Herm as Askēsis:
Prosthetic Conditions of Painting

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Copyright statement

Abstract

This research project asks how a consideration of Greek herm sculpture can be put to use in exploring prosthetic conditions of painting. This question is addressed through a series of essays and a body of studio-based art work, undertaken at the RCA from 2010 to 2015.

The written submission contains a series of interconnected essays, through which prosthetic conditions of painting are explored via Greek herm sculpture, in order to reassess the work of contemporary and historical painter's practices. The first chapter looks to a history of herm sculpture, focusing on the roles it has performed around the age of Alcibiades, of Athens 4 B.C. This assessment is aided by Michel Foucault's notion of askesis and Pierre Hadot's work on spiritual exercises. They enable a shift, from understanding the herm as a physical object to the historical roles it has performed in Greek culture — as a desecrated object, boundary-marker, object of ritual and, via its connection to hermes, a means of interpretation, bodily passage and transition. I address a collection of essays 'Six Memos for the Next Millennium', by Italo Calvino, and his connection to The Workshop for Potential Literature (Oulipo), in order to understand the use of literary restraints as exercises which offer a preliminary guide to how the herm can be used in this project. Through Foucault, Hadot and Calvino, the herm transitions from object to an askesis — undertaking tasks that perform in essays and paintings.

The subsequent essays focus on the work of Lynda Benglis, Orlan, Caravaggio, François Boucher and Imi Knoebel, addressed through contemporary thinkers that undertake considerations of the prosthetic. The intersection of material culture studies, feminist theory, disabilities studies and post-structuralism, offer a view to the prosthetic that creates a platform for a reconsideration of these artists' work. The herm becomes a silent guide in this project, understanding the prosthetic as imbedded in ideas of the relational — sensitive to the way in which body and paint, silicone and skin can adjoin, supplant, intersect, enhance and compensate, between subjects and objects. By inserting the prosthetic into narratives that question the relationships between bodies, objects and surfaces in these artist's work — and in asking what they can produce — this project explores and articulates prosthetic conditions of painting.

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During the period of registered study in which this thesis was prepared the author has not been registered for any other academic qualification. The material in this thesis has not been submitted wholly or in part for any academic and or qualification other than for which it is now submitted.

Neal Rock
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Introduction

Herms, Memos and Prosthetic Painting

This project has its origins in 2007, after I relocated from London to Los Angeles, accompanied by a book by the Hungarian classical philologist Karl Kerényi. His *Hermes*, originally published in 1944, followed my flight from the UK, providing insight into a world of philosophical journeying that formed a counterpart to my experiences in the studio. The transition of paint from viscous matter to three-dimensional form, and its dialogue with detritus gathered from the streets surrounding my LA studio, found a connection to Kerényi's interest in Grecian mutability and transition. His work helped facilitate my own shift, from understanding journey as a movement to its locus as a domain of thought – a form of philosophical practice.[1] His approach to journey as a habitable world sowed the seeds of this research project, one that had been set in motion many years before, when I was still an art student in London. During the late 1990s, I was introduced to Yve-Alain Bois and Rosalind Krauss's *Formless: A User's Guide,* which helped me articulate a response to aspects of London's art scene during that time.[2] The reference to Georges Perec's *Life: A User's Manual* in the book's title connected two important modes of thinking in my practice, one directed towards structure and the imposition of technical restraints, the other stemming from a questioning of art objects as stable and inert.

Bois and Krauss undertake a fractured, generative survey of the art object in post-war American and European art, addressing its canon through the lens of Georges Bataille's *Informe* and Julia Kristeva's essay on abjection.[3] Both Kristeva and Bataille help form an inquiry into the durational, entropic qualities of art objects while also bringing attention to limits, to what Krauss calls 'borderlines'.[4] Where *Formless* and Perec meet, where their borderlines touch (and here we find the novel as a peculiar type of art object), is in a questioning of the stasis, status and function of art objects, including that of books. Restraints and temporality relate to each other in terms of what they can produce – what the American writer Gilbert Sorrentino has called 'generative devices'.[5]

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[1] Karl Kerényi, *Hermes: Guide of Souls*, trans. Murray Stein (Woodstock, Connecticut: Spring Publications, 1998), p. 46.

[2] Yve-Alain Bois and Rosalind E. Krauss, *FORMLESS: A User's Guide* (New York: Zone Books, 1997), p. 158.

[3] Ibid., p. 237.

[4] Ibid., p. 137.

[5] Daniel Levin Becker, *Many Subtle Channels: In Praise of Potential Literature* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2012), p. 13. Specifically, Sorrentino is referring to *generative devices* within the context of the French experimental literary group, the Workshop for Potential Literature (Oulipo), and its adherents' use of literary restraints.

From this early stage of my art practice, and later through a transition from one country to another, I began to see the herm as a special kind of generative object. Kerényi's *Hermes* allowed me to see a potential capacity in the herm, a device through which to generate material. *Hermes* also marked the beginning of my thinking about this research project in earnest.

The herm has a connection both to the Greek god Hermes and to philosophies of interpretation, not only by sharing an etymological root but also in terms of the herm having historically been a vessel for inscription and, as an ancient boundary marker, an object that translates physical space.[6] At this juncture, my own appreciation began to migrate from understanding herms as physical objects to recognizing their generative capacity. In many respects, this whole research project is committed to finding out just what a herm can provisionally produce within the context of my painting practice. I do not, however, make any claims on painting as a homogeneous body, although there have been several surveys that have influenced me and that provide a context out of which my practice has developed. In order to sketch out a rough terrain for where this project and my practice are located, and in terms of seeing the herm as it was in antiquity, as a boundary marker, Rosalind Krauss's essay on an expanded condition of sculpture is an important starting point.[7] Her 1979 essay in many ways acknowledged what had been underway in Europe and the U.S. for well over a decade or more – namely, that sculpture had developed through its relationship to other forms of cultural production. Artists such as Robert Smithson and Robert Morris had not only dissolved an approach to art as defined through a specific medium, they had also taken sculpture into the public and environmental spheres. This hybrid state of production, where environment, architecture and time were all constitutive of expanded conditions of art, was also at work in painting, through the examples of artists such as Eva Hesse and Lynda Benglis. What had developed out of the 1960s was an open interplay between various art forms that had previously been annexed to their own internal discussions, particularly in the male-dominated painting scene in New York City during the late 1940s and the 1950s.

In many respects, this hybrid condition for art practice continued throughout the 1990s and into the early 21st century.[8] A significant exhibition in this regard was Simon Wallis's curatorial project at Tate Liverpool in 2001, *Hybrids: International contemporary painting*. In an accompanying catalogue essay, Alison Rowley and Griselda Pollock acknowledged Eve Hesse's *Hang Up*, from 1966, as a starting point for considering more contemporary works by artists such as Fabian

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[6] Hetty Goldman, 'The Origin of the Greek Herm', *American Journal of Archaeology*, Vol. 46, No.1 (1942), pp. 58–68. See also Josephine C. Quinn, 'Herms, Kouroi and the Political Anatomy of Athens', *Greece & Rome, 2nd Series*, Vol. 54, No. 1 (2007), pp. 82–105.

[7] Rosalind Krauss, 'Sculpture in the Expanded Field', *October*, Vol. 8 (Spring, 1979), pp. 30–44.

[8] I am aware of narratives counter to this expanded state, particularly in New York City during the first half of the 1980s, where there was a return to a 'new spirit' in painting through the practices of Francesco Clemente, David Salle and others. An exposition of these counter-movements, and their relationship to broader art-world events during this time, would deviate too much from the focus of this project.

Marcaccio and David Reed.[9] As a young artist just out of art school, I understood how this curatorial project connected the heritage delineated by Krauss's essay to a contemporary address of hybridity, located through digital technology and video, primarily within the context of contemporary painting. It also supplied me with a starting point for using silicone as a paint-material via the work of Fabian Marcaccio, who had been taking advantage of its sculptural qualities since the early 1990s. *Hybrids* managed to articulate and acknowledge installation and expanded-field practice as both historical and foundational to the advent of digital media, in a diverse range of painting practices. The exhibition also anticipated the impact of the internet on visual art which was to follow over the next decade, via its openness to discussing new technologies as contributing to an understanding of hybrid art practice.

In order to convey briefly the heterogeneity of painting today, and the problem of attempting to create a unified field as such, we can look at more recent curatorial projects and essays that approach painting from very different historical and social contexts. Catherine Wood's 2012 curatorial project at Tate Modern**,** *A Bigger Splash: Painting After Performance*, encounters an expanded state for painting via its relation to histories of performance art, with particular focus on David Hockney and Allan Kaprow.[10] They provide a foundation from which to consider the action of painting itself as intrinsic to its conversation with performance as a time-based activity. Within this sense of time there is also the role of the body across a range of practices, from Stuart Brisley's bodily performances with paint in the 1970s to the work of Ana Mendieta, whose body becomes not only an instrument to paint with but also signals a feminist critique for how female bodies were objectified both in the wider culture and within the rigid patriarchy of the New York art world in which she worked. Wood's project differs greatly from that of Simon Wallis in the sense that she locates aspects of contemporary painting within a very different historical canon that has, as its means of connection, a relation to pattern, drag, theatre and make-up, as opposed to an interest in new technologies and digitisation.[11] I would suggest, however, that both projects relate to Krauss's ideas of expanded discourse in the sense of looking for painting's extension via a connection to different cultural objects and events. I have come to understand this as 'painting-and...' conversations, whereby an accepted canon of painting – abstract expressionism, for example – is given extension through its linkage to an idea, form or object that previously it had not been associated with. In the case of *Hybrids* it might be digital photography, and the early advent of the internet, to histories of painterly abstraction. From Wood's perspective we have expressionist

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[9] Griselda Pollock and Alison Rowley, 'Painting in a 'Hybrid Moment', in Harris, Jonathan, ed., *Critical Perspectives on Contemporary Painting: Hybridity, Hegemony, Historicism* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2003), pp. 37–79.

[10] Catherine Wood, 'Painting in the Shape of a House', in Wood, Catherine, ed., *A Bigger Splash: Painting After Performance* (London: Tate Publishing, 2012), pp. 12–13.

[11] Ibid., p. 16.

gesture understood through a queering of patriarchy and through identity politics, as in Hockney's early work.[12]

Isabelle Graw offers another contemporary perspective that once more muddies any conception of a field, yet she too underscores her argument through an understanding of Krauss's post-medium condition of painting, and its current status as existing in (and across) many fields of cultural production.[13] Graw's focus is on the relation of art object to maker, specifically with regard to issues of agency, whereby a painting may represent or record the signature or agency of its maker.[14] Her view takes on painting as a visual semiotic and in this sense avoids the conversations about physical embodiment that Wood undertakes. What Graw affectively questions is the supposition that paintings are in the game of representing the artists who author them and, perhaps more importantly, that in cases where there are claims for the autonomy of painting from authorship, traits of personality and signature are offloaded onto the works themselves.[15] Graw sees this inherent anthropomorphism as signifying the market value of paintings over other art forms, in that painting carries greater potential for the indexical trace of authorship. She questions painting's lingering status as a quasi-person, which carries with it the legacy of modernist notions of expression, despite claims to the contrary in expanded and post-medium conditions, of both painting's production and its reception.

