained areas of *Exposed Painting Green Lake* with which I began, one would need to make versions of them and test different ways of applying, leaving to dry and dissolving the paint layers. They are paintings that contain this experiential aspect and I have examined some of the formal evidence of their processes of production in order to make a link between the artist's direct engagement with the physicality of his medium and the physical presence of the works as object-images. His processes of production, I have argued, are partly concerned with an avoidance not only of representation but also the kind of mark-making that has come to be identified with the mental or emotive state of the artist; by removing as far as possible such indexical marks, the paintings are distanced from their producer and have a more concrete presence in the actual space that they inhabit. In order to accommodate this link between the artist's use of medium and the physical presence of the final painting I consider it necessary to amend my definition of the object-image by adding on something like Mel Gooding's

phrase about 'tangible and visibly modified surfaces.'⁷⁴ This raises the question of why Gooding should employ both 'tangible' and 'visibly modified' as descriptors to characterise the surfaces of Innes's paintings and, in a later section, I intend to partially answer this question in terms of the inseparability of our senses and the way in which the visible contains the tangible and vice versa, but for simplicity's sake I want to insist only on the necessity of the 'visibly modified'. Thinking of the paintings' surfaces in this way leads me to consider the limitations of 'physical structure' in my definition, for the notion I have of the presence of the *Exposed Paintings* is something more than an awareness of canvas stretched over wooden bars. The word 'presence' is important here with its connotation of the way in which we, as human beings, occupy space so I think it is important to find a term which goes beyond simply the nuts and bolts of structure towards an inference of the body and the word perhaps best suited to this purpose is *corporeality*. My proposed definition of the object-image, so far worked out largely in relation to the *Exposed Paintings*, therefore reads as follows: object-images are paintings that make a viewer as much aware of their corporeality as of the image that is in or on that object and whose surfaces are visibly modified.

There are still clearly questions to be asked about this definition of which the most vital is perhaps the way in which a viewer is 'made aware' of this corporeality, a problem I intend to address in subsequent sections of this thesis. More immediately I want to widen the scope of the thesis beyond the *Exposed Paintings* and begin to evaluate this definition of *object-images* in relation to paintings by earlier artists and test it against other formulations of the balance between the literal and the pictorial in such works. In order to do so I now turn my attention to an earlier period and place and look at American painting around the middle of the last century.

Chapter Two.

Objecthood Reconsidered: Object-Images in Mid-Twentieth Century American Painting

Chapter Two considers the notion of the object-image in relation to American painting and sculpture from the middle of the twentieth century and some of the contemporary criticism which grappled with issues of literality in that work. The chapter begins with a consideration of Barnett Newman's paintings, drawing out certain parallels with Callum Innes and making the case for regarding those paintings as object-images. A comparison is made with Piet Mondrian's paintings and the idea of the dematerialisation of the canvas, as a counter-movement to that of literality, is first introduced.

Greenberg's response to Newman's paintings is considered, especially in relation to his shift from literality towards the idea of opticality. A similar turning away from materiality is evident in Michael Fried's critical writing from the period and this is explored in relation to Frank Stella's paintings, putting both into the context of the dispute between Fried and two artist/theorists, Donald Judd and Robert Morris. I argue that these two opposing camps impose a transitional status upon Stella's paintings, seeing them as leading to either the specific object or the re-assertion of the pictorial and thereby polarising the literal and the pictorial: it is for this reason that no theoretical equivalent of the object-image was devised at the time.

At this point the notion of dematerialisation is re-introduced and various strands of Post-Minimalist painting and sculpture are considered in relation to the breaking down of the object-like quality of the artwork. Returning to Frank Stella's paintings as examples of an emphasis upon materiality and structure, his earlier work is briefly assessed in the light of the influence upon the artist of Jasper Johns and the prevalence of Neo-Dadaist attitudes in American painting and sculpture. The ever

closer links between these two mediums are interrogated through a comparison between Frank Stella's paintings with the sculpture of Carl Andre until the chapter returns to Barnett Newman and his sculptural work *Here I* (1950), drawing together the various strands of literality and dematerialisation in relation to Newman's thinking about *place*. Newman's ideas around space and time leads to a first consideration of the phenomenology of such painting and the aspiration towards a non-physical domain around the viewer is considered in the light of earlier artists' efforts to imbue abstract painting with a spiritual dimension. The closeness of such ambitions to the conception of such painting in musical terms is examined, both in relation to early twentieth century artists and those American artists and composers active in the second half of the twentieth century. The chapter ends with a look at Robert Mangold's *Zone Paintings* (1996 onwards) in order to focus these notions of image and non-image in particular works.

I want to begin by considering the transition that took place in Barnett Newman's work in 1948 with the painting of *Onement 1* and linking that shift to what I see as a parallel development in Callum Innes's paintings. Innes often cites Newman as an influence and I think it is possible to see how Newman's paintings offer a model for the *Exposed Paintings*. This model, I would suggest, is that of the *object-image* and I want to trace how Barnett Newman re-defines his own practice and moves towards a different conception of what a painting might be. By the 1940's Newman is making paintings that employ a biomorphic type of imagery, loosely derived from Surrealist painting, which deals with grand themes that revolve around the origins of life, often couched in Biblical terminology. Though these paintings are meticulously planned and executed, they have an improvisational air, especially in terms of application of paint: the artist seems bent on cramming as many different modes of application as possible into these works so that their relative simplicity of composition is countered by an unusual complexity of mark-making. *Pagan Void* of 1946, for instance, has a centrally-placed irregular circular form, a kind of hoop, which is contained within a

plasma-like area of light that spreads tendrils and jagged edges out towards the dark corners of the canvas; within that lighter area there are all kinds of experiments with wet-into-wet paint that on the one hand are suggestive of biological forms, but on the other seem all too clearly to be manipulations of the medium. There are stab-like blotches of paint and palette-knife smearings and rivulets of liquid paint that have coagulated and dried, but all this variety is not suggestive of a teeming multitude of life-forms so much as the artist's activity and of the versatility of paint as a medium. There is a tension between the way in which Newman is drawing attention to the physical properties of the medium and his desire to depict events on a cosmic scale that is particularly evident in these paintings and reveals a mismatch between his intentions and his methods. It leads to some jarring examples such as *Genesis: The Break* of the same year in which, with thick paint, Newman has scrawled the title across a chasm of space so that we can neither believe in the Biblical event being presented nor, for that matter, in the surface immediacy of paint that such an act seems to foreground.¹ The mismatch arises from the artist's *conception* of what these paintings are, as Newman's own later statements appear to testify, but his immediate response is to simplify, gradually taking out more and more of the biomorphic imagery until he ends up with works such as *Moment* (1946), a field of streaked brownish colour bisected by a single band of lighter yellow.² *Moment* still retains, however, the aspiration to depict a cosmic event: that brownish field is meant to be read as a vast, murky space riven by a band of light, perhaps the Original Light, and no matter how simplified the composition the painting still fails to convince, either in terms of cosmic event or as a physical surface covered with paint.

This problem is only resolved, more or less by accident, when Newman makes *Onement 1*. The story is too well-rehearsed in the extant literature to need recounting other than to briefly describe the painting itself.³ Like *Moment*, *Onement 1* consists of a field of colour bisected by a vertical strip of colour, though in this case the field is of a flatly applied brownish-red and the central strip is of

masking tape with a roughly applied layer of Cadmium Red, initially applied to test the colour but then allowed to remain. This relatively small painting becomes Newman's point of conversion, his epiphany, and it is so because it finally offers him an alternative to *depiction*. The crucial differences between *Onement 1* and *Moment* are to do with ridding the painting of what the artist subsequently refers to as *atmospherics* which, in this context, carries a negative connotation that reflects back on the pre-1947 paintings.⁴ It is those dry-dragged brushmarks in the brown field of *Moment* that create the sense of an illusionistic space, just as surely as all the improvisatory marks in *Pagan Void* are meant to float in an equally illusionistic space. All such tonal irregularities and spontaneous mark-making, Newman realises, serve the same cause, which is to turn the canvas into a space, or a void, to be filled with forms.⁵ The shock that *Onement 1* offers the artist is that the canvas has not become such a void waiting to be filled, has not hollowed itself out into illusionistic space but rather has become itself a field, a demarcated area of activity. The layer of red that Newman laid down for *Onement 1* was a preliminary coat and is therefore devoid of intentional manipulation, more or less a flat area of colour; it resists being read as recessive space, in fact it positively suggests a lack of such space and simply declares itself, an area of red-coloured canvas. The central strip is equally declarative; its nature as a 'test' side-stepping any depictive intention so that the blandly applied paint states itself with a similar directness to the surrounding field. It is this unpremeditated directness that characterises *Onement 1* and instigates Newman's reconsideration of his conception of what a painting *is*: instead of being a container for preconceived imagery it becomes a much more physically present object, as far as possible emptied of any illusionistic content, a distinction that is neatly encapsulated in the artist's preference for the word *painting* over *picture*.⁶ It is presumably this change in his understanding of painting which causes Newman to stop working and take stock, for as the first viewer of the *Onement 1* Newman must have found himself under pressure to understand the implications of what he perceived to be a profound shift in the very terms of what defines painting.⁷

We can see the results of those ruminations in the paintings that the artist went on to make, for after this point Newman works in a completely different manner: no longer conceiving of the canvas as a void or space to be filled with forms means that he must *act upon* the canvas rather than pre-conceiving forms and then fitting them into illusionistic space. If this takes Newman away from preconception as well as mimetic mark-making, it simultaneously presents the artist with the problem of how to act upon the canvas, how to fill the field of its surface, though he does have a model for such activity in terms of having already made *Onement 1*. The works that immediately follow *Onement 1* and indeed all of Newman's subsequent output can be regarded as the working out of the implications of that breakthrough painting as he finds ways of repeating the immediacy of *Onement 1* without simply repeating exactly how it is made.⁸ Initially he retains the bilateral composition which allows him to explore ways of producing specific areas of the paintings and more particularly to consider the relationship between the *zip*, in this case the centralised vertical section, and those areas of the field that surround the zip. As the artist's statements make clear, what becomes important to him at this point is achieving a unified field of colour in which the zips form part of a continuum rather than being perceived as separate figures that exist either in front of or behind the rest of the field; they are intended to be *contiguous*, simply more contained sections of the field in terms of lateral extension.⁹ In order to produce this contiguity Newman finds different ways of making both the zips and rest of the field so that far from being *applied to* the field, which would be too reminiscent of how he considers *imagery* to be applied to an illusionistic space, they are created simultaneously and often *revealed* through masking rather than painted on top of colour. In placing his zips, the artist generally begins by using masking tape, often of varying widths, around which an initial field of colour is applied: from this point, Newman employs a range of methods to locate and define the zips more precisely, including over-painting both zips and field, removing and re-applying masking tape, even on occasion painting over the masking tape as he did with *Onement 1*.¹⁰ One of the results of this complexity of application is considerable variety in the physical qualities of the zips and especially their edges: the zips bleed into their surrounding field

and vice versa, they spill beyond their initially masked channel or adhere to its limits, they are flecked with previous applications or slowly built up through layers, but in all cases they reveal something of *their physical process of making*, rather than being anonymously applied.

Covenant of 1949 might serve as an example. It is a maroon painting that contains two zips: one that is dark and crisply defined, neatly painted within the initially masked channel and then embedded further into the field by re-masking as further coats of maroon are applied; the other a beige zip that has clearly transgressed its initial boundaries, the loosely applied colour forming irregular edges that also reveal flecks of an earlier green under-painting.¹¹ That the two zips of *Covenant* have different physical qualities, distinct *identities*, works in conjunction with their placement to make it difficult to reduce the painting to easily understood or measurable relations: we might at first suspect that the zips take their place in relation to a centre line of the canvas as a whole, but then it becomes clear that this is not the case, just as the composition does not centre upon one or other of the zips; the whole thing is subtly asymmetrical, de-stabilising what might have been regarded as an essential balance in the earlier paintings, though *Covenant* loses nothing in terms of immediacy and impact. As Yve-Alain Bois notes, the artist discovers that it is the *lateral* part of bilateral that is important, the spreading of the composition and the viewer's attention across the width of the painting and the implications that this holds for our experience before them.¹² All of this is comparable to the development of the *Exposed Paintings* that likewise emerge from an expulsion of representational forms from the artist's work, have a similar moment of definition with the making of a compositionally reduced and centralised painting, then go on to extrapolate out from that painting gradually more complex works that both retain their physical immediacy and reveal in various ways their process of production. The huge significance for both Innes and Newman of *how they find edges* reveals the underlying similarity of intention behind their works and the way that both artists endeavour to give their works an immediate physical presence.

Their works are object-images: paintings that make a viewer as much aware of their corporeality as of the image that is on or in that object, and whose surfaces are visibly modified.

The vital importance of how the artist deals with edges, both in terms of any compositional forms and in relation to the literal edge of the canvas or paper, immediately brings to mind Piet Mondrian's paintings and the long interrogation of such matters which is evident in them. The mythic element in Barnett Newman's retrospective accounts of making *Onement 1*, his building of a narrative around that painting as a point of origin and as a wholly new kind of painting, somewhat obscures the relationship between his paintings and those of the Dutchman. From roughly 1920 onwards Mondrian pared down the compositional elements in his paintings to the orthogonal formats for which he became known, the grids of black lines containing rectangles of colour, for the most part restricted to the primary colours, white, grey and black. We can follow through in his earlier work the gradual suppression of representational forms that we have noted in both Newman's and Innes's paintings and the turn to a non-representational mode of composition which involves a radically reduced number of pictorial elements that are strongly related to the literal dimensions of the canvas. We might say, then, that Mondrian's paintings are an earlier example of *object-images* and as such reveal an artist dealing with many of the issues and possibilities I am exploring in relation to the later artists' work.

To give only a brief example of this we can see in Mondrian's post-1920 paintings different ways of dealing with how the depicted forms in a painting meet its literal edge, variations that reveal different ways of *thinking about* the edge, or boundary, of a painting. The most obvious manifestation of this in Mondrian's paintings is the way in which the black lines which form their grid meet that edge or rather, in some cases, fall short of it. In *Composition with Red, Blue, Black, Yellow*

and Grey of 1921, for instance, the thick black lines meet the edge on the right hand side of the canvas and in the bottom left hand corner, above a black square which fills that corner, but elsewhere, next to the red and yellow rectangles, they stop a few millimetres short of the edge.¹³ The difference is considerable. Where they meet the edge, the black lines strongly suggest a continuation of the pictorial forms beyond that point, so that the blue rectangle is not initially read as a bar of colour running up the right hand side of the canvas but rather a more expansive area which continues beyond the literal edge of the painting. Where the black lines fall short of the edge, however, the colour areas, the yellow and the red, read much more as complete areas on the canvas surface, especially in the case of the red rectangle which optically pushes forward in front of the black lines. This opens up the possibility of regarding the blue rectangle as a contained area, especially as it is of identical thickness to its bordering black line, but at best it remains in dispute, wavering between the two possibilities.

What is signalled in the oscillation of the blue rectangle are two ways of reading the surface of the painting, often put in terms of the image having a centrifugal or a centripetal quality, the former suggestive of the grid expanding out beyond the confines of the literal canvas, so that what we are seeing is in essence a fragment of a much larger whole, the latter indicative of an image that is contained within its borders and compresses inwards under the pressure of those literal dimensions.¹⁴ These two readings are rarely definitive and reveal a tension that is evident in most of Mondrian's paintings between the physical presence of the painting and the dissolution of that presence through the endeavour to create a different order of pictorial space. Mondrian called this space *pure reality* and, in several of his theoretical texts, describes his aim of using planes of colour not to establish pictorial depth but rather to dispense with it altogether and create for the viewer an awareness of space that does not depend upon situating objects in space so much as grasping the nature of space itself. Objects, or *forms*, are for Mondrian composed of space made 'concrete only

through its determination.¹⁵ In order to reveal space it became necessary to avoid any particular forms, that is any determinate areas of space, and to do this Mondrian limited himself to rectangular planes of colour that, lacking any contrasting forms, do not take on the particularity of forms but rather exist in dynamic relation with each other. That this process involves a form of dematerialisation of the canvas itself becomes clearer when we see photographs of Mondrian's studios in which those planes of colour detach themselves altogether and move onto the walls and furniture: here again, Mondrian's intention was not to clarify the spatial relationships of the room which comprised his studios, but rather to break down the confines of walls and surface planes and open up an awareness of *pure reality* or a larger unity of space.¹⁶ This breaking down of surface planes might also be seen as part of a wider set of concerns that operate in the work of other members of DeStijl and which lead away from painting and sculpture towards different kinds of objects or architectural space or even less physically tangible forms of image-making, such as film.¹⁷

In considering centrifugal and centripetal readings of Mondrian's paintings it seems clear that the artist himself was most concerned with breaking down the literal boundary of the edges of the canvas and evoking a space beyond the painting itself. It nevertheless remains possible to see his paintings in terms of the *object-image* and the various ways in which they insist upon the material actuality of their medium and the physical structure of their support. This seeming contradiction, between physical actuality and the dematerialisation of the painting, might seem less perplexing once we consider how we perceive *all* objects and is of relevance to an understanding of how Barnett Newman both wished to have his paintings as an immediate physical presence *and* deal with different kinds of spatial experience – such as that offered by the tundra, for example – but for the moment I want to put those considerations aside and return to the notion of 'failure' as it might be applied to Newman's work.

Yve-Alain Bois, in a succession of texts, has taken Newman's work painting by painting in order to analyse the developmental links between works, a set of inter-relationships that he compares to a pack of cards in that each painting takes its place within an overall schema and can be categorised according to various groupings and sub-sets.¹⁸ Within this over-arching scheme Bois sees some paintings as more successful than others, as fulfilling the potential opened up by earlier works and offering greater possibilities for future paintings, an idea that relates to the model of artistic activity proposed by Clement Greenberg and Michael Fried in which the artist must grapple with the formal problems of paintings and endeavour to find the most effective, that is *successful*, solution.¹⁹ This opens up the possibility, potentially, of *failing* to find such solutions and for Bois such 'failures', and he always uses the word in inverted commas, occur in Newman's work when he lapses back into the suggestion of illusionistic space.²⁰ This happens, for instance, in all those paintings that employ horizontal, rather than vertical, zips, for the irresistible association with horizon lines creates an expansive illusionistic space and tips the picture plane. The zip then becomes a point in space with distance both in front and beyond: the unified nature of the field as a whole is thus lost, which makes us realise just how sensitive the *intactness* of that field is, dependent upon the careful repression of any illusionistic space. The problem is exacerbated, Bois contends, when Newman uses *shading* on the zips, as he does in *Horizon Light* of 1949, producing an odd effect of the zip bending laterally in space and once again disrupting our perception of the overall field of the painting.²¹ This sensitivity of the picture plane, the difficulty of keeping it intact and 'flat' in the sense of avoiding an illusionistic space, is partly behind Newman's criticisms of Mondrian, in whose paintings he detected too much 'compositional rhetoric.' It is the *relational* nature of Mondrian's compositions which Newman is taking issue with, even if he mistakenly regards that as the result of geometric abstraction rather than an intuitive mode of working which, in fact, is close to his own. For Newman it became important to avoid any of the kind of 'fussing' which Mondrian was forced into as he filled-in his rectangular areas and which carried with it the risk of evoking pictorial depth, or atmosphere.²²

Callum Innes locates the risk of 'failure' in Newman's work elsewhere: taking out the 'atmospherics' and paring the paintings down to basic compositional schemes, Newman runs the risk of lapsing not into illusionism but a different form of *sign*, the diagram.²³ The diagram bears a relation to something beyond itself and offers up information regarding the properties of that thing: it refers the viewer on to another form of experience in a comparable way to illusionistic painting, but does so in a more schematic manner: it renders down information and provides it in the most clearly accessible and understandable form. Most diagrams are explanations of how something works. This would clearly have been anathema to Newman who, in his writings, is constantly at pains to stress the intuitive nature of his paintings and their value as *embodiments* of experience, rather than any form of depiction or technical understanding.²⁴ It is for this reason that the artist always proposed that his paintings, especially his larger works, should be viewed from close-up, only a metre or so away, so that the field of the painting surrounds and envelops the viewer, making more difficult any rendering down to geometrical relationship.²⁵ Newman is even more allergic than Innes to the suggestion that he is engaged in some kind of formalist exercise, which in his writing is connected to the idea of 'pseudo-science' and to the many atrocities that he sees committed under the guise of rationality.²⁶ Hard-edged abstraction, in Newman's view, suffers from exactly this kind of damaging mentality, hence his insistence upon his own work's experiential nature and the constant evidencing of *process* in the paintings themselves.²⁷ If Newman thought that he had created a new *form* of painting – and in various texts he looks for other words to describe them, such as *ideographs*, in his efforts to define this new-ness – then it is primarily characterised by its physical presence and its occupation of the same space as the viewer.²⁸ To lapse into the diagrammatic is to lose this physical presence just as surely as when the painting becomes an illusionistic space. If we think of Newman's paintings as *object-images* then clearly they must avoid these two poles of 'failure', the illusionistic and the diagrammatic, to retain that sense we have of their physical structure.

Mel Gooding makes a crucial distinction in relation to Innes's paintings that is pertinent to this context in that he regards those works as *images* rather than *signs*, linking the latter to more hard-edged modes of geometric abstraction:

Thus it is that we speak of image rather than of sign, for the sign requires no indication of the manner of its making, and does its work as an autonomous carrier of meaning, as is the case in historical modes of geometric abstraction....It is quite different in Innes's work, where the image on the plane is not independent of its support, but derives its deepest meanings, in reference to time, space, matter and energy, from its material history.²⁹

This idea that a painting can avoid being a sign and in some way more directly manifest 'reality' is a potent one in relation to non-representational painting. However, for the moment, I only want to connect both Newman's and Innes's insistence on the value of their material processes and their distancing themselves from formalist painting with this notion of the image as direct and experiential, rather than as 'an autonomous carrier of meaning.'³⁰ The evidencing of process in *object-images* is an important part of what keeps their physical materiality in the forefront of the viewer's mind and separates them not only from illusionistic painting but also those forms of abstract painting that conceal such process and thereby potentially become diagrammatic or removed from experience. We find then an unexpected conjunction of qualities in the *object-image*, for on the one hand they tend to emphasize the literal shape of their support and employ various devices to assert its significance and on the other they reveal the material properties of the medium and the processes of its application: both strategies aim at the same result, which is to underscore the *corporeality* of the painting, its physical presence in actual space. We can see in this context why

Newman is so conscientious about the placing and making of the zips in his paintings and perhaps also why Innes feels a risk of failure in them, as if that evidencing of process might not be sufficiently visible to mitigate the reductive simplicity of Newman's compositions.

The harsh critical reception given to Barnett Newman's paintings when they were initially exhibited and in the subsequent decade has been well documented and reveals that there was little immediate effort to understand them in terms of their nature as paintings. One of the few to try was, predictably, Clement Greenberg, an early supporter of the artist's work, though his first short reviews reveal a certain perplexity before the paintings: he assures his readers of the work's importance, though says little about why, and places them in the forefront of a challenge to the easel painting without being able to say what kind of painting they are, exactly;

They may not be easel paintings, or murals in any accepted sense, but what do difficulties of category matter?³¹

By this point in time (1952) such categories already matter a great deal to Greenberg and the apparently throwaway nature of the question conceals uncertainty. During the late forties the critic had worked out a good deal of the framework that would culminate in his influential account of Modernist painting and his essay "The Crisis of the Easel Picture" (1948) outlines one of his principal areas of concern, the gradual displacement of the easel picture as the dominant form of European painting, or rather its 'destruction' at the hands of those artists engaged with abstraction.³² The crisis is one of pictorial space and the way that 'the illusion of a boxlike cavity into the wall' is being replaced by a model for painting that depends upon an awareness of surface and materiality.³³ Greenberg sees this as an almost inevitable consequence of what he regards to be the important

painting of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and, connecting this development to a 'materialism' that characterises American society in general, sees the new form of painting as increasingly concerned with the implications of its own object-like nature.³⁴

He detects in Cubism, for instance, a 'new realization of, and new respect for, the nature of the picture plane as a material object'.³⁵ In translating onto the picture plane not the appearance of objects but rather 'the internal logic by which objects are organised' Picasso and Braque, in Greenberg's account, come to a new awareness of the painting as a material object, one which depends upon respecting the essential flatness of the picture plane.³⁶ No longer tied to the concrete appearance of objects the two artists looked instead to their underlying structures and transposed those relations onto the physical surface of the painting.³⁷ If this meant re-thinking the relation between objects and their surrounding space, it also brought with it a new way of conceiving of the picture plane and a breaking down of established modes of representation. As cubist paintings became more schematic they also became ever more closely associated with the materiality of the painting as an object until Picasso and Braque took the inevitable step of adding more tactile materials, or even actual objects, to that surface. The development of collage is a further flattening of pictorial space and insistence upon material surface over represented space so that it becomes possible to consider a type of painting that is more like a wall than a cavity:

There is a persistent urge, as persistent as it is largely unconscious, to go beyond the cabinet picture, which is destined to occupy only a spot on the wall, to a kind of picture that, without actually becoming identified with the wall like a mural, would *spread* over it and acknowledge its physical reality.³⁸

Greenberg is at pains to stress the way in which Cubism emerges from and retains representational content or, at least, 'the logic by which bodies are organised in actual space' and sees the transposition of this logic as underlying the development of abstract painting such as Mondrian's.³⁹ It is in this way that Greenberg can describe abstract painting as 'naturalistic' in that it refers 'to the structure of the given world both outside and inside human beings.'⁴⁰ This last is of some significance in relation to Barnett Newman's paintings, suggesting as it does the importance of their size in relation to human dimensions and how our inner mechanisms of perception might be brought into play and leads to one of Greenberg's first insights into Newman's paintings, their relation to the environment around the painting:

These paintings have an effect that makes one know immediately that he is in the presence of art. They constitute, moreover, the first kind of painting I have seen that accommodates itself stylistically to the demand of modern interior architecture for flat, clear surfaces and strictly parallel divisions.⁴¹

These shifts, from painting as represented space to painting as wall, or as an aspect of an architectural environment, lead Greenberg to different ways of characterising our encounter with such paintings and of considering that 'outside' and 'inside' of our response. By 1954 he has clarified both a notion of the painting as a literal object and also as a surface, or field, which has a strictly optical dimension:

The picture has now become an object of literally the same spatial order as our bodies, and no longer the vehicle of an imagined equivalent of that order. It has lost its "inside" and become almost all "outside", all plane surface. The spectator can no longer escape into it

from the space in which he himself stands; on the contrary, the abstract or quasi-abstract picture returns him to that space in all its brute literalness, and if it deceives the eye at all, it is by optical rather than pictorial means, by relations of colour, shape, and line largely divorced from descriptive connotations, and by “situations” in which foreground and background, up and down, are interchangeable.⁴²

Here Greenberg strikes an uneasy balance between the literal and the optical. On the one hand he is describing a kind of painting that blocks a viewer from entering into pictorial space and forcibly returns that viewer into the ‘actual’ space they inhabit, yet on the other does in fact ‘deceive’ the eye, through optical rather than pictorial means, though exactly how such deception avoids the pictorial is not quite clear.⁴³ At this point Greenberg is describing something very close to what I mean by an object-image and in his sleight of hand, putting the brute literal alongside the optically deceptive as if there were no contradiction, is perhaps accepting a form of twofoldness in the experience of such works. This stance gradually changes over the next few years as the emphasis on the literal is steadily diminished and the importance of opticality comes to the fore.⁴⁴ At this point, however, Greenberg is still in the process of working through this logic so, when he comes to consider Newman again in “American Type Painting” (1955) he refrains from making any comment about whether or not Newman’s paintings might be all ‘outside’ or not: they are, he reiterates, a direct challenge to the easel painting and one that it ‘will hardly survive’ but beyond this he restricts his discussion to Newman’s use of colour and an assertion that Newman is not ‘in the least related to Mondrian or anyone else in the geometrical abstract school.’⁴⁵ Perhaps indicative of his shift towards opticality is his assertion that Newman, like Rothko, ‘soaks his pigment into the canvas, getting a dyer’s effect’ which, for a critic so insistent on the importance of close looking, is an error as startling as his finding secondary colours in Mondrian’s *Broadway Boogie-Woogie* (1942-43) and

one that suggests the critic is already modifying his view of Newman's paintings to suit his theoretical ideas.⁴⁶ By the following year he is able to write, in relation to Picasso, that:

Modernist painting, with its more explicit decorativeness, does call attention to the physical properties of the medium, but only in order to have these transcend themselves. Like any other kind of picture, a modernist one succeeds when its identity as a picture, and as pictorial experience, shuts out the awareness of it as a physical object.⁴⁷

Not surprisingly, then, there is little attempt in the review he writes on the occasion of Barnett Newman's retrospective at Bennington College in 1958 to go further in suggesting any new kind of *category* for the works shown.⁴⁸ Greenberg focuses once again mainly on colour and distancing the work from geometric abstraction. In "Sculpture of Our Time" from the same year Greenberg continues to develop the notion of opticality:

Instead of the illusion of things, we are now offered the illusion of modalities: namely, that matter is incorporeal, weightless, and exists only optically like a mirage. This kind of illusionism is stated in pictures whose paint surfaces and enclosing rectangles vibrate into the space around them; and in buildings that, apparently formed of lines alone, seem woven into the air...⁴⁹

Brute literality is broken down here into vibrations and airiness and the tendency of paintings to occupy actual space mitigated by the sheer persistence of optical illusion. An illusion, Greenberg

insists, that is instantaneous, further distancing any notion of the painting as an object that we encounter in space and might move around:

It's all there at once, like a sudden revelation. This "at-onceness" an abstract picture usually drives home to us with greater singleness and clarity than a representational painting does...You are summoned and gathered into one point in the continuum of duration...For the cultivated eye, the picture repeats its instantaneous unity like a mouth repeating a single word.⁵⁰

Thus, by the time he came to write "Modernist Painting" in 1960, Greenberg has already retreated from the idea that such painting displays a tendency towards the literal and is beginning to concentrate on the *opticality* that will inform his later writing and his support of Colour Field Painting. If painting has undergone a form of self-criticality and pushed back its "limiting conditions" to flatness and the delimitation of flatness, it is nevertheless preserved from the risk of becoming an "arbitrary object" by the force of the optical illusion it must always contain:

The latest abstract painting tries to fulfil the Impressionist insistence on the optical as the only sense that a completely and quintessentially pictorial art can invoke.⁵¹

This is spelt out in the essay which follows "Modernist Painting" on the painters Morris Louis and Kenneth Noland.⁵² Greenberg delineates a genealogy that runs from Impressionism through Still, Rothko and Newman, the black enamel paintings of Pollock and the stained paintings of Helen Frankenthaler through to Louis, Noland and others.⁵³ Impressionism becomes an alternative source

of influence to Cubism, one which leads to a more “open” field of the canvas, away from what the critic disparagingly characterises as Tenth Street touch towards a use of space and colour that he sees as more purely optical, unimpeded by any form of tactility, illusionistic or otherwise.⁵⁴ Committed to such a line of development as being the most significant of the moment, Greenberg is equally committed to interpreting the materiality of such paintings in the light of this open and purely optical space. It is in this context that he offers his most extensive piece of writing on Barnett Newman’s work in the essay “After Abstract Expressionism” written in 1962, discussing the paintings almost entirely in terms of their colour and what he terms *openness*.⁵⁵ This openness is defined in opposition to the painterly strand of abstract expressionism, in particular deKooning’s work, but in order to place Newman firmly in this camp, alongside Still and Rothko, Greenberg has once again to characterise Newman’s paint layers as ‘thin’ and link that lack of painterly texture to the colour washes of Milton Avery and, through him, to Matisse.⁵⁶ There is a matt quality to most of Newman’s paintings that is quite different to thin scumbled layers of Matisse’s paintings – we would have to turn to Diebenkorn to find such surfaces – as it is also unlike Rothko’s suspended layers of semi-transparent pigment.

It might even be suggested that there is a deliberate lack of nuance in Newman’s colour areas that comprises part of his appeal to later painters, such as Robert Mangold.⁵⁷ Greenberg also asserts that the evidence of process which the artist leaves in his paintings, especially in relation to the ‘zips’ is there ‘to advertise both their [Newman and Still’s] awareness and their repudiation of the easy effects of spontaneity’, in other words is another form of distancing from painterliness.⁵⁸ There is something almost wilfully skewed about Greenberg’s logic in this regard but what the neat phrasing achieves is another side-step around materiality and the physical presence of Newman’s paintings. Everything must contribute to their *openness*, to the dissolving of materiality and structure in the

opticality of their *open* areas of colour: even their large size ‘guarantees the purity as well as the intensity needed to suggest indeterminate space: more blue simply being bluer than less blue.’⁵⁹

The dominance of Greenberg’s critical writing during this period of time means that his emphasis on *opticality* is of tremendous importance when considering the work of those artists concerned with the object-like qualities of their paintings, an influence that becomes reinforced through the work of Michael Fried, whose 1967 text “Art and Objecthood” has become central to almost all discussion of literality. Where Greenberg is often terse and economical, Fried is discursive and expansive, drawing out many of Greenberg’s ideas in more depth and making explicit some of the underlying currents of thought in Greenberg’s texts.⁶⁰ It is Fried, for instance, who draws out in more detail how the developments in modernist painting might be seen as leading not so much towards flatness as the literal and the particular problems this poses for modernist painters.⁶¹

The risk, even the possibility, of seeing works of art as nothing more than objects did not exist. That such a possibility began to present itself around 1960 was largely the result of developments within modernist painting. Roughly, the more nearly assimilable to objects certain advanced painting had come to seem, the more the entire history of painting since Manet could be understood – delusively I believe – as consisting in the progressive (though ultimately inadequate) revelation of its essential objecthood, and the more urgent became the need for modernist painting to make explicit its conventional – specifically, its *pictorial* – essence by defeating or suspending its own objecthood through the medium of shape.⁶²

Fried is well aware that other commentators – and in “Art and Objecthood” he has Donald Judd and Robert Morris particularly in mind – see modernist painting exactly as such a revelation of

objecthood and that, if he is to retain the values he associates with such painting, he must counter arguments such as those put forward by Judd in “Specific Objects” (1965) and Morris in his two part “Notes on Sculpture”:

The primary problematic concerns with which advanced painting has been occupied for about half a century have been structural. The structural element has been gradually revealed to be located within the nature of the literal qualities of the support. It has been a long dialogue with a limit. Sculpture, on the other hand, never having been involved with illusionism could not possibly have based the efforts of fifty years upon the rather pious, if somewhat contradictory, act of giving up this illusionism and approaching the object.⁶³

Morris here echoes Judd’s assertion that ‘the main thing wrong with painting is that it is a rectangular plane placed flat against a wall’ and his conviction that far greater potential lay in abandoning that rather limited format and turning to the three dimensional object.⁶⁴ It is worth remembering that Judd arrives at such a point through the practice of painting and, what is more, a form of painting that owes much to Barnett Newman.⁶⁵ It is not within the scope of this thesis to examine this notion in depth, only to suggest that Judd begins from some of the formal problems that are evident in Newman’s paintings and tests various ways of making the object-like qualities of the earlier artist’s work more evident, more literal, *whilst still remaining within the structural confines of painting*. Hence we see, during the early sixties, Judd inserting into the picture plane various types of actual objects, such as Plexiglas letters or baking tins, in an effort to suspend the illusionism of his paintings, then moving on to various forms of structural alteration such as the curved metal flanges that bracket plywood panels before finally turning to the free-standing object in the box pieces of 1962-3.⁶⁶ Judd acknowledges this pre-history of the *Specific Object* when he

states that they are 'more like painting than sculpture'.⁶⁷ It is certainly possible to see ways in which Judd's subsequent output is informed by *pictorial* concerns.⁶⁸ There is, then, in Judd's practice various formal properties that relate back to earlier modernist painting and which mirror a similar engagement with modernist theory, in particular that of Greenberg: Judd's thinking follows a similar trajectory in terms of an understanding of the development of modernism, he simply takes it to a different conclusion.

The object-like qualities of modernist painting, then, become a point of intense focus, for it is exactly those qualities that are seen as the most significant aspect of recent painting by both camps and yet lead to types of practice that are regarded as *oppositional*. For his part, Fried is convinced that what he terms *Literal Art* puts at risk the entire endeavour of modernist painting, hence the passionate tone that informs "Art and Objecthood". There is, for Fried, a boundary that cannot be crossed without losing everything that is valuable in visual art and that boundary, as far as it can be stated, is marked by the literal object. Whilst modernist painting may well emphasize its own structure, may contain the suggestion of the literal in its reductive form of abstraction, it nevertheless must always retain its own essentially pictorial nature. The literal is only of value, Fried asserts, within the context of painting:

But it ought also to be observed that the literalness isolated and hypostatized in the work of artists like Donald Judd and Larry Bell is by no means the *same* literalness as that acknowledged by advanced painting throughout the past century: it is not the literalness of *the support*....Their pieces cannot be said to acknowledge literalness; they simply *are literal*.⁶⁹

It is the conventions of painting that have given *literalness* a value and if those conventions are too radically altered or overthrown then that value is lost.⁷⁰ The task of the contemporary painter is to reassert the pictorial in the face of the literal, to 'defeat' objecthood through 'the medium of shape.'⁷¹ What Michael Fried means by this is perhaps best exemplified by his writing on Frank Stella, not least because Stella's paintings acted as a focal point for much of this debate at the time. It is an exhibition of his *Black Paintings* in the 1959 show *Sixteen American Painters* at the Museum of Modern Art in New York that changes the terms of the debate. They are more drastically reductive than anything that has been seen previously, even Barnett Newman's paintings, in that their composition is entirely dictated by the literal shape of the support. Using a housepainter's brush and commercial black enamel paint, Stella applies stripes the width of the brush that follow the shape of the stretched canvas, leaving an edge of exposed and unprimed canvas between each stripe until the entire surface has been covered.

The close relationship between what is 'depicted' on the canvas surface and the physical structure that holds that surface – further emphasised by the congruity between the depth of the stretchers used and the width of the brush/stripes – means that the *Black Paintings* are far more evidently physical objects than most other paintings. Judd describes them as 'slabs' which neatly catches the way that they can appear as solid rather than canvas stretched over wooden bars. They seem to exemplify, at least for Judd, one of the last remaining possibilities open to *painting* as such and it is hardly surprising he initially assumes that Stella's interrogation of the structural qualities of painting, so similar to his own, will lead to a similar conclusion. Over the next few years Stella does indeed conduct a rigorous enquiry into the possibilities of such painting, exploring different shapes of support and kinds of paint, moving through sequences of *Aluminium*, *Copper* and *Purple* paintings and all the time obeying the logic of possibility that the *Black Paintings* contain. As Stella explores the 'rules' that are first manifested in the *Black Paintings* and the pressure that the logic of those

rules put upon the literal boundary of the work, he never transgresses the basic format of painting. Unlike Judd, he never moves on to the making of 'objects'. He certainly asks questions of the limits of what a painting might be. In a painting such as *Ileana Sonnabend* from 1963, one of the *Purple* series, the stripes are derived from the external edge of the canvas as we might expect, but rather than take them all the way to the centre of the canvas Stella has had that centre physically removed: the intactness of the canvas surface is disrupted and *shape* suddenly becomes a matter of an *inner* as well as an *outer* edge; not only that, a further challenge is offered to our sense of the surface as a *field*, as a demarcated area of activity, for without its physical centre the canvas surface can no longer impose itself quite so easily as a single entity. Impose itself it does, however, for even here we feel the work's identity as a *painting* and, even centreless, retain our sense of the *image*. We only need to compare it to one of Judd's boxes to feel the tenacity of the conventions of painting behind Stella's experimentation.

It is exactly this tenacity that allows Fried to claim Stella for the cause of Modernist painting in his essay on "Shape as Form: Frank Stella's Irregular Polygons." Fried's argument hinges upon his notion of *shape-as-medium*, an expanded sense of medium which includes not only the physical materials employed and the conventions associated with those materials, but also a certain degree of intention on the part of the artist. Shape-as-medium is a way of describing those works that primarily explore the relationship between literal and depicted shape and in which decisions taken by the artist, consciously or otherwise, are generated by that relationship. What makes this so crucial for Fried is that such paintings are both the most advanced in his own Modernist terms – hence his support of Stella, Olitski, Noland and Morris – and equally the most suggestive of a form of literal art outside of the conventions of painting. How such artists insist upon the pictorial is therefore of paramount importance for him:

What is at stake in this conflict is whether the paintings or objects in question are experienced as paintings or as objects, and what decides their identity as *painting* is their confronting of the demand that they hold as shapes. Otherwise they are experienced as nothing more than objects. This can be summed up by saying that modernist painting has come to find it imperative that it defeat or suspend its own objecthood, and that the crucial factor in that undertaking is shape, but shape that must belong to *painting* – it must be pictorial, not, or not merely, literal.⁷²

In the first place, Stella's *Black, Aluminium, Copper and Purple* sequences of paintings demonstrate the increasing dependence, or even *subordination*, of depicted shape to the literal shape of the support, as if, to use Fried's own words, 'depicted shape has become less and less capable of venturing on its own, of pursuing its own ends...'⁷³ This reliance upon the literal shape of the support is an outcome of the Modernist drive towards the most essential characteristics of the medium, for once a painter is concerned primarily with 'flatness and the delimitation of flatness' as Greenberg would have it, their sensitivity to *surface* will almost inevitably involve an equal awareness of the shape and extent of that surface. Stella's paintings of 1959-1965 are a working demonstration of this principle in its most extreme form, a logical outcome of the drive towards flatness and *shape-as-medium*, and in their extremity the cause for reservations on Fried's part.⁷⁴ He compares these earlier paintings unfavourably to those of Noland and Olitski, chiefly because in their absolute melding of depicted and literal shape they give the former nothing to work against, no contrasting difference by which they can compel conviction *as shapes*. This is, however, remedied in Stella's next series of works, the *Irregular Polygons*, in which Fried sees a radically different relation between literal and depicted shape.

Fried's analysis of *Moultonboro III* (1966) makes clear how in his view paintings might 'hold as shape' and what he means by shape 'stamping itself out, or compelling conviction.' The shapes in *Moultonboro III* both relate to the external, literal shape of the support and exist independently as depicted shapes. Our first instinct is to assume that they are generated by literal shape, as in Stella's previous sequences, so strongly do they impose themselves, but it soon becomes apparent that is not the case and the dominant shape, the yellow triangle that inserts itself into the main square of the painting, is only partially related to the outer edge of the canvas. It is as if literal and depicted shapes operate with equal force in the painting, the latter no longer subordinate but exerting equal pressure back onto the literal shape of the work. There is a kind of parity between literal and depicted shape. There is no *enclosing shape* that dictates the composition, but there is still a close relation between depicted forms and the outer edge of the canvas for, in a certain sense, the depicted yellow triangle seems to partially dictate that external shape. The irregularity of the shape of the canvas stops us from viewing the painting as a single or illusionistic field, so that each shape in the work imposes itself on the viewer in turn with a degree of intensity. The distinction between 'depicted and literal shape becomes nugatory.'⁷⁵ The literality of the earlier sequences can now be seen to depend upon the dominance of the literal shape of the support, but in the *Irregular*

Polygons:

....literalness in them is no longer experienced as the exclusive property of the support.

Rather, it is suffused more generally and, as it were, more deeply throughout them....as

though, that is, one's experience of literalness is above all an experience of the literalness of the individual shapes themselves.⁷⁶

This comes very close, I think, to the *twofoldness* of the object-image that I endeavour to describe in the previous chapter, though its significance for Fried lies more in the way that it re-configures the enterprise of Stella's earlier sequences of work, for in this light everything from the *Black Paintings* on can be seen as part of an on-going investigation of literality and depiction that by no means leads only to the object-nature of paintings but rather uncovers a far more complex interplay between image and support. Stella becomes not so much a player in the endgame of painting but rather a symbol of resistance:

Indeed, I suggest that it is one of the most significant facts about his new pictures that Stella seeks in them to repudiate not literalist taste or sensibility exactly, but the literalist implications which, in the grip of a particular conception of modernist painting, his stripe paintings appear to carry.⁷⁷

It is not just the literal that Stella turns against, Fried suggests, but those aspects of the practice of Modernist painting which imply the literal. His work marks, if you will, a shift in Modernist procedure, one that has stared literality in the face and come away not only with a renewed faith in the enterprise of painting but also a more complex understanding of how depicted shape operates in relation to the literal dimensions of the support. The *Irregular Polygons* are 'radically illusive'.⁷⁸ They re-absorb literality not only into the business of painting, but also into the *opticality* that both Fried and Greenberg subscribe to. Stella's paintings, Fried assures us, go even beyond advanced sculpture in their opticality, so that they seem 'a kind of mirage'.⁷⁹ Without for a moment wanting to take issue with the subtlety of Fried's argument or the rigour of his analysis of the paintings themselves, I do want to consider the way that it imposes a *transitional* nature on the works. Just as Judd and Morris's texts endeavour to make us view the paintings as *leading towards* the literal, so

Fried's arguments make us view them as *leading towards* the pictorial or optical: viewed in the context of a dispute between literality and the pictorial, interpretations of the paintings are thus weighted towards one or the other, a mode of viewing that does not necessarily enquire as to *how a painting can be both*, even if Fried's account is often strongly suggestive of just such a possibility. The tension that such a debate imposes on our viewing is clearly evident in Stella's own responses to different readings of the paintings. When, in the interview Bruce Glaser conducts with Stella, Judd and Dan Flavin, Judd cites the thickness of Stella's stretchers as imbuing the paintings with a greater sense of objecthood, Stella retorts:

I make the canvas deeper than ordinarily, but I began accidentally. I turned one-by-threes on edge to make a quick frame, and then I liked it. When you stand directly in front of the painting it gives it just enough depth to hold it off the wall; you're conscious of this sort of shadow, just enough depth to emphasize the surface. In other words, it makes it more like a painting and less like an object, by stressing the surface.⁸⁰

A few minutes later, however, Stella has this to say:

I always get into arguments with people who want to retain the old values in painting – the humanistic values that they always find on the canvas. If you pin them down, they always end up asserting that there is something there besides the paint on the canvas. My painting is based on the fact that only what can be seen there *is* there. It really is an object. Any painting is an object and anyone who gets involved enough in this finally has to face up to the objectness of whatever it is that he's doing. He is making a thing.⁸¹

The artist himself, in other words, vacillates between the two positions and is capable of viewing the paintings as leading towards both the pictorial and the literal, an ambiguity that is perhaps reflected in his titling strategies: on the one hand, the seeming arbitrariness of applied categories of titles, so that the relation between painting and title appears randomly allotted; on the other, the frequency with which Stella's titles seem appropriate to the work, both individually and as groups, especially so for those *Black Paintings* whose titles reference the history of the German National Socialist or Nazi Party. The arbitrariness of allocation is suggestive of a succession of objects, of 'things' that require labels simply as a form of production. The haunting titles of the *Black Paintings* are testament to the evocative power of the works, of their resonance *as images*.⁸² What I am suggesting is that Stella's paintings are *object-images* – paintings that make a viewer as much aware of their corporeality as of the image that is on or in that object, and whose surfaces are visibly modified – and that their nature as object-images has been partially obscured by the polarisation of literality and the pictorial in the critical context described above. To see them only as the precursors of the Minimalist object is to lose their evocative power as images – as paintings – whilst to deny their materiality and see them only as image – as optical – is to lose sense of their *presence* in our actual space.

These conflicting readings of Stella's paintings are part of a wider divergence in terms of the reception of abstract painting during this period and the way in which it could be seen as, on the one hand, an extreme of materiality and on the other as a form of dematerialisation, a passing beyond the material to a metaphysical or otherwise spiritually informed transcendence. Rosalind Krauss has plotted the way in which the grid contains such seemingly opposite possibilities, as either a mapping of the literal surface of the canvas onto its aesthetic dimension or a way of passing beyond mere appearances to a form of repetition and variation that summons meditative or spiritual modes of thinking. She traces the materialistic reading back to those grids which appear in nineteenth century

treatises on optics and impulses towards a quasi-scientific measurement of phenomena, whilst simultaneously noting the way in which that grid was transposed into symbolist painting, largely through the depiction of windows, the grid appearing ostensibly as their superimposed mullions. It is this symbolist strand which evolves into the thinking of many of the earliest abstract painters working at the beginning of the twentieth century and transmutes into the spiritual aspirations of Piet Mondrian, Kasimir Malevich and Wassily Kandinsky. For these artists abstraction was a mode of moving beyond the material, mundane appearance of everyday objects and entering realms of thought which aspired to higher levels of reality. We have already touched on how, for Mondrian, the grid was a way of evoking *pure reality*, or space as it might manifest itself outside of its ‘determination’ within objects, but that pure reality was informed by Mondrian’s earlier adherence to theosophy and to other texts which sought for a more spiritual understanding of the world. Thus two streams of developmental thought converge in Mondrian’s mature work: the first is the reductive logic of abstraction as it arises out of cubism and as Mondrian brings an ever more stringent visual code to bear; but the second is a religious vein of thought, a form of spiritual thinking that seeks to dissolve the material world in order to reveal truths normally hidden by appearances. It is the grid, Krauss suggests, which allows for these seemingly contradictory aspirations, which allows for the continuation of spiritual forms of thinking whilst also suggesting the materiality, the mundane physical presence, of the wholly secular. Behind every twentieth century grid, Krauss suggests, ‘there lies – like a trauma that must be repressed – a symbolist window parading in the guise of a treatise on optics.’⁸³

In a subsequent essay Rosalind Krauss traces these divergent aspects of abstraction through later American visual art, taking as a starting point a contrast between the paintings of Frank Stella and Ad Reinhardt.⁸⁴ Stella is the materialist in this equation, seeking to void his work of the kind of spiritual connotations which attached to earlier forms of abstract painting. Reinhardt, by contrast, contrives

to include such associations, in Krauss's account not only invoking the spiritually laden form of the Greek cross but also, more pertinently, finding visual equivalents for ideas, if not sensations, drawn from Zen philosophy. His paintings, Krauss asserts, with their close tonal values and their slow reveal of compositional form, not only have a durational quality to them but also exist as a kind of 'optical membrane' which obscures their material surface.⁸⁵ Their physical presence, in other words, is dissolved by the viewer's experience of their optical field, much as it is in front of a painting by Bridget Riley. If Stella is endeavouring to provide an unmediated experience of a painting's materiality, then Reinhardt is shifting that experience into awareness of our perceptual apparatus and away from the physical structure of the painting as an object. In this emphasis Krauss sees Reinhardt as a precursor of Californian light artists such as Robert Irwin and James Turrell whose interest in sensory-deprivation experiments such as anechoic chambers and Ganz fields led them away from the making of objects and towards the manipulation of light in physical environments. Far from sharing the Minimalists' concern with *objects*, however simplified in form they might be, Irwin and Turrell are involved with *phenomena*. 'Irwin's interest is on the other side of the frame. He begins where Minimalism stops – at the edge.'⁸⁶

In Krauss's account, then, one strand of abstract painting is strongly suggestive of a spiritual tradition and this transcendence of the everyday is achieved through the creation of an image that seems to exist separately to the canvas like an 'optical membrane.' Another strand, epitomised in her essay by the early paintings of Frank Stella, insists upon materiality and the secular presence of the painting. This is to take Stella at his word and insist, largely as I have done, upon the physical presence of his early paintings and their refusal of other, more metaphysical, qualities. Other aspects of Stella's practice ought to be considered at this point, most especially the link between Stella and Jasper Johns, whom he acknowledges as an important influence at the time he came to develop his stripe paintings. It is not simply that Stella took over the idea of using stripes from

Johns's *Flag* and *Target* paintings but also that he experimented with a Johnsian conception of assemblage, as becomes clearer in the context of his work in 1958, prior to the making of the *Black Paintings*. Megan Luke has examined these sequences of paintings in depth and points out, for instance, how much two early painting/assemblages, *Them Apples* and its *Untitled* companion piece, show Stella experimenting with a pictorial code derived from Johns.⁸⁷ *Them Apples*, roughly assembled from cardboard boxes, adorned with stripes and with a shallow compartment near the bottom which contains the roughly painted apples of its title is clearly indebted to pieces such as Johns's *Target with Four Faces* (1955) which Stella would have known from the cover of the January 1958 issue of *Art News*, a periodical to which he paid close attention. This is to link Stella's paintings to a tradition that is far more concerned with the conceptual nature of painting and a tradition of the object, the *readymade*, which derives from Marcel Duchamp. The plaster casts in *Target with Four Faces* recalls Duchamp's plaster cast *Tongue in Cheek*, just as Duchamp's *Readymades* provide Johns with the precedent and conceptual framing for the appropriation of a found imagery. Given the importance of Johns to Stella during the crucial period of his development, it is hard not to suggest that some strand of Dadaist thinking might infiltrate his paintings.

Jasper Johns was not alone in this interest in, if not allegiance to earlier Dadaist examples, in fact so many American and European artists of this period began to look back to Duchamp's example, and that of other Dadaists, that the label *Neo-Dada* began to be used to address their work. Susan Hapgood has outlined the many connections in her book *Neo-Dada Redefining Art 1958-62*, tracing complex links between the original Dadaists and strands of visual art which are otherwise grouped under disparate headings such as Performance, Conceptual Art, Pop Art, even in certain cases under Minimalism.⁸⁸ The complexity of concerns might be suggested, to take only one example, by a work such as Robert Morris's *Slant Board* of 1961, a plywood construction of simple geometric dimensions similar to those shown in his 1963 exhibition at the Green Gallery except for the fact that *Slant*

Board has attached ropes and was constructed for a performance by the Simone Forti dance company.⁸⁹ Morris's later plywood objects, so often regarded as seminal examples of the Minimalist stripping away of concerns external to the physical presence of the work, are thus revealed to have roots not only in performance but also that strand of performance which seeks to break down traditional forms of dance and its ritualised conventions based on the skills of the professional dancer, a challenge which Hapgood contextualises within the widespread turn to Dadaist attitudes and practices.

Might we then place Stella's paintings in this tradition and discover, far from there only being what *you see*, a whole other order of meanings deliberately inserted into the work? To return to Stella's 1958 assemblages, it is worth comparing them to a work by another preeminent maker of assemblages in this period, Robert Rauschenberg. By making *Untitled* in an almost identical format to *Them Apples* Stella's piece inevitably evokes Rauschenberg's pair of works from the year before, *Factum I* and *II* (1957).⁹⁰ A Duchampian undermining of conventional codes of painting is evident in the Rauschenberg diptych, most particularly in the gestural paint marks and run-offs that are reproduced in both works, revealing the indexical marks of abstract expressionism to be both reproducible and, by virtue of such reproducibility, emptied out of their original expressive quality. The *Factum* paintings subject a whole range of techniques to such emptying out, including photographic reproduction, diagrams, written script, pattern and even the simple form of the letter 'T', recalling a similar strategy in paintings by Johns. This emptying out of expressive quality is, in Rauschenberg's work, in the name of constructing meaning in other ways and if the *Factum* paintings are a deconstruction of notions of originality and expressive mark-making, they are also a rehearsal for the many ways in which the artist will utilise different modes of image-making subsequently. By breaking down the barriers between different kinds of image, whether that be the painted and the photographic or the commercial and the artistic, Rauschenberg opens up the

possibilities for combining material from many different sources in order to evoke the hectic and aggressive tenor of life in an American city.

By comparison the Stella assemblage looks conventional and simple. If Stella comes to apply paint in a relatively deadpan fashion, using house-decorator's brushes and uninflected pathways of application, at the time of these assemblages he is still using exactly the kind of expressive, loose brushmark which Rauschenberg parodies in the *Factum* paintings: there are spills of paint, run-off drips, ragged edges, overlays, all hallmarks of abstract expressionist painting. In some of the other 1958 paintings Stella has his own way of offering parody, such as the scabrous untidily written text on some of the paintings which undercut the solemnity of such works as Robert Motherwell's series of *Je t'aime* paintings, but for the most part Stella employs an expressive painting style without irony. The sequences of 1958 paintings reveal the artist to be testing such a language, just as he is also putting pressure on relational composition and colour harmonies. The principal difference between *Them Apples* and *Untitled* lies not in any ironic referencing of paint application but in Stella's removal of the eponymous apples, as if, in the second version of the assemblage, he is moving away from the conceptual model proposed by a work such as Johns's *Target with Four Faces*. Megan Luke sees the removal of the apples from the assemblage as part of a process of 'correction', more specifically as part of a decision to suppress the assemblage mode which Stella had found in Johns's work and a move towards his own use of the kind of repetitive methods of making which Johns espoused.⁹¹ If Stella took from Johns not his assemblage type of construction, or even too simple a notion of using stripes, but rather a way of repeating, of doing one thing and then doing it again, then in Stella's painting it takes on a different form. Crucially, the 1958 paintings gradually simplify in compositional terms, move towards the monochrome and align themselves with the literal dimensions of the canvas. It is this final move, where repetition is based in the literal dimensions of the support and becomes ordered by that shape, which leads Stella away from Johns

and towards a different conception of the painting as object. It is this self-containment which differentiates Stella's paintings from the assemblages of both Johns and Rauschenberg which not only have a Dadaist sense of subversion, a playfulness with the conventions of painting that contrasts with the more earnest Stella, but also open up the possibility of transposing the picture plane from the vertical to the horizontal and incorporating sculptural elements into the work.⁹² Once he had reached the position of making the *Black Paintings* Stella could no longer consider adding actual objects to their surfaces, even in the partial sense in which *Them Apples* adds objects, at least not without losing the *object-image* quality of the works.

To understand more fully how Frank Stella took up the notion of repetition from Johns and based it more firmly within the idea of repeated units of form, such as stripes, I want to compare his paintings to the sculpture of Carl Andre. In a photograph taken by Hollis Frampton in 1960, Andre's work *Last Ladder* is seen in Stella's studio, standing in front of one of the *Aluminium* paintings.⁹³ The image comes with a story of Stella's response to Andre's piece which had been made in the painter's studio due to its size: it is a rectangular column of wood and into the frontal plane Andre has chiselled out a succession of curved depressions, alternating in direction and divided by flat ridges where the sculptor has left the plane intact. After examining the work, Stella reputedly ran his hand along one of the uncut sides of the wood and said 'that's sculpture too.' In subsequent accounts of Andre's development this remark is linked to the sculptor's realisation that he could make sculpture through the manipulation of found units of material without altering or *lessening* those units through any carving, cutting or adding, though Andre admits that this ignores the critical import of the painter's comment, the suggestion that Andre was failing to consider the piece *in the round*: or, to put that another way, was thinking too much like a painter and not enough like a sculptor.⁹⁴ The anecdote serves to underline what the photograph reveals, which is the complementary nature of the two artists' work: both artists are taking a simple unit of form – a stripe, a cavity – and *applying*

that form, through repetition, to the basic format of their medium, recalling Jasper Johns's sketchbook notes:

Take an object. Do something to it. Do something else to it.

Take a canvas. Put a mark on it. Put another mark on it.⁹⁵

The direct simplicity of Johns's notes and their insistence on *doing* likewise finds an echo in the statement that Carl Andre wrote for Stella to accompany the *Black Paintings* in the 1959 *Sixteen Americans* show at the Museum of Modern Art in New York:

Preface to Stripe Painting

Art excludes the unnecessary. Frank Stella has found it necessary to paint stripes. There is nothing else in his painting. Frank Stella is not interested in expression or sensitivity. He is interested in the necessities of painting. Symbols are counters passed among people. Frank Stella's painting is not symbolic. His stripes are the paths of the brush on the canvas. These paths lead only into painting. Carl Andre.⁹⁶

Whilst not wanting to ignore Andre's intended meaning, these paths also lead into sculpture and Andre's own development follows the logic he outlines for Stella of excluding the unnecessary and insisting upon the materiality of his practice. An Andre floor piece such as *Zinc Square* of 1969, composed of sixty-four zinc plates arranged in an 8 x 8 square, displays a similar rigour to a Stella stripe painting in its pared down compositional strategy and its insistence upon a no-frills method of

production.⁹⁷ Andre, it might be said, has found it necessary to use zinc plates. In laying those plates down on the floor the artist challenges our perception of what sculpture is, but he also operates on a horizontal axis that, as Rosalind Krauss describes, is opened up by Jackson Pollock's *Poured Paintings* in the late forties, proffering a similar challenge to our vertically orientated mode of perceiving artworks.⁹⁸ Andre's Floor pieces take up another aspect of painting, even more quintessentially modernist, in that they employ the grid as their compositional format, so firmly embedding it into a sculptural discourse that it is easy to forget how much it derives from one based in painting. As with Donald Judd's early work, it is clear that Andre's sculpture derives at least in part from the concerns of painting: the directional force within modernist painting towards the literal that we have been considering so far in this chapter, in other words, informs some of the contemporary sculpture produced as well as painting.

Indeed, Judd's coining of the term *Specific Objects* is an attempt to define a category that breaks free of both sculpture and painting and yet contains many features of both and, in many of its central concerns and formal features, derives from the most advanced examples of modernist painting. What we can see in retrospect is how the central preoccupations of painting and sculpture become much closer during this period of time, so that the formal problems of the one are often translated and re-examined in the other, a process that goes some way to explaining how frequently artists move between what had been previously quite separate disciplines. Just about all of those artists who became known as Minimalist sculptors, including Dan Flavin, Sol Lewitt, Donald Judd, Michael Steiner, Ronald Bladen and John McCracken started out as painters, as did such well-known Post-Minimalist sculptors as Eva Hesse and Richard Serra.⁹⁹ This shift is also evident in the work of painters who remain within the constraints of painting as a medium in that they increasingly treat that medium, and think of their materials, in more sculptural terms, all of which leads to fluidity

between the two mediums, a dialogue that transcends the boundaries of two and three dimensional work.

We might see Judd's category of *Specific Objects* as a similar critical strategy to Greenberg's *opticality* in that both terms attempt to re-define our way of thinking about a medium, sculpture and painting respectively, in response to an increasing emphasis upon literality. If *opticality* is a form of insistence upon pictorial values, a defence against paintings becoming *arbitrary objects*, then likewise *specific objects* is a way of defining sculptural objects that might equally be seen to risk the arbitrariness of the everyday. If Greenberg can potentially see a blank stretched canvas as a painting, then Judd can see 'sculpture' in an empty box. The closeness of the critical thinking reflects a similar process happening within the two media, a process that is initiated and fuelled by the move away from *representation*: far from the issue being the essential nature of either medium, I would suggest that the principal concern underlying these redefinitions springs from the implications of *non-representation* being worked through the studio practice of several generations of artists. In both mediums that issue becomes the balance between the evocative qualities of any configuration of forms and the literal properties of their supports and materials. As Thierry deDuve rightly points out, if Greenberg had applied his idea of the 'purity' of a medium as stringently to sculpture as he had to painting, then it would have taken him to a set of conventions opposite to those of painting:

He would then have watched the reduction of the sculptural practice to questions of matter, tactility, mass and weight, which are as 'essential' to sculpture as flatness is to painting. Had he done so, even sceptical as he was with regard to the kind of Minimal art that had its origins in monochrome painting, it is probable that he would nonetheless enthusiastically have endorsed the art of Carl Andre or of Richard Serra.¹⁰⁰

Greenberg's insistence on opticality in painting, at the expense of its materiality, is mirrored in his attitude towards sculpture, which is likewise viewed in terms of its opticality, so that instead of recognising and promoting work such as that of Eva Hesse and Richard Serra, he puts his critical backing behind work which he can relate to the opticality of colour field painting, such as the free-floating coloured elements of Anthony Caro's pieces. Although this critical stance does acknowledge a relationship between contemporary sculpture and painting, it also allows Greenberg to keep them separate, as distinct mediums, their common ground being found in an 'illusion of modalities: namely, that matter is incorporeal, weightless, and exists only optically like a mirage.'¹⁰¹ This leaves aside the many ways in which the *materiality* of modernist painting, its insistence upon the physical properties of the medium and the structure which underpins their use, opens up avenues of exploration for sculpture. The endeavour to rid painting of illusionism, far from being the futile exercise Robert Morris suggests, leads a host of artists to a new relationship with the materials of their medium that can be quite easily transposed to three dimensions.¹⁰² It is as if the consequences of ridding painting of illusionism, or representation, leads to a different *attitude* to the making of artworks that, from the early sixties onwards, begins to operate in both painting and sculpture. The complementary nature of the two pieces of work in Hollis Frampton's photograph, then, derives not just from the close working relationship between Stella and Andre but also from a fundamental similarity in what they are aiming to achieve. Stella's desire to keep the paint 'as good as it is in the tin' finds a complementary aim in Andre's making work through the arrangement of 'units' of material that, like Stella's tin, come from a factory: the sculptor's realisation that the less he does to those units the more effectively he retains their material properties – their elemental nature – is closely akin to Stella's deadpan application of household paints to canvas. His works foreground this relation to painting both in their insistent materiality and in the way that they *contain* pictorial formats such as the grid and we can see similar processes in much Minimalist and Post-Minimalist sculpture. The many ways in which this sculpture *contains* painting is too complex to do justice to

here, for my interest lies in those artists who resist the cross-over into three dimensions, but I will put forward a couple of examples to clarify the point.

Rosalind Krauss, in her short essay *Eva Hesse: Contingent*, succinctly draws out some of the ways in which Hesse's sculpture relates to painting, from the looping skeins of *Right After* (1969) and *Untitled* (1970), which clearly look back to Jackson Pollock, to more oblique references, such as the echo of Jasper Johns that Krauss detects in *Hang Up* (1966).¹⁰³ Her analysis centres upon *Contingent* (1969) and the way in which its hanging sheets of latex and cheesecloth occupy an intermediate zone between painting and sculpture: hung perpendicular to the wall, they initially offer to the viewer only their edges, as if a set of paintings have been turned edge to the wall, and it is only from an angle that those sheets become rectangular fields, reveal their pictorial quality.¹⁰⁴ 'We feel ourselves,' Krauss says, 'to be in the affective terrain of painting.'¹⁰⁵ The significance of this for Krauss lies in the way in which Hesse's work relates to the wider discourse that arose around Minimalism in the sixties and in particular the way in which the sculptor draws a more expressive purpose out of some of the conventions that arise around Minimalist sculpture, but this is within the context of the implications of non-representational work that I have been considering here:

The discourse of the sixties aesthetics had of course been leading in this direction. It had been focused upon justifying or legitimating the internal structure of a given work – a structure made visible by the articulations of a surface by drawing or of a three-dimensional object by the separation of its parts – by means other than those of mimesis or illusion. In this way the minimalist aesthetic came to be deeply engaged with the condition of the literal, with the purging of the illusion from the work by making everything about it

external....In order to do this, all divisions of surface had to be experienced as the actual separations of the material of the surface...¹⁰⁶

Both sculpture and painting, to paraphrase Krauss, become increasingly concerned with notions of surface and edge in an attempt to produce work that is all 'outside', all material presence, rather than having an 'inside' of illusionistic space. For those artists working in three dimensions, this involves not only the avoidance of the modelling of forms, but also finding ways of focusing the viewer upon surface and edge, generally through using units of simple geometric forms. With Andre's *Zinc Square*, for instance, all divisions between forms are actual, material divisions: wherever there is the equivalent of a drawn line in the grid, it is brought about through one piece of matter coming up against another and there is no illusionistic passage between parts. With *Contingent*, Krauss sees Hesse as working in the space between sculpture and painting, but this intermediate space only arises because of the shared concerns of the two mediums, the desire of artists to work in the realm of the actual rather than the illusionistic. *Contingent* dramatizes the way in which sculpture partakes of painting and vice versa for as the viewer moves around the piece they also move between a perception of form as operating on a two dimensional plane or in the three dimensions of actual space:

In *Contingent*, as in Hesse's work in general, the issue is that of the mutual eclipse of the conventions, or institutions, of painting and sculpture as separate modalities of experience.¹⁰⁷

What Rosalind Krauss's analysis illuminates is the terrain in which sculpture and painting come together, which is that preoccupation with surface and edge, and in particular with edge as an actual

material property of the work, rather than any form of internal division that might suggest illusionism. An early piece by Serra, *Doors* from 1966, seems equally to occupy terrain between the two mediums, suggestive of monochrome paintings whilst clearly being sculptural objects that lean against the wall.¹⁰⁸ Their mottled rubber surfaces have all the intricate textural interest that a painter might imbue a surface with but here it is a *found* surface, not brought about through careful accretion but chemical reaction, the discoloration of rubber exposed to atmospheric conditions: within their contained rectangular planes, *Doors* highlights another aspect of actuality, that of a surface brought about through exposure to air, undergoing chemical alteration over time. It is easy to see how a painter might exploit such processes.¹⁰⁹ *Doors* is only one example of the early work which leads Serra to a working practice that is based upon *actions upon materials*, an idea that is clearly expressed in his well-known *Verb List* of 1966 which enumerates not only an extensive series of possible actions but also a set of practices that run in parallel to phenomena which occur in the natural world, such as electro-magnetic fields or tidal currents, a way of thinking through the qualities of works not in terms of formal properties but rather the responses of substances and materials to the laws of physics.

One way of understanding the notion of the *object-image* is in relation to this continuum between painting and sculpture and to suggest that *object-images* are the result of this coming together of painterly and sculptural concerns when it is played out *within the constraints of painting*. I have used this phrase previously and it might seem rash, considering the complexity of arguments already touched on around the nature and essence of what is or is not painting, but I want to propose some relatively simple distinguishing features, for unlike Greenberg I do not think that painting had, by the early sixties, many more if any more expendable conventions to be revealed. If, as Judd asserts, a painting is a single plane parallel to the wall, if that is what he regards as its limiting factor, then it seems fair to insist upon the prioritising of such a plane in what we regard as painting; it is from such

a perspective that Judd draws attention to the thickness of Stella's stretchers and the slab-like quality they give to his paintings, but those stretchers are not so thick as to jeopardise our recognition of the frontal plane of the work. If we imagine such a thing, a stretcher gaining in depth until the sides are as extensive as the front of a painting, we might find ourselves imagining what looks like a cube stuck to the wall and, if we endeavour to insist upon this object as painting, perhaps by painting an image on its surface parallel to the wall, it already seems to be a rather absurd version of painting; it already, in other words, seems to violate our understanding of the *conventions* of painting.

Let us now detach that cube from the wall and paint its sides in various colours and we have a free-standing object that has coloured planes like a painting, but is clearly three-dimensional like a piece of sculpture: such an object seems to partake of the conventions of both painting and sculpture, to derive from both and would offer significant difficulties for those trying to define such pieces in terms of the Modernist/Minimalist debate and we can see that this is the case because such objects, with rectangular rather than square sides, are made at the height of this debate by the artist Anne Truitt. They are, in fact, amongst the few examples of Minimalist sculpture that Greenberg approves of and he does so largely on the ground that they lie exactly between painting and sculpture and, by a critical sleight of hand, therefore escape the necessities of medium specificity.¹¹⁰ In order to define the category of *object-image* more clearly I want to insist upon Truitt's work being essentially sculpture, even if, like the examples drawn from Hesse and Serra above, they owe much to the conventions of Modernist painting: the crucial distinction is that in her works there is no longer a prioritised frontal plane.

We can consider the way in which concerns which arise out of painting might be translated into three dimensions or remain within the conventions of painting by returning to Barnett Newman, whose work, as already suggested, provided a significant precedent for artists such as Frank Stella and Donald Judd. In 1950, only two years after his breakthrough with *Onement I*, Newman made a sculptural version of his paintings in a piece entitled *Here I*. The two 'zips' of *Here I* consist of a narrow piece of wood painted white and a wider piece with a ragged edging of plaster which emerge from two mounds of white plaster on top of a painted milk crate.¹¹¹ These makeshift materials might be taken to have a Duchampian undertone but it is perhaps more likely that Newman was simply turning to the simplest means to hand to construct three-dimensional zips. The sense of working from the exigencies of what was immediately available – Newman often had milk crates in the studio, both as something to sit on and as props for canvases – might also evoke the direct decision making that went into *Onement I*, the provisional masking tape left as part of the final work. Nan Rosenthal has suggested that Newman may have been motivated to make *Here I* by the poor critical response to his paintings and in particular blindness to the subtleties of how he produced their zips and the contrast between straight-edged and more loosely painted 'feathered' examples. *Here I*, in Rosenthal's account, is therefore a kind of lesson in looking, a more physical manifestation of that contrast which underlines its significance for the artist and, by extension, the viewer.¹¹²

Other commentators link the sculpture to those paintings which Newman made roughly at the same time on extremely narrow and tall canvases, most especially *The Wild* of the same year, 1950.¹¹³ These paintings severely test our expectations for painting to adhere to certain ratios in their rectangular form: *The Wild* is only 4.1cm wide but nearly two and a half metres in height and its three untitled companion pieces are also stretched in format, if not quite to the same degree. Newman spoke of wanting to see if he could produce a sense of extremely large scale without the kind of expanse of canvas required for a work like *Vir Heroicus Sublimis* (1950) which, as the 2002

Philadelphia catalogue points out, is approximately 144 square feet compared to *The Wild's* 144 square inches. The catalogue also tells us that *The Wild* was first exhibited, in the Betty Parsons Gallery in 1951, alongside *Here I*. In a photograph taken by Hans Namuth we see the two works in close proximity: *The Wild*, with its extremely narrow dimensions, seems to engage the wall upon which it is hung in the same way that the zips in Newman's other paintings relate to their wider fields of colour, so that the wall is drawn into our sense of image.¹¹⁴ Likewise the plaster zips of *Here I* conjure their surrounding fields, but in this case in three dimensional space, so that we see the zips as declaring actual space, an effect that in Namuth's photograph is partially revealed by the way the gallery's hanging rail seems to exist as a functioning horizontal within the work as a whole. This breaking down of the viewer's space, its imbrication in the planes of colour and form that belong to the works themselves, is reminiscent of the effect Mondrian sought to achieve in his studios, arranging paintings and coloured boards in such a way as to dissolve the distinction between picture plane, sculptural plane and architectural plane and in doing so lead the viewer to an experience of space that is far more indeterminate.

We might recall that for Mondrian this destruction of planes occurs in order to approach *pure reality*, a notion that has for Mondrian spiritual connotations as well as perceptual ones. With his theosophical background, the breaking down of our normal modes of perception is part of a process of moving beyond the everyday world towards higher forms of consciousness which are, in turn, connected to particular beliefs about cosmic laws. Barnett Newman was likewise interested in a different conception of space, or rather what he referred to as *place*. He wanted his paintings to create a sense of *place* for their viewer or more particularly to make them aware of their own *being* in that place, to have, as he put it, 'the feeling of his own totality, of his own separateness.'¹¹⁵ Newman, in describing this awareness, spoke of the place one experiences when there are vast open spaces of land, such as prairies or the tundra, and one can look in all directions to a distant horizon;

spaces which unfix the normal spatial coordinates, in other words, and offer very little in the way of determinate forms, not unlike the ganz fields which so engaged James Turrell and Robert Irwin. In order to bring about this experience, it was necessary both to create a vivid physical encounter with the works themselves – much in the way that Newman spoke of encountering the Indian burial mounds in Ohio – and for the paintings to evoke surrounding space beyond the literal confines of the canvas, like the dome of a vast sky which arches over the viewer. Gabriele Shor articulates this idea in relation to Newman's sculptures:

He highlighted the condition for the possibility of unity between observer and sculpture. More precisely, the basic requirement for understanding Newman's sculpture was established in a confrontation with the actual fact of being "here" (as the constitutive category of place, to make conscious the fundamental difference between a place and no place at all). In other words, the sculpture *Here* will always remain inaccessible for those who do not confront the "sense of place" between the observer and the sculpture.¹¹⁶

Richard Shiff expands upon this concept of place and suggests that for Newman the most essential dimension of place was time, or rather the realisation that it was time, and not space, which was the subjective experience that provided an individual with a sense of themselves.¹¹⁷ This is not the abstract notion of time by which we measure the passage of the day, clock time, but our lived experience of time, 'not the *sense* of time but the physical *sensation* of time.'¹¹⁸ Hence Newman's many statements to the effect that he is not dealing with space but time, that his paintings are not involved with formal relationships but rather creating a presence that provokes a particular experience of space *as it is experienced through lived time*. It is, perhaps, this phenomenological emphasis upon subjective experience before the works which distinguishes Newman's paintings and

his philosophical understanding of them from the more spiritually laden aspirations of earlier artists such as Mondrian and Kandinsky. Newman's pre-1948 work may well have shared many of their concerns with the cosmic, with ideas of genesis and cosmic origins, but his shift from depiction to a form of declaration, from *illustrating* notions of creation to enacting them, also produces a shift in the way in which the artist channels his religious convictions, basing them more fully in a perceptual understanding of his paintings. The rough and ready materials that make up *Here I* are intrinsic to its immediacy, its *here-ness*, just as the roughly painted edges of many of the zips, or even Newman's scrawled signature across the picture plane, insist upon the physical presence of the work, but that *here-ness* is intended to rebound upon the viewer.

What might become clear from such an account, or appear as problematic, is that Newman's paintings seem to work in contradictory directions. I have emphasized for the most part their literal and material qualities because I want to consider them in the light of the *object-image*, but in the artist's conception of *place* and in the way that it is possible to perceive the paintings as dissolving into such an experiential place they would seem almost to be the opposite. The brief consideration of Mondrian above also makes it clear that, in earlier abstract painting, there is as much a tendency towards dematerialisation, to the evanescence of the art object, as there is to its literalisation. What is more, the two tendencies often seem to take similar form. If we consider, for instance, the divisions of the picture plane which Wassily Kandinsky translated into diagrammatic form in his text *Point and Line to Plane* (1926) we can see how formal properties which derive from the shape of the support and would, therefore, suggest the literal aspect of a work can equally be read as dematerialising that surface. Kandinsky begins with a central point in a square and, extending that first point, maps onto the square a basic grid of four units. Each of these units contains its own dynamic forces that are brought about, for instance, by any line within coming close to the edge of the picture plane. Such proximity produces a heightened tension, Kandinsky asserts, which is only

resolved by actual contact with the edge, when it ceases. In this way, the *field* of the picture plane is seen to be alive with forces which move over and around it, forces that might be conceived in entirely physical or literal terms – as intervals, geometric divisions that animate that field – but which for Kandinsky are the markers which ‘exteriorise, and make visible, the dynamic clashing interior forces that amounts to the creative artist’s inner necessity.’¹¹⁹

The nature of that inner necessity is partly revealed through the way in which Kandinsky explains these pictorial forces in musical terms. The initial point is his fundamental, a single note which has already the potential for all other notes to unfold from within it, exactly in the way that the whole of Wagner’s *Der Ring des Nibelungen* arises out of a low E-flat in the double basses. As harmonics can be elaborated from lower notes, so Kandinsky draws out from his point lines and constructs his grid, in which single notes are now replaced by the six vertical and horizontal segments equating to a 12-note chord. Within this musical structure Kandinsky can organise the forms of his composition much like a composer orchestrating a piece of music, each point on the canvas having its own distinct tension and musical/visual colour. It is not only that Kandinsky draws such close parallels between visual and musical forms, it is also that the very structure of music suggests to him a cosmic order, perhaps most easily illustrated through the Music of the Spheres, in which musical intervals have their equivalents in the distance of each planet from the sun and each planet, in its turns, emits its own particular note. The formal layout of the surface of a painting is, therefore, not only linked to a set of musical equivalents but also cosmological ones, investing pictorial forms with a significance that encompasses a whole range of beliefs about the nature of the Universe and its spiritual significance.

The examples of Kandinsky and Mondrian reveal that from its beginnings abstract painting was as much concerned with the dissolution of the picture plane as any insistence upon its literal properties and that many of the features I have considered in relation to the *object-image* can be viewed in an alternative light. The simplification of compositional structures and their alignment with the literal shape of the support, which I see as essential features of the *object-image*, are stepping stones to transcending physical reality in Kandinsky's schema. It is difficult to fully imagine, as Peter Vergo points out, the problems Kandinsky and others endeavouring to move beyond representation in these early years of abstract painting might have had in conceiving what their paintings could look like, there being very little in the way of precedent.¹²⁰ They were, Vergo suggests, 'haunted...by the resonances set up by objects' which partly explains why for many years Kandinsky's paintings held on to representational forms and recessive space.¹²¹ He looked to music, and more specifically to Arnold Schoenberg's theory of dissonance, to provide a framework which allowed him to 'think' abstract paintings.¹²² This recourse to music as a model for abstract painting became a common practice and James M. Baker in his essay "Prometheus and the Quest for Color-Music" provides an over-view of the many ways in which both musicians and visual artists have tied the two artforms together.¹²³ Alexander Scriabin's *Prometheus: The Poem of Fire* (1909-10), scored for orchestra and colour-organ, is seen by Baker to be not only a focal point which brings together many earlier efforts to combine music and painting, but also a significant marker and inspiration for the proliferation of such events after the date of its premiere, 1915, in New York. The use of coloured lights projected onto large sheets of gauze and, to some extent at least, coordinated with Scriabin's music is a good example of how the spiritual aspirations of artists sought realisation in a breaking down of the boundaries between artforms, almost the opposite of the medium specificity which Clement Greenberg advocated. Such concerns were not unknown to the abstract expressionists and Jackson Pollock, now so identified with Greenberg's account of modernism and its emphasis upon the self-criticality of each medium, had for an early teacher Frederick Schwankovsky, 'Theosophist and color-

music enthusiast,' and attended Thomas Wilfred's *Lumia* events in New York, in which the inventor of the *Clavilux*, a colour-musical instrument, projected coloured lights in a darkened environment.¹²⁴

If the abstract expressionists were involved with exploring new forms of abstract painting, then they happened to coincide with a generation of composers who were equally committed to calling into question established traditions of music and seeking new ways of approaching it.¹²⁵ Perhaps the most familiar example of parallel activity is that between the composer Morton Feldman and painter Philip Guston who found much to admire and emulate in each other's practice. Guston's slow accumulation of individual marks on the canvas, his arrival at colour through mixing those dabs of paint on the canvas surface helped Feldman to conceptualise his own composing in terms of painting and move away from linear developments of a melodic line towards thinking of sound as a kind of material to which he could respond from moment to moment.¹²⁶ Feldman's pieces lack the expected developments of classical music, the emergence of a dominant theme and its eventual recurrence or the alternation of clearly defined movements and instead work upon a more intimate level of response, progressing from one sound, or pattern of sounds, to the next, often employing near repeats of previously heard music and refusing to settle into predictable structures.¹²⁷ In Feldman's hands this process sometimes results in long pieces of music lasting for many hours which profoundly challenge our expectations of duration. Having dedicated pieces to both Philip Guston and Mark Rothko his music most readily evokes the shifting transitions of colour in space which characterise their paintings, but Feldman's notion of sound as material is more widely applicable to painting and perhaps of some relevance to Barnett Newman's paintings.¹²⁸ If music had hitherto provided the example of a dematerialised artform for visual artists then Feldman's reversal of terms, thinking music in terms of painting, also presents the possibility of music as a kind of stuff, a literal quality, albeit an aural one. His desire to think of sound as sound might even make us think of Frank

Stella's aim of keeping paint as good as it is in the tin, or Johns's admonition to make a mark upon a canvas, then make another mark.

Feldman's music also makes very particular demands upon the listener, lacking as it does the melodic returns which generally orientate a listener temporally through remembering a previously heard motif and becoming aware of its return. Such obvious signposts are lacking in Feldman's work which, combined with the long duration of some pieces, forces the listener into other ways of making sense of what they are hearing. The experience of a Feldman piece is often one of intensified listening, not in terms of identifying previously heard chords or progressions – almost impossible for anyone but experienced musicians – but something nearer to an absorption in the particular sound quality of a given piece.¹²⁹ The result of this absorption could be described as an aural space around the listener, not unlike the visual space, or *place*, which Newman wishes to create and which, as Bryn Harrison describes in relation to Feldman's music, 'seeks to position the listener at the centre of the work and through which meaning is acquired as an emergent property of the experience.'¹³⁰ Both artists circumnavigate the traditional uses of their medium and endeavour to employ their materials with a directness which imposes itself on the spectator, yet both also see that materiality as expanding out into space. Ultimately both are interested in the spectator's perceptual experience and to understand how materiality seemingly gives way to something immaterial it is necessary to ask closer questions about the phenomenology of how the work is received.¹³¹

Linking Feldman's work to that of Barnett Newman is also to suggest that there are transitional links between Abstract Expressionism and Minimalism in both music and the visual arts and Jonathan Barnard in his essay "The Minimalist Aesthetic in the Plastic Arts and in Music" traces how the work

of a subsequent generation of composers – he focuses upon Terry Riley, Le Monte Young and Philip Glass – might be profitably compared with their Minimalist peers in the visual arts.¹³² Bernard considers three areas in which these composers employ similar strategies to those of the visual artists: the controlling or limiting of the operation of chance in their works, an emphasis upon surface which produces a sense of impersonality and a shift from the idea of composition to one of arrangement, taking away not only the dependence upon separate parts of a composition but leading to music in which the *process* can be heard in the final piece. Thus Steve Reich's statement that he is 'interested in perceptible processes; I want to be able to hear the process happening throughout the sounding music' echoes the same demand for immediacy, for a directness of means which Stella proposes in relation to the processes of painting.¹³³ It is therefore possible to hear in this music the same kind of temporal dimension as becomes evident in works of Minimalist visual art, the use of repeated or serial forms demanding from the viewer/listener an awareness of themselves, and their temporal location, in relation to the piece.¹³⁴ If music can never be *material* in the same sense as an art object, it can nevertheless point towards our perceptual process in a similar manner, something which exists in the actual space of the listener and is connected as much to the temporality of that listener as any given internal musical structure. Sound is as much a part of the way in which we perceptually reach out to the world around us as sight and if thinking about sound as material, as a literal something, is something we resist then we might also question our willingness to accept visual phenomena as literal things. Where such a question leads, perhaps, is to the indivisibility of our senses and our perception of any object as dependent upon all of them.

Before turning to phenomenology to throw further light on these issues of literality and dematerialisation I want to examine a set of paintings which interrogate the tension which exists between those concepts, the *Zone Paintings* made by Robert Mangold from 1996 onwards.

Mangold is generally regarded as a Post-Minimalist painter, through chronology as much as any re-

working of Minimalist practice, though his shift to object-like paintings was chiefly influenced by seeing paintings by Frank Stella and Barnett Newman in the 1961 exhibition *American Abstract Expressionists and Imagists* at the Guggenheim Museum. It was this experience that made him realise he wanted to make paintings 'you relate to like architecture, in a scale related to human size.'¹³⁵ He went on to explore the object-ness of painting in several early series and to test the boundary between painting and the literal object. In the *Wall* and *Area* paintings made in the mid-to-late sixties Mangold employs relatively shallow panels of Masonite that are evenly painted with a single colour and are often shaped in such a way as to *cut into* or *add onto* the traditional rectangular format of paintings. In *Pink Area* of 1965 two rectangular panels of equal height are pushed together, but the left-hand panel has a roughly square notch cut out from its bottom left-hand corner: the result is the formation of an 'area' that, to employ Fried's terms, seems to compel conviction as shape, for we see the work primarily as a shaped area and not as a defaced rectangle or a less than whole painting.¹³⁶ This insight or quality is explored throughout the two series as Mangold tests more irregular shapes that move further from a rectangular form, though he always retains the sense of the rectangle as a basis for the work. Despite their shallow format and their irregularity of shape, however, I would argue that the *Walls* and *Areas* are paintings, for they always retain a clear sense of a painted frontal plane parallel to the wall. Not so with another early work, *Gray Window Wall* made by the artist in 1964 and subsequently destroyed, in which two planes run parallel to the wall, one jutting out in front of the other and joined to it by a perpendicular section, the foremost plane U-shaped with a sill along its bottom section, so that it evokes a window, the rear plane missing a rectangular section on its top right-hand corner which, again, has a sill that juts out beyond the plane.¹³⁷ It is not simply that *Gray Window Wall* is more complex than the *Walls* and *Areas*, it is that the artist has confounded our awareness of a single frontal plane in a variety of ways – breaking it in two, the interruptions of the sills, the window-like hollowing out of one section – so that it becomes impossible to read the work as *image* and we are forced to encounter the piece as

an object. At this point, I propose, it becomes more useful to think of it as sculpture rather than painting.