Through these divergent sites within which painting's histories and current conditions have been evaluated and rethought, my project accepts what many of them have also accepted and understood. There is a thinking of painting as mutable discourses forever seeking attachment to foreign objects. This has occurred through revisionist projects that seek to define painting through different and previously unconsidered historical, socio-aesthetic events. An expanded field as such is always expanding in all kinds of directions. These transversal and ever-evolving movements ironically beg for greater and more acute specificity when locating a conversation or set of ideas. This project looks to conflate and contaminate expanded conditions of painting with a history of prosthetics. I never use the term 'expanded' beyond this introduction in relation to my work or that of others with any great detail. I have undertaken an exploration of what a prosthetic condition of painting might offer in order to construct a conversation about what an expanded field might not have considered before. Part of this undertaking, and one of the reasons why prosthetics has captured my attention, is that a history of prosthetics digs itself into the very subject of relation itself. If the projects I have previously discussed can be understood through the lens of 'painting-and…', then what is often assumed is the status of one kind of history, to be supplanted and

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[12] Ibid., pp. 12–13.

[13] Isabelle Graw, 'The Value of Painting: Notes on Unspecificity, Indexicality, and Highly Valuable Quasi-Persons', in Isabelle Graw, André Rottmann, Daniel Birnbaum and Nikolaus Hirsch, eds., *Thinking Through Painting: Reflexivity and Agency Beyond the Canvas* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2012), pp. 45–57.

[14] Ibid., pp. 45–47.

[15] Ibid., pp. 56–57.

transformed by the introduction of a new subject/object. To my mind, this has already gone both too far and not far enough. Too far in that the nature of relation is often passed over, unexplored or is poorly sketched out, and not far enough because this lack of consideration often leads to a formulaic address of what constitutes interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary ideas of painting today. Prosthetics – when viewed from the perspective of disability studies and material-cultural studies, and also through histories of post-structuralist critiques of human agency – is invariably reflexive of relation as intrinsic to the generation of meaning. For me, this has provided fertile ground upon which to reconsider expanded histories of painting through the articulation of prosthetic actions as having the capacity to think about relation as generating meaning. Prosthetics considers relation as the place where meaning unfolds, whether it adjoins, supplants, disguises, enhances or replaces one thing for, to or as another. I have understood this as allowing me to transform these expanded models of painting in order to question relations themselves. The essays that follow locate historical sites in painting's near histories in order to work upon them a journey of the herm through a consideration of the prosthetic.

The first chapter has two sections, each affording differing modes of attention. Firstly, I explore a history of the herm as an ancient Greek sculpture, beyond the rudimentary exposition of its physical traits offered by Kerényi.[16] Through this historical undertaking there is a shift in attention from what herms look like to the roles they have performed over time. I offer suggestions as to how the herm — through these historical roles — can be put to use as a generative tool as opposed to a static, physical object. I outline its usefulness as a boundary marker, its apotropaic and ritualistic function, the role of touch and the desecration of the Athenian herms in the age of Alcibiades. These narratives form a platform for the second part of the first chapter, 'Herm as Askesis', which focuses on how these narratives can be converted into forms of exercise. In this respect, several other influences remain important to this project and are explored. Firstly, I consider Italo Calvino's unwritten essay entitled 'Consistency', from his posthumously published *Six Memos for the Next Millennium.* 'Consistency' is foregrounded by a contextual framing of Calvino through the Workshop for Potential Literature (Oulipo) and aspects of Raymond Roussel's influence upon it. If the herm has a history of undertaking roles which are in part connected to Hermes, then Calvino, via Oulipo, becomes a host for the herm to find a new set of concerns or forms. 'Consistency' serves as an early, provisional site that the herm navigates and within which it finds form. I was intrigued by Calvino's missing memo at the outset of this project and had intended to give it a more dominant role. Initially, it had been more explicit in this writing, as a driving force for research, but such an undertaking became progressively less important as my studio practice and accompanying essays began to take form. At various points during the course of this work, I had abandoned Calvino's *Six Memos* altogether. My thoughts fluctuated from resignation at the prospect of an impossible task to where I am now situated, within a positive affirmation of this failure.

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[16] Kerényi, op. cit., p.119.

In many respects, 'Consistency' need not be written in a literal sense. It holds pregnant meaning within the extant corpus of Calvino's work and I have simply learned the humility of sometimes letting what is before me rest on the page in order for it to self-organise. Here the herm and 'Consistency' have been allowed a conversation, through which I have been influenced by two thinkers who inform what follows. Michel Foucault's late lecture series *The Hermeneutics of the Subject* and Pierre Hadot's *Philosophy as a Way of Life* account for a conception of the herm as a mode of philosophical exercise. What Foucault has termed 'askesis' finds a correlation with Hadot's 'spiritual exercises'. I explore the similarities and differences in their work and focus particularly on Hadot's critique of Foucault's conception of askesis as a spiritual exercise. Yet, despite their differences, both thinkers undertake extensive philological excavations that unearth a deep connectedness to histories of spirituality and philosophical enquiry, the result of which is to understand philosophy as a transformation of subjectivity and as a mode of living. Philosophy, then, is only active when it is embodied, applied and, as both Foucault and Hadot explore, enacts a fundamental transformation of self through continued practice. I draw upon this idea of askesis and apply it to the herm as it has gathered a subterranean character from Calvino's missing memo. The combined influences of literary restraints via Calvino and 'Consistency', alongside ideas of philosophical askesis, give a dimensionality to the herm. As a generative tool, my intention is that it could be applied to subjects with the intention of enacting a conversion or change in them. The first chapter is a delineation of the herm as it might undertake such activities, with the decision that, much like 'Consistency', it remains active in absence. This assertion of the herm's absence is perhaps an attempt to write 'Consistency' after all, and I want to at least propose that what follows should be an indirect and provisional attempt to do so, from the remnants of my initial resignation and sense of futility. I therefore never mention the herm in the following essays. This too has a correlation with the lipogram as encountered in the work of Georges Perec, where the imposition of a restraint becomes generative of content, and again I have Sorrentino's 'generative devices' in mind when thinking in this manner. I wanted my memory of the herm as explored in the first chapter to work its way into, and act upon, the later essays that look at the relationship between painters' practices and prosthetics.

At this juncture, I ask for a certain amount of generosity in the reader, in that a loose methodology as constructed in the first chapter is enacted and embedded in the following essays, as they undertake a prosthetic condition of contemporary painting. If this process is important, it would follow that the kind of text produced be enacted in a tradition of essay writing that sees its form as explorative, performative and, from the outset, a stepping into the unknown. I write this introduction within the context of the University of Iowa and a city known for its literary scholarship. The prominence of creative non-fiction in the American literary landscape has gained momentum over recent years, and I have felt encouraged by the work of writers such as Chris Krauss and, more locally, John D'Agata, the latter having dedicated his life to the essay form,

which he views as 'trying to make a new shape where there previously was none'.[17] In this respect, the herm, aided by 'Consistency', is most certainly trying to make new shapes, in an attempt to think about histories of painting that have been normalised as hybrid, porous and continuously opening onto new horizons. I have also found solace in Theodor Adorno's 'The Essay as Form' in my process of understanding what these essays are undertaking, and with the frequent feeling that I have bitten off more than I can chew. His thoughts regarding the essay as that which is blind to its own objects has carried much weight since my first encountering it, in the understanding that what this project has undertaken is, even now, partially opaque.[18] My initial ideas around this project were to explore a prosthetic condition of paint rather than, more broadly, conditions of painting. As the essays developed, it became more apparent that to limit the discussion to paint alone would be to involve this conversation predominantly in a material condition of painting. This seemed limiting on several levels, in that I wanted to bring issues of materiality into a conversation with issues around subjectivity. I also wanted these essays to be conducting their work on the page, so as not to make a case directly for my studio practice.

The following chapters unfolded as sites, as cultural crossroads that the herm silently presides over and works upon. The herm, much like the Oulipoian lipogram and Calvino's 'Consistency', does its work out of sight. In being brought to the work of artists such as Orlan and Lynda Benglis, not only does the herm attempt a revision of their work but they, in turn, leave their own impression for the provision of future projects. 'Fallen Paint', the first of four interlacing essays, is a mapping of ideas that apply to the early work of Lynda Benglis. What follows is the intersection of two types of research that are grafted together silently by what I had undertaken before. The first is a plotted history of prosthetics within aspects of a feminist literature that has addressed the body as other, relational and incomplete. This occurs alongside a consideration of Catherine Ott and Vivian Sobchack's work within material-cultural studies, as Ott examines the production of prosthetic devices for war veterans and for Sobchack herself, as a wearer of prosthetics. These two sites are adjoined and overlapped by more speculative accounts of the prosthetic that see an opportunity to conjecture about the limits of the human and its potential to be other. I had initially set out to research a prosthetic condition of painting in this more speculative manner. However, as the writing began to take form, I understood that to write anything about painting in this way was also to account for how bodies played their part in painting's more recent narratives. The second chapter, 'Boston Elbow', explores the critique of more speculative theories of prosthetics from writers such as Marquard Smith and Vivian Sobchack, who write at the intersection of disability studies and cultural theory. Their views have informed this work in that prior thinkers such as Elisabeth Grosz and Roland Barthes use the prosthetic in a poetic mode that does not account for the material, historical and social dimension of prosthetic devices. Furthermore, these more speculative accounts do not take any interest in how medical and cosmetic prosthetics both enable and obfuscate bodily

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[17] John D'Agata, *The Lost Origins of the Essay* (Saint Paul, Minnesota: Graywolf Press, 2009), p. 4.

[18] Theodor Adorno, 'The Essay as Form', *New German Critique*, No. 32 (Spring–Summer, 1984), pp. 151–171 (p. 170).

issues of normalcy and deformity. I conclude by using Catherine Malabou's notion of plasticity as a bridge to combine material and speculative accounts in the work of Lynda Benglis. The herm presides over Benglis's work as an intersection between material and poetic accounts of the prosthetic, and transforms her work from a body or corpus to that of a generative exercise.

The last two chapters, 'Fête Galante' and 'Imi', address varying conditions of the prosthetic, both from a material-cultural perspective and through its impact on the relationship between artist and art object. This conjunction of ideas – between a social and medical history of prosthetics and issues of artistic agency – is conveyed by locating pockets of production in painting historically. I consider the cosmetic nature of paintings by François Boucher and link Boucher's work to Caravaggio's *The Incredulity of St Thomas*. Both painters are interwoven through the surgical performances of Orlan in a consideration of cosmetics and cosmology as twinned and adjoining elements, in seeing the body as extended through silicone implants, the make-up vial and wounds. Through this process, I interpret Orlan's surgical performances as a visceral *fête galante* that gives form to Michel Serres's observation that nothing goes deeper than adornment. 'Imi' looks initially to the legacy of Joseph Beuys within the work of Imi Knoebel, moving over ideas and historical figures with the herm beside me, through which a reciprocal transformation occurs. This sense of reciprocity is clearly indebted to Malabou's ideas about plasticity and the manner in which an object is capable of giving and receiving form. From this point, I undertake a moulding of Knoebel's *Raum 19* around its generative capacity, not as a site or installation but rather a rule and measure through which it addresses painting historically. I locate this capacity partially through Beuys' German romantic cosmology and through a consideration of Paul hills' essay on the history of the veil in European painting. Hills helps facilitate a turn from from Beuys and Kasmir Malevich to the potential of, to use D'Agata's words, new shapes.

The relationship of this work to my studio practice is only explicit through the image of one work, repeated throughout this text. I wanted this image to be a marker that has the ability to absorb the content of these essays whilst casting some of its own qualities upon them. Even this decision might appear forced, but some level of exposition outside of this introduction needs to be undertaken in order to make clear what has been attempted and finally achieved. The studio practice, which needs to be taken in consideration with this written work, is the material response to what occurs within the essays. The paintings and objects are an accounting for a material such as silicone, which resides at the cross-section of speculative philosophies of agency and material-culture and disability studies, which locate silicone socially and historically. These works are to be seen as generative in the sense that a relation to a maker or authorial intention is thus seen as prosthetic — of bodies that are undefined and malleable, plastic, and to the relation of artist to object as a site where meaning is generated. This latter aspect has been a site of some obstinacy and reward, in that the question of the relation of artist to artwork is itself generative of content. The twinned journey of the herm and prosthetics have generated a third space — that they exist to facilitate and mediate written work and studio practice — in seeing this prosthetic condition of

painting as enmeshed culturally and inextricably though filmic special effects, sex toys and cosmetic implants. Much like Calvino's adoption of Perseus' mirrored shield as a way of relating to the word, a prosthetic condition of painting is an indirect approach to viewing bodies not as objects but as bodies-yet-to-be.

These essays, in their early stages in particular, have groaned under the heavy-handed intimacy of the first person singular and so, a little more than a year ago, I revised the work through a pronoun that better fits the work at hand. The preference of 'we', as a relational form of self-address, has benefited from clarity of use though Judith Butler's ethical understanding of self-through-other in her late work, *Giving An Account of Oneself*. In the opening chapter, Butler claims that an authorial *I* 'has no story of its own that is not also a theory of relation – or set of relations – to a set of norms.'[19] Butler understands 'other' through a decidedly Hegelian lens that sees self-constitution through our relationship to others.[20] Her questioning of a pervasive *I* is not only a consideration of oneself relationally through other agencies but also a provisional marker of uncertainty around a sovereign and atomistic self. As my essays progressed, 'we' seemed to work with a voice that was not so much the assumption of an audience but the acknowledgement of potential other selves in the writing. It held a capacity for change and for relations of objects to exist without the dominance of an assumed single or fixed perspective. I have also used this manner of address to avoid the burden of memoir or diaristic narrative, to which the works of Chris Krauss and Wayne Kostenbaum, among others, have carved a path far more accomplished and erudite than I could hope to achieve here. The use of a collective pronoun has allowed me to see the relational as a form of address through which the prosthetic functions, in the sense that the prosthetic concerns itself with issues of relation. It is no coincidence that Butler turns to Foucault's late ideas concerning self-cultivation, as both thinkers are fundamentally interested — with the spectre of Hegel in the background — in pulling the proverbial rug out from under a self posited as a foundational object.[21] At the time of writing, as this research has come to a close, Butler's account of herself has impacted significantly on the unfolding of pronouns that follows.

Lastly, I want to address an important issue of relation, that of writing to studio practice. Over the course of five years, this aspect of the project has undergone similar revisions in terms of process and juxtaposition. I began by throwing away familiar tricks that had carried me though most of the 2000s, while maintaining the use of silicone as a paint-material. I had initially, as recently as 2009,

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[19] Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), p. 8.

[20] Ibid., pp. 27–28. Butler explains: 'The Hegelian other is always found outside; at least, it is *first* found outside and only later recognised to be constitutive of the subject.' Where Butler diverges from Hegel, and as she later points out, is in her move to maintain otherness and difference as an ethical beholding of the other, rather than its domination and sublimation into self.

[21] Ibid., pp. 22–23.

made floor works that resembled the herm's physical attributes, and so I began to address the herm through its historical interplay of different roles. A significant shift occurred when I understood that thin skins of silicone paint would retain the memory of sculptural forms they had dried upon. The connection of absent forms that guided both writing and painting resonated in much of the work that followed. The essay form as a mode of experimentation, of a stepping into the unknown, had a strong correlation with the performative nature of working with silicone, to explore its material capacities and to also think of it as a social material. I began to understand the material prosthetically in a number of ways that the essays gradually helped bring into view. The manner in which silicone is a bodily implant that serves to enhance appearance and also compensate for body trauma was key to seeing the studio works as flaunting a visceral, visual appeal while also concealing sculptural form. Expanded ideas of painting were here supplanted by ideas of normalcy, wholeness and fragmentation, and of paint-material as an element that performed enhancement, concealment and replacement. This was given more nuance with the later introduction of digital images, screen-printed onto the surfaces of silicone skins. I saw my studio practice as taking flight across different modes of production — digital image to silkscreen, flat-bed glass to silicone skin (where the transfer process occurs), skin to vertical polystyrene armature. Each phase was not only a transition but a distortion and memory of what went before. The final result was more a resting place for a conjunction of processes that, much like Orlan's performances, sought to ask questions about their relations, and an entwining of interiors and exteriors. These questions of relation revolve around prosthetic actions that adjoin, supplant, remove, add, conceal, enhance and place objects with, in and for each other.

In many ways, the herm has become a mediator between my writing and studio practice, and the difference in their relationship to the herm is one of reciprocity. In this sense, both Foucault and Hadot have enabled me to see that the essays and silicone paintings, screen prints and found objects, are all practices that simply have different reciprocities to a set of concerns that were emergent. Much like the reciprocal influence that Malabou sees in plasticity, the essays and studio practice have had a malleability where they have left impressions upon each other, but without any persistent consistency. I have found, much to my frustration, that I have not been able to write during the same time period and space as I make work in the studio, and so what has unfolded is a dialogue whereby periods in the studio have followed extended periods of writing. One set of activities is a reflection upon another, over a period of years, whereby the project has been constructed out of a collective dialogue. I have come to see these differing exercises as constitutive of a unified practice with moving and mutable parts. From this perspective, I have shifted my own work and ideas from an often constrictive and prescribed field of expanded practice to a more volatile and unsure place where the prosthetic burrows itself into relation, home to these moving parts.

Fig.1

Considering the Herm

Histories of Herm Sculpture

*I would say that the moment an object appears in a narrative, it is
charged with a special force and becomes like a pole in a magnetic
field, a knot in the network of invisible relationships.*

— Italo Calvino, *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*

In Athens in the fifth century B.C., a herm was a sculptural object made from stone or marble and crafted into a thin quadrangular column upon which the head of Hermes and other Greek deities rested.[22] Male genitalia adorned their mid-section, underlining Hermes' minor role as a fertility god, echoing the overall verticality of the herm as a phallic structure.[23] These semi-anthropomorphic pillars were once reputedly desecrated by the Greek general and statesman Alcibiades, leading to his eventual departure from the city state. Despite doubt as to whether Alcibiades had actually committed the crime, what remains clear is the kind of violation enacted upon these sacred objects, their faces and genitals having been found mutilated throughout Athens.[24] This historical emasculation connects the herm's anthropomorphism to violent acts of erasure and defacement, for as much as they relate to a human body via face and phallus, their movement between virility and castration emphasises them as objects of transition. This connects as much to their function as boundary markers – often found at crossroads and on thresholds – as it does to their relationship with Hermes, translator of Delphic messages and a god of journey.[25] Mutability is found in the figure of Alcibiades himself, a divisive character who challenged normative modes of Athenian political power and sexuality.[26] Alcibiades and herms are associated with the phallus and male potency but embrace the feminine through Hermes' association with

[22] Goldman. op. cit., pp. 58–68. See also Josephine C. Quinn, op. cit., pp. 82–105.

[23] Kerényi. op. cit, p. 118. See also Victoria Wohl, 'The Eros of Alcibiades', *Classical Antiquity*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (1999), pp.349–385.

[24] Quinn, op. cit., p. 82.

[25] Kerényi. op. cit., p. 46.

[26] Wohl. op. cit., p. 365; Josephine C. Quinn, op. cit., p.82. Wohl details the mutability of Alcibiades' character and the challenges he posed to Athenian culture, framed through the mutilation of the Athenian herms.

goddesses in Greek mythology and the wearing of make-up and women's clothes in Plutarch's account of Alcibiades' death.[27] The herms's gender is familiar yet unfixed when looked at through this early narrative lens.[28] As much as we can recognise the simplified form of column, phallus and face, its history proves that such physical features mark a journey of political turmoil and cultural mutability.

Transition is found throughout the herm's history, yet its etymological origins describe an inert, lumpen and primal form. Initially, 'herm' finds meaning as a solid mass of stones (*herma*), often placed on top of each other to mark a provisional or rudimentary grave.[29] From *herma* emerges Hermes' name as transporter of souls, forming a close connection between god and funeral stone.[30] A grave marked by an accretion of rocks becomes a site of transition, from corporeal world to afterlife, indicating the herm's twofold function as physical marker and spiritual juncture. The contrast between inert mass and spiritual transport is perhaps where herms find their most profound connectedness to the god – at once a monument to a life lived and the intersection of a soul's departure, a transition counterpoised by the stillness and simplicity of its physical form. The Ancient Greek word *hermeneia*, meaning 'explanation', also corresponds to the name of the god and connects phonetically with the Latin word *sermo,* or 'speech'.[31] The relationship of death to silence, speech to the effervescent breath of life or *pneuma*, is precisely the type of threshold that these archaic sculptures would cross, yet Hermes' role as a translator of Delphic messages and transporter of souls details not just a movement between speech and silence but also between memory and forgetting.[32] The god's mnemonic and amnestic movements are intricately interwoven across different cultures and languages.[33] One instance is the mnemonic art of Simonides of Ceos – author of *Method of Loci* – who identified buried Greek statesmen by remembering their location before a building's collapse.[34] Voltaire's short story *The Adventure of Memory* is a playful attack on the Enlightenment rationalism prevalent at the Sorbonne in 18th-century France.[35] More recently, in

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[27] Kerényi. op. cit., pp. 115–117; Wohl, op. cit., p. 369.

[28] Wohl. op.cit., pp. 365–366. Wohl again explores the nature of Alcibiades' feminine and exotic qualities within Athenian culture, detailing his embodiment of different gender identities and his status as an object of sexual attention.

[29] Goldman. op. cit., p. 58; Kerényi, op. cit., p.119. See also Walter Burkert, *Structure and History in Greek Mythology and Ritual* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1979), p. 41.

[30] Goldman. op. cit., p. 58.

[31] Kerényi. op. cit., p. 145.

[32] Burkert. *Structure and History in Greek Mythology and Ritual*. op. cit., p. 41; Kerényi, op. cit., p. 48.

[33] Harald Weinrich. *Lethe: The Art & Critique of Forgetting*, trans. Steven Rendall (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1997), p. 27.

[34] Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (London: University of Chicago Press, 2004), p. 62.

[35] Weinrich, op. cit., p. 62.

Los Angeles, Norman Klein details the operation of baroque spaces in contemporary culture, from the Las Vegas Strip to supermarkets. What Klein calls 'scripted spaces' are threaded through a history of the baroque as a dilation of time and depend upon a conflation of fiction and reality.[36] We become absorbed and entangled in our sensory experience of such spaces, subjects within and subjected to scripted environments that depend upon the visceral disruption of memory in order to function.[37] Much like the magic of Penn and Teller, a long-standing Las Vegas double act, the Eiffel Tower experience of the Las Vegas Strip offers a dazzling experience of a blatantly faux structure. Here, distraction suspends memory, forming a baroque partnership with present sensory experience. This too could be applied, as Klein has also observed, to a city like Los Angeles, where cultural amnesia is essential to a place where people constantly attempt to remake, rebrand and remodel upon the rubble of an immediate yet often forgotten past.