Mangold did not return to the format of the *Window Wall* and instead his mature work evolves out of the wall-like quality of the *Walls* and *Areas*, to the point that his entire output subsequent to those series can be seen to explore a particular kind of painting that is neither an illusionistic space nor something that can be regarded simply as an object. In his own words:

As a painter you can treat the work as a Window, as an Object, or as a Wall...All of my works since then are involved with something else, something I refer to as "Painting as Wall"...It operates between the other two, it shares some characteristics of both, window and object, it in fact is an object, but more correctly it is a portable wall, its flatness is its most prominent characteristic....In Painting as Wall you exist physically in relation to it, but you can neither enter it, nor can you make a thing of it.¹³⁸

Mangold's "Painting as Wall" is what I am calling the *object-image*, based upon the notion that it retains elements of both window and object, 'window' in this sense being inseparable from image: his term perhaps carries a greater emphasis upon the solidity of the frontal plane of a painting but in allowing it to exist as both image and object it cuts through the debate around literality in the same way that I am attempting here. Mangold's paintings have consistently examined the ways in which image and object co-exist and use the complex phenomenology of that problem to generate series of considerable subtlety and depth. If we leap over several decades of such work, we find the issue foregrounded with remarkable clarity in the *Zone Paintings* (1996 onwards). The *Zone Paintings* bring together many of the formal concerns of earlier series and in particular they develop out of the

Plane/Figure series from earlier in the decade in which shaped coloured canvases have charcoal ellipses drawn onto them that in various ways make contact with the literal edge of the work. As the series develops Mangold begins to use two colours, always on separate but adjoining panels, which the ellipses transgress, so that individual drawn ellipses are not bound by the coloured area. It is this notion of boundary that the *Zone Paintings* scrutinise in more depth.

The complexities of the *Zone Paintings* are too subtle to do justice to here – I refer the reader on to Arthur C. Danto’s clear analysis and description in his essay “The *Zone Paintings*” – but in order to clarify the way they illuminate the nature of *object-images* I have to outline some of their familial traits.¹³⁹ The *Zone Paintings* consist of coloured and non-coloured zones, the latter being white, grey or black: the coloured zones have a curved upper edge whose radius is taken from where their vertical edge meets the bottom of the canvas and these zones also contain drawn ovals or ellipses. The non-coloured zones have flattened upper edges, which is to say that they are always rectangular, and contain nothing other than their non-colour; wherever an ellipse meets the edge of a non-coloured zone it simply stops, abruptly. What complicates the *Zone Paintings*, however, is the refusal of the zones to adhere to their own rules: it isn’t simply that depicted zones over-spill or fall short of their demarcated areas, so that, for instance, a coloured zone will trespass upon the rectangular space of a non-coloured zone; it is also that the *literal* zones, the physical divisions of the panels, prove unreliable and transgress their allotted space.

This neatly reverses the ‘logic’ of Stella’s *Black* and *Shaped* paintings and throws up a complex interplay between the physical structure of the paintings as it is evidenced in the separate panels and the image that those paintings contain. As with Innes’s *Exposed Paintings*, the paintings are difficult to describe in words but easily grasped when seen and, also like the *Exposed Paintings*, they

hinge upon an area that seems to take away *painting* or in some way *reverse* its normal mode. If we consider *Brown/Gray Zone Painting V* of 1996, the central gray zone operates in a similar way to the *un-painted* area of an *Exposed Painting* in that it seems to *remove* the image, as if the coloured zones and their ellipses are somehow absorbed into it: the non-coloured zone allows for no drawing and no colour and carries within it the possibility that it might expand and allow *for no image*, swallowing up the whole of the painting, leaving us with only monochrome blankness; not simply a monochrome, it ought to be insisted, but a monochrome *at the expense of image*, an *anti-image* that has spread like a virus and consumed colour and drawing.¹⁴⁰ The reverse scenario, of the coloured zones completely overwhelming the non-coloured zone, is, as Danto tells us, not a possibility that the *Zone Paintings* allow for because of how their upper curved edges are generated, a factor which leads Danto to read into them ‘a pessimistic cosmology’ which embraces all manner of struggle, political or otherwise.¹⁴¹ Returning to *Brown/Gray Zone Painting V*, the two coloured brown zones have impinged upon the ‘terrain’ of the central gray zone, so that their contained ellipses and their colour move beyond the demarcation of their physical panels and their curved upper edges have considerably diminished the width of the flattened upper edge of the gray zone. The gray zone, for all its evidently applied layer of paint, acts as a kind of *caesura*, a non-zone in the middle of the painting, so much so that we do not readily imagine the truncated ellipses continuing behind or within it in any way. This effectively inserts *non-image* within the image of the painting as a whole, a negativity that is further enhanced by the way in which the coloured zones encroach upon it in terms of literal shape, through their curved upper edges. Mangold employs both literal and depicted shape, Fried’s *shape-as-medium*, not only to highlight the relation the two, but also to produce an optical gap, the kind of blind spot that Fried wanted to see in Pollock’s cut-outs, but here operating in terms of both image and object. Danto suggests that the *Zone Paintings* deal philosophically with ‘the ontological difference between image (zone) and reality (panels)’.¹⁴² Whilst concurring with that judgement I think the paintings also reveal the interdependence of image and reality, just how fundamentally image depends upon the physical structure which carries it. Both

image and structure work towards the same end in the *Zone Paintings*, which is to manifest what it might be like to perceive neither. They are *object-images* that propose a void, where both object and image fail and we are left with a vacuum.

The paintings of Robert Mangold and Frank Stella can be seen as *object-images* that have much to tell us about how an image co-exists with a physical structure and the further implications of such co-existence. These paintings are essentially non-representational, for any such representation, as we have seen, jeopardises the sense we have of their physical structure; likewise, they remain within certain constraints, such as the prioritising of a frontal plane, otherwise they risk becoming objects and lose their quality of having an image. The necessity of having both, of being *object-images*, derives from the fact that their deepest meanings and qualities arise from how image and material structure are combined. Mangold's *Zone Paintings* make no sense as *depictions* and would appear as simply contrary, if not irrational, unless we are able to take account of the phenomenology of their structure and image. If the voiding of illusionistic space leads to the preoccupation with surface and edge that Krauss sees in the Minimalist aesthetic, with the insistence upon any *division* in the work being a material, physical division, then the *Zone Paintings* clearly interrogate such a notion *in relation to image*, that is within the constraints of painting; they employ a physical division quite as explicit as the zinc plates in Andre's *Zinc Square* but impose upon it an image that will not obey its rules, that casts into doubt the *necessity* that is elsewhere espoused in painting and sculpture.

This chapter has considered the notion of the object-image in relation to certain forms of practice and theory in American art in the middle of the twentieth century. I suggest that no equivalent term for object-image arose during this time because of the polarisation of the debate around literality,

forcing both critics and practitioners into one camp, modernist painting, or the other, minimalist objects. I see not only Frank Stella's paintings as object-images but also those of Robert Mangold and Barnett Newman and have drawn out during the course of the chapter how paintings by those artists address the balance between image and physical structure. During the course of this analysis I have touched on how these factors are connected to the way in which these paintings might be viewed and it is to this aspect of the object-image that I now turn, considering the phenomenological implications of their physical presence.

Chapter Three

The Phenomenology of Exposure

Chapter Three explores the experience of a viewer before object-images and draws on the writing of Maurice Merleau-Ponty in order to consider the implications of that experience from a phenomenological perspective. It begins with an account of viewing Callum Innes's 2012 'Exposed Painting Green Lake' and contrasts the difficulty of finding a fixed viewpoint with the ideal viewpoint that is suggested by traditional perspectival painting. The lack of such a single viewpoint is explored in relation to three texts about Agnes Martin's paintings by Kasha Linville, Rosalind Krauss and Michael Newman, all of which examine how those paintings offer experiences that vary depending upon viewing distance, so throwing considerable weight onto the movements and responses of a spectator. The importance of this bodily engagement is linked to Merleau-Ponty's 'Phenomenology of Perception' and more specifically to his understanding of embodied perception and the reciprocal relationship between perceiver and perceived. This reciprocity is further examined through Yve-Alain Bois' texts on Barnett Newman which explore the ways in which his paintings mirror a viewer's perceptual experience, linking features such as bilateral symmetry, laterality and large fields of colour to our proprioceptive sense of our own bodies. Taking cues from Bois' analysis I turn to some of the later 'Exposed Paintings' and explore the way in which they might relate to our own embodied experience, then shift the focus from the paintings to the artist's experience of making them: I examine the way in which the paintings might be said to contain the physical experience of their production and how the artist's sense of his own embodied perception might be seen to be 'translated' into a painted form. Following on from this, I consider the way in which the 'Exposed Paintings' might be linked to Merleau-Ponty's concept of time, using the 'then' and 'now' which Mel

Gooding sees in the absent and present areas of paint and canvas as a way of approaching actuality and a perception of time that does not involve fictional time within a painting. After a brief consideration of time in relation to Barthes' writing on photography, the final sections of the chapter engage with a sequence of ideas that follow on from this, the most important of which revolves around reversibility: I make links between the reversibility of the painted and exposed zones of the Exposed Paintings, the absence and presence of paint, with the reversibility that informs the sculpture of Rachel Whiteread and the 'thematics of visibility and invisibility' that might be traced through her work.¹ This in turn is linked to Merleau-Ponty's final text 'The Visible and the Invisible' in which the invisible is the 'being' that lies at the heart of our perceptual experience and consider his idea of the painting as a 'second visible', an attempt to give physical form to the bodily sensations that are provoked by perceptual experience.

I stood in front of Callum Innes's 2012 *Exposed Painting Green Lake* in the main gallery of the Whitworth in Manchester: it had been hung on an end wall and off to the left was a large window that looked out onto the park so that the surface of the painting was as much illuminated by natural as artificial light. Whilst I was looking at the painting a woman came over and took up a position a metre or so away from it: she stepped back another metre then moved quickly forward to look at it close-to, peering intently at different parts of the canvas. Whilst looking at the un-painted/stained half of the canvas, she moved off to the side and examined the staining that runs along the stretcher edge, then did a similar exercise on the other side of the painting. She stepped back. She moved a few metres away, tried viewing the painting from various angles, gradually moved back in closer. I recognised in her movements my own earlier approach to the painting but of course the experience was different in that, whilst I was looking, I was not particularly conscious of my own visibility, but simply responding to the painting and to the desire to obtain some kind of *grip* on it. Watching someone else, I was conscious of what must be similar thought processes dictating her movement

but also of the movement itself: the very fact that my own view of the painting was being blocked forced me into an awareness of her physical presence and the relationship between painting and viewer. It seemed to be, in this case, a particularly restless relationship and I would suggest that it was so because, when it comes to looking at *Exposed Painting Green Lake*, there is no single viewing point that offers a satisfactory experience of the painting.

With representational paintings, especially those that depend upon perspective, there clearly is such a viewing point, not only because the model for creating space within the painting is built around the notion of a single eye that views the painting from a point external to the work itself but also because there is an optimum distance at which representational forms are most *legible* to a viewer: from too far away, detail and eventually forms themselves are lost; from too close up, forms also become illegible and dissolve into the materiality of applied paint. With this latter point, I have in mind something like Andrew Harrison's notion of a pictorial 'mesh' in which increasing division of a painting's surface leads first of all to isolated details but beyond that to a loss of representational readability, 'a quite "abstract" if richly factured surface, which *on its own* has no pictorial force (even though it may have a rich aesthetic or artistic power)'.² Harrison employs this notion to explore the limits of twofoldness and does not feel it necessary to suggest that moving beneath the pictorial mesh involves a viewer in moving *closer*, if not very close, to the surface of a painting, which is to infer that at this point viewing distance so radically alters the experience of a representational painting as to nullify its depictive intent. Harrison also suggests that, despite the persuasiveness of twofoldness as an account of our experience of paintings, the older model of an *imagined* view seen through an *imaginary* window exercises a greater influence upon our experience of paintings than we might assume, 'an imaginative fiction whose ghost continues to haunt us'.³ In looking at representational paintings, then, a viewer not only avoids the extremes of closeness and distance at which representational legibility becomes lost, but also may well seek a kind of *ideal* viewing point

from which such legibility offers a maximum of clarity. Comparing our perception of actual objects to paintings Maurice Merleau-Ponty states:

For each object, as for each picture in an art gallery, there is an optimum distance from which it requires to be seen, a direction viewed from which it vouchsafes most of itself: at a shorter or greater distance we have merely a perception blurred through excess or deficiency. We therefore tend towards the maximum visibility, and seek a better focus as with a microscope.⁴

This is not simply a matter of 'focus' but rather of the way in which we grasp objects perceptually and, in Merleau-Ponty's account, fundamental properties of perception, such as the judgements we make about depth, are related to our perceptual grip upon objects. What he terms 'maximum grip'⁵ amounts to an intuitive process, a tension that arises from a sense of deficient perceptual grasp of an object in our perceptual field and the need to correct that lack.⁶ With representational paintings, there is clearly the possibility for maximum grip, for we tend to intuitively seek a spot from which we can see the painting with the utmost clarity: this involves finding an angle that minimises such distractions as reflected light on the painting's surface, but perhaps more crucially locating that distance at which we can most clearly perceive both that surface and the forms that are depicted upon it. I would argue that twofoldness is still involved here, for I would suggest that *maximum grip* in relation to representational paintings must include both its depicted contents and *our awareness* of its surface as applied paint. The ideal viewing point, then, gives us this twofold experience, one which is lessened by moving nearer or further away from the painting.

It is, however, the representational content of the painting that facilitates such a viewing position for in providing an experience parallel to that of our perception of objects in actual space it gives the viewer a clear and familiar framework for their interaction with the painting. I have already suggested above that the viewer's movements and positioning make a considerable difference to the viewing of representational paintings and this is largely because the loss of perceptual grip upon the depicted content of the work is relatively easy to recognise. This is not so clear cut when it comes to non-representational paintings and watching a viewer move around *Exposed Painting Green Lake* underlines for me the way in which the spectator is not provided with a comparable point of reference, a viewing point which defines the experience of a painting from other vantage points: moving very close in to a representational painting, so that we have the experience of seeing beneath the *mesh* of legibility, or moving off to the side to view the work obliquely are *additional* views, understood in relation to what is the *primary* view of the work. So accustomed are we to these traditional viewing distances and the primacy of an approximately ideal viewpoint that it is easy to transfer this habit to non-representational paintings, which perhaps reinforces the tendency to read such works in terms of their evocative associations, in Innes's case the imagery of natural phenomena that I explored in Chapter One, but this might be to miss, or even misrepresent, other aspects of the work. This loss of a primary viewing point is explored, almost incidentally, in a short article written by Kasha Linville about the paintings made by Agnes Martin between 1960 and 1967.⁷ Linville is interested in understanding and defining the way in which Martin's paintings engage her more fully than contemporary Colour Field or Minimalist artworks and endeavours to decipher the works through close attention to her own experience:

This canvas, *Red Bird*, 1964, has close drawn, horizontal red pencil lines on a uniform white surface. The lines begin less than an inch from the edge of the canvas, creating a delicate border. Because of their color, softness and closeness, they go atmospheric very quickly as

you move back from the painting. But I don't mean "atmosphere" in the spatially illusionistic sense I associate with color field painting. Rather it is a non-radiating, impermeable red mist. It feels like, rather than looks like atmosphere. Somehow, the red lines dematerialise the canvas, making it hazy, velvety. Then, as you step back even further, the painting closes down entirely becoming completely opaque.⁸

What Linville's text clarifies is that as a viewer changes position in relation to the painting they perceive aspects of that work *changing*, so that the painting seems to take on a different quality or identity. In Linville's account this is far more significant than simply a loss of focus or detail, but rather becomes a set of phases in our viewing which any reading or interpretation of the work must take into account. It is exactly this complexity of perceptual experience offered by the paintings that gives them, for Linville, their evocative power. This idea that the painting can no longer be regarded as a fixed entity but is subject to a kind of perceptual flux is central to Rosalind Krauss's essay *Agnes Martin: The /Cloud/* of 2000.⁹ Krauss formalises Linville's poetic response into a more rigid tripartite description of viewing the paintings, moving from the materiality of the close view to the atmosphere of a middle distance and an opaque closing down of the work from further away. She systemises these viewing distances in order to contest the way in which Martin's paintings are generally interpreted as examples of the *abstract sublime*.¹⁰ Reading Martin's paintings through the tropes of Romantic landscape painting is to view them in too static a manner and for Krauss the implications of different perceptual phases lie in the way that they reveal the semiological system that underlies *painting* as a whole:

The landscape subject, no matter how reduced or abstracted, simply defines the work, is an objective attribute of it, like the color blue, or red. But Linville's three distances make it

clear that /atmosphere/ is an effect set within a system in which an opposite effect is also at work, and that it both defines and is defined by that opposite. Linville's three distances, that is, transform the experience from an intuition into a system, and convert *atmosphere* from a signified (the content of an image) into a signifier - /atmosphere/ - the open member of a differential series: wall/mist; weave/cloud; closed/open; form/formless.¹¹

The landscape readings that are imposed upon the works, Krauss suggests, are inadequate when it comes to their experiential complexity and the different phases of viewing, and therefore of interpretation, that the paintings seem to offer. Most of those readings come from viewing the paintings at a distance that privileges their atmospheric quality, a distance roughly comparable to that we habitually take up in viewing representational paintings, and ignore those experiences that foreground the *materiality* of the paintings, either the facture of their surfaces from close-to or the opaque stele-like quality that Krauss perceives from a distance. For this reason, Krauss sees their atmospheric quality as signifier rather than signified, as part of a system of how the paintings operate upon us, the /atmosphere/ bracketed between and differentiated from the two material phases of the work and defined by that contrast. This might immediately make us ask whether a similar reading might be considered in relation to the *Exposed Paintings*, for they too are commonly interpreted within the framework of landscape painting, if not an *abstract sublime*.

Do the *Exposed Paintings* likewise offer a tripartite form of experience? Possibly not: to begin with there is not, in my opinion, the closing down to an opaque solidity when the *Exposed Paintings* are viewed from a distance; on the contrary, they seem to retain a clarity of having different zones even when viewed from considerable distance and if, in the Whitworth Gallery, I turn around from looking at *Exposed Painting Green Lake* and look down the entire length of that long gallery at *Exposed*

Painting Lamp Black (2012) I can still read that painting as an image with its contrast of opaque and atmospheric zones. Beyond this, I am less certain about the demarcation of different viewing experiences and feel there is something more complex, or significant, about the *transitions* between such phases in viewing the *Exposed Paintings*: there is no clear divide between seeing their surfaces as *material* and then as *image*, only a shift in awareness between the two as I move away from the painting's surface. This sense of *transition* is taken up by Michael Newman in relation to Agnes Martin's paintings and in response to Krauss's rather fixed categories.¹² Newman sees Linville's account as the more nuanced, truer to his own experience before the paintings, which is far more one of subtle shifts in his perception of their surfaces so that *transitions* 'are crucial rather than the fixed moments.'¹³ In particular Newman is interested in the transition that takes place between a close-up view of the paintings, when the viewer is extremely aware of the materiality of their surfaces and structure, and our perception of the works from a middle distance, the 'dematerialising' atmosphere Linville describes and which Krauss formalises into /atmosphere/.¹⁴ Newman posits a form of materiality that not only evades interpretation in terms of the abstract sublime but also in the terms that Krauss proposes, as a signifier *for materiality* within the semiotic system of painting. If Greenberg's notion of *opticality* evades the materiality of non-representational paintings, Newman suggests, then that same materiality is also oddly circumvented in Krauss's account, translated into a signifier for itself, an aspect of a system of interpretation. Is it possible, he asks, to identify a materiality that exists in and for itself, a radical or raw materiality that resists such interpretation and in some way exists before interpretation sets to work?

Such a notion is clearly of significance in relation both to the *Exposed Paintings* and to the category of *object-images* that I am exploring but what I want to draw from Newman's account at this point is the way in which such materiality is connected, or rather resistant to, a viewer's perception:

The distinction I am trying to make in the experience of Martin's work is between the painting as the object of perceptual intentionality on the part of the subject – perception as an act involving a degree of projection – and materiality as that which insists or resists (I deliberately avoid saying “is perceived” here) in a way that gives the impression of being indifferent to the subject.¹⁵

The transition, then, in a viewer's experience of the works might not only consist of an awareness of materiality gradually giving way to a sensation, or as Linville would have it a *feeling* of atmosphere, but is also potentially one of the painting *existing in its own right to the painting as projection of the viewer's interpretative reading*, phases of perception that might be aligned with *object* and *image*. These transitions, it is worth repeating, are brought about by the viewer's movement in front of the works, as Newman reiterates:

In Linville's description, the “aspects” of Martin's paintings shift between surface, optical field and opaque barrier as the viewer moves back and forth, performing in front of the painting in a way that is visible to others: a movement not *in* the subject as a mind but *of* the subject as a body and declared, in this case, in writing.¹⁶

Newman proceeds to consider writing as analogous to painting and to draw a parallel form of materiality between the printed letters that make up a text and the inscribed lines of Martin's grids, but what interests me here is the insistence on the body, on the viewer as a body visible to others and perception as filtered through the body. This is what is left out of Greenberg's account of *opticality* and the idea of a pictorial space that can be accessed *only with the eye*, for such a model carries with it the implication of *a disembodied eye*, of viewing as an experience *within the painting*

as the eye journeys around its optical spaces. This is one of Krauss's principal objections to Greenberg's account of contemporary painting and in many texts she seeks to re-assert the importance of the body into how we might read paintings and sculpture, an issue that operates very clearly in their respective accounts of Jackson Pollock's work.¹⁷ Newman insists that the different phases in our viewing of Martin's paintings – the materiality/atmosphere/opacity of Krauss's account – remain linked to the movement of a body before the canvases, a body that in turn *is visible to others* and whose movement is not internal, in the mind, but happens externally, physically, in the space around the painting. This insistence on the importance of the body, of our perceptual experience before such paintings being 'of the subject as a body' and not simply 'in the subject as a mind' draws heavily on a phenomenological account of perception though this is left almost wholly implicit in these three texts on Agnes Martin.¹⁸ I want to consider for a moment what that 'of the body' might entail and link it more firmly to the model of experience that Maurice Merleau-Ponty puts forward in *The Phenomenology of Perception* and other texts.¹⁹

When I introduced Merleau-Ponty's notion of *maximum grip* above I connected our perception of paintings to the movements we make in relation to them but it is all too easy to imagine that happening through the eyes and the mind and our bodily movement simply as that which *facilitates* such a process. The model of perception that Merleau-Ponty proposes does not regard the body as incidental in this way but as fundamental: we cannot separate out any part or organ of our body, such as the eyes or the mind, in the perceptual process, nor can we regard perception as an *internal* process, happening *within* the body and separate to the body. Perception does not happen in an internal mental theatre, according to Merleau-Ponty, or in any kind of separate mental realm and so he discounts what might be said to 'haunt' many accounts of our experience, from Descartes onwards, which is a *dualism* that separates our physical and mental being. This goes against what seems to be a 'natural way' to think about our consciousness, which is that it is located somewhere

inside our heads and looks out through the eyes.²⁰ On the contrary, in Merleau-Ponty's account we perceive *through* our body and our entire understanding of the world is based upon our *bodily* experience of being in and of that world. It is our physical capabilities, the motor skills that we possess, that unlock for us the meaning of any environment for it is only in our understanding of how we can *act* in any given environment, how we can engage physically, that provides us with any meaning in our experience. My understanding of the room I presently occupy and the laptop into which I type these words arises from my physical ability to perform certain actions and if the landscape seen through the window contains meaning for me it is because I can, if I choose, leave the house and walk through it. This understanding of perception seems to strike hard against the way we tend to think about *identity* for it seems to deprive us of an inner self, replacing such a concept with an idea of *physical being* that arises from the interaction between our bodies and the world, but by understanding perception in this way Merleau-Ponty suggests that we arrive at a different understanding of self:

We have relearned to feel our body....In the same way we shall need to reawaken our experience of the world as it appears to us in so far as we are in the world through our body, and in so far as we perceive the world with our body. But by thus remaking contact with the body and with the world, we shall also rediscover ourselves, since, perceiving as we do with our body, the body is a natural self and, as it were, the subject of perception.²¹

A crucial aspect of Merleau-Ponty's account of perception, then, lies in the way in which our perception of the external world is understood through the perception of our own body, which is to say that those qualities and properties which we recognise in the world are only recognised because we *know them already*, through our perceptual experience of our own bodies. We can only make

sense of a concept such as *against*, for instance, because we are orientated bodily in such a way as to be 'face to face with the world,' so that the top and bottom of *against*, the *facingness* of *against*, is already known to us through experience before we come to its conceptualisation.²² There is a mutually constituting and implicated process between the body and the external world:

Every external perception is immediately synonymous with a certain perception of my body, just as every perception of my body is made explicit in the language of external perception.²³

Given that Merleau-Ponty thinks that our understanding of the world comes through this kind of perceptual experience, our encounter with any kind of object is as much to do with our own body as with its external properties: we might well have a conceptual understanding of such an object, for instance a cube, but that understanding in turn originates in our experience, in our bodily perception. When we come across a cube, we do not need to measure its sides, or even have moved all the way around it before we have understood it to be a cube; it is in some way already given to us as a cube and what we understand of it, the *space* that is enclosed by a cube, arises from having experienced such a space ourselves, having knowledge of *being enclosed*, or even the *cube-like* spaces of rooms.²⁴ Rather than some kind of detached and objective overview, the 'thought of an absolute object,'²⁵ we encounter rather 'the absolute existence of the object...in its perceptual self-evidence.'²⁶ What we might normally reduce to a form of *information*, so that we might classify an object or our experience of it, becomes a more complex interaction:

The thing, and the world, are given to me along with the parts of my body, not by any 'natural geometry', but in a living connection comparable, or rather identical, with that existing between the parts of my body itself.²⁷

Such a view of perception makes our movements in front of paintings take on a slightly different light and also goes some way to explaining why Agnes Martin's paintings provoke such complex reactions in terms of our *interaction* with them. By not providing an illusionistic image, such paintings prevent us from understanding them *in terms of information or iconography*, so that we are unable to categorise our experience of them through their depicted content. I am not suggesting that this is all we can do with illusionistic paintings, only that they allow, or perhaps encourage, a response in these terms, so that much of the discussion will be around their symbolism, or the significance of depicted features, or their psychological content: when we do turn to their physical qualities, as with Wollheim's analysis of twofoldness, it is generally to make judgements about *style* and to imbue their depicted content with an expressive factor. I am proposing that paintings such as those by Martin and Innes – and the category of *object-images* – function partly by blocking such readings and thereby forcing a viewer into something like an awareness of their 'absolute existence.'²⁸ Questions of depicted content, iconography, symbolism, psychological content and style seem far less pressing and not as pertinent as those around process, materiality, structure. Our experience of such paintings seems to lead, as Krauss and Newman suggest in relation to Agnes Martin, back to the body and our physical encounter with them: before the painting and without the normal cues of illusionistic representation, the viewer must find some other way of making sense of the experience and that process will begin through *physical confrontation*. What the woman in front of *Exposed Painting Green Lake* is doing is taking the painting's measure and what it is measured against is her own experience of being *in the world*.

One of the most thorough and sustained examinations of how we might perceive non-representational paintings exists in the various texts written by Yve-Alain Bois around the paintings of Barnett Newman which I have already drawn on to support my contention that Newman's

paintings are *object-images*; what I left out of that earlier section is Bois's suggestion that the artist's mature work demands a different kind of viewing to that of traditional representational paintings and that Newman 'was, in effect, radically transforming the mode of pictorial reception that had remained basically unchanged in the West since the Renaissance.'²⁹ This is a large claim but Bois backs it up with a detailed consideration of the *experience* of viewing and, what's more, one which takes full account of such viewing as *embodied*. Starting with the conversion moment in Newman's career, the making of *Onement 1* in 1948, Bois explores the significance of that painting not only in relation to its elimination of illusionistic atmospherics but also its bilaterality, a quality that finds its echo, or even its origination, in our own bilaterality:

For what is the perception of bilateral symmetry, indeed, if it is not, as Maurice Merleau-Ponty has remarked, that which constitutes the perceiving subject as an erect human being, if it is not what solidifies for us the immediate equivalence between the awareness of our own body and the always-already-given orientation of the field of perception.³⁰

The unmodulated field of colour with its central zip, then, confronts the viewer directly as a visual field that, in its refusal to be deciphered as an illusionistic space, constantly draws their awareness back to its specifics and to the centrality of that zip and its location not in front of or behind that field of red but *as a part of it*, so that our attention moves from one part of that field to another. The zip acts as the measure of the field, makes of it an *entity* that we encounter and one which shares something of our own *being in the world*, our vertical axis, our two-sidedness, the bilateral nature of our vision; shares, in other words, the way that we face the world and that 'always-already-given' way of being in the world that governs what and how we perceive. It is this shift in how we might approach such a painting – from an illusionistic space we enter into and decipher to a

visual field that we encounter and that reflects back to us our own perceptual processes – that causes Barnett Newman to ruminate upon *Onement 1* for so long, not only because it is such a radical alteration in the conception of what a *painting* might be, but also because he must then consider if such painting can function outside of the stark bilaterality of this first work. Yve-Alain Bois's extensive analysis of Newman's subsequent output is premised upon this notion of reading the paintings in perceptual terms – rather than symbolic or strictly formalist ones – and he carefully unpicks the developmental stages that might be read into the works. He sees Newman as recognising that what is important is the notion of *laterality*, rather than the symmetry or bilaterality of *Onement 1*, so that what becomes important in subsequent paintings is the way that our vision moves laterally across the visual field of the canvas.³¹ Bois follows closely the painting-by-painting development of this idea, the testing of symmetry in works such as *Abraham* and *By Twos* of 1949, the move to asymmetry and two zips in paintings such as *Untitled 1* and *Covenant* of the same year and he draws out the subtlety of perceptual experience that the paintings offer up, examining some of the strategies that Newman employs to work against our expectations of what we are seeing and make it difficult to say, with any certainty, what kind of relationship exists between the zips and their surrounding field. I will not recount any of Bois's descriptive analysis here, but only wish to consider the way in which he implicates our embodied experience in an understanding of the paintings for the very notion of *laterality* in this context connects the visual field of the canvas to our own upright stance and mode of perception: we bring to them our own *already given* understanding of the world that arises from that vertical axis, our sense of having a given *top and bottom* that anchors our perception and provides the difference between our feeling for symmetry laterally, across the field of our vision, and symmetry in height or depth. Bois employs the seventeenth-century philosopher Blaise Pascal to make the point:

Symmetry. In anything one takes in at a glance; based on something that there is no reason for doing differently: and also based on the face of man. Whence it comes that we only desire symmetry in breadth, and not in height or depth.³²

It is perhaps for this reason that Newman executed so few canvases with horizontal zips and why Bois considers those that he did attempt to be 'failures'.³³ In order to properly explore the perceptual experience of laterality Newman needed a constant, that provided by the stability of our own upright stance so that his paintings always have, as he puts it, a top and a bottom, or are 'governed by nonisotropy in one direction' as Bois comments.³⁴ As the paintings become more complex and move away from their initial bilateral format, exactly where the zips are in that lateral field, their relation to each other and to the surrounding field becomes harder and harder to judge in perceptual terms: Newman plays off subtle shifts of proportional space, employs areas of similar but not exact dimension, offsets potential symmetries with left over or remaindered areas, broadens the zips so that one edge might be placed at or hint at symmetry or some formalised relation and, as we have already seen, varies the edges, breadth and surface qualities of both zips and field to complicate any simple assumptions we might make.

Aside from these factors, Bois points to another perceptual anomaly within the paintings, the difficulty, if not impossibility, of focussing upon both the zip and the painting as a whole *at the same time*: as soon as we focus upon a zip, which strongly draws our attention, transmits a demand that we look *at it*, then at that moment we lose any sense we have of canvas as a whole, an effect that holds good for all the work but is particularly conspicuous with the larger paintings, especially if we follow Newman's injunction to look at the paintings from close-to. Instead of being able to *frame* the painting perceptually and regard it as a whole, it sets up a visual field that operates laterally and

out to the edges of our vision or our perceptual awareness, so that we become aware of our *peripheral* vision. This produces some strange effects: in looking at *Uriel* (1955) as it was installed in the Tate Gallery exhibition, for instance, I found it possible, when standing near the left-hand side of the canvas, to almost completely lose any sense of the brown band I knew to be at its right side but to nevertheless *perceive* something there, bordering the expanse of the aqua field, making it difficult to resist the impulse to move in that direction and bring that area in clearer focus: to obtain a greater *perceptual grip* upon it. In making a viewer aware of their peripheral vision the paintings call into question what is *just beyond* our perception and the way that *beyond* exerts a kind of pull, so that our perception is a constant process of becoming aware of something vague, a kind of potential that is as yet *indeterminate* and moving towards it, allowing it to become *constituted* in our perception, becoming more *determinate*.³⁵ The paintings, through their frustrating of our desire for determinacy, keep the viewer in a kind of perceptual suspension:

Newman's move seems to have gone this way (although he certainly would not have formulated it so): if the pictorial field is prevented from functioning like a permanent ground, if the canvas is divided in such a way that in looking at a zip we are solicited by another one farther away, hence are constantly in the process of adjusting and readjusting the fundamental figure/ground opposition, never finding a moment of repose when this structure could coalesce, then the only factual certitude that we will be able to grasp will be the lateral expanse of the canvas, the pictorial field as such.³⁶

As further evidence of Newman's intentions Bois cites the several photographs taken in 1958 of spectators looking at some of his paintings in which they have been asked to stand, presumably upon the artist's urging, close to the paintings, within a metre or less of their surfaces. With the

larger paintings, such as *Cathedra* (1951) and *Vir Heroicus Sublimis* (1950/51) the photographs show two viewers neither of whom, from their chosen position, will be able to see the whole of the canvas and so will be in that state of perceptual uncertainty described above, seeking to ascertain the relation of zip to field to zip and, for that matter, the edges of their own perceptual awareness, the boundary of their field of vision. What Bois also points out is that in these photographs the viewers are as often looking at an area of the field of colour as a zip and are positioned obliquely to the canvas so that their viewing of field and zips is from an angle, making even more difficult any judgement of geometrical relationship.³⁷ The photographs, once we become aware of this obliquity, have an odd quality, as if the viewers have been hypnotised before the canvases and in a way I think this is what Newman wants to suggest, that a proper viewing of such paintings, like a proper understanding of them, involves entering into a relation with them that is deeper than normal consciousness, or at least different. The photographs *dramatize* the perceptual event: we see Dorothy Miller and Newman himself stationed before *Cathedra* and their position in front of the painting, their angle of viewing and their seeming stasis make us conscious of the *process of viewing*. To take, in our turn, such a position in relation to the painting, rather than the safe distance of a few metres away, is to become conscious in turn of its perceptual ambiguity: from Newman's position before the painting, the two zips might seem comparable, though in fact the right hand zip is much broader and brighter, but beyond that zip will be an indeterminate zone, difficult to make any accurate judgement about, unless, that is, we move over to where Miller is standing. In this way the painting mirrors that coming-into-being that is a part of our perceptual process, according to Merleau-Ponty, but that we are rarely aware of:

Apart from the probing of my eye or my hand, and before my body synchronises with it, the sensible is nothing but a vague beckoning... Thus a sensible datum which is on the point of being felt sets a kind of muddled problem for my body to solve. I must find the attitude

which *will* provide it with the means of becoming determinate...And yet I do so only when I am invited by it, my attitude is never sufficient to make me really see blue or really touch a hard surface.³⁸

By this account, 'the sensible' – all that we generally consider to be out there in the world – is *constituted* by our perception, all its properties and qualities the result of the interaction between our consciousness and the world.³⁹ Things come into being as we perceive them, but we are only ever aware, of course, of a small fragment of the world; the rest, everything outside of our perception, exists only as a 'vague beckoning', but one that exerts a certain force, so that we are constantly being pulled to the edges of our perception where new data, 'on the point of being felt', constitutes itself as our consciousness grasps another aspect of the world. This constant cycle of perception goes by largely unnoticed, so accustomed are we to its nature and to our need to make of experience something understandable, so that the raw material of perception, the beckoning of perception that is not yet coalesced into the identifiable, is of necessity forgotten. This process is made manifest for us in Newman's paintings: they provide forms that beckon to us in the same way as that which lies at the edge of our perception but with the difference that they *resist* translation into determinate matter, remaining a 'muddled problem for my body to solve.'⁴⁰

It is this element of *forgetting* in our perceptual process that leads Merleau-Ponty to the idea of a *phenomenal field*, the world as we experience it *before* it is translated into knowledge: when he states that 'Nothing is more difficult than to know precisely *what we see*,' Merleau-Ponty is alluding to not only the efficiency with which we evaluate the raw material of our perception and *make sense* of it, but also the density of our preconceptions, our ways of understanding our experience of the world, that lead us to formulate the meaning of that experience as it is happening.⁴¹ In this context,

representational painting partakes of the same process of forgetting, for it provides us with experience translated into knowledge and, in its ordering of that experience, mirrors those processes of understanding the world which Merleau-Ponty terms *objective thought*.⁴² By the same token, *object-images* resist such a formulation and thereby keep a spectator in the kind of perceptual flux described above, so that what they are *seeing* is much harder to evaluate and translate into other forms of information: they are nearer, in other words, to providing access to the phenomenal field and delaying that shift from *experiencing* to *understanding*. This is perhaps why, in his efforts to define the materiality of Agnes Martin's paintings, Michael Newman wants to avoid saying it 'is perceived,' because he is at pains to posit a kind of materiality that resists translation into meaning, whether as landscape or as signifier in a semiological system, and perception seems almost automatically to involve some such projection or overlaying of meaning.⁴³ Merleau-Ponty suggests that it is possible to perceive more directly, without such processing, as long as we understand the nature of the phenomenal field and the way that it arises from our bodily interaction with the world.

I want to explore this notion in relation to Innes's *Exposed Paintings* and use some of the texts that have been written about Innes's work to consider further the phenomenology of object-images. As I described in Chapter One, the development of Callum Innes's mature work offers many parallels with that of Barnett Newman and I want to begin by re-stating the similarity between *Onement 1* and the earliest *Exposed Paintings* with their strict division into two halves around a central vertical line, suggesting the vertical orientation of our own bodily posture before the world that Bois draws out in relation to Newman's painting, an *already-given* of top and bottom and the bilaterality of our vision. These early *Exposed Paintings* are not, however, bilateral, or even symmetrical, no matter how strongly they might evoke our sense of those qualities: on the contrary, they are characterised first and foremost by the *difference* between the two halves, a material difference that depends

upon the process of dissolution that Innes has applied to the field as a whole. We must, as many commentators have insisted, think of their surfaces primarily in terms of *presence* and *absence*, of material and its removal/absence, and if their severity of composition does act to mirror our own axis and posture, the paintings moving around a central axis that finds its echo in our own *centredness*, then we must consider this in relation to their qualities of presence and absence. As the *Exposed Paintings* become more complex compositionally, then so does any potential relation to our bodily experience: once Innes begins to paint only a section of the canvas he introduces *horizontal* elements into the paintings, so we are no longer able to say, as Bois does of many of Newman's paintings, that they are 'governed by nonisotropy in one direction.'⁴⁴ There remains a dominant verticality, underlined by the verticality of his processes of dissolution, but the *Exposed Paintings* are compositionally more grid-like than Newman's paintings and are not readable purely in terms of laterality but suggest a more complex mapping of forces. This is, in fact, what Keith Hartley detects in the *Exposed Paintings* and it leads him to suggest a different bodily engagement with the paintings:

Another consequence of using an horizontal band of colour is that Innes now causes us to relate ourselves, our bodies, to his compositions. The lower edge of the band corresponds roughly in height to the position of our hips, which is perhaps the principle point of articulation in our bodies. Below are our legs which root us to the ground; above are our torso, head and arms which stretch upwards and outwards into ambient space. Involuntarily our bodies relate to the way that Innes articulates the space and the ambiguities that he creates spatially.⁴⁵

That many of the *Exposed Paintings* are approximately the size of a body – Innes, like many non-representational painters, prefers a format that relates to the span of his arms and his own height⁴⁶ – encourages such a reading, which presents the paintings as having a centre in terms of height, roughly around the middle of the canvas and equating to our hips, as well as an implicit centre in terms of their laterality that relates to our bilateral bodies and vision. I do not think for a second that Hartley is suggesting the *Exposed Paintings* represent the body in this way, but rather that their format finds a deeper recognition in the proprioceptive sense we have of our bodies and the way that we occupy space. One of the recurring themes of *Phenomenology of Perception* is that so many scientific and philosophical attempts to understand the world are done from a hypothetically removed point of view that does not, in fact, exist: that we are always located in our own bodies and must therefore understand the world from our embodied position within it. Likewise our experience of paintings is never just a matter of the retina but involves a physical encounter to which we bring our own sense of physical self and a comparative judgement about the object we confront. Hartley draws out his description further, making more specific observations about the way that the paintings carry a sense of the human body:

The stained area below the right rectangle in *Exposed Painting: Scheveningen*

Black/Cadmium Red Deep or below the left rectangle in *Exposed Painting: Blue*

Violet/Charcoal Black (2004) root our bodies downwards. On the other hand the push-pull of advancing and receding colours articulates our bodies forwards backwards and sideways into space. The red in *Scheveningen Black/Cadmium Red Deep* advances towards us, while the diluted black recedes....We are also aware visually of the black showing through the red rectangle. This all leads to strongly differentiated sensations of recession and a sense of keyed-up dynamism.⁴⁷

I quote this passage because it so clearly illustrates Merleau-Ponty's notion that 'every external perception is immediately synonymous with a certain perception of my body'.⁴⁸ Every aspect of the painting, it ought to be noted, contributes to this sense of recognition, for even the slightest shifts in tone, texture, translucency produce a different sense of form in space, of parts of the painting *reaching* back or forwards as a body might, *turning* in space, *resting* or *shifting*. The dynamic vocabulary which we employ to describe such paintings springs from how we might describe our own movements in space, not seen from the outside but felt from the inside, as we reach forwards or lean back or twist around. The shifts in the black un-painted area of the *Exposed Painting: Scheveningen Black/Cadmium Red Deep* and their relation to the lighter, softer stained area beneath carries with it, Hartley suggests, a sense of the body that we have all experienced, just as the *permeable* quality of that black residue is in marked contrast to the sumptuously ridged and tactile surface of the red and likewise is known to us already, from the physical sense we have of permeability and presence, of what it means to move through air or a liquid, or to stroke velvet. We cannot, however, isolate any one area of the painting or any one instance of *equivalence* any more than we can isolate any single sensation in our own perception.

One consequence of understanding our perception as *bodily* is exactly this impossibility of separating out any single sensation or, for that matter, sense. The red of the carpet, Merleau-Ponty points out, as well as being dependent upon how much of it there is and the light and shadow that falls across it, would also 'literally not be the same if it were not the 'woolly red' of a carpet.'⁴⁹ We might say exactly the same of the red of *Exposed Painting: Scheveningen Black/Cadmium Red Deep* and add that no other red, despite Innes's generic title, will ever have quite the same quality of red about it. For all the similarities of format that underpin the *Exposed Paintings* they somehow illustrate with considerable clarity the utter uniqueness of each and every area of painted colour and, beyond that, the way that each painting is a unique juxtaposition of such areas. If we turn from

Exposed Painting: Scheveningen Black/Cadmium Red Deep to *Exposed Painting Lamp Black* from the same year (2004) we immediately feel the qualitative difference between the two paintings, the distinctly different *identities* that they project and can even usefully describe some of those differences – the sparse delicacy of the latter, its precision and clarity that makes the other painting seem *heavier*, perhaps even *baroque* – but each description only seems to reveal its relativity and we end up coming back to a *felt* quality of the painting as a whole that finds its basis in our own bodily perception.