The historical entanglements of memory and forgetting fall heavily in favour of memory as constitutive of a fully formed ethical subject. Yet forgetting persists – there is a memory of forgetting that underlines this ethical narrative. Klein's scripted spaces talk of the importance of forgetting in order for *scripted* spaces to function. Voltaire's characters only learn the value of memory through the experience of mnemonic aporia – when society descends into chaos and caprice due to memory's subtraction. In short, we learn through the memory of forgetting and the historical consequences of its persistence. Paul Ricoeur considers whether what he calls a *lethatechnique* can have an equivalent status to the more dominant valorisation of an *ars memoriae,*[38] and whether a technique of forgetting can have some cultural significance beyond its often negative pairing with an art of memory. Ricoeur proposes several possibilities, including that of being carefree, playful and unaccountable for the weight of both history and memory.[39] This liberation from care connects to the frivolity and trickery held within the Hermes narrative. A *lethatechnique* would be one aspect of a narrative of being carefree and of language as an undoing of itself. Klein creates a glossary on forgetting as an accompaniment to his book on Los Angeles.[40] Such attempts to consider the dark side of memory are in key with Klein's overall project of locating his prose – much like the subject of LA – somewhere between factual historiography and noir fiction.

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[36] Norman M. Klein, *The Vatican to Vegas: A History of Special Effects* (New York: The New Press, 2004), p. 11.

[37] Norman M. Klein, *The History of Forgetting: Los Angeles and the Erasure of Memory* (London: Verso, 1997), p. 13.

[38] Ricoeur. op. cit., p. 504. See also Frances A. Yates, *The Art Of Memory*, 15th edn. (London: Random House, 2014).

[39] Ricoeur, op. cit., p. 506.

[40] Klein. *The History of Forgetting: Los Angeles and the Erasure of Memory*. op.cit., pp. 301–12. Klein covers in some detail a wider historical narrative of the uses and places of forgetting across Western culture, particularly in the Romantic period, where ruination and forgetting form an attraction for artists and thinkers such as Shelley and Schelling. See also Brian Dillon, ed., *Ruins* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2011).

Of a distinctly different tone to Klein's offering but published in the same year is Harald Weinrich's *Lethe: The Art & Critique of Forgetting*. Another project could gain insight from the relative differences and commonalities between these two dedications to an *ars oblivionis*.[41] For the purpose and function of the herm, we can look to Ricoeur's idea of a *lethatechnique* as a mediator between Weinrich and Klein, in particular their treatment of forgetting and its relationship to memory. We might see a herm presiding over various mnemonic and amnestic junctures in order to describe the manner of their touching and means of connection. If Klein sees their association through notions of disruption and displacement – that to remember one thing is to displace and forget another[42] – then Weinrich sees their correlation as one of rebirth and renewal.[43] While both pertain to the mechanics of thought, they also hint at the spatialisation of thinking and its dissolution. For Klein, displacement and disruption are located in relation to Los Angeles; Weinrich's thought finds its location and articulation through the mythical Greek river Lethe. Between them, disruption and displacement give rise to Lethe as a birthing of thought, and so a 'lethe-technique' is here transformed from Ricoeur's understanding of forgetting as being carefree, to a process through which a transformation of self can occur. Lines of transparency and obfuscation work with and against each other, to an opening of narrative through erosion. The carefree nature that forgetting induces is the forging of new identities and the banishment of pain and loss that the course of a life may carry. Here, the herm carries a circularity, continually displacing and disrupting one memory with another, giving rise to new thoughts through the recession and suppression of others. This can be seen in the herm's historical narrative of erect masculinity, one which is interwoven with, and made potent through, the very ruination of that power, its eventual emasculation. A cartography of male sex extends to the boundaries between towns and of speech acts that are silenced. In short, we come to a provisional hermeneutics of the herm, its function reaching beyond the sculpted representation of face and male sex, encompassing ideas of ritual, spatial marking and interpretation.

Herms were apotropaic objects – of magic and ritual – touched at crossroads, protectors of harvests and symbols of fertility.[44] A route to their apotropaic function is given through accounts of early herms or proto-herms as being made provisionally from wood, upon which garments and masks were hung.[45] These adornments were used in rites of passage and harvest rituals, among others.[46] The herm is an object that heralds transition in that an essential aspect of ritual is its capacity to

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[41] Ricoeur, op. cit., p. 68; Weinrich, op. cit., p. 12.

[42] Klein. *The History of Forgetting: Los Angeles and the Erasure of Memory*. op cit., p. 13.

[43] Weinrich., op. cit., p. 6.

[44] Goldman, op. cit., p. 61; Burkert. *Structure and History in Greek Mythology and Ritual*. op. cit., p. 40.

[45] Goldman, op. cit., p. 67.

[46] Burkert, op. cit., p. 23.

induce change. In calendric ritual – a re-enactment undertaken at specific times of the year – the very form of the ritual changes over time.[47] There is a strong correlation between the purpose of ritual (transformation) and the gradual change within its iterative form, albeit through different temporalities. While ritual might mark the passing of a soul from the corporeal world to the afterlife, or the passage from childhood to adulthood, for example, its own structural movement occurs over a longer time frame. In this sense, the original function or purpose of a ritual act may be completely lost on those that perform it.[48] This motion of change over generations of people is embedded in ritual – the transition of meaning through a gradual mutation of its original form – and is reflected in the changing function of the herm itself, from substructure used in ritual to object found outside the entrances to Athenian family homes.[49] This erosion of antecedent meaning is intrinsic to its status in being simultaneously moving and unmoving, an apparent contradiction implied through repetition. The contradiction inherent within repetition lies at the centre of its apotropaic function by both inviting and repelling touch. A phallus that is touched becomes appendage and dagger — the narrative of Herakles breaking off a horn from the bull-like Acheloos is particularly seductive in transforming the horn, as an object used in war and associated with death, into a hollow vessel that overflows with flowers and fruit.[50] Ritual is a process that both engages in and undergoes transition. These distinctions articulate not only the quality of an object but the nature of its effects,[51] as ritual is set aside from, and yet becomes capable of transforming, everyday life. These qualities can take form before the introduction of myth as such, with a history of ritual largely preceding the advent of speech.[52] The animal nature of ritual serves as a foundation for the inherently linguistic nature of myth and that of narratives written and spoken.[53] If the herm can be transposed upon this history, one that is formative of its own historical evolution, then a ruined phallus could preside over the juncture between an animalistic cry or howl and its development into spoken language. The movement of a body transitions from one that is impulsive and spontaneous to an orchestrated choreography – the learned and repeated movements of calendric ritual.

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[47] Marcus Joyce, 'Rethinking Ritual', in *The Archaeology of Ritual*, ed. Evangelos Kyriakidis (California: The Cotsen Institute of Archaeology Press, 2007), p. 44.

[48] Walter Burkert, *Homo Necans: The Anthropology of Ancient Greek Sacrificial Ritual and Myth*, trans. Peter Bing, 3rd edn. (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1983), p. 27.

[49] John Winkler, 'Representing the Body Politic: The Theater of Manhood in Classical Athens', *Perspecta*, Vol. 26, Theater, Theatricality, and Architecture (1990), pp. 223.

[50] Burkert. *Structure and History in Greek Mythology and Ritual*. op cit., p.72.

[51] Ibid., p. 23.

[52] Ibid., pp. 30–31. See also Giorgio Agamben, *Infancy and History: On the Destruction of Experience*, trans. Liz Heron (London and New York: Verso, 2007), pp. 68–69. Like Burkert, Agamben acknowledges the inherently semiotic and linguistic nature of myth through an account of Claude Lévi-Strauss's research.

[53] Burkert. *Homo Necans*. op. cit., pp.28–29.

In the history of ritual, there is a distinction between sacred and profane time, marking an important difference between the time of mortals and the time of gods.[54] Sacred time is a disruption of the profane, a means of changing the everyday or familiar. The herm stands as a marker for both temporalities, itself changing over generations and communities of people, from wood to stone or marble, garment-draped substructure to boundary marker. A herm's involvement *in* ritual would be to situate it within the sacred, in a wholly different temporality to the passing of a herm at a crossroads or threshold. Within a sense of the divine, it is masked and clothed – the herm plays dress-up. It may be asked to adopt or perform different roles or identities depending on the kind of ritual that is being performed – in this sense the herm is shifting, echoing the nature of ritual as a form of cultural transformation. Within profane space, a quotidian kind of marking is enacted in that people pass by the herm, giving it less attention, especially as it becomes an adornment outside the homes of wealthy Athenian families. Between these temporalities there is a change of emphasis in both motion and attention. The former places a fixed or central attention on an object whose identity is mutable; the latter sees the motion of the viewer as transitory and the mode of attention as fleeting. These qualities of attention and participation are the kinds of transition that Hermes would traverse as part of a greater, unified mode of viewership. Sacred time and profane time are part of a composite that reflects shared but contrasting qualities. By association the herm, too, becomes a provisional object, beyond marble and wood, that crosses these spaces. In a sense this is the construction of one operation that the herm can structurally preside over – a conjunction of the profane and the sacred. We encounter the coexistence of the mutability of an object and the mutability of subjects; beholder and beheld circle each, forming movements of mutable attention.

The adornment of early herms is significant in relation to the purpose and function of masks, from their use on herms and in Greek ritual and theatre.[55] If the juncture (and overlapping) of the sacred and the profane is one compositional aspect of the herm, then the shift from communal to individual is perhaps the beginning of another aspect of its composition. Both face and mask find a connection in the Greek word *prosopon*, signifying as face, mask and persona.[56] This melding is contained within a shared etymology of words that are often viewed as antithetical to each other; the opposition of face to mask contains a narrative of transparency and concealment – we *face* others or *mask* ourselves from them. A prosopon is formative of identity in one sense and a form of concealment in another, yet they needn't be contradictory as such. The covering of a face could be an act that allows a liberation for the identity of the mask-wearer, a freedom from the gaze of others. This ritualistic moment of not knowing the mask-wearer, and of not being identified, enables a condition or state whereby the prosopon creates an unstable identity, unfixed and volatile. The use of masks in this sense demonstrates the inherent malleability of the prosopon, through

[54] Joyce., op. cit., p. 44.

[55] Goldman., op. cit., p. 67. See also Robin Osborne, *Athens and Athenian Democracy* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 348.

[56] A. David Napier, *Masks, Transformation, and Paradox* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1987), p. 8.

participation in ritual, inducing a change of identity and meaning.[57] This mutability can be traced in the formation of an early mask, where linen or cloth was drenched in plaster and placed over a sculpted form to create the final mask-object.[58] The combining of face and mask via persona could be a way of articulating the manner in which the communal and the individual are set to work both with and against each other. Through the porous nature of a prosopon and its connection to herms, wearing a mask becomes a way of escaping the gaze of the communal – of an individual's place within a communal order – while being simultaneously constitutive of self-formation. This quality rests within sacred time, participating in group ritual yet remaining outside the wider community or demos. This mask is a way of restructuring one's place and identity within a group and thus within the wider culture. The profane mask, one that is in and amid the demos, is that of the face itself. This face, akin to the herm at the threshold or boundary, is a place-marker for others to see and locate within a cultural fabric. The thresholds of prosopons connect ritual space to profane space, providing communal fixity and belonging through processes of instability and change. These exchanges are congruent with more recent historical narratives, specifically Vilém Flusser's contrasting ideas of magical and historical consciousness in relation to the photographic production of images.[59] The apotropaic (magic) time of the subject is given priority, and is, interestingly, one that Flusser sees as circular. This circular sense of time corresponds to the repetitive nature of ritual and is a means whereby subjects relate to, and make sense of, the world.[60] Flusser's polemic is reserved for the linear quality of historical consciousness – where images work against the relation between subject and world in order to *produce* subjectivities. This observation can be thought of as profane roadside boundary marker. The herm, in marking a specific space, also locates the passing subject – it produces that space as subject. This interchange of temporalities, durations and qualities gives the prosopon a dynamic and multivalent purpose, and creates another object that can once more be absorbed into the function and operation of a herm. It marks transition yet it also undergoes transition. The nature and duration of these interchanges will be partially formative of a subject.

The transition from early, provisional herm to boundary marker is one that is embedded in ritual but moves more overtly to spatial marking and territory in Alcibiades' Athens.[61] The shift from the apotropaic to something that mediates between city and village was a slow transition and one that was not necessarily sequential – herms could still have been used in sacrifice and as spatial markers

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[57] Ibid., pp. 41–42.

[58] Walter Sorell, *The Other Face: Mask in the Arts* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1974), p. 50. See also Thanos Vovolis, 'Prosopon: The Acoustical Mask in Greek Tragedy and in Contemporary Theatre', *Dramatic Institute, Stockholm*, Vol. 5 (2009), p. 31.

[59] Vilém Flusser, *Towards a Philosophy of Photography*, trans. Anthony Mathews, 6th edn. (London: Reaktion Books, 2010), p. 50.

[60] Ibid., p. 9.

[61] Goldman, op. cit., p. 60; Quinn., op. cit., p. 91.

in fifth-century-BC Athens.[62] Hermes enables a journey within which words and language are shapeshifters, chameleons and tricksters. We are subject to the fragility and aggression of their restlessness. Kerényi's rich exposition and evident admiration of Hermes in particular serves as a tool to consider the herm's spatial qualities. His understanding of journey as a site or mode of being – as opposed to being merely a movement between two or more fixed coordinates – is important.[63] Journey becomes a world in itself, through which Hermes finds and defines his place. The herm becomes a provisional marker that oversees or even orchestrates movement – the overlapping and touching of materials, ideas and histories as they pass through each other.

The stillness of roadside herms, perhaps more than anything else, emphasises the mobility and temporality of people that pass between villages and cities. Journey as a quality designates herms as marking people *in* their passing, raising an awareness of political powers that locate people in a given community – as subjects entangled in the political anatomy of their culture.[64] This entanglement can be understood via the ancient desecration of herms as a matter of destabilisation. As phallus and face fall to a proverbial floor, their previously unified verticality becomes a fragmented landscape. Figuring the toppled herm is useful in that it can be an opportunity for construction. 'Body' is understood here as 'body politic' but also quite literally as that of a corporeal, individual body, specific to a time and place, desiring to act outside the body politic as such. How does the herm aid movements to transform its initial function of locating and naming? If Hermes is, among many other things, a god of subterfuge, then a kind of trickery is needed in order to transform and relocate the passer-by in both a broader landscape and within the specificity of their experience.[65]

In 'An Essay on the Destruction of Experience', Giorgio Agamben explores the value of quest as an experiential aporia – etymologically speaking, the 'absence of a road or path'.[66] If this destruction of roads is a conflation of knowledge and space – once more, Simonides comes to mind – then such ruination is for the sake of a subject's experience, as Agamben has observed. The fallen herm is a coming to light of aporia, for the sake of the entangled anatomy of passers-by. This works for the fallen parts of an object as a means of reorganising and disrupting the path that it presides over. The desecrated herm joins such paths and displaces movement and experience. Here,

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[62] Goldman, op. cit., p. 61. Goldman refers to the only existing evidence – Greek vase painting – that remains of early herms being adorned, draped and used in ritual, but the exact date and time of these early, wooden herms remains vague.

[63] Kerényi, op. cit., p. 46.

[64] Winkler, op. cit., p. 221. Winkler provides a further conflation of anatomy and politics, detailing the politicisation of the male body in Athens as being inscribed by class and status.

[65] William Furley, 'The Mutilation of the Herms', *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies*, 41 (2011), p. 13–30.

[66] Agamben. op.cit., pp.32–33.

Adorno's dictum that the quality of thought is measured by its distance from the familiar finds new ground, and so the herm is set to inform such distances for experience and thought.[67] What is important with regards to revised method of loci is not so much method as aporia. An aporetic locus returns us to forgetting and to Ricoeur's *carefree* play of an *ars oblivionis*. The herm treats care with an abandon that only a trickster can afford. In its state of fragmentation and horizontality comes an abundance of parts, to be gathered and assembled to form another kind of object, for its effects upon subjects.

Herms bore ethical and spatial inscriptions that were engraved upon their surfaces.[68] The act of inscription itself sets them aside from singularly sculptural qualities, herms being both spatial markers and objects marked by language. This kind of inscription pertains largely to the divine in being carried out on an object that depicts the face of gods.[69] Carrying and being marked by language, the herm brings to attention the manner in which language is held and used. 'Held' is meant here in the literal, physical sense of the word, but also figuratively in terms of how language is put to use and affects us. Language's touch speaks of words that can be activated through, and act upon, objects and people. Hermes is responsible for amnestic carriage and celestial messages, yet his varying role in these movements is highlighted by the stark differences between spatial and ethical engraving. Herms mediate us not only in physical space but also within an ethical topography, one that cannot be separated from an awareness of being at a crossroads, threshold or boundary. These inscriptions become fluid when brought once more to the Greek prosopon. Face and mask merge within the performative nature of persona, which, like the herm, is a forming or place of passage – a durational process where things come into being or come to light. This lightness is also complicit with a kind of play that forgetting induces, yet its orchestration is never far removed from Voltaire's morality play whereby chaos and carnality are never too far away.

In Plato's *Cratylus,* Socrates gives insight into the name of Hermes, offering an understanding of the god both as an interpreter of divine language and as a celestial trickster.[70] Here, language can be understood much like an armature, which moulds words as obfuscators and carriers of meaning. The sense of opacity that Hermes holds might provide a path to truth, through a recognition of trickery and deception. Such an understanding provides a reading of Plato's *Cratylus*, one that is embodied in Socrates and his varying etymological fabrications.[71] The pedagogical function of Socrates is best seen through his account of *aletheia* – the Greek word for 'truth' – as a divine

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[67] Butler. op.cit., p. 3.

[68] Burkert, *The Anthropology of Ancient Greek Sacrificial Ritual and Myth*. op. cit., p. 40; Quinn, op. cit., p. 94.

[69] Osborne, op. cit., p. 347.

[70] Plato, *Cratylus*, trans. C. D. C. Reeve (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1998), p. 43.

[71] Plato. op. cit., p. 43.

wandering ('ale-theia').[72] This playful turn corresponds not to the etymology of *aletheia* but to that of Hermes himself. Throughout the *Cratylus,* Plato offers amusing falsehoods of varying credibility as a means to lead Hermogenes to a realisation of doubt in the nature, function and origin of names. The value of this doubt rests within the relationship of mutability to names, one that sees no contradiction between words that are put to use in order to conceal and mask and others that set out to create transparency and clarity. Importantly, through the conjunction of these ideas a further movement is given – the recognition of trickery as forming a path to truth itself. If *aletheia* contains unconcealedness and forgetting, the river Lethe here is also a means of self-realisation. The nature of Socrates' narrative is both truth and trickery at play for the sake of each other, and their modes of deception and revelation are always shifting. The focus is not the distinction between clarity and obfuscation, but the movement or sets of moves that enable such a transition in the first instance. The fallen parts of a herm encounter the interstices of these ideas.

Rainer Maria Rilke's *Duino Elegies* proposes that our translated world is perhaps one where language creates both alienation and connectedness.[73] The opening elegy describes a triadic relationship between man, animal and angel, wherein the very insertion of language both translates and obscures a world that is anterior to the formation of words and speech. Between the celestial and the animal is language – a surrogate for what stands as human – from which one aspect of humanity is constructed and translated. As Jean-Luc Nancy has suggested in his interpretation of Hegel, this movement is a kind of restlessness where thought has already begun.[74] We might situate language, like thought, as intrinsic to a process of self-realisation, yet one that is ultimately irrecoverable and opaque to us. In the Hegel encountered through Nancy, a trembling is the restless quality of thought itself, a dismantling of dialectic in order to stay within the turbulence of a negative force. In a sense, the inadequacy of language to encompass a totality of lived experience, is the very means of its perpetual attempt to do so.

The dominant image of a herm as an erect, vertical structure will shift to encounter narratives of desecration, encompassing the fallen herm. Although not necessarily toppled, their castration and facial debasement has been suggestive of a place marker that can no longer function in the role. A toppled herm is an intentional political desecration of sorts, a cultural emasculation of its powerful phallus-like form. The mutilation of genitals and faces is of significance in that it restructures an

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[72] Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), p. 36; Plato, op. cit., p. 64. Heidegger's interpretation of *aletheia* as *unconcealedness* is a key idea in the discourse of 20th-century phenomenology, particularly as it was put to work in the later poetic essays of Heidegger in its relation to the work of art.

[73] Rainer Maria Rilke, *Duino Elegies and The Sonnets to Orpheus*, trans. A. Poulin Jr. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977), p. 5.

[74] Butler., op. cit., p. 32; Jean-Luc Nancy, *Hegel: The Restlessness of the Negative*, trans. Jason E. Smith and Steven Miller (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), p. 40. Although it is Judith Butler who describes this ecstatic tradition when referring to the work of Adriana Cavarero, Nancy's use of Hegel, particularly the opening pages of his chapter titled 'Trembling', squarely positions Hegel within this tradition, as opposed to the more systematic, totalising approach of Hegel's 20th-century commentator Alexandre Kojève.

address to the bodily, ushering in an estrangement from recognition and familiarity, giving rise to accusations of sexual deviancy, particularly that of Alcibiades, who stood accused of the crime.[75] The Athenian herms, in having their faces and genitals eroded, attempt a repositioning to the body, one in which identity and sex are no longer clear. The significance of this defacement relates to these talismanic signposts destabilising their very own own territory and function. As a horizontal vessel, the herm can no longer be seen; it is stumbled over and upon, blending with the material of its immediate environment. Even though the Athenian hermai were not physically toppled, their sexual and facial scarring acts as a form of cultural collapse, one that allows new relations and considerations to be unearthed.

The Draped Herm of Sardis is a powerful example of a stone face that functions as a support for drapery, its facial support creating a historical loop from the early adornment and masking of herms to their roadside, concrete manifestations. Over time, the boundary between face and drapery is blurred to suggest face as structural support for linen or cloth. Drapery and face blend, their twinned embrace of skin and cloth melding as the Sardis Herm becomes unrecognisable as singularly body or adornment. The Sardis Herm embodies the qualities of a prosopon, whereby flesh and drapery appear indistinguishable. This herm has grown through its own decay – it has become a semi-anthropomorphic object whose bodily qualities are inseparable from that which support it. The face in this instance is also a mask of sorts, such is its deformity. To place a herm over this Sardis form is not of a material nature – it is a procedure that allows thought its restlessness, creating spaces that are conjured from the fabric of such movements.

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[75] Wohl, op. cit., p. 351.

Fig. 2

Georges Perec has explored the lipogram in various forms, with *La Disparition* (*The Disappearance*) appearing in English translation as *A Void,* and with 'History of the Lipogram', a short essay that playfully asserts the aberration and persistence of lipograms throughout literary history.[76] The difference between the two works is quite clear – while 'History of the Lipogram' is a meditation upon the lipogram as a literary form, *A Void* is an embodied practice that demonstrates what can emerge from the exercise itself. The use of literary restraints is not unique to Perec; it is also found across the work of writers associated with Oulipo, some of whom will be discussed in this chapter.[77] The lipogram in particular articulates a restraint of absence by omitting a letter of the alphabet from a text, in Perec's case the vowel 'e' from *A Void*.[78] It is worth pointing out that its history, as retold by Perec, is lipogrammatic in nature also, having been excluded from canons of literature only to reoccur on the fringes. It seems intentional that Perec would have us see this connection where a biography of the lipogram has a correlation with its linguistic function. The interplay between autobiography and text will be explored here and with it the importance of literary restraints as exercises that undertake a form of self-writing and modification.