If the finished paintings contain this sense of our own bodily experience then we can be reasonably certain that *the experience of making them* likewise depends upon some form of equivalence between the process of applying and removing paint and our proprioceptive sense of our bodies occupying space, as various accounts of Innes's working methods, including his own, would seem to attest. Like the American painter Brice Marden, Innes prefers formats that relate to the size of his own body, that equate more or less to his own height and the span of his arms.⁵⁰ The armature that Hartley proposes underlies some of the *Exposed Paintings* and that works on the spectator in a largely unconscious manner must surely work upon the artist in a similar way, but in this case it is combined with the rhythmic and repetitive motions of applying and dissolving paint and the duration of time passing during the course of the painting's production. I have already quoted from Fiona Bradley's account of Innes's working method and her view of the artist as a kind of 'conductor' who provides 'the temporal and spatial armature within which and against which the paint and the turpentine play.'⁵¹ What this image evokes, with its musical analogy, is something of Innes's motion before the canvas, those repeating physical movements, particularly during the dissolution phase of the paintings' production, as he draws turpentine up from the bottom of the canvas, allows for its slower descent, then once more draws it up. There is a pulse to such painting, a set of movements that are dictated as much by the desire to externalise bodily sensation as the finding of pictorial

forms: a satisfaction not only in a particular movement in relation to the canvas, but in its continued repetition. It is exactly this repetition of a painting *movement* that leaves a successive series of traces, 'each the index of an event,' that Rosalind Krauss detects in Jackson Pollock's paintings and that she sees as the crucial relation between Pollock and later artists such as Richard Serra and Eva Hesse.⁵² For Krauss this re-orientates the activity of drawing, and I would dissolve the boundary between drawing and painting in this context, and posit it 'not as the boundary of a form but as the expression of an event, a predicate, a serial variation.'⁵³ In the paintings of Callum Innes, then, we can perceive in their worked surfaces this kind of serial event and if those traces are not *layered* in the manner of a Pollock painting, we are nevertheless aware of the *cumulative quality* of those surfaces, that they are not brought about by any single act of application or erasure but are indexical of many such acts.

The activity of making such paintings, then, involves a series of repeated or near-repeated movements as the artist manipulates the material properties of the medium and during which certain aspects of the artist's perception are *externalised* and manifested upon the canvas. The bodily nature of our perception is particularly crucial to the making of such paintings as, freed from the equivalence-finding of representational painting, the artist comes to depend more intensely upon the physical responsiveness of the medium and that closer relationship between their own movement and the marks made upon the surface. When Innes describes the making of his work, it is often this intense relationship, this absorption in the physical behaviour of the medium, that is central: the *Resonance* paintings, for instance, are made in a single prolonged sitting of between seven and twelve hours when work upon the image must be sustained, never allowing the white paint to become too dry and it is this intense experience that gives those paintings, for the artist, 'a nice sense of time in them' and that 'ask you to sit and spend time with them in a different way.'⁵⁴ This intensity of experience, of perception, is *somehow visible to the spectator* and is surely

connected to the way in which many accounts of viewing Innes's paintings revolve around the idea of being able to *undo* or *reverse* the paintings, to take them back to their originating point of blank canvas and imaginatively re-create them. The complexity of many of Innes's processes means that this cannot be a literal recreation, but equally the paintings consistently provoke such a response and engage viewers deeply in the way that they reveal their own process. I would link this notion to Hartley's analysis of the *Exposed Paintings* in terms of their mirroring of the body and to the artist's preference for canvas sizes that relate to his own physical dimensions, for what we read from the final paintings is, I believe, a kind of *translation* of perceptual experience and one which takes full account of that perception as *engaging the body*. For the artist, this involves a particular conception of the canvas as *a surface to be acted upon*, indeed as an *object-image* that mirrors their own sense of being and that can reflect back to them their proprioceptive experience of *being-in-the-world*. The painting has an equal quality of *being-in-the-world* and acting upon it involves a recognition that our external perceptions are synonymous with our internal perceptions, that our way of making sense of the 'sensible' comes from our knowledge of not only being a part of the world, but a physical part of it, enmeshed within it. For the spectator, it is not really a question of any kind of exact match with the artist's experience, but rather a picking up of that physical engagement through perception that has been recorded upon the canvas.

The stretched canvas, or whatever kind of support the artist is using, might be seen as an arena for activity, not in the sense which Harold Rosenberg proposes, with its existential overtones and prioritising of action over its product, but rather as a field of activity that provides the artist with the necessary structure for making their activity meaningful.⁵⁵ This makes more sense if we consider Merleau-Ponty's understanding of motor skills as a form of practical knowledge.⁵⁶ Different environments, he proposes, offer opportunities for the exercise of motor skills and are, in turn, made meaningful by such activity. Romdenh-Romluc gives the example of a rock climber whose

internalised knowledge of climbing is what makes a rock face *climbable*, so that as they analyse fissures and footholds in that rock face they are bringing to bear a knowledge that has arisen from their previous experience of climbing, an experience that is now, somehow, in their bodies.⁵⁷

Merleau-Ponty considers the way a typist does not necessarily *know* where all the individual keys are on a typewriter but has 'knowledge in the hands,' the act of typing not being a set of deliberate decisions but rather a kind of bodily adjustment as the internalised knowledge is exercised.⁵⁸ To the objection that these forms of activity are habit rather than knowledge Merleau-Ponty counters:

We said earlier that it is the body which 'understands' in the acquisition of a habit. This way of putting it will appear absurd, if understanding is subsuming a sense-datum under an idea, and if the body is an object. But the phenomenon of habit is just what prompts us to revise our notion of 'understand' and our notion of the body. To understand is to experience the harmony between what we aim at and what is given, between the intention and the performance – and the body is our anchorage in a world.⁵⁹

Merleau-Ponty expands on this point by pondering how it is that an organist, after only a short period of time, can transfer their skills to an unfamiliar instrument, for clearly it is not a matter of memorising and measuring the new relations between pedals, stops, manuals and keyboard, but rather adjusting their body to the instrument:

Between the musical essence of the piece as it is shown in the score and the notes which actually sound round the organ, so direct a relation is established that the organist's body and his instrument are merely the medium of this relationship. Henceforth the music exists by itself and through it all the rest exists.⁶⁰

It is this understanding of knowledge as coming from motility and our ability to interact with our environment that I consider of such relevance to the *Exposed Paintings* and to the category of object-images in general, for rather than seeing the artist as preconceiving any kind of image we have instead the artist exercising a form of internalised knowledge that has cumulatively developed with the practice of painting. This is not simply habit, nor is it the translation of ideas and concepts into physical form, but rather it is *exercise of knowledge, brought into being through the act of painting*, just as ideas are formed through the act of speaking or writing.⁶¹ Those repeated movements that Innes makes before the canvas are not *separate* to his idea of the painting, the manual labour part of the process that could well be dispensed with if the idea could be realised more economically, but *are* the idea of the painting. The blank canvas offers up to the artist a set of possibilities that arise from his previous activity, from the knowledge that is now in his hands, arms, legs, torso, head, in his entire body and each separate canvas offers an environment for the exercise of that knowledge. The viewer brings to these canvases their own experiential knowledge and will only respond to these paintings and find them meaningful if they can, to some extent at least, enter into the kind of bodily perception Merleau-Ponty describes: they do not have to visualise the artist's activity, or perform their own dance before the canvas, only have some of that internalised knowledge of painting, of what it means to apply or dissolve an area of paint upon a surface which informs their making. The viewer enters into the painting through a shared knowledge of *making* and it might even be a necessary precondition to an engagement with paintings such as the *Exposed Paintings* that the viewer has at least some experience of painting *as an activity* and not just as objects of interest. Romdenh-Romluc, in her discussion of how we enter into the experience of others, draws on recent research conducted on monkeys which appears to reveal that the same neurons in the motor cortex are fired when monkeys witness an action as when they themselves perform that action.⁶² If we can transfer such an idea to the human realm, it would mean that we *feel* an action performed by others as if we were doing it ourselves and only learned behaviours of

containment stop us from physically acting it out. This at least opens up the possibility that when we scrutinise the way a painting has been made, assuming both that the painting reveals to us with some clarity *how* it was made and the necessary experience of painting in the viewer, then the marks upon the painting's surface will not only communicate to us something of the artist's activity but also be experienced *as if we ourselves were making those marks*.⁶³

It is this direct experience of the painting that leads to the necessity of *visibly modified surfaces* in my description of object-images, as a considerable part of their presence derives from their nature as physical objects that present to us certain possibilities for action and understanding. We must confront the canvas in the way that the artist did and measure the possibilities that it offers in our own bodily sense of its properties. This is why we move around an object-image and why our experience of such paintings occurs over a certain period of time, for we cannot access them instantaneously, as Michael Fried describes in relation to Modernist painting, nor do we perceive them as a succession of such moments, as Greenberg has it, but must gradually absorb aspects of their structure and materiality. If Greenberg and Fried's insistence on the instantaneous quality of our response to paintings, of the work being wholly present to us in the first moment of viewing, is in part a defence against literality and materiality, then it is exactly those qualities that define an object-image and that require *duration* in the viewing process and produce, in our experience of them, distinct phases of viewing in which the paintings take on different physical characteristics and identities, as Linville, Krauss and Newman describe in relation to Agnes Martin's work. Although this in some respects aligns object-images with Minimalist sculpture, it is the persistence of the image in the face of material facts that differentiates them from such practice. Robert Morris's well-known observation that Minimalist sculpture takes the relations out of the work and re-positions them between the work and its surrounding space does not apply because object-images *retain* relations within the work at the same time as existing in relation to their surroundings. Indeed, what Morris

saw as the fundamental problem of painting, that it had become engaged in the futile of business of trying to be 'a structurally self-revealing object' serves as a good description of object-images, only what Morris sees as an unviable contradiction is, in the hands of other artists, a productive tension.⁶⁴ This makes the whole experience of viewing object-images different to traditional painting for instead of entering into other illusionistic spaces we remain within our own actual space and instead of looking to unpick signifiers we are given a more mute form of information.

This viewing of object-images in actual space, in relation to the dimensions and qualities of the space that houses and surrounds them, has a corollary in temporal terms, for if traditional representational paintings offer the viewer an illusionistic space, an elsewhere in which the action of the painting takes place, it also offers an illusionistic temporality, the time in which *depicted* events unfold, as Mel Gooding describes:

What is 'pictured' in these works of Innes does not happen in imagined or 'evoked' time, the time that is an aspect of fiction, whether it be the fiction of still life, landscape, portraiture, narrative or fantasy. In such cases there are two kinds of time at work in the eye's movement, and the mind's: ordinary or actual time, and diagetive, or fictional time; as one might say, real time and imagined time. In Innes's paintings this latter temporality does not exist, except as an extension to an imaginative projection into another mode, as for example a 'reading' of a *Monologue* or *Resonance* as a fanciful landscape.⁶⁵

Fictional or diagetive time may not exist in Innes's paintings, but clearly some form of temporality does in the sense of the artist's experience in the making of the painting and the way in which a spectator partakes of that experience and enters into the *process* of the painting's production. That

process is something that has happened over time and, what's more, time that is previous to our viewing of the painting: there is a *then*, the making of the painting, and a *now*, our viewing, which is of course true of all paintings but is particularly *evidenced* in the *Exposed Paintings*, whose compositions *act out* that temporal separation. On each canvas we see an area of applied paint and an area of its removal, leaving only traces of its presence: we know that the *un-painted* area would have been of the same quality, the same texture and colour and luminosity, as the painted area that remains and so are simultaneously aware of what it would have looked like *before*, when paint was present, and what it looks like now, after its dissolution. Equally we could see the exposed area as revealing the previous state of the canvas and the paint as what is now present:

We are presented with a concrete realization of 'then-ness' and 'now-ness'. It is of course true that the opposite reading is as true: where the surface is exposed is the image of what now is, where the paint remains is the image of what was there before the exposure.⁶⁶

There is a kind of temporal *fold* in the paintings that links the spatial ambiguity of the paintings, the difficulty of placing painted and un-painted areas in relation to each other in depth, with a temporal ambiguity that displaces time in a similar manner. When, as spectators, we enter in the process of the making of these paintings we also enter into a collapsing of time, when successive moments are detached from their proper order and overlaid onto the surfaces of the painting. 'Then' and 'now' are side by side or perhaps even interchangeable. Merleau-Ponty takes issue with the most common metaphor of time, that of a river, because it posits the perceiver as *outside* of time, able to somehow view time from a detached point: to properly understand time, he contends, we must comprehend it from our own enmeshed position in the world, as beings who are subject to time rather than observers outside of it. For him, time is not best explained as a succession of moments

but rather as a continuum that is contained in our present moment of experience, so that the moments just lived through, for instance, are still with us, quite directly available as part of our present; likewise what we did a few hours ago is retained, becomes what Merleau-Ponty, borrowing from Husserl, terms a *retention*, already a part of our past but still fresh, available in a bodily sense; but there is no break in our experience, only a further series of retentions going ever further back in our experience and all *nested* in our present, not separate to us or stored somewhere but contained within our present awareness.⁶⁷ If this were not so, Merleau-Ponty suggests, if we had to *recall* our past then we would be doing so continuously in order to verify its existence, to check that we still had a past, but this is not the case because we carry our entire past with us as ‘an unbroken continuity’ of retentions, it is with us as ‘an incontestable acquisition.’⁶⁸ The future is with us in the same way, as a series of *protensions*: the next few minutes are clear to us in terms of what we are likely to be doing, in my case writing these paragraphs, so that a series of moments in the future are coming towards us, towards being our *present*, just as future events in our diary, a meeting, a trip, an appointment, are moving towards becoming present and form part of a continuum that is rooted in our perception, our awareness of present being, with its nested retentions and protensions of *our own* past and future.

Time, then, is a part of our subjectivity, our own position within the world. To return to Merleau-Ponty’s metaphor of the river, if the subjective position is removed and there is no witness, either on the riverbank or in the river, then there is an absolute simultaneity to what seemed like separate events: the melting glacier, the mountain stream, the growing river, the emergence onto an estuary, all these are of the same moment and continue to be of the same moment:

If the objective world is incapable of sustaining time, it is not because it is in some way too narrow, and that we need to add to it a bit of past and a bit of future. Past and future exist only too unmistakably in the world, they exist in the present, and what being itself lacks in order to be of the temporal order, is the not-being of elsewhere, formerly and tomorrow. The objective world is too much of a plenum for there to be time.⁶⁹

Maurice Merleau-Ponty's understanding of time makes it clearer why the experience of looking at works such as the *Exposed Paintings* feels so different to traditional illusionistic paintings with their fictional time of depicted events, for in effect the latter falsify our perception in the same way as the river metaphor, putting us in an artificial position *outside of time*, just as it is outside of space. If we accept the main thrust of Merleau-Ponty's argument, then temporality is only to be understood in relation to our own experience of the world:

We must understand time as the subject and the subject as time.⁷⁰

It might be said, then, that the *Exposed Paintings* proffer a different model for understanding time by attempting to locate a viewer *in* time, rather than outside of it. The whole thrust of the argument that I have been putting forward is to do with the corporeality of object-images, the idea that they exist in the same space as the spectator and, as a result, in the same time: but in retaining their quality of *image* such paintings offer the possibility of exploring the limits of such corporeality, of testing the literal nature of support and materials against the seemingly inevitable tendency of paint, or any applied substance, to evoke beyond its own material properties. Where the *Exposed Paintings* are distinctive is in the way that they manifest this tension *on their surfaces* and *within their compositions*. If we perceive temporality only because we are embedded in the world, and

view the world from a particular place – if temporality does not exist outside of such a view because everything simply *is* and there is no *not is* to perceive time from – then the painted and un-painted parts of an *Exposed Painting* seem to provide a remarkable parallel, or analogue, to such a concept. The shifts in pictorial identity that Linville and Krauss perceive in Agnes Martin’s paintings when viewed from different distances hold good for Innes’s paintings, but those shifts are also inscribed on the canvas surface, in the transitions between the different areas. The radical materiality that Newman wants to find in the near view of a Martin painting, and the elusive moment of transition between materiality and image, or illusion, is made visible in an *Exposed Painting*, is laid out across the surface and, close-to, we can see its very edge, as paint almost microscopically transitions into an absence of paint. Through his exploration of processes of dissolution, Innes has found ways of showing us things that are both *there* and *not there* and his relentless probing of the formal possibilities thrown up by this technique acts as an on-going enquiry into the nature of presence and absence.

This line of thought takes us to a far more evidently *metaphorical* reading of the *Exposed Paintings*, though in practice I think it is impossible to separate what I am saying about the way that these paintings throw up questions of perception and temporality from interpretations that regard the forms and surfaces of the *Exposed Paintings* as metaphors. Innes’s paintings may well operate against metaphor in certain ways, or at least against a single over-riding metaphor, as T.J.Clark suggests about Jackson Pollock’s 1947-50 *Poured Paintings*, but Clark also believes that metaphor is inescapable, that any mark, even an indexical mark, is in effect being read by a viewer as standing in for something else.⁷¹ The emphasis on structure and materiality may well put any metaphorical reading of the *Exposed Paintings* into a particular context, but it does not discount or even inhibit such readings and, in the literature on the *Exposed Paintings*, one of the most dominant metaphors is that of the photograph. *Exposure* as a process leads us to photography rather than painting and

encourages us to look at the *Exposed Paintings* in photographic terms. Here is the artist discussing his work:

With my work in abstraction, I think about it as photography, as photography freezes moments in time, so I work with time in the paintings more than anything else. For example when a painting is exposed, it deals with a moment in time, the exposure of the painting. There is a moment in time and space when a painting stops in much the same way that a camera's shutter closes on a moment in time, this is not a static thing. Time is constructed in the making of the work, the making of the support, the applying of the material, the time that it takes to actually put paint on canvas, the time that it takes to reduce the paint from the canvas, or dissolve it, or unpaint it from the canvas, the time that it sits in the studio and then there is the viewer. There is a kind of real time and then this other time, and I often get that feeling from photographs.⁷²

The 'real' time that Innes proposes for the paintings is, I think, similar to the notion of the paintings existing in actual time for a viewer that I have been proposing except that Innes includes everything that has gone into the painting's production and which happens to it subsequently: as an existing object, it is subject to such time, regardless of when it is encountered by artist or viewer. They contain, however, another kind of time for him, one which derives from the model of photography and is to do with *freezing* a particular moment in time: he compares the moment that an *Exposed Painting* takes on its final form with the blink of the camera's shutter capturing an image. What is the nature, then, of this other kind of time that Innes detects in photographs and wishes to us to perceive in the *Exposed Paintings*? To begin with, I think it is safe to say it is different to the diagetic time Gooding speaks about in relation to representational paintings, the fictional realm of the

depicted action of such works, so there must be something fundamentally different between *representation* in a photograph and in a painting: a difference which surely derives from the relationship between the image and its referent, a relation in the photograph that Roland Barthes describes as 'like the condemned man and the corpse in certain tortures.'⁷³ This is one of the essential qualities of photography for Barthes, the utter certainty we have before the photograph of the fact that it shows us what *once was*, that the referent *existed* beyond any shred of doubt: a painting never convinces us of this, for we know with equal certainty that the painting has been constructed over time and is shot through with the subjectivity of its maker. This is why, perhaps, we can think of time in representational paintings as *fictional*, not only because being *made* is close to being *made up*, but also because paintings have none of the *frozen* quality of photographs that depends upon our recognising the actuality of the captured event. When we look at Edward Hopper's *Office at Night* of 1941, we see not only the depicted moment, but also begin to work out what has just happened and hypothesize about what *will* happen. The painting encourages us to see the still image as part of a narrative, as a moment in a story.⁷⁴ The photograph shows us, in contrast, the *contingency* of events. We are 'astonished', Barthes suggests, by the *that has been*, by the brute fact of existence that the photograph provides, which leads not to narrative but to the arbitrary nature of the photograph, the sense that this chosen moment of existence could just as easily have been another.⁷⁵ Even when faced with a contact sheet of consecutive moments, close to each other in time, this sense of each image being an *isolated* moment in time persists: every photograph, Barthes tells us, is 'a certificate of presence.'⁷⁶

It might be objected that photography no longer represents such a certificate, with good reason, and what becomes clear, both in *Camera Lucida* (1980) and in the way that we might consider the *Exposed Paintings* in relation to a photographic paradigm is that it is more useful to think of photography as it was, before the digital era. Barthes's idea that what the photograph captures is an

emanation from the referent, so that in touching a photograph we touch the rays of light that the original object or person emitted, to be caught, magically, by the camera, 'like the delayed rays of a star,' is a distinctly pre-digital conceit, especially in that the magic involved here is that of chemistry.⁷⁷ It is a chemical process, the sensitivity of silver halogens to light, that makes possible the '*that has been*' of the photograph, which translates the referent so directly into image that we are forced to acknowledge its real-ness, its actual existence. *Exposure* takes us not only to the moment of a photograph's capture – the optical moment, the *taking* – but also to that of its development in the dark room, in a tray of chemicals, *gradually* emerging to view – the chemical moment. 'When a painting is exposed,' says Innes, as if he is pressing the button that closes the shutter on a moment in time, but in fact the experience must be more like watching a photograph develop in the tray, for the painting continues to *expose itself* beyond the moment of the artist's final physical action upon the canvas, as turpentine slowly seeps down its surface, still displacing pigment, still altering the image that is being formed. There is chemistry in the *Exposed Paintings*, as Gooding reminds us with phrases such as 'the interaction of unstable substances'.⁷⁸ This tempts us to say of them, as Barthes does of photographs, 'that it was not made by the hand of man, *acheiropoietos*.'⁷⁹ This quality of having come about of its own accord, so that the painting 'looks like it has *developed* by itself,' (my italics) has already been touched on and it is this process that makes possible the '*that has been*' of the *Exposed Paintings*.⁸⁰ If paintings can always feign reality then they must find some other way to insist upon the real outside of mimesis.⁸¹ The *Exposed Paintings*, in their rigorous non-representation, seek to evade the idea of an external referent, some physical reality beyond the painting to which they need to be related, and instead to be experienced *in themselves*; but it is exactly the sense of the real, and what's more of the *arresting* of the real in a moment of time, that links the paintings to the photographic model. There may not be an external referent for the *Exposed Paintings* but there is something of the relationship between image and referent that photography contains to be found in the inter-relating parts of an *Exposed Painting*: like the 'condemned man and the corpse,' the two halves of the early *Exposed Paintings* are

intimately bound, but, as we have already proposed, their inter-relationship is ambiguous both spatially and temporally. The photograph, as Barthes makes clear, has a very clear temporality, indeed his entire meditation upon the medium in *Camera Lucida* is based upon the notion of *loss* and that the referent of any photograph is located in a time *previous* to that of our viewing, hence imbued with a kind of melancholy as we peer back at them from their future, knowing that they are gone:

These two little girls looking at a primitive airplane above their village (they are dressed like my mother as a child, they are playing with hoops) – how alive they are! They have their whole lives before them; but also they are dead (today), they are then *already* dead (yesterday). At the limit, there is no need to represent a body in order for me to experience this vertigo of time defeated.⁸²

This perhaps takes us nearer to the 'frozen' time which Innes feels inhabits the *Exposed Paintings*, for they share with the photograph this sense of the captured moment, this indexical rather than iconic trace of *what has been* and manifest that relationship to the referent on their surfaces; the various zones of an *Exposed Painting* reveal a succession of states that reveal temporalities in the making of the work as well as what is before us. In showing what once was and is no longer, the photograph produces a new category of 'space-time' Barthes tells us, one of 'spatial immediacy and temporal anteriority.' He continues:

Photography produces an illogical conjunction of the *here* and the *formerly*....Its unreality is that of the here, since the photograph is never experienced as an illusion; it is nothing but a *presence* (one must continually keep in mind the magical character of the photographic

image). Its unreality is that of *having-been-there*, because in all photographs there is the constantly amazing evidence: *this took place in this way*.⁸³

This *here and formerly*, the unreality of a presence that is not experienced as an illusion alongside its own *having-been-there* is a remarkably appropriate description of how we experience different temporal states in the *Exposed Paintings* and in manifesting Barthes' order of spatial immediacy and temporal anteriority they participate in that feeling of loss which we associate with the photograph. These modes of temporality in the *Exposed Paintings* shift under our scrutiny: if we return to the early *Exposed Paintings*, with their central division and mirrored composition, we detect in them, as Mel Gooding suggests, a kind of *reversibility*, so that we are left uncertain as to which half of the painting should be considered as a *previous* state: is it the remaining paint, brought into relation with its own dissolution, its own removal, or is it the exposed canvas, which underlies the paint layer? This may seem to be over-complicating the paintings, but once we begin pondering their process the mutual relation of the two halves becomes ever more difficult to pin down, for their *reversibility* might also be seen as our own imaginative response, much discussed in the literature on the paintings, in *reversing* the process of their making, of *un-doing* what has been done and taking the paintings back towards their origination and, of course, an earlier time in their existence. Innes even explores reversibility through re-visiting certain works and making them *in reverse*: the early *Agitated Verticals*, for instance, in which a single line is dissolved down the centre of a field of paint, are neatly reversed in some *Untitled* paintings from 2012, in which the entire field of paint is dissolved *except for* a single central vertical line; both sets of works create the vertical through dissolution, through subtraction, rather than addition, offering in turn a kind of reversal of Barnett Newman's 'zips', so that a different kind of temporal vertigo starts to set in, making us question any initial assumptions of what came first and how paintings might *accrue* over time.

To explore what the implications of *reversibility* might be, I first want to consider the notion in relation to the work of Rachel Whiteread (b.1963), a close contemporary of Callum Innes. Whiteread's practice is substantially based upon the process of *casting*: where Whiteread is unusual is in *what* she casts, for generally she is interested in casting not objects but rather the *space* around them, or under them, or within them. In her piece *Untitled (Floor)* of 1994-5, for instance, Whiteread has made a resin cast of the space beneath the floorboards in a Victorian house, a series of deep rectangular slabs separated by the spaces once occupied by joists: what was present, the joists, becomes absent, just as the physical mass of the sculpture relates to what we consider an absence, the space, or the air, beneath the floorboards.⁸⁴ There is a kind of *confusion* of absence and presence that her work provokes, an interchangeability of solid substance with empty space, a confusion that is further enforced by the resolute physical presence of her pieces: *Untitled (Floor)* has the adamant materiality of a Carl Andre work, indeed is visually reminiscent of his *Equivalents* in its modular floor-based structure, but is conjured from *hidden* space, from what is normally *out of sight*. The *reversibility* in Whiteread's pieces, it might be said, is connected to that between *absence* and *presence*, which in turn we might think of in terms of *visibility* and *invisibility*. Briony Fer makes such a connection and proposes that Whiteread's work 'triggers a thematics of visibility and invisibility.'⁸⁵ Fer describes how different viewing distances and conditions of light alter a spectator's experience of *Untitled (Floor)*, much as Rosalind Krauss finds different phases of viewing before Agnes Martin's paintings:

The obdurate mass of the first view of *Untitled (Floor)* (1994-5) is cancelled out by subsequent views, which, as in Judd's work, are not complementary but contradictory. Standing on the other side of the room, we see what appears as another object; the neutral inert surfaces have been rendered invisible and visible instead is a scintillating surface against the light. It is decrepit but dazzling, worm-eaten but ravishing, as water reflects

light.....There is a disturbance of vision which interrupts the spectator's track, a deliberate reversal of viewpoints which imposes a rift between the viewpoints.⁸⁶

Here, the changes of *identity* that the piece undergoes as the spectator moves around it are put in terms of visibility and invisibility, just as the operation of Whiteread's processes in general engage in such a thematics by making *absent space*, what is invisible, into physical *visible* form. The way in which this strategy is intimately bound up with the artist's methods is explored in Susan Lawson's account of Whiteread's 1999 piece *Untitled (Wall)* in which a cast of the brick walls of a gallery is positioned parallel to and a few feet away from the walls themselves, forming a corridor between walls and cast through which spectators could walk.⁸⁷ Lawson uses the piece to explore notions of the 'skin' between object and cast, or between external surfaces and surrounding space, which in turn lead to a consideration of absence and presence:

Crucially, as I've said, in *Wall*, the cast-mould relationship is exhibited. But since the only relation between a cast and a mould is indexical – the cast must touch the mould intimately to exist – this is the relation foremost in your mind precisely as you walk between them....Is it for this reason that the space in *Wall* seemed to be impossible, or at least impossibly *thin*? It is difficult to pinpoint where the bricks ended and the cast began. Instead of walking between a presence and its reverse, or, more accurately, down an absence slung between two presences, walking through *Wall* was like skirting the very border between the two.⁸⁸

Lawson's description captures the disorientating effect of Whiteread's sculptures: her reversals are not the usual ones, in which a mould is used to make a cast that resembles the original object, but rather, in casting space around an object, offer the viewer strange *inversions* of form that, above all,

cast into doubt the boundary between *outsides* and *insides*, between what we see of an object, what is *visible*, and what composes or occupies space within or around an object, what is normally *invisible*. Walking between a wall and its reverse cast is to perceive an impossible skin, one that exists between an object's surface and surrounding space which, in *Wall*, has been pulled apart to produce another space, an *absence* expanded sufficiently to allow us to walk through it, hence its impossible thin-ness. All of Whiteread's work in some way or other deals with such impossible spaces: a light switch becomes a mysterious set of diminishing declivities burrowing into substance, a window and its frame transform into an external protusion of perplexing blankness. To reverse a form, in Whiteread's terms, is not some simple mirror procedure but a distancing strategy which makes the familiar entirely strange, hence the frequency with which the *uncanny* is invoked, or the relevance of Shklovsky's notion of *ostraneniye*, of making strange.⁸⁹

This calling into question the *outside* and the *inside* of an object and thinking of *visibility* in terms of how we perceive *surfaces*, and how in turn those surfaces enclose the mass of an object, returns us once more to phenomenology and, for my purposes here, to Maurice Merleau-Ponty's last book, *The Visible and the Invisible*.⁹⁰ I want to consider how Merleau-Ponty conceives visibility and invisibility in relation to Whiteread's *Monument* (2001). *Monument* is a cast in transparent resin of the fourth plinth in Trafalgar Square which has remained empty until recent years, when a succession of contemporary artists have been commissioned to make work to occupy it. As the fourth plinth is itself a listed monument Whiteread was unable to take a cast directly and instead took a cast from a replica, using transparent resin to make an object of the same dimensions which was then placed, upside down, on top of the plinth. The two plinths, in physical form at least, are mirror images, but the translucency of the resin version lends it an air of immateriality, heightened by the way in which the resin responds to the varying conditions of light. It seems a kind of absence and indeed it might be thought of as such, for it replaces what should be on top of a plinth, a piece of sculpture. We

might recall Rosalind Krauss's account of Modernist sculpture as a gradual breakdown of the function of sculpture as memorial, so that its traditional role of marking a site, of commemoration, is replaced by the 'autonomy' of the work: in this process, the traditional role of the plinth, as mediator between site and work, a kind of transitional marker, is equally eroded, evidenced by the way in which the plinth is first absorbed *into* the work and then finally dispensed with, allowing sculpture to occupy space on its own terms. 'The logic of the Monument' Krauss tells us, passes over 'to a kind of sitelessness, or homelessness, an absolute loss of place.'⁹¹ It certainly isn't fanciful to regard Rachel Whiteread's *Monument* as such a loss of place or, as Chris Townsend proposes, to see the piece as drawing our attention to the way in which a plinth signifies whilst having a kind of invisibility and that 'this assumed invisibility of stone parallels an invisibility assumed by institutional structures.'⁹²

These readings derive from a perceptual negation that it is *within* the work, a form of reversibility that is comparable to that which we have been examining in the *Exposed Paintings*: what might at first seem a straightforward relationship, between cast and original object, quickly becomes more complex as we experience the work itself, just as the relation between painting and dissolution throws up difficult questions about surface and materiality. The cast section of *Monument* does not appear as simply a second version of the original but, with the kind of reversibility I have been discussing, seems to throw the original granite plinth into question. It is as if the resin cast allows us to see *into* the granite plinth and opens up questions about substance and solidity, just as *Ghost* (1991), an earlier piece by Whiteread, suggests a solid mass when in fact it is largely hollow.⁹³ We begin to realise, standing before *Monument*, how fully our vision contains the *density* of what we look at, how completely intertwined the tangible and the visible are in our perception. The resin plinth reveals its *insides*, giving us at least the illusion that we can see *all the way through it*; but the granite plinth gives us some sense of its insides also, for we do not see it simply as a surface but

rather a mass. The two plinths together form a reversible whole, so that the qualities of one seem to inform the other and, as with Lawson's account of *Wall*, instead of seeing a presence and its reverse we see something more complex, a suggestion of presence *in* absence.

There is, in Merleau-Ponty's view, an absence, or an invisibility, at the heart of our perception. We have already considered, in this chapter, some of the ways in which Merleau-Ponty views perception as a matter of the body and in particular how it derives from our ability to engage with the world through motor skills. I have also endeavoured to show how this informs certain texts about Agnes Martin's paintings and how these accounts expand upon bodily perception in terms of our viewing such paintings from different distances. I used a quotation from Michael Newman's *Phenomenality and Materiality in Agnes Martin* to lead into an exploration of Merleau-Ponty's understanding of such embodied perception, but chose at that point not to focus on that part of the text that draws our attention specifically to the way that the viewer 'performing in front of the painting...is visible to others.'⁹⁴ This visibility throws up a number of problems, the most pressing of which is how *our own* visibility fits into any scheme of perception: for if we perceive the world through our bodies and its ability to engage with that world, then how do we perceive our own body? If I look down at my own hands, are they of the world or of my body? We might try to separate out these aspects of the body into that which does the perceiving – the body sentient to use Merleau-Ponty's term – and the body we perceive – the body sensed, but clearly it isn't this simple. If I imagine, for instance, reaching out with my right hand to touch an object, then my hand is doing the *touching*, is part of my perceiving; but if I now reach out with my left hand to touch my right, what happens? I cannot, according to Merleau-Ponty, feel in my right hand both its touching and its being touched, it has to be either one or the other. To touch something, even our own hand, is to take hold of it in a way that goes beyond simple tangibility, is to somehow draw that thing into my body, into my own perceptual experience; but at the same time, it is to have my body partake of that thing, to *participate* in its existence, so

that it becomes impossible to draw a clear line between what is me and what is *it*. Seeing, Merleau-Ponty asserts, works in exactly the same way, so that the visible in some way *captures* our seeing, rather than being the passive recipient of our gaze:

There is a circle of the touched and the touching, the touched takes hold of the touching; there is a circle of the visible and the seeing, the seeing is not without visible existence.⁹⁵

There is a kind of *reversibility* between touched and touching, the visible and seeing. If I immerse my hands and arms in a bathtub full of ice-cold water, I cannot separate what I learn about the water from the searing sensation that runs through my whole body. If my little boy cannot sleep and I reach down and place my hand reassuringly on the back of his shoulder, I feel the entire living mass of his body beneath my hand, a sensation that seems centred as much in his body as in the skin of my palm. When I focus my attention onto my own back, which is not visible to me, my perception seems to be as much about what lies behind me as the surface of my back, about what I can feel *through* my back, even if that is simply air or the texture of clothes.

So far in this chapter I have concentrated on how the world becomes understandable to us through the lived sensations of our own bodies, but Merleau-Ponty suggests that the reverse is equally true, that we only understand our sensed bodies through our engagement with the *sensible*, that 'every perception of my body is made explicit in the language of external perception.'⁹⁶ We are not separate to the sensible, we are of it, are *born* into it.⁹⁷ We enter, however, into a relationship with the sensible that has a reversibility built into it: we have already seen how our understanding of the world comes through our motor ability, our potential for action in that world; our perception of the sensible is, more accurately, our experience of being able to *act* or, even more precisely, *respond* to

the sensible. To use Bergson's more physiologically oriented terminology, our complex nervous systems allow for a much greater range of response to stimuli than other creatures, so that such responses move beyond *reflex* actions and enter a realm of much greater indeterminacy, but nevertheless our perception is essentially that system of responses, of processing external stimuli and reacting with some form or other of motor activity.⁹⁸ It is our action in the world that creates our perception of it so that what we perceive of any object is, in a certain sense, what we can do with it. There is no boundary between our bodies and the rest of the visible:

The body interposed is not itself a thing, an interstitial matter, a connective tissue, but a *sensible for itself*....which offers to him who inhabits it and senses it the wherewithal to sense everything that resembles himself on the outside, such that, caught up in the tissue of things, it draws it entirely to itself, incorporates it, and, with the same movement, communicates to the things upon which it closes over that identity without superposition, that difference without contradiction, that divergence between the within and the without that constitutes its natal secret.⁹⁹

It is this folding over of the within and the without, so that what might seem to be external is brought into ourselves and what we might take to be ourselves is laid over what we perceive with *the same movement*, it is this reversibility between the sentient and the sensed that Merleau-Ponty refers to as the *flesh*. What the previous quotation lays bare is the ambiguity of where our identity might be placed in the *flesh*, for we seem to inhabit our body and the world equally but also with a kind of anonymity. The body 'offers' to its inhabitant a certain perceptual knowledge of *being* in the world and that inhabitant, as Merleau-Ponty suggests, is more of a *one* than an *I*. It is this *being*, finally, that is the absence, the *invisible*, which lies at the centre of our perception. The visible exists

around us, and includes us, with an 'inexhaustible depth.'¹⁰⁰ The invisible is not another object, is not something hidden, but rather what lies within the visible and makes it possible:

It is therefore not a *de facto* invisible, like an object hidden behind another, and not an absolute invisible, which would have nothing to do with the visible. Rather it is the invisible of this world, that which inhabits this world, sustains it, and renders it visible, its own and interior possibility, the Being of this being.¹⁰¹

The problem that Merleau-Ponty faces is how to imbue the invisible with sufficient *carnality*, for it is not an idea of the invisible that he is after but an experiential matter, an awareness of an absence which underlies what seems to be the *presence* of our experience, our interaction with the visible. He must resort to allusive and metaphorical language in order to evoke the invisible and so he speaks of *folds*, of *doublings over*, *connective tissues* and *linings*, of *invagination*, *hollows* and *espousals*. He brings to bear a *poetic* form of language in the full knowledge that language can operate beyond the strict sense of its meaning and 'can sustain a sense by virtue of its own arrangement, catch a meaning in its own mesh.'¹⁰² This comes from a conviction that in order to express how the invisible lies at the heart of the visible, any form of expression must partake of the visible, must share the carnal nature of the visible. It is like the difference between an evocative musical phrase and its notation in a score, the former speaking directly of experience, the latter having only 'bare values substituted for the mysterious entity he had perceived, for the convenience of his understanding.'¹⁰³ Such ideas as his notion of the invisible, Merleau-Ponty asserts:

....could not be given to us *as ideas* except in a carnal experience. It is not only that we would find in that carnal experience the *occasion* to think them; it is that they owe their

authority, their fascinating, indestructible power, precisely to the fact that they are in transparency behind the sensible, or in its heart.¹⁰⁴

Whiteread's *Monument* seems to me not only such an *occasion* to think the idea of the invisible within the carnal, but also a work specifically about such thinking. For me, at least, it is not so much about *plinths*, or even the status of sculpture, but rather our perception of objects, for it provides us with an *occasion*, a carnal manifestation, to consider how it is that we grasp an object perceptually and the way that it is both *within* and *without*. The difference between *presence* and *representation*, Bergson tells us, lies exactly in the difference between objects that exist and objects that *are perceived*: in the former case, when objects are not subjected to human perception, they show all aspects of themselves in all directions, forming a vast infinitely complex network with all other objects.¹⁰⁵ There is, Merleau-Ponty suggests, no such thing as depth in such a universe, for nothing is hidden behind anything else, everything shows all its faces to everything else. This is the sensible, or matter. A human being is a centre of action in the sensible, a viewpoint, and suddenly objects are seen from *somewhere* and take on significance in relation to that centre, but in some respects this is a *reduction* of those objects, because instead of relating to all other objects they now present only a part of themselves, that part which provokes a corresponding action on our part. They enter a human world, that of human perception, which, as we have seen, is one of motor response. What we perceive of those objects is not the object in its brute reality, as it is in itself, but rather an object only from our point of view and incorporating our potential action upon it: it is *inseparable* from that motor response, from our bodily knowledge of it, and so we *feel* the object *within* at the same time as perceiving it without. It is blended with us. This is the reversibility of *sensed* and *sensing* that underpins Merleau-Ponty's thesis in *The Visible and the Invisible* and that seems to be so strikingly embodied in *Monument*. It is as if the granite plinth has somehow *made physical* the perceptual

double that exists in terms of our perception, our grasping of an object as part of our environment for action:

Things have an internal equivalent in me: they arouse in me a carnal formula of their presence. Why shouldn't these [correspondences] in their turn give rise to some [external] visible shape in which anyone else would recognize those motifs which support his own inspection of the world.¹⁰⁶

What Merleau-Ponty has in mind, here, is painting: the painter's vision, he implies, is not simply to do with the visible, but rather *a second visible* which is based upon our bodily perception of the world and the reversibility of *sensed* and *sensing*. Indeed, some of the more allusive sections of *The Visible and the Invisible*, whilst endeavouring to describe this internal armature of perception, sound remarkably pertinent to the *Exposed Paintings*:

My flesh and that of the world therefore involve clear zones, clearings, about which pivot their opaque zones, and the primary visibility, that of the quale and of the things, does not come without a second visibility, that of the lines of force and dimensions, the massive flesh without a rarefied flesh, the momentary body without a glorified body.¹⁰⁷

The *Exposed Paintings*, it might be said, are composed of such clear and opaque zones and we have already read into their dissolved surfaces a reversibility of perception, a spatial and temporal ambiguity that can be read as an analogue of how we perceive the world. The *flesh* complicates this process further in that it dissolves the difference between spectator and world, makes of them one

substance, so that the *quale*, the *sensible*, is only the other side, the obverse, of ourselves, of our perception. The sensible may well exist *in itself*, but it also exists *for us* and, understood through our own sensing, our own bodily knowledge of it, has a kind of echo that is *the world in us*, in which each and every object is as much felt inside as perceived without. This side of the flesh might be given the carnal formula that Merleau-Ponty describes, might be re-translated into forms and shapes which provide us with its 'lines of force and dimensions.'¹⁰⁸ One thinks of Michael Fried's description of Jackson Pollock's line as 'pure, disembodied energy' as long as that *disembodied* is understood to contain our experience, to be an *imaginary* that springs from the carnal.¹⁰⁹ This is how we might choose to understand the *imaginary* zones of the *Exposed Paintings*, not as versions of the *seen* but rather as analogues of the visible world as it is perceived through our bodies:

For the imaginary is much nearer to, and much further away from, the actual – nearer because it is in my body as a diagram of the life of the actual, with all its pulp and carnal obverse [*son enverse charnel*] exposed to view for the first time....And the imaginary is much further away from the actual because the painting is an analogue or likeness only according to the body.¹¹⁰

If it is our *seeing* that is invisible, the *being* that exists at the heart of the flesh, then these carnal formulae, paintings, are about that invisibility. The various forms of insistence upon our bodily experience before such paintings that we have encountered in this chapter have circled the idea that they are more than visible forms and that they engage the viewer in their own actual space: this space, according to Merleau-Ponty, is not separate to the viewer, it radiates out around and from them and pulls into its orbit all of the visible that the spectator encounters. I return to the Whitworth and to my encounter with *Exposed Painting Lake Green*: to the particular light that falls

upon its surface and to the *open-ness* of that large gallery, not only high-ceilinged but opening above to another floor, extending up and beyond into space, so that I feel myself moving in large volumes of space without feeling dwarfed or overwhelmed. The large windows to the side of the painting open onto parkland. I have come to Manchester to see this exhibition and to catch up with friends and my mood is charged with special occasion. This is not a divergence into fiction, this is the background to my encounter. I see upon the surface of *Exposed Painting Green Lake* its painted and dissolved areas, I bring to bear the knowledge I already have of Innes's processes and the cumulative nature of the *Exposed Paintings* and their relation to his other series.

My viewing, however, is not separate to the painting. When I say that I see that surface, I am not in my body looking out and feeling my gaze hit that surface, rather *I am in that surface*, I feel, as if inside myself, its transitions and relations. The carnal formula which Merleau-Ponty describes is the painting as I feel it inside myself, translated into sensations which arise from *being* a body and moving amongst the visible, of which I and the painting are a part. When I watch the woman looking at *Exposed Painting Lake Green* I know, from her visible movements around it, that she is similarly experiencing it as a part of her whole experience, through her bodily perception. Merleau-Ponty's notion of the *flesh* and the account he gives of perception provides us with a model for understanding *object-images*, the way in which such paintings seem to insist upon actuality, a physical presence, at the same time as making us aware that it is exactly such actuality which leads back to our perceptual processes and to the ways in which we comprehend the world through our bodies, not just our minds.

I have explored in this chapter some of the phenomenological implications of viewing object-images and how their actuality, their presence in our own space, might be regarded as mirroring our own

processes of perception and the way in which such perception operates through the body and involves a reciprocal relation with objects outside of ourselves. I have drawn on several accounts of viewing non-representational paintings in order to consider more fully how our bodily movements before such paintings reveal these deeper levels of engagement and how the emphasis upon physical structure and materiality in the object-image produces a different form of presence and even temporality in the spectator's experience. I have tried to make links between some of the metaphorical readings of the 'Exposed Paintings' and the way in which they address fundamental issues of how paintings are perceived. In the following chapter I consider Callum Innes's work in relation to comparable painting by some of his contemporaries and consider the nature of object-images in relation to the notion of the simulacral within the practice of abstract painting.

Chapter Four

Continuity and Critique: Object-Images in Contemporary British Painting

Chapter Four considers object-images in relation to the notion of the simulacral and the category of simulacral abstraction as outlined by Hal Foster in the text 'Signs Taken for Wonders.' It begins with a description of Ian Davenport's early work, drawing out the similarities with Callum Innes's practice and examining Davenport's manipulation of the physical properties of his medium and his bodily involvement with materials. This examination involves scrutinising aspects of Davenport's studio practice which raises the question of a mechanical quality in his repeated processes, a question that is taken up further by considering another British artist, Torie Begg. Begg's paintings are seen to fit with my definition of object-images but a more rigorous conceptual approach to production distinguishes her from both Ian Davenport and Callum Innes. I draw on previous interpretations of Torie Begg's work to contextualise the materiality of her practice and put forward the idea that her work enacts a conceptual structure of painting as an applied process that can be employed in an impersonal fashion to any form of support or object. The chapter goes on to compare Begg to some of those artists Hal Foster writes about in 'Signs Taken for Wonders' as makers of simulacral abstract paintings, in particular Sherrie Levine, and proposes that whereas Levine and others are engaged in institutional critique, Begg aims more at the practice of painting itself and that her work dramatizes a disengagement with the medium of painting or a simulation of the act of painting. Having framed this argument in terms of the difference between 'strategy' and 'formula' I go on to consider the paintings of Jason Martin and how, whilst using a repetitive mode of production, Martin not only finds a variety of methods for individualising works but also conceives of his own practice in terms of

a bodily engagement with the medium, something which he sees the spectator gaining a 'first-hand access' to through the indexical trace of the work itself. The final part of the chapter looks at the paintings of Alexis Harding and considers the way in which they might be interpreted in poststructuralist terms whilst suggesting that Harding's physical engagement with the medium is comparable to Martin's and connects him, like Martin, to more modernist concerns. This is considered in relation to his works being object-images and how, through the physical separation of the skin of the painting from its underlying structural support, they throw further light upon the nature of the object-image.

In front of Ian Davenport's 1996 *Poured Painting: White, Black, White* one of the first things that might draw our attention is our own reflection, clearly visible, along with the room behind, in the smooth coats of household gloss paint. The painting is square, 182.9 x 182.9cm, and done on medium density fibreboard. It's surface is immaculate and the elegantly slender arch of black that sweeps up from one edge, rises to almost touch the top edge of the panel then back down to run parallel to the opposite edge, undulating in width as it goes, appears both marvellously exact and vigorously spontaneous, as if it rose of its own accord, untouched by the human hand. Our first impulse might be to conceive of the painting as something like a work by Bridget Riley, that arch of black paint carefully worked out in advance, its undulations following mathematical variation and its crisp delineation executed painstakingly by hand with small brushes. Close examination would suggest otherwise, for there is not the merest hint of a brushmark anywhere to be seen on the whole painting, not even on the expanse of white. How then has the painting been made? If we have no idea of its process and can find no evidence of the artist at work, then, as we have touched on in previous chapters, we lose sight of the artist as maker and the painting becomes more markedly a presence *in itself*, having an autonomy from the artist that many painters seem desirous of achieving and that I have already associated with the notion of the object-image: paintings that

make a viewer as much aware of their corporeality as of the image that is on or in that object, and whose surfaces are visibly modified.

As with Innes's *Exposed Paintings*, it is an incidental result of the painting's manner of making that both opens up a decoding of that process and further insists upon the material and physical nature of the work: in this case, a short wavering black line that appears to have seeped out from the bottom-most right-hand corner of the arch. In the context of the painting's flawless surface it looks like a mistake, but as is often the case it is an imperfection that only throws into greater relief the exactness of the remainder. It reveals, exactly because it has been able to *seep*, the liquidity of the black paint when applied in the same way that the residues of pigment on the stretcher sides of an *Exposed Painting* point to their processes of dissolution and draws our attention to the importance of the physical structure of the painting. It is also reminiscent of an earlier precedent, recalling those troughs of colour that run along the bottom edges of Morris Louis's *Veil* paintings, an effect produced by paint pooling in the curled up bottom edge of his unstretched canvas as it gradually gathered the run-off of liquid acrylic paint that he poured down its surface.¹ This leads us towards the idea that *Poured Painting: White, Black, White* has been made by *pouring*, as its title states, further providing the sequence of pours, but it is only once we have seen photographs of the process, or come across Davenport's own verbal descriptions, that it all becomes clear: the MDF is initially coated in white, then, with the board flat on the ground, a circle of black is poured into its centre; the board is then physically lifted, or rather tilted, so that the black runs down to the bottom edge; once dry, the board is laid flat again and a circle of white paint is poured until it almost covers the black then the board is tilted once more and the white runs down to the bottom edge.² One of the most crucial aspects of the process is to know *exactly* when to stop pouring the final layer, for there is presumably a settling effect as the paint finds its final boundaries. The wavering line in question is produced by a slight excess of black paint at the tilting stage, accumulating sufficiently at

the bottom edge to wash back onto the board and run sideways, an effect that Davenport subsequently imports deliberately into later paintings, even learning how to produce a double line with the final two layers of colour.

This manner of making paintings through a manipulation of the physical properties of the medium and utilising the physical structure of the painting is what I describe in Chapter One in relation to Callum Innes's *Exposed Paintings* and just as those paintings depend upon the canvas being stretched, allowing residues to collect on the sides of the stretcher, so Davenport's *Poured Paintings* depend upon the rigidity and smoothness of the MDF, the assiduously prepared first layer of paint and the relative properties of household gloss paint. Indeed, in the section on how Innes uses materials in Chapter One the metaphor of his studio as a laboratory comes not from the literature on Innes but rather Jonathan Watkins's text on Davenport.³ There are many parallels between the two painters though they are rarely discussed in relation to each other: one of the few articles to compare them, a review by Martin Maloney of an exhibition in Southampton, does so by invidiously characterising Innes's paintings as timid and reactionary next to the bold experimentation of Davenport's early paintings, but this is to entirely miss the common ground in what the two artists are exploring.⁴ Davenport undergoes a similar turn away from depiction at more or less the same time as Innes, in 1988, and in his case the transition occurs as he makes successive images of tins of paint that have runnels of paint coming down from their open tops; eventually, as he paints their elliptical openings faster and faster, with more paint allowed to run down the canvas, the physical action of placing and making the mark, as well as the behaviour of the diluted paint upon the canvas surface, becomes more important than any representational content. A remarkable series of paintings ensues in which the artist lines up tins of household emulsion in front of the canvas, dips his brush into one or other of them then reaches up to paint an ellipse on the canvas, allowing a trail of viscous paint to spatter onto its surface as he goes; he repeats this process, placing ellipses in

grid-like formation until he has covered most of the surface. Again, the repetitive action, the leaving of traces of process upon the canvas and, perhaps most of all, the evidencing of bodily movement before the canvas are all factors I have discussed in relation to the *Exposed Paintings*, though if anything these particular paintings reveal the physical actions of the artist even more clearly, the sweeping filaments of paint intensely evocative of the physical motion required to produce them and the denser coagulations of paint near the centre of the bottom edge providing a clear index as to the position of the painter and thicker loading of the brush. The paintings seem to explode outwards or, conversely, implode into a dense core near the bottom of the image. *Untitled 1988* is densely packed with several layers of colour and evocative of some complex natural structure, spreading out from the thick mass of its central trunk to outermost ellipses in the far corners of the canvas.⁵ Another *Untitled* work from the same year is executed entirely in red on a pale grey ground and erupts from the bottom edge with controlled elegance, the precision of its forms, and also their sense of being delicately outlined with the grey, recalling those virtuosic paintings Jackson Pollock made on paper by dropping black enamel paint onto a still wet surface of white enamel.⁶

These paintings trigger an intensive period of experimentation that revolves around different ways of applying and allowing gravity to act upon paint during the making of a work. Once Davenport hits upon this way of working he finds the central concerns of his work and most of the technical requirements he will exploit over several decades to come as quickly and assuredly as Innes. He employs a similar bottom to top method of applying paint though he relies upon the viscosity of emulsion, its capacity to retain elasticity in the air, rather than a process of dissolution. More fundamentally, he finds from the beginning a principle of *verticality*, allowing paint to fall and run into vertical channels, that mirrors a similar concern in Innes's work. I am not suggesting that Davenport or Innes are working in relation to each other – I have little idea of how aware of the other's work either artist was at the time – only that they share some central preoccupations.

Through 1988/89 Davenport makes works that explore different ways of applying emulsion towards the upper edge of a canvas and allowing residues to fall and run back down, paintings that strike a fine balance between opening up to the vagaries and accidents of flinging paint and an ordering system of composition that always reigns in the arbitrary, what Norman Rosenthal describes as a 'combination of rigour and lyric poetry.'⁷ These early works have a muted palette, unlike the later brightly coloured paintings for which he is now better known, and so their allusive qualities, secondary to the works themselves in much the same way as the 'landscape' readings of the *Exposed Paintings*, tend to be focussed around natural rather than man-made processes; Rosenthal links them to John Cage's understanding, through Oriental philosophy, that art should 'imitate Nature in her manner of operation' and finds them evocative of elemental forces, such as wind or water.⁸ What is notable is the breadth of Davenport's experimentation and his ability to make successful paintings out of the most unlikely of technical innovations, perhaps epitomised by the paintings he makes using an electric fan in which he allows paint falling from brushes, or nails, to be blown in various directions by powerful electric fans.⁹ What might in other hands be a gimmick is for Davenport a way of introducing another form of energy, or natural process, into the ordering systems of his work, harnessing the potential chaos of fan-blown marks into delicate webs of fine irregular lines, from the spacious freedom of a work like *Painting made with an Electric Fan, No.5* from 1989 to the more elaborately built up *Painting made with an Electric Fan* of the same year, with its tight mesh of blue and white strung from a series of points at the top of the canvas and rippling across the image in a widening channel. Once again it is hard not to be reminded of Pollock, though Davenport's fan paintings have an airiness, a literally wind-blown quality, that is quite different to the generally dense meshes of the earlier artist, but in their mixture of spontaneity and control they have a kinship and might also recall Pollock's terse response to criticism: 'No chaos, damn it!'¹⁰

If the paintings from the first few years of Davenport's mature work are evocative of natural process then, like Innes, he begins to seek ways of repressing such readings and insisting upon the formal properties of the work more firmly. I have not the space here to describe the complex shifts in the artist's practice, only to suggest some of the more salient changes. To begin with the application of paint to canvas becomes more ordered, following the physical dimensions of the canvas in a series of works that employ vertical columns of paint at regular intervals, generally on top of runnels of paint that are horizontal, though were applied with canvas turned to 90 degrees. As with Innes's *Repetition* and *Formed* paintings the effect is partly to dampen down potential landscape readings and make a viewer more conscious of the literal boundaries of the canvas and the physical materiality of the paint. These lead to a set of monochromatic paintings done in greys and blacks in which the artist begins to experiment with larger pours of paint and we see, for the first time, those wide tear-shaped forms that run down to the bottom edge of the canvas. There is, in these works, a different relation between the physical process of their making and the forms on their surface, a *slowness* that speaks not so much of the artist's movement as the paint's, its slow expansion into form, its heavy liquidity and movement under the influence of gravity. Their revelation of process, as described above in relation to later *Poured Paintings*, is more mysterious and initially obscured by the remarkably self-sufficient quality of the forms. There are subtle interplays between gloss and matt paints that provide much of the brooding quality in these paintings, but also, as we might expect, those incidental markers of process that arise unpredictably and activate the surface, such as the 'drips' that spring vertically upwards from the top edge of the forms in *Untitled Matt Black* of 1990. Over the next few years Davenport tests out various ways of pouring and controlling the flow of paint, including an innovative set of works that involve dipping, and moves gradually towards the greater discipline of the *Poured Paintings* of the mid-nineteen nineties that involve narrower and even more regular vertical stripes that are made using syringes, carefully applying each stripe at the top edge and allowing it to run down to the bottom of the canvas. As well as their tighter control and more regular compositional format, both of which contribute to eliminating any sense of

depiction, the artist also introduces a much brighter, more artificial, range of colour and it is from this point onwards that commentators connect the allusive qualities in his paintings to an urban rather than a natural environment.¹¹

Even this brief survey of Ian Davenport's early paintings hopefully makes clear why I consider there to be parallels with the development of Callum Innes's work and that both artists are involved with questions that arise from non-representational painting, in particular the kind of *presence* a painting can attain that I have chosen to examine using the term *object-images*. In my account of the *Exposed Paintings* in Chapter One most of the parallels I drew upon were with much earlier artists, such as Barnett Newman and Frank Stella, rather than Innes's contemporaries, because I wished to propose a degree of *continuity* with those earlier painters, just as I also want to suggest that much might be gained from comparing Ian Davenport's paintings to those of Jackson Pollock or Morris Louis. I also think it feasible to follow this chain of logic further back, for instance to Mondrian or to Russian/Soviet Constructivism, but for the sake of clarity I am largely confining myself to thinking through contemporary practice in relation to that of the mid-twentieth century. The kinds of *continuity* and *critique* that I want to explore in this chapter, however, are not well served by thinking in terms of modernism and postmodernism and, as I stated above, I am not trying to claim Callum Innes, or Ian Davenport, as latter-day Modernists. 'People are always asking me whether I'm post modern – to be honest I'm more post pub,' retorts Davenport in an interview with David Batchelor.¹² Beneath the glibness lies a serious point, that for many artists the issues of their work are not resolved in relation to a theoretical stance but to the exigencies of their practice, the demands of making work that are thrown up on a day-to-day basis in the studio. These demands, for both Davenport and Innes, revolve around a way of working that depends primarily upon exploring and manipulating the physical properties of their medium, an attitude to those materials that has something in common with the practice of sculpture. Davenport stresses, in interviews and

statements, how the development of his mature work arose partly from the freedom to move between media that he encountered at Goldsmith's College, with the result that he spent most of his time in the sculpture department: rather than going on to make three-dimensional objects, what the artist presumably took from that experience is a sculptor's understanding that work is made through taking physical substances and bringing about some kind of *transformation* through physical action. Whereas for many painters their materials are a kind of *given*, their uses proscribed by conventions that have held good for centuries, for sculptors, especially since the turn of the twentieth century, their practice often involves the sourcing of unconventional materials and testing them under a range of conditions. A sculpture must stand, or collapse, in actual space, under the influence of gravity and so a sculptor must necessarily know how a material will behave if it is moulded or carved or dissolved or heated. The traditional media of sculpture have always been dependent upon such knowledge, whether that is the lost-wax method of casting in metal or a working awareness of the tensile strength of different stones and a sculptor such as Richard Serra, whose output is driven by notions of the artist *doing things* to materials, rather than preconceiving ideas and attempting to force materials into that form, exemplifies the way in which some contemporary sculpture has sprung from this kind of *practical knowledge*. Ian Davenport and Callum Innes represent a comparable strand amongst painters and when they talk of *sculptural* concerns it is this rooting of their practice in curiosity about *what paint will do* that I consider them to be acknowledging.

It is this aspect of Davenport's practice that makes photographs of the artist at work interesting, just as earlier photographs of Jackson Pollock, or indeed Richard Serra, have become important beyond their function of providing information about the appearance of the artist or the documentation of their work habits.¹³ When we look at Namuth's photographs of Pollock or Gianfranco Gorgoni's 1969 photograph of Serra throwing lead in the Castelli warehouse what we see dramatized, framed

by the image, is the directness of their engagement with a medium.¹⁴ There have been many critical responses that, reasonably enough, outline a subtext of masculine superiority in these images – Serra heroically handling dangerous materials amongst the industrial heft of his work, the floor scattered with shards and spills of leads like that of a shipyard – but I leave aside that issue for the moment in order to focus upon their relation to medium and the way in which these photographs reveal not the artist meditating upon the content of their work, but their bodily engagement with its material constituents. This difference reflects a profound shift in artistic practice and one which is often overlooked, either because it is re-framed in other terms, as above, or because that shift is now deemed to be *historical* and its implications already worked through. When, however, we see a contemporary version of this engagement with materials, I think it not only illuminates something of contemporary practice but also re-opens debate around these earlier artists. Photographs of Ian Davenport at work in the studio reveal an artist working at a scale that relates to his body, to its physical possibilities and limitations, and developing strategies, or even makeshift structures, that enable that body to operate upon materials and bring about controlled outcomes from the potential disorder that large quantities of materials in flux tend to throw up.¹⁵ In one image, we see the artist precariously perched on a plank above a large panel, pouring a quantity of household emulsion from a tin, its steady pour spreading out beneath him like a toxic pool. In another, the artist is at full stretch, pulling on a wooden bar that upends a huge trough of paint onto a tilted panel, the unlikely contraption that the artist built in order to produce his *Tip* paintings: in his breathing mask and bespattered overalls he clearly resembles Gorgoni's Serra and the frozen moment of physical effort, as with that earlier photograph, evokes not so much the artist as the industrial worker exerting himself against the heavy materials of mass production. The sheet of falling paint that we see contains thick rivulets of matter and it is hard to believe that such a mass of emulsion will result in a smooth surface and, what's more, one that has been manipulated to a precise degree to allow thin slivers of the coat beneath to remain visible. In a recent monograph on Davenport the photograph is shown next to an illustration of the finished painting, *Untitled Tip Painting: White, Black, White of*

2004 and there is a peculiar disconnect between the two: the reproduced image dazzlingly pristine, attenuated, verging on the immaterial with its delicately tapering black lines at the very edges of the panel and the industrial quantities of paint that have gone into its making, the figure heaving at the wooden bar like a Victorian millworker, his clothes and shoes covered with paint and large sheets of polythene unable to protect his surroundings from daily overspill.¹⁶ Jonathan Watkins may characterise Davenport's studio as a laboratory, evoking a series of experiments conducted upon chemical substances, but it is a laboratory that is at least halfway towards industrial production, making the product as well as testing its properties.

Thinking about the *Tip* paintings makes us realise not just how physically demanding Davenport's processes might be but also the inevitability of paintings going wrong. How long did it take the artist to come up with a pouring machine that actually worked, one cannot help wondering? Once he had finessed such a contraption, how often did the pour go wrong, either by covering the undercoat completely, or not enough, or just not quite creating the kind of tapering line that the artist sought? We know from his own accounts that a considerable number of works fail and that, at various points in time, he has to have a large number of works in process – partly because of long drying times in the paint that he uses – so that, with the *Tip* paintings, for instance, he has stated that out of about two hundred panels in process he ends up with around ten paintings.¹⁷ This phenomenal wastage rate seems to belong more to the realm of industrial production than the artist's studio, to quantity rather than quality, but this is misleading for it is only the artist's insistence on the latter, on paintings fulfilling some expectation on his part that is exceptional, that dictates such a large-scale operation. However much studio processes come to superficially resemble some kind of production line – and it is worth bearing in mind a distinction that Kirk Varnedoe makes in relation to Donald Judd between full-scale industrial production and that of the small-scale workshop – they are brought to bear in order to produce single extremely considered products: paintings.¹⁸

Nevertheless, it might be objected, those paintings, in their various series, come to resemble each other quite closely so that their differences lie in nuances of detail rather than overall character and it is this resemblance that I wish to explore further and to link to ideas of continuity and critique, so that the making of *object-images* might be seen to throw light upon other forms of painting as well as upon the boundary between painting and the literal object. In order to do this, I first want to turn to the work of another British painter, Torie Begg.

To begin with Begg's paintings clearly fit with the working definition of *object-images* that I have proposed, paintings that make a viewer as much aware of their corporeality as of the image that is on or in that object, and whose surfaces are visibly modified. The artist makes most of her paintings through a system of layered coats of translucent acrylic paint and there are a number of traits to be found in her paintings that foreground process and the physical structure of the work. Many of her paintings, such as the 'l and m' series, are made with the canvas flat on the ground and coats of acrylic are applied in a pre-determined order using dilute paint, one consequence of which is that the stretcher bars often leave a visible trace in the final image. Once all the coats of acrylic have been applied and are dry Begg un-stretches the painting and then re-stretches it on a stretcher that is slightly larger, so that any paint which ran down the sides of the canvas during painting is now displaced onto the front surface of the canvas. Generally these are monochrome paintings, though the artist also produces works that are grids, so once more we are in the terrain of the painted image being closely related to, or even deduced from, the literal shape of the canvas. Even a description as brief as this makes it evident that Torie Begg is interested in the physical presence of the work and has incorporated various techniques into her working practice that underline such presence in a similar way to those methods we have seen employed by Innes and Davenport. Once we begin to look at her practice more closely, however, we can detect considerable differences in approach and intention. The artist always employs the same colours in her paintings, black, white,

grey and the three primary colours and these are applied either in the same order, so that each painting follows the same sequence of colours, though beginning and ending at different points in that sequence, or the order of colours is decided through a computer programme. Either way Begg renounces individual choice in relation to colour beyond the matter of her initial selection, not only revealing that she is not aiming at specific effects of colour but, more fundamentally, that she is not responding to changes of colour in the work as it progresses: her interests must lie elsewhere. This de-personalised aspect of her process is reflected in her titling: if we remain with the 'l and m' series for the moment, the pairing of letters is taken from her systematic usage of the alphabet; the following series of paintings, which involved painting only the sides of the canvas and allowing paint to run onto the frontal plane to create an image, is known as 'n and o'. Beyond this generic group title, each individual work has a title that is made up of the following constituents: firstly, the word *Apparently*; then the final colour that has been applied, let us say yellow, and their mode of display, as in 'Corner Installation'; then a coding of letters and numbers that identifies each individual painting or work, such as LLLL01, followed by *brush structure* and the order in which the colours were applied, with a multiplication symbol 'x' and the number of applications, and finally the medium. Thus, for an installation of three yellow paintings at Galerie Xippas in Paris in 1996, the title read: *Apparently Yellow Corner Installation, 1996, LLLL01/LLLL02/MMMM01, brush structure grey/blue/black/red/white/yellowx5, pure acrylic polymer, organic pigment, canvas and timber, each panel 300 x 300cm.*¹⁹ If all this seems reminiscent of some of Sol Lewitt's procedural techniques then it comes as no surprise that for one exhibition, at the Apex Gallery in New York in 2001, Begg presented not the paintings themselves but the 'scores' required for their construction and the necessary materials in a box, as concrete a manifestation of Lewitt's desire to demote production as can be imagined.²⁰

This conceptual rigour is equally manifested in the artist's exhibition strategies. The *Apparently Yellow Corner Installation* seen in Paris consists of three paintings put into a corner of the space, two on the walls and one on the floor, equidistantly spaced and aligned so that they appear as the slightly separated sides of a cube that almost fill the height of the gallery; the canvas on the floor stops a spectator moving close to those on the wall so that they are forced to move around the piece as a whole and consider the three canvases as a single entity, a move reinforced by the seemingly near identical nature of the works. In her ambitious installation at the Watertoren, Theo van Doesburgcentrum in Vlissingen (1997) the six floors of the building were colour-coded, filled with works only of one 'apparent' colour, so that a viewer's progress through the building acts as an echo of the colour layering in the works themselves; on the top floor the artist installed her *'Apparently' Gold Floor Installation*, 1996, brick 01-100, silver/gold x 50, brick and pure polymer with organic pigment, unit size 21 x 10 x 6.5cm, which, as the title spells out, consists of one hundred bricks whose upper surfaces have been painted and re-painted silver then gold fifty times, ending with the fiftieth layer of gold, the process evident from the runnels of gold and silver that have covered the sides of the bricks.²¹ The one hundred 'units' are arranged, much in the manner of Carl Andre, in a careful grid and take their place in the centre of a circular gold-painted room.²² This is not the only occasion the artist has transferred her painting system to objects other than a canvas and she often employs shoes, chairs, ladders and even, as one element of a work called *Andy Electric Chair* (1996), an electric toaster.²³

The making of *object-images* for Torie Begg is evidently a very different matter than for Innes or Davenport and has a conceptual under-pinning that leads the artist and the viewer to another kind of experience: her *Apparently Yellow Corner Installation* makes for an interesting comparison with the *Exposed Paintings* Innes produced around the same time and the uses both artists have made of the run-off of paint around the sides of the stretcher is instructive. We have already examined the

way in which Innes allows these residual coats of pigment to remain on the sides of the canvas and proposed that, amongst other things, this staining functions as an indicator of the process of making and specifically that the painting *was painted on its stretcher*, thereby subtly reinforcing our experience of the *Exposed Paintings* as physical objects. At first sight, with her re-stretching procedure, it might seem that Torie Begg is doing a similar thing and certainly, by transposing the run-off of paint to the frontal plane of the canvas, one effect the artist achieves is to insist upon the materiality of the paintings, so that a viewer is unable to immerse themselves in the potentially recessive space of a translucent monochrome: 'as if,' Sally O'Reilly says in an evocative metaphor, 'the painting is showing its petticoats.'²⁴ Brian Muller also emphasizes the way in which these paintings block illusionistic or associative readings:

In these works the viewer's reading of the physical process of painting and the materiality of the paint dominates and disrupts his/her automatic external associational references.²⁵

This materiality does not, however, seem to work in the terms we have been exploring so far, with the painting taking on a kind of *insistence* in its occupation of actual space so that it *confronts* a viewer and, in some way, acts as a mirror to their own embodied occupation of that space: *Apparently Yellow Corner Installation* appears, on the contrary, to disrupt our sense of actual space and *not* to insist upon physical presence in anything like the same way. When we come to examine those 'petticoats' it is perhaps significant that they have been displaced, that they offer a kind of false evidence of process because they are not where they are meant to be: far from revealing the material structure of the painting during its process of production they tell a lie about that process – re-stretching a painting a different size to its original dimension being an extremely unexpected and counter-intuitive manoeuvre – as well as re-locating that evidence within the image, so that in one

sense this is the reverse of Innes's strategy, which asserts the edge of the image at the same moment as revealing its material structure. By absorbing the evidence of process *into* the space of the image these paintings affect an almost disorientating effect upon the viewer, de-stabilising our sense of where the edge of the painting lies, which in turn de-stabilises our notions of *what a painting is*, a conceptual challenge that is further extended through the juxtaposition of wall and floor positions. Mick Finch describes the vertically hung paintings as 'at risk of being subject to a reading in terms of pure opticality,' recalling the debate around around verticality and the suppression of the carnal.²⁶ He likewise reads the horizontally placed work as suggestive of 'base materialism at work both in their production and presentation,' more specifically referencing the reading of horizontality as it appears in Rosalind Krauss's and Yve-Alain Bois's book *Formless: A User's Guide*.²⁷ We can see how their installation and Begg's manipulation of her paintings' vertical planes might throw into doubt their ontological status.

We only need to look at some of the interpretative readings of Begg's work to appreciate how difficult it is to locate the materiality of her paintings in any wider framework of meaning. The most influential reading to date is that proposed by Brian Muller when he included Torie Begg in the exhibition he curated for Southampton Art Gallery in 1996, titled *Real Art*. For Muller, the tension between the detached conceptualisation of Begg's paintings and the materiality of their hand-made production produces an 'anticipative gap', so that the viewer is called upon to constantly re-assess the nature of what they are looking at; this produces, in Muller's view, a form of reflexivity, one which makes the viewer aware of their own questioning process and of their own interpretative constructions. The meaning of the work, he asserts, lies in the viewer, not the work itself. The 'realness' of the artworks, their evident materiality and lack of illusionism, operates here not to reveal process to the viewer, nor to offer perceptual data linked to our own embodied experience,

but rather to block all conventional associations, even those of the blank canvas and constantly force a viewer to become conscious of their own interpretative processes as they happen:

It is during the 'viewing event', within the tension between the assumed, procedural structures of artistic production and the viewer's cognital structures that the dialectic takes place and the effort to locate structures generates transformations of those structures. The direct observation of this moment to moment transformation is the reflexiveness in which the falseness of the observer/observed duality becomes apparent....Content is shifted out of the 'art object' into the cognitive process of the viewer (the viewer as subject in process) as he/she watches himself/herself looking while assumptions have to be corrected, reassessed and re-corrected.²⁸

The problem here is that Muller, as well as the artist herself whose statements are largely in accord with this reading, imbue the work with an idealistic degree of neutrality, putting aside how leading the conceptual basis of Begg's practice might be in dictating our experience of her installations. Mick Finch links this assumed neutrality and its shift of meaning onto the spectator with earlier interpretative readings of Minimalist art and takes issue with it:

The framework in which the viewing event is set up is subject to the faktura of the work, in Begg's case a kind of techno-logic. Secondary levels of meaning and reading are simply disqualified in their [Muller and Begg's] discourse. However this seems like a conjuring trick and closer examination reveals that a more complex nexus of modes of control and the management of time and perception can be argued to be at work.²⁹

Those modes of control are, in Finch's view, largely technological and he goes on to examine Begg's work in the light of the technological modes of operation that it appropriates, such as her computer-generated scores for making paintings, her insistence on reading them as 'information' or 'data' and the mechanistic procedures that it takes from photography.³⁰ In the end, Finch sees the value of her work lying principally in its position between these two forms of activity – between the analogue and the digital, or the indexical nature of photography and 'the infinite possibilities of image manipulation' thrown up by the technologized version of this, digital imaging – and the way in which a crisis in photography, its basis in the 'real' undermined by digital manipulation, can be played out in 'a simulated form of painting.'³¹ Sally O'Reilly likewise calls into question Begg's claim that she is creating 'authorless work' and compares the viewer's position to that of the reader/viewer of a hyper-text novel that 'invites you to make choices at nodal points in the plot,' which opens the work to a similar vein of interpretation as Finch's.³² Whatever their differences, all these readings take as their starting point a tension in Torie Begg's work that springs from a practice that emphasizes the materiality of her pieces but derives from a strictly controlled conceptual system. The unstretching and re-stretching of Begg's canvases does not derive from formal necessity – from a problem encountered during *making* in the studio that has found resolution through a technical change – but is part of a *conceptual structure* that the artist has constructed around an *idea* of painting. That idea, as we have seen above, is complex, but I believe that the materiality of Torie Begg's paintings and painted objects is part of a project to reduce painting down to *an applied process* that is at once unvarying and systemic, taking no account of changes in surface or format, nor for that matter any personal responses on the part of the artist. The reason for the artist's rigid limiting and ordering of colour is to take out of the equation any unpredictable factors, such as personal mood or unexpectedly evocative combinations of colours, and endeavour to keep some kind of *control* in place, so that variations between works arise from other aspects of the process. The re-stretching operates in a similar manner, laying as bare as possible productive methods not to assert the

physical actuality of the work, but rather to eliminate *application* as another source of differentiation. If paint behaves differently on a ladder to a canvas, in other words, it isn't because the artist has applied it in a special way, it is simply that the layering process has been executed on a changed physical format.

The idea that Torie Begg is taking procedural decisions not in response to events that take place on the canvas but rather as a conceptual pre-empting of such activity is reminiscent of something that Hal Foster describes in relation to the work of American artist Jack Goldstein:

For example, Goldstein makes his abstract paintings structurally as deep as early Stellas (4 to 12 inches thick) and often frames them with painted gold or silver bands; yet this stress on 'objecthood' is beside any formalist point, and the metallic elements are formally gratuitous (the colours and chromatic schemes are precisely not 'serious'). This gratuitousness is intentional: the stretchers and bands do not partake in any late-modernist reflection on the material presence of painting (Goldstein is only interested in mediated representations); rather, they serve as signs of such reflection. In effect, Goldstein suggests that critical painting a la Ryman has become all but reified in its conventions, that it is, in short, a readymade.³³

Here we encounter, in Foster's reading of Goldstein's intentions, something that runs entirely counter to the notion of the *object-image*, for it would include such a possibility within the conventions of painting 'a la Ryman', no longer able to throw up valid issues in the arena of visual art, reduced to the status of *readymade* – only useful in terms of its appropriation and inclusion in other contexts. Such a reading of Goldstein's work places him in a critical tradition that is extremely

widespread and, since the advent of poststructuralism, a mainstay in both critical writing and art education. There is not the space here to begin to outline the many forms of this critical stance, but in terms of its interpretative reading of painting let one short quotation from John Tozer's 1999 article, *From today painting is dead*, suffice:

Instead it [painting] seems to survive because it has become a resource for artists who wish to draw upon its ability to signify as a cultural stereotype. Painting's contribution today lies in its use by artists whose work is rooted not within the *tradition* of painting but in the late-twentieth century acknowledgement of the multiple codings of perception and interpretation, and in the intertextuality that has come to be seen as the prevailing dynamic between all signs. For these artists painting is a resource: a means to an end and not an end in itself.³⁴

The distinction that Tozer makes here, between work that is *rooted* in a tradition and work that employs the formal characteristics of a tradition as a cultural stereotype, a set of *signs* to be appropriated and inserted into more mediated forms of visual art, is one that lies at the heart of Hal Foster's 1986 text *Signs Taken for Wonders*, in which he distinguishes between two forms of abstract painting: one which arises from a direct engagement with the tradition of abstraction as it has developed since the beginning of the twentieth century, what he refers to as *critical abstract painting* and into which category, I am sure, he would place Callum Innes and Ian Davenport, as well as such precursors as Barnett Newman and Frank Stella; and a form of abstract painting that has arisen over recent decades which appropriates earlier modes, or styles, and employs them as the *signs* for such painting, what he terms *simulacral abstraction*. As an example of the latter he cites Sherrie Levine's *Stripe Paintings* which utilise the formal devices developed by Frank Stella, Robert

Ryman and Kenneth Noland but not with any intention of further exploring those formal possibilities, but rather using them as *a sign of that kind of painting*, so that a viewer's awareness is shifted away from any experiential understanding of the work towards its institutional and historic context, a set of coded signs that carries within it the ideologies that legitimate and sustain it. To treat earlier abstract painting as a readymade is to shift its use, so that its primary function becomes exactly this kind of institutional critique: to hang a Sherrie Levine *Stripe Painting* in an exhibition is a gesture similar to Duchamp's showing of *Fountain*, shifting questions away from the work itself to its defining context and, more specifically, how such contexts operate to define *our experience* of the work. A Levine *Stripe Painting* tells us something not about abstract painting, but about those systems, social, economic, cultural, which produce the activity of abstract painting: if we find this painting meaningful, they propose, it is because we have bought into the discourse around them and have learnt to read certain codes. Just as Sherrie Levine's re-photographing of Walker Evans's photographs calls into question the nature of an original, or the appropriative and institutional codings that might be embedded in what we think of as originals, so her simulacral abstract paintings call into question our perceived responses to abstract painting and seek to re-position them within a framework of ideological deconstruction.

Where Levine's abstract paintings differ from her appropriation of Walker Evans is in the way that they do not superficially resemble any single previous work. Her 1986/87 work *Untitled (Lead Checks:2)*, made from casein and lead on wood, does not reproduce any single work by another artist but instead generically references the use of chequerboard formats in modernist painting and sculpture, drawing in everything from Carl Andre's floorbound metallic sculptures to later chequerboard paintings by Sean Scully. *Melt Down (After Yves Klein)* of 1991, despite the specific reference of its title, if anything spreads the net even wider: it consists of eight monochrome panels, executed in oil paint on mahogany panels, arranged in a row, starting with black, moving through a

range of colours and ending with white; the work arose from a project in which Levine had the colour in reproductions of work by Monet and Duchamp averaged out by a computer, so that the images were reduced to a series of monochrome samples which Levine then re-cycled into a series of *Melt Downs*. With their appropriately sumptuous surfaces and their suitably traditional wooden supports, the panels of *Melt Down (After Yves Klein)* have a sombre resonance, their muted colours and black/white end brackets reminiscent of Brice Marden's monochrome paintings or even those icons of early abstraction, Aleksandr Rodchenko's *Pure Red, Pure Yellow, Pure Blue* of 1921. If we came across them without any additional information provided, there is nothing visible in the work that reveals their simulacral nature or the process through which the artist appropriated their colours, a problem of which Hal Foster is keenly aware, stating that Levine's paintings:

....do not reframe any original painting so much as they vaguely recall this Kenneth Noland, that John McLaughlin or that Brice Marden; thus insinuated into the paternal order of modern abstraction, her abstract frauds or 'false claimants' are potentially in a position to disrupt its institutional canon and confuse its historical logic.³⁵

Here is one of the most perplexing aspects of *simulacral abstraction*: simulacral paintings are not copies but rather 'image[s] without resemblance' that, through their appropriation of the formal characteristics of earlier works, calls into question 'the very notions of the copy and the model.'³⁶ In doing so, they offer not just a critique of previous forms of abstract painting but, as Foster suggests, potentially insert themselves into those historical accounts and narratives which have been developed to make sense of the tradition. Sherrie Levine's *Melt Down (After Yves Klein)* becomes an act of sabotage, insinuating itself into the genealogy of the monochrome and inserting doubts into the historical record, putting a question mark over the monochrome by throwing up the possibility

that there is no difference between the genuine and the simulated. We are left with the question of how we distinguish between the simulacral and the genuine or even whether we can make such a distinction, for if the simulacral can subvert any fixed notions of a canon or a thread of sustained development within abstract painting then it becomes difficult to point to anything as 'the genuine'. Foster reserves the right to consider a group of painters and their works as a 'critical tradition', as do painters such as Innes and Davenport, but Torie Begg raises a slightly more complex set of questions in relation to the issue. What interests me here about Foster's notion of *simulacral abstract painting* is exactly that it reveals a set of different positions towards the tradition, or history, of abstract painting that we might conceive of as a continuum, extending from a direct engagement with that tradition – a desire to further the developments of abstract painting through an involvement with its formal complexities and philosophical implications – at one end, to a profound cynicism about that tradition at the other, in which artists seek to adopt a superior position to earlier forms of practice through the deconstruction of its ideological failings. It is partly the simplifications involved in outlining these extremes that necessitates thinking in terms of a continuum, a spectrum of possibilities that are not so clear cut but which might be considered in relation to such poles.³⁷ The simulacral is located towards the cynical end of the spectrum, employing the formal characteristics of the abstract tradition against itself, seeking to destabilise the 'canon' of 'modernist' abstract art in the ways described above. An artist such as Innes, whose working through formal issues and engagement with earlier artists, such as Barnett Newman, is not undertaken with any ironic intention but rather in an exploratory mode that seeks to discover new possibilities for non-representational painting is clearly towards the other end of the scale, one which involves the continuing validity of abstract painting, not as a *sign* of its own redundancy, but rather as a form of communication that is still appropriate in the early twenty-first century.³⁸ Where, then, would we position Torie Begg on such a spectrum?

Begg is not a simulacral artist in the same way as Sherrie Levine and if there is an element of *simulation* in her work it is not aimed at specific artists, or at the kind of institutional critique that lies behind Levine's work, but rather is connected to dealing with painting as an applied process in the way that I outlined above. If the re-stretching of her canvases so that the evidence of procedure is laid bare on their surfaces is part of an overall strategy to reduce the production of paintings to a system – one which includes the programming of colour sequences and unvarying techniques of application – then the simulation which Torie Begg engages in is somehow more centred in the actual business of painting rather than taking place in the realm of a purely conceptual art. Her systems for making work may have a strict conceptual underpinning, but the operation of the work itself takes place through the materiality of its production, almost as if what the artist simulates is *the act of painting itself* rather than any specific precedent. Her installations do not call to mind specific artists in the way that Levine's work tends to and neither does Begg indulge in any appropriation of the *materials* of earlier painters, such as the mahogany panels of *Melt Down (After Yves Klein)*: in this sense, her work does not call into question the notions of the original and the copy but rather what might differentiate the simulacral from previous forms of making and more particularly the whole edifice of meaning that has been constructed around the personal engagement and commitment of the individual artist. If we cast our minds back to the earlier discussion of Michael Fried, then it seems as if Torie Begg has entirely side-stepped the anxieties that are generally involved with the formal problems of abstract painting and the whole issue of the 'success' or 'failure' of individual pieces of works is beside the point. Whereas Ian Davenport makes large numbers of similar works because he knows that only a very few will have the serendipitous 'rightness' that he seeks, Torie Begg makes large numbers of similar works because she wishes to use them as 'units' in the context of installations. Photographs of her studio resemble a factory with rows of propped paintings awaiting their next coat and groups of objects, layered in exactly the same way and standing amidst pools of run-off paint. There is a synthetic sheen to her paintings, the result of many layers of acrylic applied in deadpan fashion, which refuses to pander to any desire

for a nuanced or richly textured surface. In her endeavour to depersonalise the business of painting it is as if the artist has turned to the procedures of mass production, seeking to turn out her product as efficiently as a factory making plastic dolls.

Despite all these efforts, no two paintings from her studio are identical. I suggested above that if the artist is controlling key aspects of production in order to ensure that works are not differentiated on the basis of how paint is applied or her own personal responses, then such differentiation must arise from some other aspect of her process and I believe that to be the fact that materials will never behave in exactly the same way twice. Begg stacks the odds, for she uses paint in a fluid state and often over relatively large surfaces so there is considerable scope for different densities of wash and hue, but it is perhaps in those exposed edges, transposed to the frontal surface of the painting, that the real space for individual identity arises. In some of her paintings, when she allows a build-up of run-off paint to coagulate along the bottom edge of the canvas, the sheer delicacy, one is tempted to say beauty, of that formation completely nullifies any sense we might have of the production line. It is as if what is ultimately manifested in Torie Begg's work is the difference that will always arise between a *conceptual* system and a *productive* system, so that no matter how exact an idea and how rigidly ordered its execution there is always an element of *transformation* when the idea is realised in physical form. She may adopt some of the methods of the production line and her work may raise questions about the loss of individual identity in contemporary society, but there is a counter-logic operating as well that insists upon the unique behaviour of materials when applied by human hands to any kind of surface.

In *Footsie-FTSE 01-143* (1999) the artist produced 143 apparently-red pairs of shoes each of which has been stuffed with pages from the *Financial Times*, the first and last dates of which correspond to

the period of the work's making. Sally O'Reilly points out how the piece 'marks the accrual of time, literally equating the mechanics of painting to the mechanics of economic society.'³⁹ The neat congruence between Begg's usual titling strategies and the numerical precision of the Footsie index further underlines the point, but then this 'mechanics', this non-human working of the monetary markets is somehow not equated in the translucent drippings of paint off the edges of the shoes: there is just too much of the human hand in there.