The connection of absence to notions of erasure is worth considering in terms both of what is erased and of what remains within a work. Perec saw writing as a trace or residue of the corporeal – having lost both parents at a young age, he claims writing as a memory of death and simultaneously an affirmation of life.[79] The question to be posed is then one of intention. What is to be gained from the imposition of literary restraints and how, moreover, do these impositions lead us to places where subjectivity and authorial intention are sufficiently recast to give birth to narratives and subjects that tell us something other than those of familiar custom, culture and visibility? In works such as *A Void* we are aware of words omitted due to the lipogrammatic restraint being imposed; what comes to the fore is a constant awareness of words that never enter the text but are present through sheer occlusion. Perhaps the relationship between absence and erasure is mediated through memory – both function within an order where our memory of an image, object or word has some narrative influence over what is actually in front of us. Through different means, erasure and

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[76] Georges Perec, 'History of the Lipogram', in *Oulipo: A Primer of Potential Literature*, trans. Warren F. Motte Jr (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), p. 98.

[77] Jacques Bens, 'Queneau Oulipoian', in *Oulipo: A Primer of Potential Literature*, trans. Warren F. Motte Jr (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), p. 65. For a detailed account of Oulipo's use and understanding of literary restraints, see Marcel Bénabou, 'Rule and Constraint', in *Oulipo: A Primer for Potential Literature*, trans. Warren F. Motte Jr (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), pp. 40–47.

[78] Motte, op. cit., p. 200. For a list of Oulipo literary restraints, Warren Motte's glossary is extensive: pp. 197–202.

[79] Peter Consenstein, *Literary Memory, Consciousness, and the Group Oulipo* (Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi B.V., 2002), p. 59.

absence hold spectral images, remaining in forms that attempt to carve out their oblivion. If we learn anything from Perec, it is that means are in fact formative of subjects, where we can isolate the lipogram as an absence within the heart of a text. A bodily allusion might help in this respect – consider, for example, the difference between someone born with a missing limb and someone who has had a limb wrenched from their body by disease or accident. Erasure is a gestural wrenching of material from a body it once belonged to, while absence is a more mutable encounter with – to use Perec's translated title – a void. If erasure is located through traces of removal, absence is closer to Perec's understanding of the lipogram as a void that generates material. Alison James observes that the missing vowel 'e' in *A Void* has a phonological correlation with *eux* ('them' in French), with both linguistic loss and corporeal loss (that of Perec's parents) informing each other.[80]

Absence takes on the lipogrammatic value of an action or exercise whose energy is found in this idea of loss, a process where language initially undertakes mourning in order to confirm its own fragile vitality. Perec's essay on the lipogram moves in abbreviated form over a course of history, beginning in the sixth century B.C. He describes a temporary loss of consciousness or feelings of faintness as *lipothymy*, finding a willing partner in the lipogram, as both conjoin through their Greek root, *leipo* ('I leave').[81] The departure within grammar is the absence of the vowel 'e' but it also extends to the omission of a word ('liponymy') in other ventures.[82] If the latter is an extension from letter to word, then lipothymy and the lipogram find extension with a melding of bodily and grammatical absences. The conjunction of erasure and absence around literary and physical bodies serves us well in maintaining an awareness of things that are left out, cut off, separated or hidden. Bodily and linguistic restraints are active as silent guides, generating subplots that have an ability to write script and produce images that manipulate what is before us.

The sense of work to be done, with regard to the possibility or futurity of a text, is inscribed within Perec's affiliation with Oulipo. The literary interventions of this group, which still exists today, albeit with different participants, coalesce around the implementation of literary restraints in the generation of a potential literature. Jean Lescure quotes François Le Lionnais, Oulipo's founder, in making the distinction between two types of literary restraints, which he terms 'lipos': one which remains within literary traditions, seeking only modification, and another kind of potential literature, which looks to generate new readers and authors.[83] This approach to literature is

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[80] Alison James, *Constraining Chance: Georges Perec and the Oulipo* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2009), p. 90. Both Consenstein and James acknowledge the connection of the omitted vowel to loss, with Consenstein quoting Perec directly in understanding language as both life-affirming and deathly. See also Consenstein, op. cit., p. 59.

[81] Perec, op. cit., p. 98.

[82] Ibid., p.107.

[83] Jean Lescure, 'A Brief History of the Oulipo', in *Oulipo: A Primer of Potential Literature*, trans. Warren F. Motte Jr (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), p. 38.

fundamentally structural, where the lipogram is seen as a generative tool from which new forms can emerge. These lipos are not intended to be objects but exercises. As Raymond Queneau has pointed out, potentiality is measured by how literary structures are used and eventually transformed through continued use.[84] Perec's summation of the lipogram as the *constraint degree zero*, through which everything becomes possible, relates to the kind of structural pursuits initially set out by Le Lionnais and Queneau.[85] Perec sees this operation as more objective than subjective, programmatic as opposed to personal. This opposition to the personal, which Queneau would deride as 'inspiration',[86] is accounted for by Warren Motte Jr's distinction between auto-reference and autobiography in Perec's work.[87] Auto-reference is the positioning of the author as a textual element within a narrative and should not be confused with an attempt to account for the kind of subterranean psyche that André Breton had embraced in the earlier part of the 20th century. However, a major influence on Oulipo writers and Breton was Raymond Roussel,[88] with both Perec and Breton shedding light on him from angles different enough to create the impression of a distinct object, a new Roussel, in each case.[89]

With reference to Michel Foucault's text on Roussel, Alison James acknowledges the relationship between chance and anti-chance in Roussel, and the manner in which the Oulipoian project, if one can see it this way, gives voice to the inherent darkness of chance and its harnessing through language. Perec focuses on the means whereby Roussel generates language – his understanding of the procedural – and seems to reject the type of psychological, authorial depths that seduced the earlier enterprises of Breton.[90] Whilst Perec locates his Roussel in the structural operations of how language and literature make subjects possible, Breton was more interested in the manner of subconscious revelation that Roussel's work elicited. In an essay from 1953, Breton reflects upon the nature of surrealism's 'pure psychic automatism', which he sees will 'set up the flow from a spring that one need only go search for fairly deep down within oneself.'[91] While Roussel might have helped facilitate this flow between conscious and subconscious awareness, Perec's

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[84] Ibid.

[85] Perec, op.cit., p. 107.

[86] Lescure, op. cit., p. 38. Queneau refers to a whole inventory of literary forms 'in which the poet may pick and choose, whenever he wishes to escape from that which is called inspiration'.

[87] Motte Jr, *The Poetics of Experiment: A Study of the Work of Georges Perec*, ed. R. C. La Charité and V. A. La Charité (Lexington, Kentucky: French Forum Publishers, 1984), pp. 38–39.

[88] James, op. cit., p.11. Alison James also points to this with an acknowledgement of Breton's *hazard objectif* or 'objective chance' giving access to subconscious thoughts.

[89] Ibid., p. 123.

[90] Becker, op. cit., p. 254. Becker makes a distinction between the surrealists' interest in the visual imagery of Roussel — appealing to their subconscious well of images — and the Oulipoian engagement with Roussel in terms of the productive mode of language.

[91] André Breton, *Manifestos of Surrealism*, trans. Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2010), pp. 298–299.

understanding of language and literary convention denies a recourse to locating an individualised author within a work.

Perec's auto-referential outlook can be seen in other writers associated with the Oulipo project, perhaps most prominently Italo Calvino. The final page of *Six Memos for the Next Millennium* talks about exits, giving hope for a type of work produced outside an individualised conception of self.[92] The intertextual play so typical of Calvino is on display with talk of exits upon the stage of an ending, his final thoughts given not to his own words but to those of Ovid and Lucretius, in their consideration of a more universal and timeless connectivity.[93] Calvino asks us what more we can be than the totality of books we read, of things imagined and combination of experiences accrued over time. He wonders whether our lives can be little more than an inventory of objects, constantly being reorganised and shuffled around, reminding us of Perec's Paris apartment block as we shuffle from page to room, time line and life line. Calvino's quick flight to near and distant histories is emblematic of the type of treatment evidenced throughout the *Memos*; at one point he confesses to a desire to be like Mercury, the Roman incarnation of Hermes.[94] 'Lightness' and 'Quickness' – two of the five extant memos – are, among other things, an indirect attention to the wing-footed god whose allegiance to flight and interpretation have already been noted. Calvino began writing the *Memos* in 1984, with the intention of delivering them at the Charles Eliot Norton lecture series at Harvard University in 1985.[95] Before his departure for the U.S., five memos had been completed. He died of a cerebral haemorrhage before the last memo, 'Consistency', could be written, and all that exists of it today is its intended title.[96] The missing memo permeates the extant corpus, with the book's title a constant reminder of its hanging absence. We have at this moment Perec's bodily and grammatical palindrome, perhaps a better fit with Roussel's world of reanimated bodies and subterranean imagination. It seems particularly easy to spot this corporeal and linguistic conjunction – body and word as absence – within an understanding of the restraint as a form of imposition upon a text, object or body. We can refer to body in a literal and figurative sense — body of work, flesh and bone, hovering between autobiography and Warren Motte's auto-reference. Calvino's death refuses to be limited to either its textual or bodily dimension but is inextricably interwoven with 'Consistency' as it mediates death's persistent inevitability and mystery. His death shuffles the meaning of the memos, negotiating what is put forward as work and a narrative instruction for our lives. This move dilates and extends far beyond the instance of its particular occurrence, embedding itself into the memos that Calvino left behind and readdressing Oulipo's

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[92] Italo Calvino, *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*, trans. Patrick Creagh (London: Vintage, 1996), p. 124.

[93] Ibid.

[94] Ibid., p. 52.

[95] Ibid., p. 1.

[96] Dani Cavallaro, *The Mind of Italo Calvino: A Critical Exploration of his Thought and Writings* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 2010), p. 9.

yearning for a future of literature beyond the tyranny of inspiration. This readdressing is found in the fuzziness of 'Consistency' — it is not a hard, linguistic restraint like the lipogram; its edges and contours are not fully delineated. In this sense, 'Consistency' is a soft restraint, something potential — one in waiting, looking for a form to inhabit and within which it finds work. It did not assume that its conditions of use would emerge through a host whose absence it is indebted to.