If Torie Begg's work opens up questions about the way in which an artist's practice might be modelled upon modes of production that come from outside of the arena of fine art, replacing the traditionally intensive procedures of the studio with methods more akin to the factory production line, than those questions rebound upon other artists we have been considering. We begin to realise that artists such as Ian Davenport and Callum Innes have imported into their processes seemingly mechanical ways of making painting, something that comes into clearer focus with some of their more recent activity. With Ian Davenport's commission for the Southwark Street tunnel, for instance, for which he fabricated forty-eight panels, each three feet by ten feet, of enamel paint baked onto steel.⁴⁰ It isn't so much the scale of *Poured Lines: Southwark Street* (2006) that is relevant here as the ease with which the artist could adapt his processes to production on an industrial scale and in a factory environment, shifting his painting technique from canvas or board to metal and being able to break down the piece into *units* that could be manufactured. Callum Innes's recent show (2015) at the Frith Street Gallery in London equally demonstrates a mode of production that is expanding in terms of scale and scope: the show consisted of a group of *Exposed Paintings* all of which are large paintings, especially compared to earlier examples of the series, and explore a restricted range of blue-violet hues through the *exposure* of up to seven layers of applied paint. This increase in scale and complexity runs alongside a willingness to make paintings that are superficially more similar and to exhibit them in a single group, without any worry that the audience might find

them repetitive: far from his previous strategies of mixing series and juxtaposing different kinds of work to influence readings of the work, the Frith Street show makes a virtue of similarity and reveals an artist confident enough to emphasize not only the seriality of works but also the systemic elements in their production.

We have already seen how seriality in the work of these artists derives to a large extent from the exigencies of making non-representational paintings and how the desire to avoid evocative or associative forms leads them to more simplified compositional schemas and a greater adherence to the physical structure of the work; leads, in other words, to the realm of the *object-image*. Process is dictated to a considerable extent by the need to repress representational content, which means also that artists must find other solutions to the basic question of *how to make a painting*. If we consider, for a moment, the first marks that an artist makes upon a support, let's say a canvas, then for the representational artist those marks are primarily governed by their response to an observed form: the object that is external to the painting provides a kind of armature for the marks to be made upon the canvas; once that armature is removed, an artist must find other ways of initiating a painting, must come up with some other rationale for generating an image. It is not just starting a painting that is the issue, however, for at each step an artist must find some ordering form of logic that allows the work to continue, just as they must also have some kind of framework for deciding at which point a work is finished. It is this need for an internal logic for the work, no longer guided by the more straightforward process of mimesis, which requires a maker of non-representational paintings to have in place *strategies of production*. These strategies derive from what we might normally term, perhaps mistakenly, formal problems, that is to say they are developed through a system of trial and error in which different ways of applying materials to a support are trialed and are then subsequently *applied* and refined through *series* of works. Seriality is the test-bed for modes of production and practice becomes less concerned with the individual 'subject-matter' of

each work (a notion that is deeply tied into representational content) and more to do with how, through variation and near-repetition, the mode of production can be altered. We have seen these processes at work in the output of Innes and Davenport, but we might equally be looking at earlier artists such as Barnett Newman or Robert Mangold, not to mention any number of contemporaries. We have also become aware of the extent to which what we see of these artists' work has been edited, something that I suspect to be not only to do with issues of quality but also obscuring the steps of their production: if we could somehow see every single work by Callum Innes we would gain a much clearer idea of that internal logic which drives his production, a clarity that might not necessarily be the ideal condition for viewing individual pieces.

In simple terms there would seem to be an obvious danger for an artist in working in this manner, the possibility that *strategies* for making paintings might become *formulas*. This is a problem that haunts much abstract painting, but most especially that form of non-representational painting that I am considering as *object-images*. The formula occurs when a mode of production takes on too much of its own momentum and the artist no longer needs to think through how they make their work, a moment Bridget Riley identifies as a 'becoming bored' with the work, so that to be re-involved she has to find a new way of making.⁴¹ If an artist is willing to accept boredom, however, then they can apply the formula over and over and it is this possibility that is played out in Torie Begg's work. It might be said that Begg embraces the formula and rather than seeking engagement in the production of individual works seeks it in the *deployment of series*, finding a positive value in a more *mechanical* mode of production. She highlights that point at which the making of non-representational artwork finds something in common with the mass production of commodities, when the strategies for production become emptied out of personal value and applied to one artefact after the other without discrimination.⁴² I want to explore the phenomenological

consequences of this emptying out in more depth, but first I want to turn to another artist in order to draw out some further differences of approach in the making of *object-images*.

Jason Martin is a British artist whose work came to prominence in the 1990's through inclusion in exhibitions such as Brian Muller's *Real Art* (1996) and *Sensation* at the Royal Academy (1997). His mature paintings depend upon a deceptively simple procedure: using an application device, a brush or a squeegee, and an amount of paint large enough to cover the entire surface of a canvas (or other kind of support) he sweeps paint across that surface in a single uninterrupted gesture. He may well move the application device up or down, or vary the pressure he is putting on, or in other ways manipulate the way in which he is compressing paint onto that surface, but he invariably moves from one side of the canvas to the other without breaking contact with its surface. The squeegee leaves fine lines inscribed into the paint surface and the resultant images often appear like meticulously produced sets of grooves that run, with considerable precision, across the canvas, following parallel curves and straights. Where Martin has steered the squeegee, those grooves shift direction and unpredictable factors in the application process produce a range of tonalities, such as very pale lines cutting through darker areas, as well as startling effects of convergence and divergence. The artist has found numerous ways of varying this single application and sometimes allows paint to clog and knot on the surface, so that from the one procedure he has learnt to bring about a wide repertoire of effects and surface variations.⁴³ There is no sense whatsoever of monotony about his output so that even though almost all his work derives from this single technique, each painting has an highly individual character, something which Martin capitalises on through his use of imaginative titling. *Thriller*, a small painting from 1997 executed in oil paint on a 10cm deep panel of aluminium, makes the process evident: thick cadmium red paint has been dragged across the smooth metal surface leaving ragged smears and clots of paint at both edges, but especially at the *initiating* left-hand edge where a large blob clings to the bottom-most corner and

hangs down below the panel. All four sides of the painting are irregular as paint has wrapped itself around the sides of the panel so that our sense of the painting's surface is as much about this *squeezing out* beyond its edges as what takes place on the frontal plane; there is something sumptuous about this excess, like cream oozing out of a cake. That frontal surface, what we might call the image, is composed of those trademark grooves with two slight undulations, glitches in their smooth progress, to the left of the panel; we might read those undulations as simple changes in direction but it is almost impossible to resist their illusionistic pull and not to see them as declivities in the surface, as if the whole painting dips and bends at those points. The grooves are of different widths so the whole surface has an intricate rhythm as light hits the uppermost ridge of each groove and produces its own wavelength of visibility, further enlivened by the minute pockmarks that litter the paint's skin. *Thriller* lives up to its name: only a small piece of work, it is perhaps the shiny edges of flawless aluminium in relation to that vivid slab of red paint which gives it a punch and evokes its pop-song excitement. *Harlot* (1998) is much larger, though shallower, a 3cm deep square that is 120cm wide, executed in acrylic gel on polished stainless steel. *Harlot* looks like it has been moulded in metal: its silvery-grey lines ease across the panel in two large sweeping curves like the factory-formed body parts of a sports car, only hitting an irregularity at the right-hand edge where a tall thin wedge of straight lines occur, like a flange that ought to be folded over. The edges have been trimmed clean and the paint lightens towards the upper part of the image, leaving an area of almost flat colour to demarcate the top edge of the curves and heighten even further their illusionistic swell and shift. It is like some incredibly precise piece of op-art – indeed it recalls works such as Bridget Riley's early *Current* – and like *Current* it contains a sense of electricity, of energy harnessed and released, a *Harlot* of a distinctly technological bent.

With their visibly modified surfaces, the tell-tale excesses of paint around their edges, their evident materiality and structure as well as the way in which they retain an image that has a certain pictorial

depth, Martin's paintings fit my definition of *object-images*. The artist speaks of many of the concerns that I have rehearsed in relation to other *object-images*, such as the lack of a central viewing point, the way in which these paintings require a viewer's movement around them and his sense of painting as a *sculptural* activity.⁴⁴ In this last regard, it is worth quoting his words at length:

Painting has to investigate itself through the capacity of its medium. That occurs in the surface. The most interesting paintings to me in the twentieth century have all been by people who have managed to disrupt, or to try and re-invent aspects of the surface and the capacity of the medium, investigating the grammar, if you like, of painting....And also, for me, the object itself comes under scrutiny, the volume of the object, the volume of the support...by these loop paintings I want to give the viewer an access into the volume of the surface, so you get a sense of the materiality of the surface that you can perceive from a different perspective...a point of origin for me is that I want to investigate paint as a sculptural medium in itself. So I treat it sculpturally as much as I treat it painterly.⁴⁵

In his investigation of painting as a grammar, it might be said that Martin's work throws particular light on the relationship between surface and support. In the *Loop Paintings* that he mentions above the artist uses acrylic gel on metal supports, copper and stainless steel, that are 10cm deep and have no sides, so that from any kind of angle a viewer can see the shiny *inner* surfaces of the piece.⁴⁶ The image, the frontal surface of the support, is therefore experienced quite differently depending upon a spectator's position: from front-on, we enter into the pictorial depth of the image, a shallow and fluctuating space, the translucency of the gel being particularly difficult to locate in physical space, whereas from any other position it is impossible not to see that surface in relation to the entire volume of the support, as a surface connected to other surfaces that contain

within them a volume of actual space. The effect is somewhat like that of Donald Judd's brightly coloured *Wall Pieces* in that we become aware of an inner volume to the piece that can never be seen in its entirety – that is partially *hidden* – and which inflects our sense of the outer sections of the work.⁴⁷ In a painting like *Gel Loop Painting No.1* (1997) the surface image and the glowing copper interior combine to produce an effect that is evocative of some mysterious technology, as if the painting is a machine made for some unknown purpose, and this sense of the painting coming about through a technological, rather than a hand-painted, technique is further strengthened by the way in which the copper support seems *to come through* the gel, so that the paint is given some of the hard reflexivity of the metal. This notion of the way in which a support can be seen *through* the surface of paint and alters our sense of that surface can be seen to operate through much of Martin's work and has led him to employ a much wider range of materials as supports than most other painters. He has become attuned to subtleties of combination in terms of how he applies different kinds of paint to various supports, for which he has used everything from canvas and MDF to a host of metals and synthetic substances such as Perspex and polyester. The stainless steel that underlies the acrylic gel of *Harlot* is a large part of what makes the work's surface so exact and metallic, whereas *S.O.S.* from 1998, executed in oil on melamine and MDF, has the shiny plasticity of a vinyl record, a more antiquated form of technology that is somehow acknowledged in the ragged edges of the work and the knotted vein of paint that runs across one of its corners. Mark Gisbourne calls this effect a 'hidden visible' and stresses that it is 'a material and physical fact, and not the result of a metaphysical projection on the part of the viewer,' keen to emphasize the degree to which Martin's practice is built upon such materiality rather than any transcendental aspirations.⁴⁸ Despite this, Gisbourne somehow wishes to separate out the two factors, surface and support:

They [surface and support] connote for him [Martin] two distinctly different things within the process of making, the first will be the site of activity, and the second a constructed or

structural inactivity that makes the first form of activity possible. Therefore the surface alone has to be understood as the pictorial space or locus, while its extended physical support must be read as the stretcher/structure that quite literally 'supports' and stabilises it.⁴⁹

Given that Gisbourne describes in some detail the way in which the 'hidden visible' of the support is inseparable from the surface image and that he goes on to elucidate the sculptural nature of Martin's paintings and the way in which they force a spectator to walk around them *physically*, it seems slightly odd that he should make such a separation, but it comes back to the difficulty of reconciling the structure and image of *object-images*.⁵⁰ The problem arises partly from the strong sense of illusionistic space that many of the artist's paintings contain, but we have already seen how such pictorial space is largely unavoidable and how it exists *in relation to* the physical structure of such works, a *twofoldness* that encompasses both image and materiality. Jason Martin has spoken eloquently about how illusion and materiality co-exist in his paintings and alternates between two kinds of reading of the works, one of which stresses their illusionistic space and the other which puts greater emphasis on the materiality of their surfaces and in particular how that surface might be seen as a *trace* of the artist's activity. Limiting himself to a single continuous movement is a fundamental element of this way of thinking about the paintings, for it is this which makes the paintings accessible to a viewer, who is able to imaginatively enter the duration of their making. If the artist were to re-visit their surfaces and make further marks, then he would be engaging upon the kind of *relational* painting that, for Martin, is of little interest. It is that the way of making the painting is *visible* in its surface which is so crucial, just as we have seen with Innes and Davenport, and Martin imbues the activity of making work with the same psychological significance:

Making you walk around them demands that you look at these paintings, these objects from different positions. But also, I think you do get a trace of the time – you may disagree, but they are, literally, records of my body moving through a space, moving through a time. And I think that – if I can say it allegorically – in your own mind’s eye you can re-invent that moment, this seamless, uninterrupted event....I want to give the viewer a first hand access into the dynamic of how the painting was made – and that’s a very brief, spontaneous event.⁵¹

In the dialogue that this quotation is taken from, Martin’s interlocutor Alan Woods is not quite satisfied with the artist’s description and keeps returning to the viewer’s experience of the works as something more active, or complex, than somehow just reading off the way the works are made and relating that to the artist’s activity. He knows that this more active engagement is to do with how the viewer moves around the paintings and the sense this gives them of their own body and also connects this to the way in which the works insist upon an encounter in actual space:

Which is why, I think, one is distracted from their making, because there’s so much there, and then you’re sort of operating within the paintings. It doesn’t deny what you’re saying, but you’re unexpectedly concentrated upon your own movement in the room – you’re not imaginatively drawn into some other space or time, either illusionistic perspective space or some spiritualized, abstract space.⁵²

Martin’s paintings, then, might be said to occupy *actual* space, rather than illusionistic or ‘spiritualised’ space and to draw the viewer in not only through that sense of physical presence, but also through involving them, retrospectively, in the *making* of the work. This is a duality we have

already explored in relation to Innes and Davenport and has the same implications for the viewer, some of which I tried to draw out in the previous chapter in terms of a phenomenology of the object-image. For Martin, there is a bodily engagement in the making of his work that can potentially be shared with the viewer, who can be given ‘first-hand access’ into the process. If the artist had made the paintings through a painstaking application of fine lines – and he reports that viewers often mistakenly think he has – then they would be very different exactly because they would not contain this *trace* of his action. If this trace acts indexically, then for Martin it is not simply of the artist’s physical presence, or as mark of authorship, but more precisely of the bodily experience of their production. He expects a viewer to recreate not so much the steps of the process, but rather how it must have felt to pull the squeegee along the breadth of the canvas surface, to feel the resistances of pigment, even the irregularities of paint becoming caught in the squeegee’s path and creating a greater pull, felt through the hands and body; or the effort of keeping an even tension on the squeegee towards the far end of its journey, a sensation that combines the emerging visual forms with the artist’s focussed attention and physical activity. It is worth remembering Merleau-Ponty’s formulations of knowledge as motor-activity, of understanding coming through the body and not the separated ‘mind’. The process of making these paintings, in other words, is not the physical working through of a separate idea but rather *is the idea coming into being* and the first hand access that Martin wants for his viewer is access to that moment-by-moment experience which is not only a physical activity but a form of thinking, just as speaking is a form of thinking: to enter into the physical making of such a painting is inseparable from the idea, the thinking, that the painting ultimately manifests.

To view the physical activity of making paintings in this way is to reveal what lies at stake in the seemingly straightforward differentiation between *strategy* and *formula*. What Martin has in common with Callum Innes and Ian Davenport is an absolute conviction that the physical process of

making their work and the thinking which inhabits such making can be a meaningful experience for both artist and spectator. Their strategies for making work have arisen, I suggested above, from the exigencies of creating non-representational paintings, but those problems and compulsions are deeply connected to the way in which painting *is a form of thinking*, or rather the way in which painting as an activity is particularly good at revealing and making present to us just how much *we think through our bodies*. This is perhaps why the actuality of object-images, their physical presence in actual space, is so much like that of another body and so potently makes us reflect upon our own physical presence, for at their best they are like some remarkably sensitive *recording* of experience in all its richness of thinking/acting. For any individual artist, however, there will be a limited number of strategies that they can find to make such a recording and the problem will invariably arise of sustaining production. Once we have the formula for making an *Exposed Painting* then any one of us could do so, but it would most likely be a hollow experience because we would be acting out not our own thought but someone else's, which is surely why copies of such paintings, and one thinks in particular of the incredible dearth of credible variations on Jackson Pollock's method of painting, are so unconvincing. The artist as originator of a mode of working will initially be free from this difficulty, but what about after making ten versions of a work, or after a hundred? At what point does the activity become meaningless for the artist, emptied out of its compulsion, so that the making of a painting is done on auto-pilot, with none of the original engagement with materials? Hence the need to be constantly varying the mode of production, trying out different strategies, and the cyclic nature of the work of artists like Innes and Davenport, so that formula, the empty acting out of a method of production, is avoided. Torie Begg's paintings, I would suggest, are not the empty acting out of strategies of making, but rather a sustained meditation upon the *possibility* of working in such a way. In order to explore such a notion and all that comes in its wake, not least the deadening effects of mass production and our own rather uneasy familiarity with it, Begg has had to come up with ways of making paintings that engage her fully and then find methods for removing herself from them, which partly explains why her work is so difficult to interpret or *read*.⁵³ As an

originator of object-images, Begg is quite as convincing as Innes and Davenport, but whereas they would do everything they could to sustain their complete engagement with the painting process, Begg accepts, if not embraces, all those tendencies towards repetition and the *emptying out* of process that such painting contains. I imagine a point early in Begg's practice when she found herself producing a painting *without* the kind of phenomenological engagement I have been describing and suddenly conceived of an entire practice founded on such a removal: if such is the case, then her work paradoxically draws attention to the *possibility* of such engagement and alerts us to it, making us look all the harder for that evidence of the artist *thinking through* the medium.

It is worth recalling, in this context, Merleau-Ponty's distinction between *abstract* and *concrete* forms of motor intentionality and in particular his examination of the medical case of Schneider, who could easily complete actions that were a part of his habitual life, such as scratching an itch or the necessary actions needed to make wallets, his paid work, but was unable to touch any part of his body upon request or draw a circle in the air. Merleau-Ponty explains Schneider's behaviour through incapacity of the *power to project*, so that beyond those concrete actions with which his body is familiar he is unable to perform the required movements. What Schneider lacks is what Katherine J. Morris terms a 'bodily imagination' for, she argues, what Schneider has retained is not so much his motor intentionality but rather 'a simulacrum of motor intentionality that looks *so like* genuine motor intentionality ...that we can actually learn from his case what genuine motor intentionality is.'⁵⁴ In emptying out her practice of an engaged bodily imagination, I am suggesting that Torie Begg's paintings offer just such a simulacrum and one that, like Schneider's actions, makes us aware of how such a bodily imagination is deployed. Far from being a straightforward critique of the critical tradition of abstract painting, Begg's work potentially provokes questions about the nature of simulation. Her work reveals, amongst other things, that one aspect of simulacral painting

must involve a disengagement with the medium and the physical structure of the painting, so that these aspects of process are no longer a necessary part of realising the work.

In simple terms this is to say that *simulacral abstraction* is preconceived and that the actual process of making is of little import in the ultimate look and intended effect of the work, but in more complex terms it is to do with the difference between *strategy* and *formula*, the removal of *thinking through the medium* that is such a vital part of object-images. This is to suggest that we can *see* the difference: that when an artist is *finding the form* of the painting through the manipulation of the medium upon the support, when they are fully attuned to how their medium behaves and alert to its relationship with the physical dimensions of that support, when, in other words, they are using the medium of painting as a way of thinking and their bodily manipulation of the medium manifests such thought, then we will see in the final painting the *evidence* of that engagement; the painting itself is the direct manifestation of that process and the *idea* behind the painting – the *thoughts*, the *decisions*, the *actions*, whatever we want to call them – cannot be separated from the physical object we have before us. If, on the other hand, the artist only intends to simulate the *look* of such painting, if the medium is handled without any consideration for its properties or behaviour, then that too will be visible in the final work. This difference is not, of course, factual, but rather a perceptual quality and, what's more, one that is dependent upon the previous experience of the viewer, but what I want to insist upon is that the difference lies in an attitude towards the medium and physical actuality of the painting. In order to examine *how* we might perceive such a difference and perhaps decide whether works derive from the kind of phenomenological considerations I have been putting forward or are demonstrations of theoretical thinking, I want to consider one final artist, the British painter Alexis Harding.

Once again we have an artist whose processes depend upon the material properties and behaviour of paint, the chemical reactions of differently based paints and their further interactions when

subjected to gravity. Harding makes his paintings by first laying down a coat of oil paint, heavily diluted with linseed oil: he then takes a length of plastic troughing into which he has bored holes so that parallel lines of emulsion paint can be poured through the trough and overlaid onto the field of oil paint, which he does across the length of the canvas; he then turns the trough to ninety degrees and makes a second pass over the canvas, so that a loose grid composed of lines of emulsion paint has been formed. The two layers are allowed to partially dry with the canvas flat, as it was painted, but he then raises the work to the vertical and allows the grid of emulsion lines to partially, or even wholly, slide off the underlying oil.⁵⁵ In finished paintings, the grids have slid or bunched, leaving traces of their downward slide in the oil ground and often collapsing off the edges of the canvas, hanging in mid-air in various degrees of intactness. Occasionally the emulsion will slide off completely, or send a pool of colour down to the floor and in some recent site-specific works Harding has allowed the process to take place more quickly, so that the work consists of the canvas on the wall and the heap of fallen, semi-congealed paint on the floor. In *Pulmonary III* of 2005, to give one example, a dark red emulsion grid has been overlaid onto a bright red ground and has gradually slipped inwards and down, forming a butterfly-wing shape that reaches a point near the centre of the bottom edge of the canvas and sends a bleed of paint off the canvas, to run in irregular rivulets down the wall and over the skirting board, eventually forming a small intensely red pool on the bare floorboards.⁵⁶ The canvas seems almost to have exhaled that spatter of red so that Harding's bodily title underlines the aspect of biological function which the installation evokes.

That Harding takes the exemplary form of modernist painting, the grid, and subjects it to forms of treatment that might easily be read as degradation, or as a reduction down to *base materialism*, immediately signals how his work might be read in poststructuralist terms. Eugene Tan remarks on the pull of fascination and repulsion that operates in the artist's paintings, a psychological mechanism that Tan connects to notions of the sublime but might equally well direct us to Kristeva's

concept of *abjection*.⁵⁷ Both abjection and base materialism lead us to George Bataille's writing on *informe* and the way in which Rosalind Krauss and Yve-Alain Bois re-work those ideas in *Formless: A User's Guide*. Harding's paintings, in other words, might well be relevant to those theoretical approaches that endeavour to undo the logic of modernist thinking and the paintings *un-making* of the grid, in particular their subjection of its rational form to gravity, can be read as a form of slippage that mirrors the emptying out of meaning from traditionally modernist modes of production. Chris Townsend in *New Art from London* (2006) warns against seeing Harding's paintings as such a 'typically playful post-modern critique of modernism's failings.'⁵⁸ Instead he sees the artist as involved with 'a number of fundamental modernist concerns,' most particularly ones connected to the relationship between the image and its sustaining field or support.⁵⁹ Townsend elaborates on this by linking the collapse which Harding's paintings enact with a collapse of meaning not 'post' modernism but rather located within modernism, a breakdown of meaning and order that can be followed from the disruption of *edge* in Mondrian, Rothko and Newman, through the horizontality and materiality of Pollock's practice to forms of the *entropic* in Smithson, Morris, Hesse and Serra.⁶⁰ This is not ironic or detached critique, Townsend seems to be suggesting, but rather an artist engaging with painting in a modernist mode, exploring issues of order and structure and their inherent potential for the opposite, disorder, chaos, through means that display a continuity with, rather than critique of, those earlier modernist artists.

Townsend does not go into great depth with regard to the ways in which Harding explores the relation of image and field but that direction of thought might certainly be expanded in relation to the notion of the *object-image*. In some ways these paintings dramatise aspects of the *object-image* as I have been characterising it so far: their surfaces are not simply *visibly modified* but seem to capture that modification even more forcibly than works by Innes and Davenport; their combination of different paints and the visible repulsion of one by the other, especially in that breaking of the

boundary of the support by the slippage of the emulsion, makes more *tangible* than ever the materiality of surface; but it is in the way that *image* and the *physical structure* of the painting are *seen to separate* that these paintings most illuminate the nature of the *object-image*. The form of slippage that these paintings display most, it seems to me, is exactly that between the illusionistic or pictorial space of the image and the physical structure of the painting as an object. In *Double Crossed* of 2005 a black emulsion grid has separated itself entirely from the pale yellow ground to which it once adhered and neatly laid itself out on the floor beneath, partially contracting through a further chemical interaction of layers to leave a yellow smear on the floorboards that slides beneath the now horizontal black-yellow grid. The panel left on the wall has been almost entirely denuded except for a set of faint vertical smears and a single dark black line, like a wavering brushstroke, towards the bottom. *Double Crossed* takes the processes of dissolution and liquidity that inform the work of Innes and Davenport and uses them to wholly separate the image from its support, whilst leaving the kind of evidence of process that we are by now accustomed to seeing: pictorial space is more evident in the floor-bound grid, but the panel left on the wall acts somewhat in the manner of the pigment residues on the sides of Innes's *Exposed Paintings*, or the pools of paint at the bottom of Davenport's *Puddle Paintings*, with the difference that there is a literal separation of where this evidence is situated and its resulting image. In most of Harding's paintings, this complete separation is held at bay and what we see is this *separation in the process of happening*. It is not only in the slippage away from the support, but also in the remaining traces of that slippage that these paintings manage to enact a pulling apart of image from physical support.

To manifest the separation of 'image' from the physical structure of the painting in this way wrenches apart the *twofoldness* of the *object-image*, the way in which the pictorial space of the image co-exists with the materiality of the painting as an object and does so in such a way that throws light not only on the nature of that co-existence, but more widely on the nature of painting in

general. His works contravene one of the basic assumptions of the practice of painting, which is that 'the medium should stay where you put it.'⁶¹ We might well see the physical movement of paint that has taken place in the works of Davenport and Innes, but that movement is not put into contrast with the stasis of the support beneath, in fact is generally manipulated in relation to the physical dimensions of that support. In allowing the material constituents of the image to slip wholly or partly away from the physical structure to which they adhere and breaking that relationship, Harding's paintings reveal the image to be what it is, a material skin that covers a skeletal structure and can be stripped away, most effectively demonstrated in those paintings in which that skin has become wholly separated and, like the dark floor-bound image of *Double Crossed*, takes on the air of a waste product whilst still retaining some of the opticality of an image. It may seem paradoxical, therefore, to suggest that these works arise from Alexis Harding's deep involvement with the nature of painting, rather than any theoretical desire to negate the basis of painting, but I think that involvement is demonstrated not only in statements of Harding's practice, but more crucially in the excitement that the paintings reveal in *holding onto the image*. As with many of the *object-images* we have encountered, there is for the viewer an initial excitement in seeing paintings that seem to defy explanation, whose processes are initially rather mysterious, but as with the *Exposed Paintings* once we understand the basics of their production a deeper engagement occurs, which is with the way in which the artist has controlled and manipulated the material constituents of the medium.⁶² It is that 'first-hand' access of which Jason Martin speaks in which we enter into the motor-actions of the making of the painting and, through our identification not with the artist but with *the making of the painting*, enter into the idea of the painting as a form of coming-into-being. What Harding's paintings throw into greater relief than those of Martin, Davenport or Innes, however, is that such processes always contain the risk of complete collapse: in simple terms, a failure to make a coherent image, to make a painting that *works*, but in more complex terms a collapse away from coherence as a guiding principal, as a mode of structuring not only painting but also thought, a collapse into *incoherence*. Such a collapse is an ever-present possibility for object-images – we could see it, for

instance, in the inchoate mass of white substance that pours from the trough of Davenport's machine for making *Poured Paintings* – but in Harding's paintings it is more evident because of the way in which the image separates itself from support, the slippage away from coherence in that separation.

This chapter has surveyed the work of several contemporary British painters with the aim of seeing if their paintings fit the category of the object-image and, if so, what might be the relation of such a category to that of simulacral abstraction. It has found that object-image is an appropriate description for paintings by Ian Davenport, Torie Begg, Jason Martin and Alexis Harding and that through scrutinising their different attitudes to the production of work we can see a degree of the mechanical entering into their practice in the form of repeated strategies of making and series of similar or near-identical works. This mechanical aspect is seen to be most present in Torie Begg's modes of production which employ a conceptual framework to generate paintings and distance the artist from the act of painting. In this respect Begg is compared to artists who make simulacral abstract paintings such as Sherrie Levine and an essential difference is posited, that whereas the latter are engaged in institutional critique, Begg's practice is more concerned with the act of painting and what simulation might mean in the context of her own activity in front of the canvas. It is suggested that Begg's work reveals as much about the disengagement of simulation as a critique of the critical tradition of abstract painting, leading to a discussion of Martin and Harding in the context of how their work reveals the bodily engagement discussed in relation to Innes's 'Exposed Paintings'. This engagement is to do with our embodied perception and the notion of painting as a form of thinking and it is this physical involvement with the medium that becomes visible in the final work and that mitigates those aspects of production which might be regarded as mechanical. To end the chapter considers the way in which Alexis Harding's paintings have formal qualities which might

easily relate to aspects of poststructuralist theory but that such interpretative readings ought not to discount the artist's involvement with issues of literality and materiality.

Conclusion

The main concern of this thesis has been the physical presence of a certain type of non-representational painting and my attempt to re-define such paintings, to include them in the category of *object-images*, has been motivated not by any ambition to establish a new narrative of abstract painting but only to throw light on what that *presence* constitutes. I have tried, during the course of these investigations, to stay close to the paintings and to my experience of viewing them, but in writing about corporeality and materiality it is impossible to ignore those currents of critical thinking which tend to by-pass the physical presence of works and situate them wholly within a theoretical context. This is the theme of Richard Shiff's book *Doubt*, the substitution of conceptual explanations for experiential understanding and in her introduction to that text Rosie Bennett briefly outlines how this is manifested in Shiff's work:

What emerges from Shiff's writing is a concern that the *applique* of interpretation has replaced an understanding of the *applique* of paint. This potentially reduces the materiality of artworks to the immateriality of anamorphic images that are viewed from the wrong viewpoint. He seems weary of the wholesale application of academic trends because the easy deployment of conceptual metaphors and categories of appraisal, threaten to reduce artworks to little more than illustration.¹

A preoccupation with the *applique* of paint, to put this another way, is not a neutral matter but brings one up against those 'academic trends' which locate the significance of artworks far more in forms of theoretical rigour than material presence. About such a broad subject it is impossible not to generalise but part of my own response comes from having experienced art education in many

forms in this country, both as a student and a teacher, and through knowing how difficult it is to persevere with the discipline of painting against strands of academic thinking that are largely based upon recent continental philosophy. This is not to denigrate those writers who have become part of the core curriculum in art colleges nor to in any way diminish their contributions to our understanding of contemporary society but it is to throw a question mark over the way in which their work has been deployed to produce a particular kind of art practice. The problem occurs, as Yve-Alain Bois succinctly suggests, when theory is used 'as a set of ready-made tools to handle a question, as the miracle-solution, no matter the problem.'² Immersed in analysis of signifying practices, confronted with texts that even specialists struggle with, faced with the demand of placing what they make in the context of a sophisticated understanding of ideologies, discourses and political affiliations, art students are often bamboozled and intimidated. Poststructuralist theory offers many fierce challenges to traditional forms of art practice and, in making such theory central to our art education and practice, the risk is that those practices which can be characterised as retrograde – such as abstract painting, if not painting altogether – might be squeezed out. Mira Shor suggests how this expands out from colleges into the world of current art practice:

A very bright, young art critic recently explained to me why painters today have a basic problem of reception of their work: the most intelligent of her generation of art critics, she said, do not understand painting, they don't know how to read it, don't understand colour, and so on. This admission, at least honest and made in the spirit of trying to develop such an understanding, did not come as a surprise but, rather, confirmed what any practising painter might already suspect from personal experience.³

These are perhaps the local manifestations of something much wider which can be seen in the position, or rather relative insignificance, of painting on the international art scene. What takes place in the Biennales and Documentas of the global art market is a form of art-making that is post-conceptual in the sense that it arises from an understanding of European and American visual art in the latter part of the twentieth century and accepts almost as dogma those shifts into more conceptual forms of practice and their underpinning with postmodern and poststructuralist theory.⁴ If in this discourse the 1960's represent a 'crux' then it is one that has been irredeemably passed.⁵ At an academic conference on abstraction held at Tate Modern one of the most substantial discussions centred upon the 'embarrassment' that arose from deKooning's paintings which, all the speakers involved agreed, it was difficult not to feel.⁶ This embarrassment stems from a set of beliefs that might be attributed to deKooning which are to do, perhaps, with emotional exposure or possibly the conviction of painting as a vessel of spiritual values, but this is to read the artist, and his works, in a manner that wholly accepts their characterisation as modernist. As Richard Shiff points out, there are many postmodernist aspects of deKooning's practice that tend to be left out of such an account.⁷ It is, perhaps, symptomatic of a critical environment that demands of artworks particular theoretical credentials and which, despite its deconstruction of previous discourses around the practice of art, nevertheless imposes a discourse of its own, with its own dense and often obscure critical language and a set of hierarchical judgements about the value of different kinds of artwork that is every bit as prescriptive as the modernist tradition which it so often damns.

All of this, however over-simplified it might be, feels different in the studio to the seminar room. Poststructuralism is endlessly fascinating, its key texts undeniably important and the business of applying those texts to artworks immensely satisfying; I have drawn on many such texts during the course of this thesis and left out the possibilities thrown up by many others.⁸ In the studio, however – in my studio – such a discourse threatens to overwhelm practice. This of course depends upon

what any individual considers painting to be and much of what I have written revolves around that issue, that within the discipline which we call *painting* there are many ways of conceiving a *painting* and often, to understand what is going on in a painting, we have to have some grasp of that prior conception. There is a way of conceiving of a painting that holds on to the fact that the painting is a physical object and this is the most important aspect of the *object-image*, but from that simple recognition there seems to flow a whole stream of complications, some of which I have tried to outline in this thesis. What I have not laboured is that such a conception, with its emphasis upon the literal properties of the support and the material qualities of the medium, has implications not only for our conception of *painting* but also for how we conceive of identity.

I have described how I consider *object-images* to have arisen from the pursuit of non-representation and, put at its simplest, this comes down to a simple equation in which the further an artist goes in trying to eradicate representation from a painting the more they will find themselves working with and aware of the physical properties of their medium and the support. Non-representation is not simply the absence of representation but something more complex that opens out onto other conceptions of realness, for it is a sense of something more 'real' which motivates many of the artists discussed above. To move away from illusionism is to move towards the actual but, it has to be said, only the 'actual' within this context of painting, only the 'real' in contrast to the pictorial tradition of an illusionistic space. This is the point Michael Fried makes about the 'literal' in relation to Minimalist objects, that once the boundaries of painting have been transgressed, once we have before us an object rather than a painting, then the 'literal' no longer has the same traction, can no longer generate 'pictorial' tension.⁹ Painting provides a model for thinking about the real and, if we are to understand how that operates, then it seems we must also understand how the 'real' operates elsewhere in our perception.

Once we turn to our perception outside of painting, however, it seems that the 'real' is equally elusive. I have drawn primarily on Maurice Merleau-Ponty in this thesis because it is his account of perception which, for me at least, most clearly elucidates the way in which we grasp the world around us. The 'real' only becomes so for us because of our bodily engagement with our environment and the way in which our motor habits – those activities which we have learned to do, such as driving, and that have become a form of internalised knowledge – are layered within us and 'may be seen as literally *incarnating the past*.'¹⁰ These motor habits remain with us: we wake up each morning still able to drive, or type, or play the piano and they form a vital part of what we might consider to be our identity. Our body 'implies an entire history, and even a prehistory.'¹¹ Our notions of identity and other forms of knowledge arise out of this bodily history, this internalised set of motor capabilities which dictate what we are capable of and how we perceive of ourselves. Even with that most basic element of perception, figure/ground relations, there must of necessity be a viewpoint: the body, Merleau-Ponty tells us, is the third term in those relations.¹²

Painting, in this model of perception, is a motor habit. It is a form of knowing that has become embedded within us and which only works because we 'think' through our bodies.¹³ This is perhaps to talk of a particular kind of painting, one in which the body is allowed to exercise its expertise as a pianist, or a tennis player, might. No one learns to play the piano overnight. To acquire a motor habit is 'a re-alignment of the lived body,' it is an adjustment in the body-schema which, in turn, is an adjustment in the world as we perceive it. In that moment when the beginner first grasps how to remain balanced upon ice-skates, the ice rink transforms and opens up to a whole new set of potentialities. For the concert pianist, the piano in the corner of the room is a wholly different object than it is to the person who has never once depressed a single key. For the painter, the brushes, the canvas, the paint, even the smell of the turpentine release potentialities, are a field

upon which he or she operates, which is why Merleau-Ponty considers that 'the interrogation of painting looks towards the secret and feverish genesis of things in our body.'¹⁴

I have in the course of this thesis emphasized two aspects of the *object-image* which relate to this notion of painting as a motor habit: the physical structure of paintings (and the way in which their size often approximates to the dimensions of the body) and the artist's close identification with the physical properties and behaviour of the medium. An artist's bodily involvement with the act of painting, the way in which the painting mirrors our body schema, is more *visible* in an *object-image* than in other types of painting. Illusionism not only dissembles through the creation of an artificial space and time, it dissembles in relation to the body, suppressing those sensations which make up our carnal response to the world in favour of an idealised view, removed from the body, seemingly detached from our actual space and time. Callum Innes's work, Mel Gooding asserts, 'derives its deepest meanings, in reference to time, space, matter and energy, from its material history.'¹⁵ The actuality to which *object-images* aspire is the actuality of the body: the 'realness' which is discovered through painting, once the armature and structuring of representation is removed, is the realness which has its source in our bodily interaction with the world. The material history of an *Exposed Painting* is a form of layering which echoes those layers of bodily memory which constitute our past.

This is perhaps why it is so important, to borrow Rosie Bennett's words, to resist an *applique of interpretation* and attend more fully to our experience of *paint*.¹⁶ Once we are accustomed to the 'immateriality of the anamorphic image' painting becomes a form of illustration and we will no longer be able to understand the value of a painting's 'material history.'¹⁷ *Object-images*, I have claimed, are paintings which make a viewer aware of their *corporeality*, a word which contains a sense of how we grasp the world through our bodies and, as such, they can be regarded in relation

to Merleau-Ponty's understanding of perception, as containing something of that carnal formula which he sees as painting's way of capturing our embodied being-in-the-world. The desire to make something which exists in actual space, to *actualise* something, can be regarded as a striving to manifest our sense of being-in-the-world, to take that reversibility between ourselves and the world around us and translate it into an existing object in the form of a painting. This is to align *object-images* with Merleau-Ponty's philosophy and to read them through his understanding of our perception. It might also be to place them in opposition to *objective thought*, all those methods of thinking about the world which take our consciousness and the existence of the world for granted, which treat the body as an object or which, in Katherine J. Morris's words, 'does not simply ignore the life-world: it positively *conceals* it from us, by constructing *simulacra* of the life-world and presenting them to us as the real thing.'¹⁸ (author's italics.) Her choice of the word 'simulacra' makes the connection I am moving towards, the idea that it might be possible to regard aspects of poststructuralist theory as a form of objective thought.

Once this connection has been made it emphasizes the way in which poststructuralist writing is shot through with concepts which separate the individual from their experience of being-in-the-world and has, as one its principal themes, the supplanting of the real by the artificial or the mediated or the simulacral.¹⁹ The individual, more often referred to as the subject, is formed not so much by experience as by the ebb and flow of discourse around them and what they might think of as identity is a product of such discourses/ideologies.²⁰ Experience comes to them only in mediated forms and their hold on the 'real' is tenuous: events, both in the public and private sphere, if such a distinction can be made, are brought to them through a technological network of media. The environment around the subject undergoes a kind of de-stabilisation and threatens to undermine any kind of orientation or stable position as 'actual' space gives way to the virtual, or hyperspace, or the simulacral.²¹ Communication between such subjects consists of a succession of shifting signifiers

which will never settle into any definitive meaning and their works of art will be likewise constructed, their possible meaning as numerous as their viewers or readers.²² Such readers, Barthes tells us, are 'simply that *someone* who holds together in a single field all the traces by which the written text is constituted.'²³ They 'cannot any longer be personal' and are 'without history, biography, psychology.'²⁴ Whereas Merleau-Ponty's ideas about identity, about the 'self', depend upon and arise out of our embodied condition and our 'being-in-the-world', the poststructuralist subject is disembodied and exists in a similarly attenuated world. The former is based in the body and our experience of the world whereas the latter is based in the linguistic systems from which the theory arises: one is *experiential*, the other concerned with the ways in which what we think is experience is, more often than not, a form of *information*.

The 'real' of the *object-image*, however difficult it may be to define, exists in contradistinction to the *unreal* which might be seen to permeate our contemporary experience. If those makers of *object-images* discussed above tend to be associated with modernism it is perhaps because there is something in their practice which resists the interpretation of our experience as wholly mediated or governed only by cultural discourse and seeks to re-position painting as relevant to our perceptual understanding of the world around us. I am not suggesting this is an explicit intention but rather one which, through their practice, operates in 'a spontaneous and largely subliminal way.'²⁵ There is, at the centre of such a practice, an involvement with the materials of painting and sensitivity to the physical presence of paintings that is *experiential* and that cannot easily be conveyed in forms other than the making of paintings. In thinking about such paintings in relation to the philosophy of Maurice Merleau-Ponty my aim is not only to build on the phenomenological understanding of abstract painting and sculpture put forward by other writers but also to frame such painting as a philosophical activity and draw parallels between abstraction's recent history and developments in the discipline of philosophy. Christopher Macann has outlined the comprehensive movement away

from phenomenology towards those deconstructive strategies associated with poststructuralism.²⁶ The central idea in such a shift is that it is difficult, if not impossible, to establish any kind of 'philosophical, even metaphysical position.'²⁷ This produces a relativism which eventuates in an 'end of philosophy,' a point where no single system of thought, or even idea, can be any more credible than another.²⁸ There are many similar accounts of the visual arts which arrive at an 'end of painting'²⁹. Macann sees that 'ending' as false and one that has obscured the significance of texts such as Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*. I have a similar belief about 'endings' in the visual arts and the way in which they have obscured developments in the field of painting. It is easy to forget, as Bridget Riley tells us, that 'painting is an ancient – an archaic – form of art. It takes and needs time and this is its great advantage.'³⁰ Within this archaic form of art abstraction is a new phenomenon, a recent turn in events and its implications are surely only just beginning to be felt rather than being fully worked out and exhausted. I put forward this thesis and the notion of the *object-image* as a contribution towards that larger project.

Notes

Introduction

¹ This is Sean Scully's own phrase but for a good summary of what it might involve, see Armin Zweite's text "To Humanize Abstract Painting: Reflections on Sean Scully's "Stone Light"," in *Sean Scully: Twenty Years, 1976-1995*, ed. Ned Rifkin. (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1995), pp.21-31.

² For a discussion of the spiritual values in Scully's paintings see Victoria Combalia's "Against Formalism," in *Sean Scully* (1995), especially pp.42-44 in which Scully's embrace of spirituality is contrasted with a North American and Anglo-Saxon 'aversion to speaking of a spiritual dimension.' (p.42).

³ From the same volume, see the nuanced discussion by Lynne Cooke of the object-like nature of Scully's paintings in "Sean Scully: Taking a Stand, Taking a Stance," pp.47-55, in which she examines the interplay of surface and the literal properties of the works but only to assert that, despite the way in which paintings 'obdurately enters the viewer's space', despite sections that break or jut forward of the surface they have 'a continuous, if "warped," surface" (p.50). These paintings 'disavow' the single viewpoint of the disembodied spectator, but not to the degree that they 'take one outside of the boundaries of the frame.' (p.50.) Cooke's analysis works hard to dissociate the paintings from their minimalist forebears whilst wanting to keep hold of some of the phenomenological implications that such work fosters. For Scully's own take on the objectness of his paintings see "High and Low, Or the Sublime and the Ordinary," in *Sean Scully: Resistance and Persistence, Selected Writings* (London, New York: Merrell Publishers Ltd., 2006), in which he talks of 'the inert object, the lifeless object' of Minimalist painting. (p.24.) This text spells out some of the complexity of Sean Scully's relation to literality and the object-like in painting. (pp.17-38).

⁴ Peter Vergo, ed., *Abstraction: Towards a New Art, Painting 1910-20*, (London: Tate Gallery Publishing, 1980), p.8.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p.8.

⁶ I am thinking in particular of the interchangeability of non-representational and non-figurative, to the extent that they can be used in an exactly opposite manner, as they are by Michael Fried and Richard Wollheim.

⁷ Clement Greenberg, "Modernist Painting," 1960 in O'Brian, *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism, Volume Four, Modernism with a Vengeance 1957-1969* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1995b), p.90.

⁸ Richard Wollheim, *Painting as an Art* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), especially pp.46-7 for an explanation of twofoldness.

⁹ Michel Foucault, *Manet and the Object of Painting*, (London: Tate Publishing, 2009).

¹⁰ *Ibid.* Foucault sees Manet as inventing the picture-object which is a painting that foregrounds its materiality: 'the picture as materiality...about which the viewer revolves.' (p.31.) His text is mainly a demonstration of how Manet's paintings come to take greater account of the rectangular shape of the canvas, the materiality of the medium and the problematics of where a viewer might be situated in relation to what is depicted in the painting. This unfixing of the viewer so that the painting is 'like a space in front of which and by rapport with which one can move around' is an idea critical for my later analysis of non-representational paintings and although Foucault understands this consequence of materiality as a 'fundamental condition' of non-representation he does not pursue that idea further. (pp.78-79).

¹¹ Edmund Husserl, *Phantasy, Image Consciousness, and Memory (1898-1925)*, trans. John B. Brough, Volume 11 of the *Collected Works*, ed. Rudolf Bernet (Springer Publishing), pp.20-24.

¹² *Ibid.*, p.20 and p.25.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp.23-24. It is too early to follow up the implications of this statement but its importance lies in the fact that the image does not exist in some internal mental theatre, to be brought to consciousness in some way, but arises by virtue of an 'objectivating consciousness' (p.24). The image object is rather 'a complex of sensations that the spectator contemplating the painting experiences in himself,' (p.23) and I will later examine Merleau-Ponty's version of this idea in terms of the reversibility of bodily and external perception.

¹⁴ See the section in Chapter Four, p.169 of this thesis, for a more detailed account of how such strategies for production might arise.

¹⁵ As I clarify in Chapter One, this final clause is adapted from Mel Gooding's phrase 'whose surfaces are tangible and visibly modified' as it appears in "Looking at the Paintings: Two Meditations," in *Callum Innes* (Edinburgh: Royal Botanic Gardens, 1996) unpaginated.

¹⁶ See the discussion of Greenberg's writings in Chapter Two. Greenberg uses the term *arbitrary object* in "Modernist Painting", 1960, in O'Brian, Volume 4, 1995b, p.90.

¹⁷ See the discussion of Fried's writings in Chapter Two. He discusses *Out of the Web* in "Three American Painters: Kenneth Noland, Jules Olitski, Frank Stella," of 1965 in *Art and Objecthood* (Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 1998) pp.213-268. I discuss his response at more length in an endnote in Chapter Two.

¹⁸ Mainly Robert Morris, *Notes on Sculpture* (1966) in Gregory Battock, *Minimal Art* (London: Studio Vista Ltd., 1969) pp.222-235 and Donald Judd, *Specific Objects* 1965 in James Meyer, *Minimalism* (London: Phaidon Press, 2000).

¹⁹ As a focal point for this debate around Stella's paintings I use the interview with Donald Judd and Frank Stella conducted in 1964 by Bruce Glaser. In Battock, 1969, pp.148-164.

²⁰ See for instance Thierry deDuve's cogent analysis of the debate in "The Monochrome and the Blank Canvas" in Serge Guilbaut, ed., *Reconstructing Modernism* (London/Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1990), pp.244-310 and his comments on Judd's texts such as the following: 'The paradox, however, becomes intelligible when one understands that Judd's justification for Minimal art is absolutely overdetermined, albeit *a contrario*, by the Greenbergian doctrine.' P.267. Hal Foster goes further and states that Judd's 'extreme defiance developed as excessive devotion.' Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real* (Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, 1996), p.44. Foster follows through the ways in which Judd takes up Greenberg's thinking and 'reads the putatively Greenbergian call for an objective painting so literally as to exceed painting altogether in the creation of objects.' (p.44).

²¹ Most especially in Rosalind Krauss, *The Optical Unconscious* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: The MIT Press, 1993), but I draw on many of her texts in the course of this thesis.

²² Bryony Fer, *On Abstract Art* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997).

²³ See references in Chapters Two and Three for the sequence of texts by Yve-Alain Bois on Newman's paintings.

²⁴ Principally Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 1945, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 2010), but I draw on a range of his writing; see later chapters for references.

²⁵ For a cogent account of what Merleau-Ponty means by objective thought see Komarine Romdenh-Romluc, *Merleau-Ponty and Phenomenology of Perception* (London and New York: Routledge, Oxon, 2011,) pp.16-19. The crux lies in taking the world to be a set of determinate entities whose existence and qualities are beyond dispute, an attitude which encourages a set of prejudices that Merleau-Ponty sees at work in some scientific endeavours.

²⁶ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 2010, p.67.

²⁷ Kasha Linville, "Agnes Martin: An Appreciation," *Artforum* 9 (June 1971), p. 72. Rosalind Krauss, "Agnes Martin: The /Cloud/" in *Bachelors* (London/Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1999), pp. 75-90. Michael Newman, in Cooke, 2011.

²⁸ I owe this example to Komarine Romdenh-Romluc, *Merleau-Ponty and Phenomenology of Perception* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), pp.77-78.

²⁹ Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, 2010, p.237.

³⁰ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968).

³¹ The flesh, reversibility, the second visible and the idea of paintings as carnal maps all come from *The Visible and the Invisible*, 1968.

³² As it is put forward in Hal Foster, "Signs Taken For Wonders," in ed. Terry R. Myers, *Painting: Documents of Contemporary Art* (Cambridge and London: MIT Press and Whitechapel Gallery, 2011), pp.47-57.

³³ Brian Muller, *Real Art, A New Modernism: British Reflexive Painters in the 1990's* (Southampton Art Gallery, 1995) and also his short review of Begg's exhibition at the Kunstbunker, Munich in 1996, "Torie Begg – L + M + Bricks," *Contemporary Visual Arts*, Issue 15, 1997.

³⁴ Mick Finch, *Apparently Real: Torie Begg's paintings*, Unpublished text, 1996 and O'Reilly, Sally, "Torie Begg," *Contemporary*, no.58, 2003. pp.42-5.

³⁵ See Merleau-Ponty, 2010, p.206-213 for his description of how speech is the expression of thought as it comes into being. 'The orator does not think before speaking, nor even while speaking: his speech is his thought.' (p.209).

³⁶ See Conclusion for a more extended discussion of the end of philosophy and painting.

Chapter One

¹ See the descriptions of Innes's processes in Fiona Bradley, "Keeping Time," in *Callum Innes: from memory* (London, New York, Edinburgh: Hatje Cantz, 2006), pp.18-19.

² A remarkable example of this is the video of Innes making watercolours for the *Tateshots* series in which he reveals the process step-by-step, but still somehow contrives not to show how he obtains the unmasked edges. www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y2aunPHTe_I Callum Innes Studio Visit, *Tateshots*. Accessed 2.2.14.

³ Mel Gooding, "Looking at the Paintings: Two Meditations," *Callum Innes* (Edinburgh: The Royal Botanic Garden, 1996), unpaginated.

⁴ Donald Judd, "Barnett Newman," 1964, reprinted in Francis Francina and Charles Harrison, *Modern Art and Modernism: A Critical Anthology* (London: Open University, 1982), pp.129-132.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.129-130. For illustration of *Shining Forth (To George)* 1961, see Temkin, 2002, p.93.

⁶ Marco Livingstone, "appearance and disappearance," in *Callum Innes: exposed paintings* (Edinburgh: Callum Innes and Ingleby Gallery, 2001).

⁷ Richard Shiff, *Doubt* (New York and London: Routledge, 2008), p.54. *Stack Piece* illustrated on p.55.

⁸ See for instance his remark to Paul Bonaventura in a 2006 interview: 'To a lot of people's eyes, and it's a worry to me, it looks like the same painting is being endlessly repeated, but there are subtle changes in structure and form and colour. How the work changes is an important function of its impact.' Paul Bonaventura and Callum Innes, "Interview: Edinburgh, January 2006," in Fiona Bradley, 2006, p.80.

⁹ Bridget Riley, *The Eye's Mind: Bridget Riley* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2009), p56.

¹⁰ Bonaventura and Innes in Bradley, 2006, p.75.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp.75-77.

¹² For illustration of *From Memory* see Bradley, 2006, p.23.

¹³ For *Cento* series, see Bradley, 2006, pp.24-32.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.40-69.

¹⁵ Richard Cork, "Being and Not," in Bradley, 2006, p.36. Illustration on p.25.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.36.

¹⁷ Eric deChasse, "Callum Innes," in Bradley, 2006, p.132.

¹⁸ Greenberg frequently comments on how easily 'abstract' forms can be read as representational: 'All recognisable entities (including pictures themselves) exist in three-dimensional space, and the barest suggestion of a recognisable entity suffices to call up associations of that kind of space. The fragmentary silhouette of a human figure, or of a teacup, will do so...' "Modernist Painting," (1960) in John O'Brian, ed. *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism, Volume Four; Modernism with a Vengeance, 1957-1969* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1995b), p.88. In "The Case for Abstract Art," (1959) he outlines how such representational seeing interferes with the kind of disinterested contemplation that non-representational painting, in his view, requires: 'We are left alone with shapes and colors. These may or may not remind us of real things; but if they do, they usually do so incidentally or accidentally – on *our own responsibility* as it were; and the genuine enjoyment of an abstract picture does not ordinarily depend on such resemblances.' (my italics) O'Brian, *Volume Four*, 1995b, p.80.

¹⁹ DeChasse compares Innes to other European painters, such as Bernard Frize, in this respect; 'like many of his contemporaries, especially in Europe, Innes doesn't start from images but works towards them, or rather, he doesn't care if they appear or not (knowing that they will differ according to the viewers anyway). In the same way that he doesn't "carry feeling to the piece, it comes from the work", he doesn't carry images to the piece but lets them happen.' DeChasse in Bradley, 2006, p.131.

²⁰ Mel Gooding, "Looking at the Paintings: Two Meditations," *Callum Innes* (Edinburgh: The Royal Botanic Garden, 1996), unpaginated.

²¹ Bonaventura and Innes, in Bradley, 2006, p.74. For illustration of *Monologue No.2* see p.103.

²² Clement Greenberg, "After Abstract Expressionism," 1962, in O'Brian, *Volume Four*, 1995b, p.124.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Mel Gooding, 1996, unpaginated.

²⁵ In talking about 'natural' forms and processes or 'nature' I realise I am using a contested term and that what we think of as 'nature' is generally culturally constructed: in this context I want only to point to the kinds of physical phenomena that are not specifically man-made or the 'physical power causing phenomena of material

world, these phenomena as a whole,' to quote part of the definition in the *The Concise Oxford Dictionary* (Seventh Edition, 1987) p.675. In relation to Innes's paintings, the importance of these phenomena is not only visual, as Gooding's analogy with estuarine sand establishes, but also to do with the idea of forces at play, both in those 'natural' processes and in the behaviour of the medium, comparable perhaps to Richard Serra's inclusion of such forces in his *Verb List* (1967-68): 'of waves, of tides, of electromagnetic, of ionization.' (Quoted in Krauss, "The Crisis of the Easel Picture," in Varnedoe and Karmel, eds., 1998, p.172.) I am deliberately leaving aside how much these ideas about nature might be dictated by current discourse, aesthetic or scientific, or the degree to which 'landscape' and 'nature' are forms of text. See Stephen Daniels and Denis Cosgrove, "Introduction: iconography and landscape," in Cosgrove and Daniels, eds., *The Iconology of Landscape*, Cambridge Studies in Historical Geography (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp.1-10.

²⁶ Cork in Bradley, 2006, pp.37-38.

²⁷ For illustration of *Repetition (Grey/Violet)* see Bradley, 2006, p.101.

²⁸ Illustration in Bradley, 2006, p.93.

²⁹ For illustration of *Exposed Vertical (1992)* see Bradley, 2006, p.58.

³⁰ Illustration in Bradley, 2006, p.153.

³¹ As two examples of this, see the frontispiece photograph in Bradley, 2006 or the endpiece image in *Callum Innes: I look to you* (Edinburgh: Ingleby Gallery, 2009).

³² E.H.Gombrich, *Art and Illusion* (London/New York: Phaidon Press, 1960, Sixth Edition 2002). Gombrich's argument depends upon the notion of how viewers project onto and fill in the visual information given in any image, what he terms the beholder's share. With ambiguous images we might 'switch' between readings and it is just such switching that he posits between our awareness of an image and its painted surface. See Part Three: the Beholder's Share, section 7, Conditions of Illusion.

³³ For a cogent analysis of this difference, see Andrew Harrison, "The Limits of Twofoldness," pp.40-42 in *Richard Wollheim on the Art of Painting*, ed. Rob van Gerwen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

³⁴ Richard Wollheim, *Painting as an Art* (1988), p.46.

³⁵ Harrison in Van Gerwen, 2007. One of the crucial aspects of Harrison's revision of twofoldness comes in assessing how we manage this kind of projective seeing and his answer depends upon the importance of how we make images – that it is in our making of images that we learn our reading of images. pp.56-7.

³⁶ *Ibid*, p.47.

³⁷ *Ibid*.

³⁸ Paul Crowther, "Twofoldness: From Transcendental Imagination to Pictorial Art," in Rob van Gerwen, 2001, pp.85-100. One of the main strands of Crowther's argument is that twofoldness does not do justice to the complexity of how we perceive a painting's surface and suggests fourfoldness would be more adequate, separating out a material base, formal properties, physiognomic properties and what is represented. For my own purposes, this usefully directs attention to the need to include the material base, or literal properties, of a work in any view of twofoldness.

³⁹ *Ibid*, p.62.

⁴⁰ Clement Greenberg, "Modernist Painting," 1960 in O'Brian, *Volume Four*, 1995b, p.90.

⁴¹ Greenberg's emphasis on flatness as an essential convention of painting leads him to the conclusion that such flatness must, of course, be 'delimited' by the literal boundaries of the painting. As he puts it in "After Abstract Expressionism", (1962), 'the irreducible essence of pictorial art consists in but two constitutive conventions or norms: flatness and the delimitation of flatness.' O'Brian, 1995b, p.131. This precision becomes important as Minimalist practice triggers debate around the difference between an object and a painting.

⁴² Greenberg says something similar: 'The picture has now become an entity belonging to the same order of space as our bodies: it is no longer the vehicle of an imagined equivalent of that order. Pictorial space has lost its "inside" and become all "outside." The spectator can no longer escape into it from the space in which he himself stands.' Greenberg, "Abstract, Representational and So Forth," 1974, p.61 in Morgan, ed., *The Late Writings*, 2003.

⁴³ Gooding, 1996, unpaginated.

⁴⁴ Gooding, 1996, unpaginated.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Wollheim, *Painting as an Art*, 1988, p.46.

⁵¹ Eric deChasse, "Callum Innes," in Bradley, 2006, p.131.

⁵² The nature of this content is partly the subject of this thesis, but the point here is largely to do with Innes's feeling that there is more to his painting than formal manipulation, as in this comment from his 2006 interview with Paul Bonaventura: 'I still see myself as being an inherently figurative artist, whether that figuration is to do with how I approach the making of a painting or its physicality, how a painting reacts to you, what you bring to it. I do not see my paintings as formal or abstract exercises...' Bradley, 2006, pp.71-72. It is allowing for the kind of evocative content Innes is describing here whilst differentiating his paintings from representational pictures that I am chiefly concerned with.

⁵³ Bonaventura and Innes, in Bradley, 2006, p.71.

⁵⁴ Cork in Bradley, 2006, p.38.

⁵⁵ Gooding, 1996, no pagination.

⁵⁶ For illustration see Bradley, 2006, p.169.

⁵⁷ Illustration in Bradley, 2006, p.158.

⁵⁸ Illustration in Bradley, 2006, p.172.

⁵⁹ Eric deChasse, "Callum Innes", in Bradley, 2006, p.131.

⁶⁰ Gooding, 1996, unpaginated.

⁶¹ This is to echo a remark made by Jonathan Watkins regarding the studio practice of Ian Davenport, see Watkins, "On Reflection", in *Ian Davenport: Paintings* (Dundee: Dundee Contemporary Arts, 1999), p.11.

⁶² Most remarkably, his cutting up of 'successful' paintings to make the limited edition volumes of "The Unknown Masterpiece", see the interview with Kevin Henderson, *transcript*, Vol.3, No.2, 1998, p.38.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Bonaventura and Innes, in Bradley, 2006, p.85.

⁶⁵ Daniel Sturgis, *The Indiscipline of Painting* (London, St.Ives, Warwick: Tate Publishing, 2011), p.12.

⁶⁶ DeChasse in Bradley, 2006, p.133.

⁶⁷ Fiona Bradley, "Keeping Time," p.17 in Bradley, 2006.

⁶⁸ Ibid, p.18.

⁶⁹ Carolyn Wilde, "Style and Value in the Art of Painting," in *Richard Wollheim on the Art of Painting*, ed. Rob van Gerwen, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p.127.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p.127.

⁷¹ 'Thus speech, in the speaker, does not translate ready-made thought, but accomplishes it.' Merleau-Ponty, 2010, p.207.

⁷² Illustration in Bradley, 2006, p.185.

⁷³ Interview with Kevin Henderson in *Transcript*, Vol.3, No.2, 1998.

⁷⁴ Gooding, 1996, unpaginated.

Chapter Two

¹ Illustration in Ann Temkin, *Barnett Newman* (London and Philadelphia: Tate Publishing, 2002), p.129.

² Illustration in Temkin, 2002, p.145.

³ A succinct account occurs in Yve-Alain Bois's "Newman's Laterality," in Ho, 2002, pp.29-32.

⁴ Newman criticised his pre-1947 works for their 'sense of an atmospheric background' and containing a void of spatial illusionism that he filled in with forms. See Barnett Newman quoted in Yve-Alain Bois, "Newman's Laterality," in Melissa Ho, *Reconsidering Barnett Newman* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2002), p.32.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Bois in Ho, 2002, p.32. Bois elaborates: 'A picture is necessarily a picture of something; it is an intransitive object. Painting is a statement; it is addressed to someone.' P.32.

⁷ For an account of what this shift in his understanding of painting entailed, see Suzanne Penn, "Intuition and Incidents: The Paintings of Barnett Newman," in Ho, 2002, pp.82-95. Penn's text also goes into some detail on how Newman paints his zips.

⁸ This idea and the following analysis are heavily indebted to Yve-Alain Bois's texts on Newman, most especially the chapter "Perceiving Newman," in Yve-Alain Bois, *Painting as Model* (Cambridge/London: The MIT Press, 1993), pp. 187-214.

⁹ For a cogent analysis of the way in which the zips are contiguous with the field around them see Bois, 1993, pp.199-204. In testing the pictorial basis of figure/ground relations, Bois asserts, Newman finds a way of isolating the 'pictorial' rather than the 'perceptual' field and it is in this way that his paintings challenge the traditional ways of viewing, or rather perceiving, paintings.

¹⁰ For a detailed account of how Newman makes both zips and fields of paint, see Carol Mancusi-Ungaro, "Newman's Pilgrimage in Paint," in Ho, 2002, especially pp.76-77 in relation to the zips.

¹¹ For an account of how the zips are painted in 'Covenant' see the relevant plate notes provided by Ann Temkin, Suzanne Penn and Melissa Ho in Ann Temkin, *Barnett Newman* (London and Philadelphia: Tate Publishing, 2002), p.172.

¹² Bois, "Newman's Laterality," in Ho, 2002, p.34: '...Newman began to realize that what was essential for him in bilateral symmetry was less the central axis and the self-duplication – the "bi" – than the *laterality*, the lateral extension.' (author's italics.)

¹³ For illustration of *Composition with Red, Blue, Black, Yellow and Grey*, 1921, see Francesco Manacorda and Michael White, 2014, p.25.

¹⁴ For a fuller discussion of centrifugal and centripetal grids see Rosalind Krauss's "The Grid," in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*, 1986.

¹⁵ See "Toward the True Vision of Reality," (1941), in *Mondrian and his Studios: Colour in Space*, eds. Francesco Manacorda and Michael White, London: Tate Publishing, 2014, pp.11-15. Mondrian expands upon this conception of space: 'Actually all is space, form as well as what we see as empty space. To create unity, art has to follow not nature's aspect but what nature really is. Appearing in oppositions, nature is unity; form is limited space concrete only through its determination.' Pp.12-13. This conception of space is not unlike the notion of space developed by Maurice Merleau-Ponty outside the subjectivity of the human viewpoint, in which all objects face in all directions simultaneously. That Mondrian's notion of pure reality is likewise connected to subjectivity becomes clear as the text progresses: 'Our subjective vision and experience made it impossible to be happy.' Pure reality, or neo-plastic space, is an escape from such subjectivity and, indeed, from time. P.15.

¹⁶ For a comprehensive discussion of Mondrian's studios, see Marek Wieczorek, "Mondrian's Studio Utopia, 26 rue de Depart," in Manacorda and White, 2014, pp.47-75. On the overcoming of architectural space in favour of a Neo-Plastic conception of space: 'As with the 1921 painting, whose form-destroying compositional principles were to be expanded onto wall planes, an architectural structure conceived through the notion of the 'plane' – a multiplicity, intersecting, expansive, spatial, consisting of differentially articulated planes at right angles – also eliminates form, and thus its status as a separate object, going against everything we associate with architecture as solid object, as corporeal.' pp59-60. For photographs of the relevant studios, see pp.46, 49-51, 56, 60-62 and 64 in the same volume.

¹⁷ Michael White, in *DeStijl and Dutch modernism*, (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2003) corrects the perception that DeStijl was a highly formalised group and, more pertinently, that it was chiefly occupied with painting. Abstraction, White tells us, was seen by members of the group as 'an appropriate means to address, among other things, the new spatial relations of modern life, the place of the figure in the industrial landscape and the new modes of consumption of visual imagery' and he goes on to show how these concerns were applied to urban planning, advertising, interior and exhibition design. (p.5) Mondrian's concerns with breaking down the boundaries of painting have, therefore, to be put into this context of understanding how, in modern urban centres, there are different ways of conceptualising and experiencing space. Thinking in terms of spatial rather than planar elements can be seen in the interaction between Theo van Doesburg's mosaics, tiled floors and doors and the architectural design of J.P.Oud's house known as *De Vonk* (pp.31-33), in which the 'decorations' break down, rather than emphasize, the load-bearing structure of the walls. Van Doesburg employed a similarly 'destructive' method in Jan Wils's *De Dubbele Sleutel*. (pp.34-6). Abstraction in these cases 'encouraged an anthropomorphic view of architectural space as bodily form,' (p.37) just as the latter informs Vilmos Huszar's seemingly abstract cover design for the DeStijl journal and his *Mechanical Dancing Figure*, a geometric shadow puppet whose movements are controlled through shifting planes operated by keys and projected onto a bright screen (pp.38-9). To concentrate upon the mystical 'purity' of Mondrian's paintings, in other words, is perhaps to miss the modernity of DeStijl's concerns and the way in which 'objects' dissolve not only into architecture and interior decoration, but also the intangible space of the cinema screen.

¹⁸ See the introductory statement to "On Two Paintings by Barnett Newman," *October*, 108, Spring 2004, pp.3-27. 'My contention is that Newman's pictorial oeuvre should be considered something like a deck of cards...In

such a deck, each card has a distinct role to play while forming specific links with various other cards...such is my working model.' p.4.

¹⁹ The most eloquent expression of this is surely Fried's in an early section of "Three American Painters: Noland, Olitski, Stella," in Fried, 1997, pp.219-220. On the idea of failure: 'Finally, just as a modernist painter may be mistaken in his assessment of a particular situation, or having grasped the situation may fail to cope with it successfully, the formal critic who shares the basic premises of modernist painting runs the risk of being wrong.' p.220.

²⁰ See Bois, "Perceiving Newman," 1993, especially p.196 where Bois describes the "failure" of those paintings which employ horizontal zips. This idea of failure is linked into the exploratory mode of painting described by Fried and so is part of a process of generating work: 'In a sense, however, it is absurd to speak of "failure" here: not only is the "failure" entirely relative, but Newman's attempt was both logical and necessary – for what it foreclosed and what it opened in the future of his art.' P.196.

²¹ For illustration see Temkin, 2002, p.169.

²² This in turn might make us recall Greenberg's supportive statement of Newman's work: 'And the suppression is part of the triumph of his art, next to which most other contemporary painting begins to look fussy.' O'Brian, Volume Four, 1995b, p.133.

²³ Innes in Bradley, 2006, p.71.

²⁴ On Newman's emphasis on experience over any kind of mental abstraction, see Richard Shiff, "Newman's Time," in Ho, 2002, especially pp.164-6.

²⁵ See for instance Newman's statement for the Betty Parsons Gallery in 1951: 'There is a tendency to look at large pictures from a distance. The large pictures in this exhibition are intended to be seen from a short distance.' Quoted in Bois, 2002, p.42.

²⁶ See Newman's forceful statement about pseudo-science, in which Hegel is as damned as Hitler, quoted in Richard Shiff, "Newman's Time," in Ho, 2002, p.161.

²⁷ See also Mel Bochner's "Barnett Newman: Writing Painting/Painting Writing," for an account of Newman's negative characterisation of formalism and his view of Mondrian as an artist prey to such empty formalism. In Ho, 2002, p.25.

²⁸ For an account of Newman's search for a new terminology to describe the paintings of himself and his contemporaries, as well as its entanglement in his activity as a curator, see Ann Temkin, "Barnett Newman on Exhibition," in Temkin, 2002, pp.18-76. 'Ideograph' first arises from a mixed show of painting Newman curates in 1947 titled "The Ideographic Picture" (pp.30-1). Newman also subtly subverts Mondrian's 'plastic' into the word 'plasmic' to suggest a more living form of abstraction (p.34). For a more precise analysis of what Newman might have intended by 'ideograph' see "Perceiving Newman," in Bois, 1993, pp.192-3. Both terms, Ideographic and Plasmic, arise from Newman's determination to contrast the metaphysical content of his own art with what he perceived to be the mere formal exercise of much abstract painting, plasmic suggesting the living thought which can inhabit abstract forms and ideograph the direct embodiment of such thought. See "The Ideographic Picture" (1947) and "The Plasmic Image" (1945) in *Barnett Newman: Selected Writings and Interviews*, edited by John P. O'Neill (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), pp. 107-8 and 138-155.

²⁹ Mel Gooding, 1996, unpaginated.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ "Feeling Is All," 1952, in John O'Brian, *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism, Volume Three, Affirmations and Refusals 1950-56* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1995a), p.104.

³² "The Crisis of the Easel Picture," 1948, in John O'Brian, *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism, Volume Two, Arrogant Purpose 1945-1949* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), pp.221-225. His actual words: 'What, at least, it does mean for the discipline of painting is that the future of the easel picture as the vehicle of ambitious art has become very problematic; for in using the easel picture as they do – and cannot help doing – these artists are destroying it.' P.225.

³³ Ibid., p.221.

³⁴ That Greenberg extrapolates out from the condition of painting to that of wider society is a mark of his earlier writing and becomes gradually expunged from his criticism. In this case, 'materialism' is a narrowing of experience in modern society brought on by the demands for profit and efficiency that a capitalist system requires, a 'flattening' of experience: 'What matters is not what one believes but what happens to one. From now on you had nothing to go on but your states of mind and your naked sensations...It is its materialism, or positivism, presented more explicitly than in literature or music, that made painting the most advanced and hopeful art in the West between 1860 and 1914.' "The Present Prospects of American Painting and Sculpture," 1947, in O'Brian, 1988, p.164.

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- ³⁵ O'Brian, 1988, Volume Two, "The Role of Nature in Modern Painting," 1949, p.273.
- ³⁶ Ibid., p.273.
- ³⁷ Ibid.
- ³⁸ Ibid., "The Situation at the Moment," 1948, p.195.
- ³⁹ Ibid, "The Role of Nature in Modern Painting", p.274.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid, p.275.
- ⁴¹ John O'Brian, 1995a, Volume Three, p.104.
- ⁴² O'Brian, Volume Three, 1995a, "Abstract and Representational," p.191.
- ⁴³ Caroline A. Jones links the 'inside' of which Greenberg speaks to the way in which perspectival space accommodates a 'humanist subjectivity' and the outside he ascribes to modern painting to the loss of that interior subjectivity, even to the alienation of the modern subject which 'can now be experienced and represented as an exterior.' Greenberg's emphasis on the optical is part of a larger fragmentation of the senses which in turn relates to the bureaucratization of modern urban life, though this simplification does little justice to Jones's account. Caroline A. Jones, *Eyesight Alone: Clement Greenberg's Modernism and the Bureaucratization of the Senses* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2005), pp.10-14.
- ⁴⁴ Rosalind Krauss deals with Greenberg's move away from materiality towards opticality in Chapter Six of *The Optical Unconscious*, especially pp.245-247: 'The stolid neutrality of "space as an object," materialist and literal, would cede its place to the idea of the pictorial field as "mirage"...' and in doing so would lead to his concern with vision rather than literality. This movement, for Krauss, is also one of sublimation, a putting aside of the body.
- ⁴⁵ O'Brian, 1995a, Volume Three, "American-Type Painting," pp.231-232.
- ⁴⁶ For a fuller account of Greenberg's misreading of Mondrian's painting see Caroline A. Jones, *Eyesight Alone: Clement Greenberg's Modernism and the Bureaucratization of the Senses* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), especially pp.211-214. Greenberg's self-correction about the painting is seen by Jones as part of a process not so much of looking as learning the codes of visibility within a particular view of modernity, one which is connected to the bureaucratization in all areas of American life. Greenberg's gradual shift in regard to Newman might be regarded as part of this specularisation, the isolating of individual senses which Jones sees in opticality.
- ⁴⁷ "Picasso at Seventy-Five," 1957, in John O'Brian, *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism, Volume Four, Modernism with a Vengeance 1957-1969* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1995b), p.33.
- ⁴⁸ Ibid., "Introduction to an Exhibition of Barnett Newman," 1958, pp.54-55.
- ⁴⁹ Ibid., "Sculpture in Our Time," 1958, pp.60-61.
- ⁵⁰ Ibid., "The Case for Abstract Art," 1959, p.81.
- ⁵¹ Ibid., "Modernist Painting," 1960, p.90.
- ⁵² Ibid., "Louis and Noland," 1960, pp.94-100.
- ⁵³ Michael Fried elaborates upon Greenberg's notion of opticality in relation to Morris Louis in his own essay on that painter: 'Rather, it is as though the apparent massiveness and solidarity of the one and the apparent hardness and sharpness of the other were experienced by eyesight alone, without reference to the sense of touch; as though massiveness, solidity, hardness, and sharpness as such were known to eyesight alone and not to touch; as though the sense of touch *itself* were strictly visual.' Fried, "Morris Louis", *Art and Objecthood*, 1998, pp.112-113.
- ⁵⁴ O'Brian, 1995b, "Post-Painterly Abstraction," 1964, p.194.
- ⁵⁵ Ibid., "After Abstract Expressionism," 1962.
- ⁵⁶ Ibid., p.130.
- ⁵⁷ 'Mangold's newly realized sense of scale...depended on an application of paint that totally avoided the "fussy" and "fastidious" quality of most earlier abstraction, including Mondrian's geometries. Newman became Mangold's primary model of material straight-forwardness as well as his phenomenological guide.' Richard Shiff, "Whiteout: The Not-Influence Newman Effect," in Temkin, 2002, p.99.
- ⁵⁸ Ibid., p.130.
- ⁵⁹ Ibid., p.131.
- ⁶⁰ Fried elaborates greatly upon opticality, for instance, in "Three American Painters: Noland, Olitski, Stella," of 1965, in Fried, *Art and Objecthood*, 1998, pp.213-265. In particular his discussion of Jackson Pollock's painting *Out of the Web* (1949) provides a good example of how materiality is underplayed in order to emphasize such optical qualities, an account that has been taken issue with both by Rosalind Krauss and Bryony Fer.

⁶¹ In this chapter I am using the terms ‘modernist’ and ‘modernism’ in the same sense as Greenberg and Fried or rather to refer to those developments in the arts as they perceived them, especially those developments in the visual arts from the middle of the nineteenth century onwards and which Greenberg in particular was instrumental in outlining from the 1960’s onwards. I put aside some of the more complex arguments about when modernism happened or indeed the ways in which the term has become corrupted. For the former, James Elkins’s *Master Narratives and Their Discontents* (2005) is a comprehensive analysis of the term and its possible timescales, see especially the opening chapter, pp.37-83, and Richard Shiff’s *Doubt* (2008) examines the misuse of the term, see pp.56-60. I use the term here largely in the context of arguments around mid-twentieth century visual art and Greenberg’s writing and part of the impetus for finding a new terminology for non-representational painting is to avoid some of the traps that are set by the fixed categories of modernism and postmodernism.

⁶² Michael Fried, *Art and Objecthood*, 1967, in Fried, 1998, p.160.

⁶³ Morris in Battock, 1969, p.223.

⁶⁴ Donald Judd, *Specific Objects*, 1965, in Meyer, 2000, p.207.

⁶⁵ For an account of Judd’s view of Newman’s work, both in terms of its influence upon him and his retrospective reading of the paintings, see Richard Shiff’s “Whiteout: The Not-Influence Newman Effect,” in Temkin, 2002, especially pp.92-5. More precisely, see Marianne Stockbrand’s analysis of Judd’s *Untitled 1961* which, she hypothesizes, had for Judd ‘too great an affinity to the work of Barnett Newman and that he tried to leave it behind as quickly as possible...’ in Serota, ed., *Donald Judd* (London: Tate Publishing, 2004), p.162.

⁶⁶ For illustrations of this sequence of works by Judd, see Serota, 2004, pp.162-179.

⁶⁷ Judd in Meyer 2000, p.209.

⁶⁸ To give just two examples, I am thinking of the blush of light cast by the Plexiglas sections of his *Stack Pieces* and the glow of colour that emanates from the red enamel base of *Untitled* of 1972. Rosalind Krauss has drawn out how Judd’s works often go against his own stated intentions in such ways, ‘the extraordinary beauty of the sculptures themselves, a beauty and authority which is nowhere described or accounted for in the polemics of object-art..’ Rosalind Krauss, “Allusion and Illusion in Donald Judd,” 1966, in Meyer 2000, p.211. It is worth noting in this context how often colour in Minimalist sculpture is ignored: David Batchelor makes this point in “Everything as Colour,” in Serota, ed., *Donald Judd* (London: Tate Publishing, 2004), and also how much this omission is about characterising the work as masculine and authoritarian; not only does this colour have the quality of ‘the feminine, the irrational or the infantile,’ it is also ‘often weird and weightless too.’ Serota, 2004, p.71.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p.88.

⁷⁰ The idea of overthrowing conventions prematurely is one much rehearsed by Greenberg. His fullest account occurs in “Seminar 6,” from 1976, in Robert C. Morgan, *Clement Greenberg: Late Writings* (Minneapolis/London: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), pp.74-86 and his short account of Kandinsky’s innovations in painting and why they might be deemed premature usefully summarises his position. (pp.80-81). See also his characterisation of Minimalist sculpture in “The Recentness of Sculpture”, 1967, in O’Brian, 1995b, pp.250-256.

⁷¹ Michael Fried, *Art and Objecthood*, 1967, in Fried, 1998, p.160.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p.151.

⁷³ Michael Fried, “Shape as Form: Frank Stella’s Irregular Polygons”, in *Art and Objecthood*, 1998, p.81.

⁷⁴ Even more so on Greenberg’s part, who found them ‘too much a feat of ideation.’ O’Brian, 1995b, p.254.

⁷⁵ Fried, 1998, p.90.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.92-3.

⁷⁷ Fried, 1998, p.95.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 1998, p.94.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 1998, p.96.

⁸⁰ Glaser interview in Battock, 1969, p.162.

⁸¹ Glaser interview in Battock, 1969, pp.157-158.

⁸² For an in-depth analysis of Stella’s titling strategies see Caroline A. Jones, *Machine in the Studio: Constructing the Postwar American Artist*, (Chicago and London: University of Chicago), 1996.

⁸³ Rosalind E. Krauss, “The Grid,” in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, Mass. And London: MIT Press, 1986), pp.8-23, quotation from p.17.

⁸⁴ Rosalind Krauss, “Overcoming the Limits of Matter: On Revising Minimalism,” in *American Art of the 1960’s: Studies in Modern Art 1* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1991), pp.123-142.

⁸⁵ For illustration, see Krauss, 1991, p.122.

⁸⁶ Edward Levine, "Robert Irwin's Recent Work," *Artforum*, 16 (December 1977), p.26, quoted in Krauss, 1991, p.132. Illustrations of Irwin's work on pp.130-1 and James Turrell's on pp.134-5 in the same volume.

⁸⁷ Illustrations of *Them Apples* and *Untitled* from 1958 in Luke, 2006, Plates 32 and 33 in the unpaginated section of plates. Jasper Johns's *Target with Four Faces* (1955) illustrated on p.15.

⁸⁸ Hapgood also points out the irony of the importance of Robert Motherwell's *The Dada Painters and Poets: An Anthology*, first published in 1951, to this upsurge of interest in Dada. Motherwell is not only one of the principal artists of the first generation of Abstract Expressionists, he is also the artist who in subsequent decades became the most significant voice in recounting its development. His anthology reveals the breadth of Motherwell's interests as well as his engagement with European culture, in particular its poetry, and in being an inspiration for many of the artists who reacted against Abstract Expressionism perhaps ought to alert us to some of the underlying commonalities and concerns. It also links Motherwell's lifelong commitment to the flatness of the picture plane with Dadaist moves towards the objectification of the picture plane, if not the objectification of the art object itself. For the importance of the flatness of the picture plane see almost any of Motherwell's reflections upon his own painting in *The Collected Writing of Robert Motherwell*, edited by Stephanie Terenzio (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1999), a concern which is intimately linked to his idea of the medium as part of a triadic relationship between artist, subject and medium, so that 'an artistic medium is the only thing in human existence that has precisely the same range of sensed feeling as people themselves do.' "A Process of Painting," 5 October, 1963, in *Collected Writing*, pp.138-141, quotation on p.139. I have edited out of this thesis sections on Motherwell and in particular a consideration of his *Lyric Suite* painted in 1965 in which he allowed inks to run freely on absorbent Japanese paper and worked quickly, with as little premeditation as possible. I initially linked the kind of evocative forms that resulted with Callum Innes's early series of works – how physical process in paint evokes natural process – but also drew on Arthur Danto's account of these works to explore how notions of materiality dovetail with the idea of automatism. See Arthur C. Danto, "The "Original Creative Principle": Motherwell and Psychic Automatism," from *Robert Motherwell on Paper* edited by David Rosand, pp.39-58. The importance of Motherwell in dealing with materiality and the picture plane and how that sensibility combines in his work with thematic content is perhaps best demonstrated in the long series of paintings of *Elegies to the Spanish Republic* dating from 1948 until his death in 1991. Their seriality, the almost-repetitions of their compositional forms and Motherwell's insistence upon the material presence of the picture plane are all of relevance to my concerns but I consider the issue too complex to do justice to here.

⁸⁹ See Thomas Crow, *The Rise of the Sixties* (London: Laurence King Publishing, 2004), pp.123-25. Crow's book traces the way in which political activism informed many of the artistic trends in the sixties and how groups, such as the Hudson Dance Theater, acted as conduits for ideas and debates which fuelled those trends. The Dadaist tradition which is Hapgood's focus is elaborated more fully in terms of its political content in Crow's text. Exactly how such political affiliations and social debate contribute to the dematerialisation of the art object and the burgeoning forms of conceptual art is traced in some detail in Lucy Lippard's essay "Escape Attempts" in *Art of the Twentieth Century: A Reader*, eds., Jason Gaiger and Paul Wood (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003) pp.189-198. Calling it ultra-conceptual art to differentiate it from Minimalism and other recent forms such as earthworks and performance, Lippard traces how it was bound up with political movements of the time, indeed how her own understanding is bound up with her activism. Lippard characterises Minimalism as a failed attempt at a tabula rasa, a materialist effort to sweep away a stultifying and ideologically unacceptable tradition, and Conceptual Art, with its prioritising of idea over object, as a more successful challenge to the status quo, even if it in turn is absorbed into an ever-adaptable art market. Illustration of *Slant Board* (1961) in Crow, 2004, p.124.

⁹⁰ Illustrations in Hapgood, 1994, p.17.

⁹¹ Megan Luke, "Objecting to Things," in *Frank Stella 1958* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006), pp.1-67. Luke describes Stella as 'resisting, even hiding, the assemblage mode' and taking a 'number of corrective measures against his own works' flirtation with their status as things.' P.7. Luke goes on to explore how Stella's works fall between the literal and the pictorial and how the 1958 works lead to a changed conception of painting that moves away from assemblage towards the relation between the literal and the depicted that is demonstrated in the *Black Paintings*.

⁹² Rauschenberg takes up all of these implications and gradually increases the number and scale of the sculptural elements he incorporates into his works, moving from smaller objects to ones which could no longer be absorbed into the kind of additive picture plane of earlier works such as *Short Circuit* (1955) and *Canyon* (1959). Once Rauschenberg begins to add radios and electric fans, not to mention stuffed goats, to his

paintings, he is moving into a new hybrid terrain, one which he acknowledged in his own term for these works, "Combines." The Combines reveal Rauschenberg breaking down Welchman's *first frame*, putting pressure on the conventions of both painting and sculpture, and it is no coincidence that the artist is involved in other art forms such as dance and performance. For my purposes here, once Rauschenberg's paintings lose the predominance of their frontal plane – and that threshold is by no means clear cut – they are no longer object-images in the narrow sense I am defining that term, though they reveal the complexity of a transitional terrain between object-images and other forms of painting/sculpture.

⁹³ The photographs appears in Alistair Rider, *Carl Andre: Things in their Elements*, (London: Phaidon, 2014), p.59.

⁹⁴ Rider explores the significance of this anecdote at some length and this paragraph is heavily indebted to that account. Rider, 2014, pp.53-61.

⁹⁵ Kirk Varnedoe, *Jasper Johns: A Retrospective*, (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1996) p.24.

⁹⁶ Quoted in Thierry de Duve, "The Monochrome and the Blank Canvas," in *Reconstructing Modernism*, ed. Serge Guilbaut, (Cambridge, London: The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1986) p.245.

⁹⁷ Illustration of *Zinc Square* in Rider, 2014, p.88.

⁹⁸ Rosalind Krauss, "The Crisis of the Easel Picture," in Kirk Varnedoe and Pepe Karmel, eds., *Jackson Pollock: New Approaches* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1998), pp.155-180.

⁹⁹ The list is from Thierry deDuve, 1986, p.248 and he goes on to outline examples of how these artists gradually tested the boundaries of painting.