A preamble to its work exists in Harry Mathews's *The Orchard*, written in the months following Perec's death in 1982.[97] *The Orchard* is several things at once – a literary exercise (almost every paragraph begins with the same two words) and a poignant collection of memories that form a fractured portrait of author and subject. As Mathews's memories gather momentum, the portrait is neither fully of him nor of Perec; instead, it is an interpersonal, relational collage that ultimately moves beyond both of them. Mathews, who was also a member of Oulipo, sees a relationship between the repetition of the words *I remember* and the irrecoverable loss at the centre of its project. As the lipogram relentlessly conducts its act of omission, a double vision occurs that entails an awareness of what is omitted and, simultaneously, the realisation of another object being created in the process. Peter Consenstein has explored this at length, giving some depth to the notion that Oulipo members were not concerned with transcending history in so much as they were trying to reorder it through mnemonic games that incorporated literary restraints and repetition.[98] Mathews undertakes a literary exercise that is fundamentally transformative of the *I* that speaks and that of the subject depicted. Consenstein's quotation of Perec — that writing operates at a crossroads between memories of death and affirmations of a writers's life — help us see the perpetual recession of writing's subject, both within itself and from objects outside it. Perec would see these literary transformations within writing as a just reward, not only to affirm the élan of the page but to undertake its impossible task — an *écriture* of death.[99]

Mathews's short narrative serves as a template for considering 'Consistency' as more than simply an unwritten chapter or missing memo. The operation of the memo as a mode of remembrance is directly related to the repetition at the heart of Mathews's memorial to Perec and suggests that through repetition a kind of mourning is exercised. Looking back over Calvino's extant work, 'Consistency' then exercises its own vision, one inextricably linked to death and absence as the seeking out of consistent ideas, themes and subjects throughout Calvino's broader project. In many of Calvino's memos, he sees the opposite of a quality as intrinsic to its nature, and so setting up a conversation about lightness could not be achieved without consideration of writing that has weight and density.[100] The exercise of writing is to rid work of its own deathly, lumpen origins, yet it is a

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[97] Harry Mathews, *The Orchard: A Remembrance of Georges Perec* (Flint, Michigan: Bamberger Books, 1988), p. 1.

[98] Consenstein, op. cit., p. 19.

[99] Ibid., p. 59.

[100] Calvino, op. cit., p. 3.

volatile task, hiding under a constructed edifice that might convincingly promote lightness yet harbour the opposite in its depths. 'Consistency' is on the lookout for connections, trying its best to remember, blotting out some narratives while promoting others. It is a thread that moves through stories and ideas, and in Calvino's *Memos* weaves anew the literary qualities he holds dear. To place 'Consistency' within the genre of 'memento mori' speaks of its deathly character while summoning an art of mnemonics that Mathews's *The Orchard* elicits. Never far from corporeal fragility is the text itself, kept alive through iterations that seek different stories. As Calvino has written through the avatar of a fictive reader, 'The ultimate meaning to which all stories refer has two faces: the continuity of life, the inevitability of death.'[101] 'Consistency' becomes a Janus-faced exercise that seeks the life of stories while at the same time undoing them. A parallel occurs between 'Consistency' and Mathews' *The Orchard* in that both shift from a corpus of ideas to an example of literary exercises.

To accompany Mathews's memento mori is Calvino's retelling of Perseus and the Gorgon, focusing on the mirrored shield of Perseus as providing protection from, and a distorted image of, his opponent. To impose 'Consistency' upon this narrative we can isolate Calvino's attention to sight as mediated through Perseus' shield. It provides an indirect vision of the world and simultaneously becomes a tool to overcome, and finally behead, the Gorgon. The mediating object is language itself; words laid down are equivalent to the convex and concave sides of a shield, one offering a distorted relation to a subject, the other a form of protection against it. Initially, 'Consistency' imposes its influence from outside a work, to finally become embedded within it. To begin, Calvino's death is extraneous to the *Memos*, yet knowledge of his passing and its causal relationship to the state of consistency is key for an entrance of sorts. This knowledge works its way under the text's skin and narrates Perseus and the Gorgon, resisting direct addresses to bodies that are severed, fractured and viewed indirectly. Calvino's retelling of this narrative does not occur within the memo on visibility, as we would have anticipated, but in his chapter on lightness. Writing itself becomes a ward and protector against that which threatens it — of blackened words that ossify on the page. Lightness is a quality of thought in flight, having poignancy in motion as a collection of words interwoven to gain strength through standing together, yet their relations are seldom direct or transparent. Calvino's indirect vision of the mirrored shield is temporarily posited as an allegory of how a writer might relate to the word, where a subject might best be revealed through oblique means.[102] 'Consistency' holds a conjunction of ideas for how words work — we see them as shells whose outer layer conveys fluidity and buoyancy. They also point outwards, to other objects whose images we see indirectly as the concave mirror of a shield. 'Consistency' enables the shells of words to intersect with their ability to reflect objects outside of themselves and so an exercise is generated. Calvino's absent memo is allowing for these two different functions of

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[101] Italo Calvino, in *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler*, trans. William Weaver (Orlando, Florida: Harcourt, 1982), p. 259.

[102] Calvino. *Memos.* op. cit., pp. 4–5.

language to join forces, as both a container of thought that either demands or forbids penetration, and a distorted mirror which perpetually shifts our attention away from its shell, to the lure of other objects.

With Perec in mind, Calvino's death becomes a textual element that constantly asserts a liveliness by intersecting corporeal finitude. We see the beheading of the Gorgon not as a death but as a transformation and opportunity for another form of life — Perseus carrying the severed head as a narrative for relational and intersubjective journey.[103] 'Consistency' gathers up these strands of indirect vision and composes a narrative that is literary and bodily. Its function rests not only in being instructive — in that it provides a template for the generation of other forms — but revisionary, having the ability to revise the *Memos*, creating lightness to which words and grammar can move, wherein meaning is mutable. These insights, however, take us back further than Calvino's death, to a narrative initiated by Roussel's passing in 1933.[104] His posthumously published *How I Wrote Certain of My Works* foregrounds much of what has been covered here and becomes a shadow that follows 'Consistency'. It also links *Death and the Labyrinth* (1963), Foucault's early essay on Roussel, to his later Collège de France lecture series *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*.

Death and the Labyrinth explores the quality and character of Roussel's contribution to literature, which Foucault acknowledges as having had an impact on the surrealists and later authors such as Perec and Alain Robbe-Grillet.[105] Foucault understands the biographical details of Roussel's death as being instructive for a reading of his work. The image of a dead body — propped up on a mattress leant against a locked door — is illuminating not just of Foucault's later ideas but exercises a vision upon the role of consistency as a mediator of material. What resonates clearly is the articulation of a body that simultaneously holds up a potential passage and barrier to narrative.[106] Roussel's death, much like Calvino's after him, has movement between a bodily and textual dimension, but of most interest here is their twinned journey — they both elicit exercises of writing that have a capacity to perform other histories, of extant works unexplored.[107] The task of writing, if these works are to set an example, is not to undertake the articulation of an authorial position or that of a subject, but to write as a process of self-modification. Foucault makes this

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[103] Ibid., p. 4.

[104] Michel Foucault, *Death and the Labyrinth*, trans. Charles Ruas (London: Continuum, 2004), p. 6.

[105] Ibid., p. 178.

[106] Ibid., p. 6.

[107] Becker, op. cit., p. 42. Daniel Levin Becker acknowledges the debt Calvino has to Roussel via his essay *How I Wrote One of My Books*, a clear reference to Roussel's earlier essay, although it is fitting of the Workshop that they intersect not only via the title but also via the authors' deaths. For a further comparison between the two essays, see also Consenstein, op. cit., p. 76.

point in an interview with Charles Ruas in 1984, as he looks back over the Roussel essay in the light of *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*.[108] Through a consideration of Roussel, Foucault articulates a function of writing that has reverberated throughout the *Hermeneutics* — that writing is a kind of theatre, a performance of words, not for oneself or others but to undertake a process of self-transformation.[109] This idea of self-transformation, set out at an early stage in Foucault, would become the driving motor of his thought towards the end of his life.

Arnold Davidson's introduction to the *Hermeneutics* points to the importance of conversion-through-exercise that Foucault uncovers in a rigorous exposition of Greek thought.[110] There have been several commentators on this particular aspect of Foucault's work, not least Davidson, more recently Edward McGushin and, of relevance within a context of aesthetics and visual art, Simon O'Sullivan.[111] A full exposition of their positions could lead to a lumpen writing that Calvino exorcised from the page, yet they can aid in creating a flight for which 'Consistency' will find more depth and movement. It is worth pointing out their connections, initially seen through how they approach philosophy. McGushin and Davidson locate fiction writing and the essay as cultural spaces where Foucault's ideas can be put to work.[112] McGushin in particular cites Foucault as acknowledging that his work should be regarded as a form of fiction writing.[113] Roussel's influence here is the proverbial as well as literal body, resting on its mattress against a locked door, where a textual body is the fictive result of a biographical detail. What McGushin is pointing at, and what Foucault is referring to when he speaks of fiction, is the futurity of work, its potential. To write what one is yet to be – to write into the unknown – is where Oulipo, Roussel and Foucault intersect, from different directions but at the same crossroads. McGushin cites Foucault – from *The Use of Pleasure* – as claiming the essay as 'the living substance of philosophy, at least if we assume that philosophy is still what it was in times past, i.e., an "askēsis," *askēsis,* an exercise of oneself in the activity of thought.'[114] Askesis is of central importance to Foucault; he describes it as a working

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[108] Ibid., p. 184.

[109] Ibid.

[110] Arnold I. Davidson, 'Introduction', in *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France*, ed. Frédéric Gros, trans. Graham Burchell (London: Picador, 2005), p. 28.

[111] Edward F. McGushin, *Foucault's Askēsis: An Introduction to the Philosophical Life* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2007), p. 11. Davidson, op. cit., pp. 19–28. See also Simon O'Sullivan, *On the Production of Subjectivity: Five Diagrams on the Finite-Infinite Relation* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 59–87.

[112] McGushin, op. cit., p.11; Davidson, op. cit., p. 28.

[113] McGushin, op.cit., p. 11 & fn., p. 294. McGushin quotes Foucault directly in his footnotes as claiming fiction as having to work in truth, to '*induce effects of truth with a discourse of fiction.*'

[114] McGushin, op.cit., p. 281.

on self by self, an exercise of *care of the self*.[115] The kind of exercise that McGushin is highlighting here is one of conversion, a fundamental exercise of the self on self. The essay, whose etymology Foucault acknowledges, is one place of such exercises (in French, *essai*, meaning 'trial' or 'attempt'), to generate a fiction that, at some future point, holds a different truth. Restraints such as the lipogram set this *degree zero* through which trials and modifications can tangibly be grasped. Mathews's restraint to *remember* Perec is just such an askesis of self that creates a different Perec and simultaneously a new relation of Mathews to himself. 'Consistency' in this way is a kind of grit in the cognition of an *ars memoriae* of self that is recast by its operations across a series of essays such as Calvino's *Memos*. Foucault's askesis is cast upon the *Memos* through its absent affiliate, working upon a mirrored shield as it also works upon Roussel's corpse, perpetually balanced between mattress and door.

The aspect of futurity in Foucault's *Hermeneutics* is also found in Simon O'Sullivan's work, particularly in what he calls a subject-yet-to-come.[116] O'Sullivan's reading of Foucault has a decidedly Deleuzean lens,[117] a perspective of value in casting further light on Foucault's notion of askesis as an *outside*. Askesis is seen as an exercise to achieve what O'Sullivan (in debt to Deleuze) has called an *outside* — the production of new agencies.[118] An outside could be likened to the fictionality and futurity of work in that it is something yet-to-be, something striven for. In his essay on Foucault, Deleuze has commented on accessing an outside when he asks how we are to narrate Foucault's fiction.[119] Deleuze's narrative is already such a narration in terms of using his thought as a medium through which an outside might be accessed or considered. This is indeed what O'Sullivan uses in pointing to a folding-in of an outside, in the very constitution of a new interior — a different subjectivity. What we are more concerned with here is turning away from the nature of folds, which preoccupies O'Sullivan, to a generative capacity of narration through a more Oulipoian lens. We can retain this idea of an outside in terms of looking once more to the restraint within Oulipo, and in particular to Perec's lipogram, which can be understood as an askesis that undertakes the task of exposing a text to its outside — where 'Consistency' is written and Calvino's *Memos* are altered in the process. The various histories of askesis that stem from antiquity, which Foucault explores, can initially be sketched out as forms of philosophical exercise, through which a transformation of self is required in order to gain access to a sense of truth.[120] Foucault uses the

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[115] Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France*, ed. Frédéric Gros, trans. Graham Burchell (London: Picador, 2005), p. 16.