¹⁰⁰ DeDuve, 1986, p.265.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., "Sculpture in Our Time," 1958, pp.60-61.

¹⁰² Morris in Battcock, 1969, p.223.

¹⁰³ Rosalind Krauss, "Eva Hesse: Contingent", in *Bachelors* (Cambridge/London: The MIT Press, 1999), pp.91-100. *Right After* is illustrated on p.97.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., *Contingent* illustrated on p.93.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p.98.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p.99.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p.99.

¹⁰⁸ For illustration of *Doors* see Kynaston McShine, 2004, p.188.

¹⁰⁹ For a contemporary example of an artist who exploits this kind of chemical change in the surface of paintings see my own essay on Richard Nott, in *Earthworks* (St.Ives: Millenium Gallery, 2011).

¹¹⁰ 'At the same time it was hard to tell whether the success of Truitt's best works was primarily sculptural or pictorial, but part of their success consisted precisely in making that question irrelevant.' Clement Greenberg, "Recentness of Sculpture," in O'Brian, 1995b, p.255. For a more precise placing of Greenberg's advocacy of Truitt in relation to his strategies for fending off the threat of the Minimalist object, see Thierry deDuve's "The Monochrome and the Blank Canvas", in Guilbaut, 1986, pp.264-266. DeDuve's argument revolves around a tension between 'modernism' and 'formalism' as descriptive terms and how placing Truitt between painting and sculpture allows Greenberg to keep hold of the latter as a viable approach to works.

¹¹¹ See Temkin, 2002, p.250.

¹¹² Nan Rosenthal, "The Sculpture of Barnett Newman," in *Reconsidering Barnett Newman*, ed. Melissa Ho, 2002, pp.15-132.

¹¹³ Illustration in Temkin, 2002, p.189.

¹¹⁴ The photograph is fig.22 in Temkin, 2002, p.43.

¹¹⁵ Quotation in Richard Shiff, "Newman's Time," in *Reconsidering Barnett Newman*, ed. Melissa Ho, 2002, pp.161-181, quotation on p.167.

¹¹⁶ Gabriele Shor, "Barnett Newman's "Here" Series: A Meditation on Sense of Place, or How Can a Sculpture Say "I"?" in *Reconsidering Barnett Newman*, ed. Melissa Ho, 2002, pp.148-161.

¹¹⁷ Richard Shiff, "Newman's Time," in *Reconsidering Barnett Newman*, ed. Melissa Ho, 2002, pp.161-181.

¹¹⁸ Ibid, p.164. The quotation comes from Newman's text "Ohio, 1949" (1949) as it appears in *Barnett Newman: Selected Writings and Interviews*, ed. John P. O'Neill (New York: Alfred A.Knopf, 1990), p.175.

¹¹⁹ James Leggio, "Kandinsky, Schoenberg, and the Music of the Spheres," in *Music and Modern Art*, ed. James Leggio (London and New York: Routledge, 2015), pp.97-127, quotation on p.110.

¹²⁰ Peter Vergo, "Music and abstract painting: Kandinsky, Goethe and Schoenberg," in *Towards a New Art: essays on the background to abstract art 1910-20* (London: Tate Gallery Publications, 1980), pp.41-63.

¹²¹ Ibid., pp.48-9.

¹²² Ibid., pp.56-63. Vergo explains how Kandinsky saw in Schoenberg's move away from tonality and understanding of dissonance as a 'further removed consonance' a new way of conceiving abstract visual forms. The comparison between representational form and the libretto or text put to music might be misleading and Kandinsky saw a more appropriate analogy to be made between representation and tonality. If tonality could be dispensed with, revealed as simply a convention, then representational form could likewise be put aside, leaving the fundamental nature of painting in place.

¹²³ James M. Baker, "Prometheus and the Quest for Color-Music," in *Music and Modern Art* (London and New York: Routledge, 2015), pp.61-95.

¹²⁴ Ibid., pp.85-6.

¹²⁵ For an account of how intertwined the composers and visual artists became in the New York art scene, see Amy Beal, "'Time Canvasses': Morton Feldman and the Painters of the New York School," in *Music and Modern Art*, ed. James Leggio, 2015, pp.227-246. Jonathan Bernard in his essay "The Minimalist Aesthetic in the Plastic Arts and in Music," *Perspectives of New Music*, Vol. 31, No.1, (Winter, 1993), pp.86-132, associates John Cage, Morton Feldman and Earle Brown specifically with abstract expressionism, drawing parallels between their compositional methods, their use of chance and process not being evident in the finished work. (p.91).

¹²⁶ Feldman contrasted 'material' with 'craft', the former being a way of responding to the demands of the medium, the latter being a wilful control of that medium. 'The painter achieves mastery by allowing what he is doing to be itself,' came to be a working principle for Feldman. Morton Feldman, "The Anxiety of Art," in *Give My Regards to Eighth Street: Collected Writings of Morton Feldman*, ed. B.H.Friedman (Cambridge: Exact Change, 2000), pp.21-32, quotation p.26.

¹²⁷ For a description of Feldman's working methods and how closely the near-symmetries of his music can be related to visual artefacts, in this case mainly Near and Middle eastern rugs, which the composer collected, see "Crippled Symmetry", in *Give My Regards to Eighth Street*, ed. B.H.Friedman, 2000, pp.134-149. Feldman also discusses Rauschenberg in this essay, taking from his *Black Painting* a notion of in-between-ness that becomes important for his composing.

¹²⁸ In Amy Beal's description of those characteristics of color-field painting which offer the clearest parallels to Feldman's music it is certainly Newman's work which most springs to mind: 'the elimination of symbolism, the simplification of gesture, the avoidance of marked contrast or exaggerated differentiation, and, in later works, the dramatic expansion of scale.' Beal in Leggio, 2015, p.230.

¹²⁹ Bryn Harrison's "Listening through Morton Feldman's *Triadic Memories*," in *overcoming form: reflections on immersive listening* (Huddersfield: University of Huddersfield Press, 2013), pp.61-74, offers an insight not only to the nature of Feldman's music but also the intensity with which a composer can listen to music. It reveals the complexity of Feldman's music and how the near repeats which he employs are as likely to give way to new and unexpected material as further variation. As Harrison notes at one point, 'The suggestion that the piece, up and running, will write itself, was an illusion.' (p.65) This distinguishes Feldman's music from the more programmatic Minimalist music which I discuss in the next paragraphs.

¹³⁰ Bryn Harrison, "Repetitions in extended time: recursive structures and musical temporality," in *overcoming form*, 2013, pp.40-59, quotation on p.42.

¹³¹ For Harrison, the centrality of the listener to music such as Feldman's opens onto questions of phenomenology and he links this idea to Maurice Merleau-Ponty's notion of time as a subjective experience. I develop a similar line of thought in relation to object-images in the next chapter.

¹³² Bernard, "The Minimalist Aesthetic...", 1993.

¹³³ Ibid., p.107. The quotation is from Steve Reich's text "Music as a Gradual Process," (1968) in *Writings About Music* (Halifax: Nova Scotia College of Art and Design; New York: New York University Press, 1974), p.9. Reich goes on to contrast such music with that of John Cage, in which the process is not audible and the listener is caught in a present moment, much as with Feldman's music.

¹³⁴ This perhaps returns us to where I began this thesis, with the Post-Minimalist paintings of Sean Scully, paintings which share many formal strategies with the music under discussion. The rigour of Scully's early New York works strongly call to mind the severity of early works by Glass and Riley, making no concessions to any desire for the personal or the virtuosic, and demonstrate the kind of conceptual striving to make the process self-evident put forward by Reich in "Music as a Gradual Process."

¹³⁵ Ibid., p.99. the quotation comes from an unpublished studio note, November 30, 1993.

¹³⁶ For illustration of *Pink Area* see *Robert Mangold*, 2004, p.26. For other Area paintings see pp.178, 185 and 186 in the same volume.

¹³⁷ For illustration see *Robert Mangold*, 2004, p.177.

¹³⁸ Quoted in Nancy Princenthal, "A Survey of the Paintings," in *Robert Mangold*, Shiff, Storr et al., (London: Phaidon Press, 2000) pp.109-12. Princenthal notes Mangold seeking a 'third way' between painting as illusion or thing. P.109.

¹³⁹ Arthur C. Danto, "The Zone Paintings," in *Robert Mangold*, 2000, pp.136-157.

¹⁴⁰ For illustration see *Robert Mangold*, 2004, pp.138-9.

¹⁴¹ Danto's explanation of the limitations of the coloured zones is on p.155 and I have greatly simplified his reading of the works in terms of struggle and cosmology in order not to become too diverted by his persuasive reasoning.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, p.143.

Chapter Three

¹ Briony Fer, *On Abstract Art*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997) pp.167-8.

² Andrew Harrison, "The Limits of Twofoldness" in Rob van Gerwen, *Richard Wollheim on the Art of Painting* (Cambridge University Press, 2001), p.47.

³ *Ibid.*, pp.42-43.

⁴ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), p.352.

⁵ See Merleau-Ponty, 2010, pp.352-354. The notion of maximum grip depends upon an understanding of our lived experience, of the way in which objects are grasped perceptually from our embodied point of view and 'through the body I am at grips with the world.' (p.353.) See also Romdenh-Romluc, 2011, pp.115-6.

⁶ It is this lack of perceptual grip, Merleau-Ponty suggests, that underlies our awareness of depth, rather than any sense of relative size: not being able to fully grasp the qualities of an object arises from its being too near or far away from us, so that degrees of perceptual grip can inform us of distances in depth in our perceptual field. Merleau-Ponty, 2010, pp.351-353.

⁷ Kasha Linville, "Agnes Martin: An Appreciation," *Artforum* 9, no.10 (June 1971), pp.72-73.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p.73.

⁹ Rosalind E. Krauss, "Agnes Martin: The /Cloud/," in *Bachelors: Essays on Nine Women "Bachelors" Who Challenged Masculinist Aesthetics* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000), pp.75-89.

¹⁰ The 'abstract sublime' is a term coined by Robert Rosenblum and links abstract painting, specifically Mondrian and the abstract expressionists, to a Northern tradition of painting, much of it landscape, that endeavours to explore religious and spiritual beliefs, in partial contrast to the supposed 'formalism' of French painting. See Rosenblum's *Modern Painting and the Northern Romantic Tradition: Friedrich to Rothko* (New York: Harper and Row, 1975). Since then the 'sublime' has been vigorously reinterpreted, most relevantly to this thesis in relation to Barnett Newman's paintings and especially in the writing of Jean-Francois Lyotard. In two essays that deal specifically with Newman, Lyotard links the notion of the sublime to the physical presence of his paintings and the way in which they insist upon a present instant of time. See "The Sublime and the Avant-Garde" and "Newman: The Instant" in Andrew Benjamin, ed., *The Lyotard Reader* (Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), pp.196-211 and pp.240-249 respectively.

¹¹ Krauss, 2000, p82.

¹² Michael Newman, "Phenomenality and Materiality in Agnes Martin," *Agnes Martin* (New York: Dia Art Foundation, 2011), pp.198-227.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p.201.

¹⁴ Linville, p.73.

¹⁵ Newman, pp.201-02.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.206.

¹⁷ I would like at this point to consider how both Rosalind Krauss and Briony Fer respond to Michael Fried's account of Jackson Pollock's 1949 painting *Out of the Web: Number 7* in his catalogue essay "Three American Painters: Kenneth Noland, Jules Olitski, Frank Stella" of 1965, *Art and Objecthood*, (Chicago/London: University of Chicago, 1998) pp.213-268. Fried's account of the painting places it as a telling example of opticality and the 'removed' parts of the painting, gouged out of the painted panel by Pollock, are for Fried like a 'blind spot within the eye', an idea that comes from what he sees as the extreme difficulty of locating figure and ground in such works 'so that the figure created by removing part of the field...seems to lie within our own eyes, as strange as this may sound.' (p.228) This is to ignore not only the obvious way in which the removed areas act as figures in the field of paint, but also the ragged edges and clumsily removed surfaces of those areas, just as, Krauss points out, Greenberg and Fried pass over the various forms of detritus that Pollock regularly embeds in the surface of his paintings, not to mention the sheer physical tactility of paint that has run, merged and

congealed upon them. Krauss's "The Crisis of the Easel Picture" in *Jackson Pollock: New Approaches* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1999) pp.155-180 takes issue with all this and employs the notion of *horizontality* to re-introduce the body, Pollock's painting flat on the floor operating against the optical axis of verticality and engaging him in a physical form of making that, for Krauss, in some ways operates *below* culture. Fer takes up Krauss's theme in her chapter on Pollock in *On Abstract Art* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000) pp.93-108, in which she outlines how Fried's account depends upon the idea of an ideal viewing position in order to ignore the physical attack upon the painting, 'those hacked, remaindered surfaces where the paint has been cut away.' (p.106) Fer sees Pollock cutting into this painting 'as if it were a kind of trauma or wound,' (p.208) a wound which Fried must ignore or repress in order to retain his reading of Modernism and his notion of opticality intact. This is all extremely relevant to notions of materiality and embodied perception, but I offer it as an endnote in order not to become too diverted by the arguments that have revolved around Pollock's paintings.

¹⁸ Newman, pp.201-02.

¹⁹ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 2010.

²⁰ Susan Blakemore, *Consciousness: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) p.13. Blakemore explores how the 'internal theatre' model of perception develops through various accounts and also its wide appeal: 'This way of conceiving of our own minds is so easy, and so natural, that it hardly seems worth questioning.' P.15. 'Yet, as we shall see, the vast majority [of scientists] assume something like a stream of consciousness, or treat the mind as an inner theatre.' P.16.

²¹ Merleau-Ponty, 2010, p.239.

²² *Ibid.*, p.116.

²³ *Ibid.*, p.237.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Yve-Alain Bois, "Newman's Laterality," in *Reconsidering Barnett Newman*, ed. Melissa Ho (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2002,) p.34.

³⁰ Yves-Alain Bois, "Perceiving Newman," in *Painting as Model* (Cambridge/London: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1993,) p.195.

³¹ See in particular Yve-Alain Bois, "Newman's Laterality," in Ho, 2002, especially pp.34-40.

³² Bois employs the seventeenth-century philosopher Pascal to make the point: 'Symmetry. In anything one takes in at a glance; based on something that there is no reason for doing differently: and also based on the face of man. Whence it comes that we only desire symmetry in breadth, and not in height or depth.' Bois, 1993, pp.195-6.

³³ See the earlier section on Newman in Chapter Two of this thesis.

³⁴ Bois, 1993, p.197.

³⁵ This account leaves out the complexity of the way in which objects have an *outer horizon* and an *inner horizon*, the latter equating roughly to all those sides of an object which we cannot actually see but which we nevertheless know to be present and the former being comparable to what we would normally think of as 'ground' in figure/ground relations, except that other figures in that zone of background are always on the point of coming into determinacy, just as the periphery of our vision is an indeterminate zone that can likewise become the focus of our attention. Morris (2012) suggests that 'not-fully-determinate' might clarify what Merleau-Ponty intends, the way in which new figures that might come into focus are 'already immanent in the indeterminate background.' She cites the example of the line on an optician's eye-chart that you cannot quite make out. (p.36.)

³⁶ Bois, 1993, p.203.

³⁷ Bois, 2002, pp.42-44.

³⁸ Merleau-Ponty, 2010, p.248.

³⁹ Komarine Romdenh-Romluc draws the useful comparison with our perception of colour: 'It is sometimes claimed that an object's *being* green is constituted by its *appearing* green to colour-perceiving subjects in suitable lighting conditions such as bright daylight. On this model, objects are not green in-themselves; their greenness is constituted in experience of them.' Komarine Romdenh-Romluc, *Merleau-Ponty and Phenomenology of Perception* (London and New York: Routledge, Oxon, 2011,) p.108.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p.248.

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- ⁴¹ Merleau-Ponty, 2010, p.67.
- ⁴² Komarine Romdenh-Romluc offers extensive analysis of the term in *Merleau-Ponty and Phenomenology of Perception*, 2011, pp. 16-20.
- ⁴³ Newman, 2011, pp.201-02.
- ⁴⁴ Bois, 1993, p.197.
- ⁴⁵ Keith Hartley, "The Art of Callum Innes: Resonance" in *Callum Innes: Resonance*, (St.Ives: Tate Publishing, 2005,) p.10.
- ⁴⁶ See Innes's comments to Kevin Henderson in the interview in *transcript*, 1998, p.37.
- ⁴⁷ Hartley, 2005, pp.10-11.
- ⁴⁸ Merleau-Ponty, 2010, p.237.
- ⁴⁹ Merleau-Ponty, 2010, p.5.
- ⁵⁰ Marden often comments on this aspect of the relation between his paintings and his sense of his own body: 'What one is physically...I am 5'8 ½", and I weigh this much, and I am left-handed, and I'm a certain age. This has a big effect on what the thing looks like. The kind of mark I can make physically. If everybody tried to draw the same line, they just couldn't do it.' Richard Shiff, "Force of Myself Looking," in *Plane Image: A Brice Marden Retrospective* (New York: MOMA, New York, 2007) pp.36-37.
- ⁵¹ Fiona Bradley, "Keeping Time," p.17 in Bradley, 2006.
- ⁵² Rosalind Krauss, "The Crisis of the Easel Picture," in *Jackson Pollock: New Approaches*, (New York: MOMA, New York, 1999) p.175.
- ⁵³ *Ibid.*, p.175.
- ⁵⁴ Paul Bonaventura in Bradley, 2006, p.78.
- ⁵⁵ Rosenberg's account of action painting sometimes comes close to the kind of phenomenological engagement I am proposing here, especially in some of his footnotes to "The American Action Painters," in Harold Rosenberg, *The Tradition of the New* (London: Paladin Books, 1970), pp.35-47, for instance: 'With regard to the tensions it is capable of setting up in our bodies the medium of any art is an extension of the physical world; a stroke of pigment, for example, 'works' within us in the same way as a bridge across the Hudson.' (p.38). The problem lies in Rosenberg's conception of the artist as an 'actor' and his notion that any aesthetic concerns lead only to turning the 'act' into 'making a painting at sufficient speed to meet an exhibition date.' (p.39).
- ⁵⁶ Romdenh-Romluc, 2011, p.84.
- ⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p.84.
- ⁵⁸ Merleau-Ponty, 2010, p.166.
- ⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p.167.
- ⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p.168.
- ⁶¹ 'The process of expression, when it is successful, does not merely leave for the reader and the writer himself a kind of reminder, it brings the meaning into existence as a thing at the very heart of the text, it brings it to life in an organism of words, establishing it in the writer or the reader as a new sense organ, opening a new field or a new dimension to our experience.' Merleau-Ponty, 2010, p.212. It is this exact coinciding of thought with expression and its opening out onto new dimensions of experience that I see occurring in the act of painting.
- ⁶² Romdenh-Romluc (2011) discusses these 'mirror' neurons on p.141: 'When I see you acting, the mirror system fires as if it was me performing the action, thus generating a perception of you as an agent engaged in a behaviour, rather than a mere object moving.'
- ⁶³ Romdenh-Romluc, in discussing how 'representations' might be imbued with motor significance, gives the example of an academic interested in conditions for sailors in the British Navy in the eighteenth century, who only fully enters into an understanding of their experience after being stranded in a lightless tube train for several hours, so that his 'conceptual understanding' is now 'imbued with motor significance'. It is this kind of 'bodily sense' that I have in mind in terms of a spectator's awareness of a painting. Romdenh-Romluc, 2011, pp.98-99. In relation to the idea of a viewer needing to have some experience of painting to be able to access these paintings in the way I describe, I think Barthes's distinction between music that is listened to and music that is played is helpful, the latter being a wholly different experience, 'sensual', 'muscular', 'as though the body were hearing.' Roland Barthes, "Musica Practica" in *Image Music Text* (London: Fontana Press, 1977) pp.149-154, quotations from p.149.
- ⁶⁴ Morris in Battock, 1969, p.223.
- ⁶⁵ Mel Gooding, 1996, unpaginated.
- ⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 1996, unpaginated.

⁶⁷ Merleau-Ponty, 2010, pp.483-4. The terms come from Husserl's *Vorlesungen zur Phanomenologie des inneren Zeitbewusstseins*, pp.390 and ff. These retentions and protensions arise directly from our 'perceptual field' and not from 'a central I' and with each new retention the previous one sinks deeper below the present so that 'the layer of time between it and me thickens,' so that retentions gradually recede and become less bodily accessible to us. Time, Merleau-Ponty concludes, 'is not a line, but a network of intentionalities.' Merleau-Ponty, 2010, p.484.

⁶⁸ Merleau-Ponty, 2010, p.485 and p.486.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p.478.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p.490.

⁷¹ This is to greatly simplify Clark's complex and subtle thinking, but when pressed Clark affirms his belief that no single work of modern art manages to avoid such metaphor. The crux of his argument is that: 'In order to represent at all, I suppose, a series of marks in a picture have to be seen as standing for something besides themselves; they have to be construed metaphorically. (This is true even of indices, if that is what we believe Pollock's marks to be: the moment a character or quality is attributed to an index, we are making it into a metaphor of sorts – of its maker, or of that which gave rise to it.) Metaphor is inescapable, and what in any case would an exit from it be like?' T.J.Clark, "Jackson Pollock's Abstraction," in *Reconstructing Modernism*, ed. Serge Guilbaut (Cambridge, London: MIT Press, 1990.) p.199.

⁷² Henderson, 1997, p.30.

⁷³ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, (London: Flamingo Books, 1984.) p.6.

⁷⁴ To elaborate on this just a little: as far as I read this painting, the secretary is looking down at a piece of paper that has just blown onto the floor, which we know because the window blind and its cord is still flapping from the gust of wind. She is deciding whether or not to pick the paper up, a decision complicated by her proximity to the man's desk, the restrictive and exposing tightness of her dress and also, I would suggest, by the sensation of her hair being loose, having just taken off her hair band and placed it on a chair. Complicated, in other words, by her own sense of physicality and the confined space of the office. Like much of Hopper's work, it is about an interior mental process and I use it as an example here because it makes explicit the way a painting can suggest a narrative. I am leaving out some of the implications of this narrative, such as the intersection of gender and capitalism that has exercised other writers.

⁷⁵ Roland Barthes, 1984, pp.82-85.

⁷⁶ Barthes, 1984, p.87.

⁷⁷ Sontag quoted in Barthes, in the section on emanation, pp.80-81.

⁷⁸ Gooding, 1996, unpaginated.

⁷⁹ Barthes, 1984, p.82.

⁸⁰ Eric deChasse, "Callum Innes," in Bradley, 2006, p.131.

⁸¹ Barthes, 1984, p.76: 'Painting can feign reality without having seen it.'

⁸² Barthes, 1984, pp.96-7.

⁸³ Roland Barthes, "Rhetoric de l'image," translated by Rosalind Krauss, *Communications*, No.4 (1964), 42, and quoted here as it appears in Krauss's essay "Notes on the Index, Part 2", *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, Mass. And London: Yale University Press, 1986) pp. 210-220, quotation on p.217. The presence and anteriority of the photograph are linked in the essay to a shift in abstract painting from the iconic to the indexical and the replacement of abstract painting's self-referentiality to the taking up of the photograph as a paradigmatic model.

⁸⁴ For illustrations of *Untitled (Floor)* see Fer, *On abstract art*, 2000, p.166.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Briony Fer, *On Abstract Art*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997) pp.167-8.

⁸⁷ Illustration of *Wall* in Townsend, 2004, p.68.

⁸⁸ Susan Lawson, "Sensitive Skin: infra mince and difference," in *The Art of Rachel Whiteread* edited by Chris Townsend (London: Thames and Hudson, 2004), pp.68-84, quotation on p.72.

⁸⁹ Shelley Hornstein, "Matters Immaterial: On the Meaning of Houses and the Things Inside Them," in Townsend, 2004, pp.51-67, quotation on p.64.

⁹⁰ Briony Fer's 'thematics of the visible and the invisible' is, I think, a deliberate echo of Merleau-Ponty's title.

⁹¹ Rosalind Krauss, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*, (Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, 1986) p.280.

⁹² Chris Townsend, "Lessons From What's Poor," in *The Art of Rachel Whiteread*, ed. Chris Townsend (London: Thames and Hudson, 2004), p.184.

- ⁹³ Merleau-Ponty's notion of the inner and outer horizons of objects is pertinent here. Merleau-Ponty, 2010, p.78-9.
- ⁹⁴ Ibid., p.206.
- ⁹⁵ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 1968, p.143.
- ⁹⁶ Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, 2010, p.237.
- ⁹⁷ Ibid: '...the sensible mass it is [the body] and the mass of the sensible wherein it is born by segregation and upon which, as seer, it remains open.' p.136.
- ⁹⁸ Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, trans. N.M.Paul and W.S.Palmer, (New York: Zone Books, 1991), pp.28-32. The reversibility of perception that Merleau-Ponty describes is, in Bergson, more firmly tied to the workings of the nervous system, a complex interplay of afferent and efferent nerves which respond to stimuli and provoke our actions. The brain, in Bergson's description, is 'no more than a kind of central telephonic exchange' (p.30) only differentiated from the spinal cord in its degree of complexity. There is no separate consciousness to this system, nothing that 'spiritualises itself into consciousness' and no system of representation outside of it. (p.29).
- ⁹⁹ Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, 2010, pp.135-6.
- ¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p.143.
- ¹⁰¹ Ibid., p.151.
- ¹⁰² Ibid., p.153.
- ¹⁰³ Ibid., p.150. The quotation is taken from Proust, *Du cote de chez Swann*, II, 189. [Eng. Trans., p.503.] For a contemporary account of the experiential difference between a score and a listening experience, see Bryn Harrison's two essays in *overcoming form: reflections on immersive listening* (Huddersfield: University of Huddersfield Press, 2013), especially "Listening through Morton Feldman's *Triadic Memories*," in which he explores the complexity of memory and duration in the listening experience. In terms of an aural parallel to the differing experiences of object-images in space and time, Richard Glover's "Performed installations" in the same volume is particularly illuminating.
- ¹⁰⁴ Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p.150.
- ¹⁰⁵ Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, trans. N.M.Paul and W.S.Palmer (New York: Zone Books, 1991), pp.35-37. To put this another way, presence is matter and representation is perception of matter. To perceive matter, say an object, is to suppress all of those infinite relations it has with everything else and reduce it down to that which is of interest to me. Perception, Bergson says, 'is like an effect of mirage.' (p.37).
- ¹⁰⁶ Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind," in *The Primacy of Perception* (Northwestern University Press, 1964) p.164.
- ¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p.148.
- ¹⁰⁸ Ibid.
- ¹⁰⁹ Fried, 1998, p.224.
- ¹¹⁰ Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind," in *The Primacy of Perception* (Northwestern University Press, 1964) p.164.

Chapter Four

- ¹ See Michael Fried, "Morris Louis," in *Art and Objecthood* (1998), p.114: 'The darkish cusps often found at the bottom of these paintings are the result of unabsorbed paint having collected there in shallow pools after having flooded down the rest of the canvas.' For some elaboration on this see John Elderfield, *Morris Louis* (London: Arts Council of Great Britain), p.10 and pp.18-19.
- ² For a description of how these paintings are made, see Watkins, 1999, p.7 as well as the frontispiece photograph in that volume. See also pp.114-115, pp.124-125, pp.136-137 in Filler, (2014).
- ³ "On Reflection," Jonathan Watkins, in *Ian Davenport: Paintings* (Dundee: Dundee Contemporary Arts, 1999), p.11. Watkins goes on to describe the test sheets Davenport uses to try out different pours.
- ⁴ Martin Maloney, "Current Abstract Painters: Southampton and London," *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol.138, No.1114 (Jan., 1996), pp.45-46. Maloney is equally unimpressed with the artists chosen for Brian Muller's *Real Art* exhibition and compares them unfavourably to Damien Hirst, Gary Hume and Fiona Rae.
- ⁵ Untitled 1988 is illustrated on p.25 of Filler, 2014 and the series as a whole are on pp.19-31.
- ⁶ Such as *Number 14, 1948*, 1948, Enamel on paper, Yale University Art Gallery. See *No Limits, Just Edges: Jackson Pollock, Paintings on Paper* (New York: Distributed Art Publishers, 2005), p.100.
- ⁷ Norman Rosenthal, *Ian Davenport*, (London: Waddington Galleries, 1990), unpaginated. Expanding on this earlier in the text Rosenthal says: 'For whilst this painting was every bit as abstract and rigorous in its use of an abstract repetitive motif taken from top to bottom and across the canvas, it seemed to achieve the almost

impossible – namely the combination of a totally rigorous and highly premeditated method with an apparent organic even musical rhythm that was totally seducing.’

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Though not too powerful – Davenport describes how he initially tried a wind machine borrowed from a film set and blew most of the contents of his studio across the floor. Talk given by Davenport at Manchester University. Date unknown.

¹⁰ The wording of a telegram Pollock sent to Time magazine in response to criticism of his paintings, see James Coddington, “No Chaos Damn It,” in Varnedoe and Carmel, eds., 1998, pp.101-116. Coddington’s essay goes some way to revealing the technical skills that underlie Pollock’s technique and I make the comparison to stress that Davenport, like Pollock, makes technically difficult feats of painting look easy.

¹¹ See for instance “Homage to Homer: Ian Davenport in conversation with David Batchelor,” in *Ian Davenport: New Paintings* (London: Waddington Galleries, 2003) unpaginated.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ For Namuth’s images of Pollock at work see Pepe Carmel, “Pollock at Work: The Films and Photography of Hans Namuth,” in Carmel and Varnedoe, eds., 1999, pp.86-137.

¹⁴ *Richard Serra/Sculpture*, ed. Laura Rosenstock (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1986), p.14. The photograph is the springboard for Rosalind Krauss’s essay “Richard Serra/Sculpture,” and leads her to consider the displacement of narrative in modernism from the work to the figure of the artist.

¹⁵ See the images of Davenport making the pour paintings from the early nineties on pp.80-81 in Filler, 2014 and standing over pools of paint, pp.114-15 and 124-25 in the same volume.

¹⁶ Ibid., pp.174-5.

¹⁷ Batchelor, 2003, unpaginated.

¹⁸ Varnedoe counters those readings of Minimalism which emphasize power, masculinity and mass production partly by pointing out that most of the works were fabricated in small workshops, ‘a kind of mom-and-pop metal shop’ and as such are nearer to a form of nostalgia, an America, and a form of craftsmanship, that is now less common. Varnedoe, *Pictures of Nothing*, 2003, pp.54-55.

¹⁹ For illustration, see Mick Finch, “Painting as Vigilance,” *contemporary visual arts*, Issue 15, p.22.

²⁰ Brian Muller, “212121 Painting: From Postconceptualism to Recontextualism,” *Contemporary*, No.58, 2003, p.37.

²¹ For illustration see Brian Muller, “Torie Begg – L and M plus Bricks,” *contemporary visual arts*, Issue 15, p.64.

²² See Brian Muller’s review of the exhibition in *contemporary visual arts*, Issue 15, pp.64-65.

²³ See Sally O’Reilly, “Torie Begg,” *Contemporary*, No.58, 2003, p.42 for an image of this work. Warhol often employed humour to undermine some of the more bombastic aspects of abstract painting and here Begg turns such irony to double account, having fun with Warhol and abstraction in the same moment.

²⁴ Ibid., p.43.

²⁵ Brian Muller, *‘real’/reflexive/art*, 1997, unpaginated.

²⁶ Mick Finch, *Apparently Real: Torie Begg’s paintings*, Unpublished text, 1996, unpaginated.

²⁷ Ibid. See also the specific sections in *Formless: A User’s Guide* (1997), on “Horizontality”, pp.93-103 and “Base Materialism,” pp.51-63.

²⁸ Muller, 1997, unpaginated.

²⁹ Finch, 1996, unpaginated.

³⁰ Torie Begg, A Statement for the Real Art catalogue and an interview for *Contemporary Art* titled “Apparently Red Painting,” Winter, Vol.3, Issue 1.

³¹ Finch, 1996, unpaginated.

³² O’Reilly, 2003, pp.42-45.

³³ Ibid., p.48.

³⁴ John Tozer, “From today painting is dead,” *Contemporary Visual Arts*, Issue 21, pp.60-65.

³⁵ Ibid., p.49.

³⁶ Hal Foster, “Signs Taken for Wonders,” 1986, p.48, reprinted in *Painting: Documents of Contemporary Art*, ed. Terry R. Myers (London and Cambridge: The Whitechapel Gallery/MIT Press, 2011), p.49, quotation taken from Gilles Deleuze, “Plato and the Simulacrum,” trans. Rosalind Krauss, *October*, no.27 (Winter 1983) 48; p.47.

³⁷ Thinking in terms of a spectrum of possibilities avoids making the difference between the critical tradition and the simulacral a dichotomy: for a more detailed analysis of such a move, see Katherine J. Morris’s understanding of Merleau-Ponty’s use of the terms normal/abnormal and the spectrum of possibilities they

contain. Katherine J. Morris, *Starting with Merleau-Ponty*, (London, New York: Continuum Publishing, 2012), p.72.

³⁸ To gain some sense of the difference in attitude towards the earlier tradition, one only needs to compare Innes's taking up of some of the formal issues of Newman's work with the appropriations of Newman's paintings by the painter Philip Taaffe.

³⁹ Sally O'Reilly, 2003, p.43.

⁴⁰ For illustration see Whitfield, 2008, pp.6-7,44-5.

⁴¹ The cyclic nature of this process, as new ways of making are discovered, consolidated, mined and then become too familiar, their solutions too predictable, is a constant theme of both Riley's practice and her writing. "Work," from 2009 (in Riley, 2009, pp.55-60) and "Painting Now," from 1996 (Riley, 2009, pp.290-303) describe her work processes with great clarity.

⁴² It might be said that Torie Begg applies seriality, or mechanisation, not only to the pictorial ordering of her work but also to its technical production: the distinction is Hal Foster's and the seriality of mid-twentieth century abstraction in pictorial terms is contrasted with the seriality of technical production in Minimalism and Pop Art. This aspect of Minimalism is certainly pertinent to Torie Begg's work, as is Foster's thesis around the logic of difference and repetition within the mass consumption of commodities that can be seen to penetrate such artistic practices. Foster, 1996, pp.62-66.

⁴³ This account of Jason Martin's working methods derives largely from Jason Martin's own words in his interview with Alan Woods in *transcript* Volume 3, Issue 2, 1997 and Mark Gisbourne's 1998 text.

⁴⁴ Jason Martin in dialogue with Alan Woods, *Transcript*, Volume 3, Issue 2, 1997. This interview is an extremely cogent exploration of many of the issues I explore in this thesis but there is not the space to draw them all out using the artist's own words; rather I refer the reader on to the interview itself to see how the dialogue explores some of the ideas I think of as relevant to object-images. The interview follows on from Kevin Henderson's with Callum Innes, a conjunction that underlines the similarities between the two artists.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p.54.

⁴⁶ For illustrations of the *Loop* paintings see Gisbourne, 1998, pp.28-9.

⁴⁷ For an account of how such 'hidden-ness' might be read psychologically, see Briony Fer's analysis of Donald Judd's *Untitled* wall pieces in *On Abstract Art* (2000) pp.150-1. The 'blind alley' built into these pieces, far from offering clarity, is part of what Fer characterises as 'an economy of anxiety' and her insights into Judd's work, especially around a prohibition on touch, are pertinent to Martin's paintings and his more recent sculpture.

⁴⁸ Mark Gisbourne, "A Clean Sweep: From Parody to Perpetuity and Beyond," *Jason Martin*, (Nordhorn: Stadtische Galerie Nordhorn, 1998) p.38.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p.38.

⁵⁰ The remark is reminiscent of Mel Gooding's initial emphasis in his text on Callum Innes, which is gradually put under pressure as he analyses the work in more depth.

⁵¹ Jason Martin/Alan Woods, 1997, p.45.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p.47.

⁵³ I am thinking here of the incorporation into painting of the mechanical and 'a reversal of the original reaction to industrialisation,' which Yve-Alain Bois perceives in the latter half of the twentieth century. Rather than an insistence upon the hand-made in contrast to industrial production, there has been a turn to the incorporation of such mechanisation within the painting process that might be seen to be starting with its increasingly mass-produced materials. See Yve-Alain Bois, "Painting: The Task of Mourning," 1993, pp.232-233.

⁵⁴ Katherine J. Morris, *Starting with Merleau-Ponty*, (London, New York: Continuum Publishing, 2012), pp.60-63.

⁵⁵ I am grateful to the painter Colin Day, who has assisted Harding, for talking me through the processes involved.

⁵⁶ For illustration see Townsend, 2006, p.44.

⁵⁷ Eugene Tan, "Alexis Harding and Neil Taylor, *Contemporary Visual Arts*, Issue 20, p.76.

⁵⁸ Chris Townsend, *New Art from London*, (London: Thames and Hudson), 2006, p.46.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ This re-positioning of 'collapse' is reminiscent of Lyotard's locating the postmodern not after modernism but within modernism as a latent tendency, as already implicit in modernist practice and thinking. See Malpas, 2006, p.43.

⁶¹ J.J. Charlesworth, quoted in Chris Townsend, 2006, p.48.

⁶² In interviews, Harding describes the long genesis of these paintings, their slow drying times and the way in which different paintings call for different responses from him. Talking with Paul Bonaventura, for instance, Harding says: 'So to me the work isn't made in a formal way. The activity feels more like a strange bodily and topological farming in the studio and my relationship with materials, although fundamental to the work, feels unorthodox...I remember each path the painting took in its making; for example, a painting I really had to care for and nurse, taking it down off the wall for two months, compared to a painting that I completely ignored and then shook violently.' "Raw and Beautiful," *Contemporary*, No.88, 2006, pp.56-7. This by way of suggesting Harding's deep level of engagement with the physical act of making.

Conclusion

¹ Rosie Bennett, "To Fix Art History in Memory," in Richard Shiff, *Doubt* (2008), p.15.

² Bois, 1993, p.xii in his introductory section "Resisting Blackmail." *Painting as Model* as a text is intended by Bois to counter such an indiscriminate application of theory by allowing the object under scrutiny to lead to theoretical models and not the other way round, that 'the concepts must be forged *from* the object of one's inquiry or imported *according to* that object's specific exigency..' (p.xii, author's italics.)

³ Mira Shor, "Course Proposal," in Terry R. Myers (2011), p.96.

⁴ As an outline of this attitude and the systematic dismissal of painting see Robert Storr's interview with Catherine David at Kassel Rock in 1997. David's high-handed refusal to take any painting seriously is almost comical, especially when she finally accepts some painters as of significance but suggests their work isn't painting so much as 'privileging cultural operations, crossbreeding, questioning cultural identity, and using specific image-strategies.' In Myers, 2011, pp.118-120.

⁵ Hal Foster is much more precise about the nature of this 'crux', seeing Minimalism and Pop Art as a crux between the autonomy of the Modernist work and the various forms of practice which might be regarded as postmodern or poststructuralist, a transitional stage between the two. Foster, 1996, pp.35-70.

⁶ The conference was 'Abstract Connections' held on the 25th and 26th March 2010 and the discussion followed on from Robert Slifkin's paper, "The Tragic Image: Action Painting Refigured."

⁷ 'Today academics might say that deKooning was a rhizomatic figure, creating his imagery on a Deleuzian plateau, that he was someone for whom the suggestion of possibilities would be more meaningful than the authoritative delimiting of a form.' Richard Shiff, 2008, p.41. Shiff has devoted a whole book, *Between Sense and deKooning*, to elaborating upon the complexity of deKooning's work and the difficulty of categorising his output. Shiff, *Between Sense and deKooning* (London: Reaktion Books, 2011).

⁸ The greatest omission in terms of thinking about object-images must be Jean Francois Lyotard's ideas around the event and the sublime and in particular his two essays that centre upon Barnett Newman. Lyotard's analysis of Newman's paintings in terms of the event - '*is it happening?*' - and the way in which such an event must precede rationalisation clearly has parallels with what I am saying about object-images and the indeterminacy that Merleau-Ponty places at the heart of perception. See "The Sublime and the Avant-Garde" and "Newman: The Instant," in Benjamin, 1998, pp.196-212 and pp.240-250 respectively.

⁹ Fried, 1998, p.151. See the discussion around Fried in Chapter Two.

¹⁰ Katherine J. Morris, 2012, p.69.

¹¹ Simone deBeauvoir quoted in Morris, 2012, p.69.

¹² Merleau-Ponty, 2010, p.115. The section establishes the body, and bodily space, as a zone of *not-being* which provides the backdrop to all our perception, like the 'darkness needed in the theatre to show up the performance.' Every figure stands out 'against the double horizon of external and bodily space.' (p.115.)

¹³ To elucidate this point Katherine J. Morris gives the example of how, if a tennis player thinks about where they are putting their feet, that conscious effort will interfere with their ability to play well. Likewise painters – at least the kind of painter discussed in this thesis – have to trust their internalised knowledge in order to paint 'well'. Morris uses the example to distinguish between 'normal' and 'analytical' attitudes towards perception. Morris, 2012, 79-80.

¹⁴ From "Eye and Mind," in Merleau-Ponty, ed. James M. Edie, *The Primacy of Perception* (Northwestern University Press, 1964), p.167.

¹⁵ Mel Gooding, 1996, unpaginated.

¹⁶ Rosie Bennett in Shiff, 2008, p.15.

¹⁷ Mel Gooding, 1996, unpaginated.

¹⁸ Katherine L. Morris, 2012, p.146.

¹⁹ This statement and what follows does not take account of the complexity of poststructuralist theory or the fact that it is not 'a homogenous system corpus or a fixed system, is constituted by a conglomerate of highly complex and often antagonistic works...' Bois, 1993, p.xii. To do justice to the depth of thinking about identity in these works is simply beyond the scope of this thesis and I offer a thumbnail rather than a summary.

²⁰ I am referring primarily to those notions of identity and discourse in the work of Michael Foucault: for a more adequate summary, see Christopher Butler, *Postmodernism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp.50-54.

²¹ I am thinking primarily of Jean Baudrillard and Frederic Jameson. The latter's description of the Westin Bonaventure Hotel in *The Cultural Turn* (1998), pp.11-16 neatly catches how new forms of postmodern space alter a subject's perception and orientation and Baudrillard's notion of America as Disneyland suggests the degree of simulation postmodern experience might contain. See Butler, 2002, pp.112-114.

²² For a good summary of the instability of signification and the deconstructive techniques of Jacques Derrida, see Eagleton, 1983, pp.127-134.

²³ Roland Barthes, "Image-Text-Music," in *Image Text Music* (London: Fontana Press, 1977), p.148. Author's italics.

²⁴ Ibid, p.148.

²⁵ Clement Greenberg, "Modernist Painting," in O'Brian, 1995b, p.91.

²⁶ For this shift and the move towards refusals of any kind of metaphysical position, see Macann, 2005, pp.209-212.

²⁷ Ibid., p.210.

²⁸ For one such statement of an end of philosophy and its replacement with 'theory', see Jameson, 1998, p.3. It is the inter-disciplinary nature of theory which marks, for Jameson, the end of 'a technical discourse of professional philosophy' such as 'the great systems of Sartre or the phenomenologists.' (p.3).

²⁹ One of the most well known statements about this, Douglas Crimp's "The End of Painting," *October*, Vol 16, Art World Follies (Spring, 1981), pp.69-86, describes the way in which painting has been made redundant by the shift towards conceptual art, minimalism and electronic, especially time-based media such as film and video, as well as the longer term effect of photography, so that now it is more or less a kind of 'idiocy'. Crimp loads his argument by choosing only statements in support of painting that make claims about its spiritual essence so that none of the ways in which painting has responded to these developments are properly accounted for and his essay suffers from the either/or mentality which characterises much of the 'end' of painting debate. For a text which avoids this polarity see Yve-Alain Bois, "Painting: The Task of Mourning," 1993, pp.229-244. Against various endings Bois posits painting as a set of 'matches' within the overall 'game' of painting: it is matches that end, not the game.

³⁰ Bridget Riley, "Painting Now," 1966, in *The Eye's Mind: Bridget Riley, Collected Writings 1965-2009* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2009), p.302.

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