[116] O'Sullivan, op. cit., p. 61.

[117] Ibid., pp. 84–87.

[118] Ibid.

[119] Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault*, trans. Seán Hand (London: Continuum, 2006), p. 98.

[120] Foucault, op. cit., pp. 415–16.

word *tekhné* as part of a history that encompasses the *care-of-the-self* (*epimeleia heautou*).[121] If askesis can be thought of as a program for and of self, tekhné can be approached as a means or method through which a particular form of askesis is realised, yet tekhné should not be reduced simply to a method or process. Foucault also refers to these actions as *tekhné tou biou* — an art for living.[122] Inherent within an understanding of tekhné is a sense of refinement, practice and skill. With this in mind, tekhné can be understood as the formulation of an askesis. As Arnold Davidson points out in his introductory essay to the *Hermeneutics,* these terms can be thought of as a relationship between the singularity of event (tekhné) and an architectonic order (askesis).[123] Davidson concludes by observing the importance of losing our way for the sake of self-transformation and quotes Foucault as claiming the essay as 'the living form of philosophy'.[124] By this he means that a subject has to undergo a change for the very sake of knowledge itself and the essay is a place where such an undertaking can occur.

Reading the *Hermeneutics* as an apocryphal Oulipoian work might better be fitted to its provisional role as a soft restraint. The *Hermeneutics* can be placed over the contributions of Perec, Calvino and Roussel as providing a conversion of their work. In this way we see *A Void* as an askesis in much the same way as we could recognise 'Consistency'*,* both initiating exercises that undertake a transformation of their given subjects. Foucault's *Hermeneutics* should not be regarded as Oulipoian in the sense of using predetermined literary restraints but as a guide for the proliferation of future techniques and exercises. This returns us to the idea of potential restraints – what we have called, soft restraints. As opposed to having the restraint imposed from the outset, what we have here is the focus on an activity, an askesis, that learns the nature of its own rules and means of imposition through undertaking an activity. Perec's corporeal and grammatical lipogram is a soft restraint in this way, not yet defined but finding character and form through an Oulipoian reading of the *Hermeneutics*, as a drifting exploration of how a subject might be formed or arrived at.

Before we return to the herm, some attention should be given to the work of Pierre Hadot, whose work and research had considerable influence on Foucault's later preoccupations and on the *Hermeneutics* in particular. Hadot's work might not enjoy an appeal as widespread as Foucault's, yet McGushin and Davidson both acknowledge the debt that Foucault owes him.[125] Davidson in particular has produced introductory essays for both thinkers and has commented upon Foucault's admiration for Hadot's research.[126] The connection between them is located in their philological

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[121] Ibid., p. 58. Tekhné can be translated as *technique,* which is its etymological root. The *care* of the self, which is a form of askesis, can thus be seen as a technique that enables a self-becoming

[122] Ibid., pp. 86–249.

[123] Ibid., p. 27.

[124] Ibid., p. 28.

[125] McGushin, op.cit., pp. 103–104. See also Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, trans. Arnold I. Davidson, 2nd edn. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2010), p. 1.

[126] Ibid.

excavation of Western philosophy and its development since the Enlightenment – where spirituality and philosophy often follow separate paths and functions.[127] Davidson understands this in his introduction to Hadot's essays, seeing spiritual exercise as an undertaking of self-conversion or modification.[128] It is important to note that both thinkers locate a problem within philosophy when knowledge is taken as the object of discourse, as opposed to its practical application in an art of living (Foucault's *tekhné tou biou)*. Whereas Foucault sees this art of living residing in the modification of self for the benefit of self, Hadot's understanding is more in line with Calvino's interpersonal cosmology, and it is through his appreciation of a universal connectedness that Hadot disagrees with Foucault.[129] Whereas Hadot verges on a philosophical monism of seeing agency and spiritual exercise as uncovering a connection to the Whole (cosmic, universal)*,* Foucault's understanding of askesis, through the art of living, sees a transformation of subjectivity from within as its primary goal. These criticisms have been summarised by McGushin in his work on Foucault's askesis, and he goes further, suggesting that, contrary to what Hadot claims, intersubjectivity is found throughout the *Hermeneutics.*[130] What can be agreed upon, however, is their attempt at a realignment of philosophy within an understanding of ancient spiritual exercises. Such exercises can be found within Oulipo and are connected through an attention to, and concern for, memory.

We find in memory what Foucault has articulated as 'the mode of being of that which no longer is'.[131] Absence in this sense connects Oulipo and Foucault to the importance of language games and literary restraints, which, in the case of the lipogram, is a literary exercise undertaken through the imposition of absence. Foucault understands reflexivity as a term to describe a thinking of thought upon itself, and within this he sees memory as a major form of reflexivity in a history of Western thought.[132] Time and again he sees more value in memory over considerations of the future, and it seems that an art of memory is intrinsic to an art of living.[133] The soft restraint of a provisional lipogram that combines both body and word, life and page, is what concerns us here. Oulipoians are veterans of the hard restraint — an acrobatics that denies vowels, using the rules of board games to commit acts of serial repetition. Subjects of soft restraints are prone to mistakes, with greater flexibility, where the game hasn't been predetermined. These restraints present themselves in motion, avoiding a path that might lead back to the workshop from which they originally fled. The writing that follows is a process of maintaining suppleness — soft restraints that feel their imprint on fleshy subjects. The herm is considered as such a restraint and should be understood as

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[127] Foucault, op. cit., pp. 13–15. See also Hadot, op. cit., pp. 103–108.

[128] Hadot, op. cit., p. 23.

[129] Hadot, op. cit., p. 211.

[130] McGushin, op. cit., p. 104.

[131] Foucault, op. cit., p. 468.

[132] Ibid., p. 460.

[133] Ibid.

an object that can take names, forms and exercises other than those explored in the previous chapter. Like the lipogram, its name will remain absent from what follows, in the hope that it retains more influence this way. It has moved from its once static position as both a physical object and one of historical exposition to a potential askesis, of exercises-yet-to-be.

Prosthetic Conditions of Paint

Fallen Paint[134]

Lynda Benglis's poured latex grafts narrative onto paint independently of traditional supports such as canvas, panel or wall. A horizontal pooling of otherwise phallic-shaped forms addressed the male dominance of mid-century gestural abstraction in cities such as New York, isolating the performative nature of paint as a driving principle and material.[135] Studio images of Benglis pouring latex had more than a passing resemblance to Hans Namuth's earlier photographs of Jackson Pollock in his Long Island studio. The images demonstrate, albeit in frozen moments, the importance of Pollock's bodily movement in the production of his all-over works and marked the floor as a space of production. Benglis's creative affiliation with Pollock extended the relationship of painting to performance even further, in maintaining the floor not only as a site of production but also as a site of reception and interaction. The contexts in which painting finds itself today – impacted by time-based media, performance, sculpture and architecture – are in many ways informed through the period in which Benglis's work emerged.[136] Her initial stripping back to paint was also an opening to different supports that now seem normalised within more interdisciplinary conditions for painting, despite robust market revivals of canvas and pictorial imagery.[137]

A clearing of space for thought was articulated by her choice of non-traditional materials and a rigorous uncoupling of paint from previous cultural and physical substrates. A European pictorial tradition loosened its grip on a type of paint that achieved newfound support through celluloid, TV

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[134] Susan Krane, *Lynda Benglis: Dual Natures* (Atlanta, Georgia: High Museum of Art, 1991), p. 24. 'Benglis's expansive poured latex paintings spread like biomorphic mats on the floor – almost as if they had slid off the canvas. She humorously referred to these objects as "fallen paintings" and later so titled a work of 1968.'

[135] Ibid., p. 18. See also Susan Richmond, *Lynda Benglis: Beyond Process* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2013), pp. 5–11. Despite Benglis bringing awareness to gender inequality, Richmond gives a detailed account of the initial feminist rejection of her work and its later recuperation in the 1990s and onwards.

[136] Elisabeth Lebovici, 'Lynda Benglis: All That Matters', in *Lynda Benglis,* ed. Franck Gautherot, Caroline Hancock and Seungduk Kim (Dijon: Les Presses du Reél, 2009), pp. 78–100. Lebovici details the nuances of Benglis's work in being simultaneously influenced by post-minimalist and feminist thought, yet she remained resistant to, and somewhat outside, these circles.

[137] From the *New Spirit* in painting in New York City during the 1980s to Germany's Leipzig School of the 1990s and more recently in Cluj, through painters such as Adrian Ghenie and Serban Savu, the art market has continually recognised the currency of painting images on canvas.

screens and magazines. Most of these supports were, however, associative, from gallery to advertising space, from moving image to the sheen of plastic surfaces. An *Artforum* advertisement from 1974 of Benglis oiled and naked and sporting a dildo shows the extent to which she saw her work as a critique of the pervasive media objectification of women in the wider culture and their ongoing marginalisation in the art world.[138] Not far from the artist's intention perhaps was the connection between pigment and plastic material. Latex, polyurethane and other non-traditional carriers of pigment became conveyors of thought, supported and contextualised through time-based media and advertisements that Benglis had created throughout the 1970s and into the 1980s. The *Artforum* ad in particular suggests a reading of the artist's early latex pieces, in that the material of her choosing is not just a physical melting or liquefying of what might take sculptural form, but a cultural dissolve.[139]

The extent to which floor space becomes the mise en scène of her practice is important in encountering a different landscape of paint and for painting. While she might have anticipated a more level playing field, her work opened a pictorial European tradition to temporal and bodily spaces that, while close to the tendencies of Eva Hesse and Ana Mendieta, nonetheless retained a connection to composition, image and expressionist gesture.[140] The material kinship that Benglis felt with Hesse is evidenced in her choice of rubber materials, and though Mendieta an understanding of paint as having libidinal associations to bodily fluids, blood and excrement.[141] To map out a terrain of feminism in relation to Benglis' work during this time lies outside the focus of this essay, yet her sensitivity to a sexualised, personalised body had clear connections to these artist's work. In this sense, Benglis's work touches the boundaries between European traditions of painting and post-war American artists who attempted to distance themselves from such histories.[142]

A significant aspect of this European heritage was the claiming of a humanist trait in her work, offset by the social context her work was made in. This can be thought of in terms of proximity, of

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[138] Whitney Chadwick, 'Balancing Acts: Reflections on Postminimalism and Gender in the 1970s', in *More Than Minimal: Feminism and Abstraction in the '70s*, ed. Susan L. Stoops (Waltham, Massachusetts: Rose Museum of Art, 1996), pp. 14–21. See also Lucy Lippard, 'Making Up: Role-Playing and Transformation in Women's Art', in *From the Center* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1976), pp. 101–108.

[139] Marcia Tucker and James Monte, *Anti-Illusion: Procedures/Materials* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1969), pp. 27–28. Marcia Tucker notes the lack of boundaries in Benglis's work, drawing attention to her work being neither hung nor stretched.

[140] Krane, op. cit., pp. 16–20.

[141] Chadwick, op. cit., pp. 14–15. Chadwick details the dangers of grouping such a diverse range of artists together such as Mendieta, Benglis and Stuart, yet nonetheless points out the twin forces of modernism and feminism which significantly impacted their work.

[142] Bruce Glazer, 'Questions to Stella and Judd', in *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Gregory Battcock and Lucy R. Lippard (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1995), pp. 1–10. In an interview with Glazer from 1964, Judd states his lack of interest in European art and a compositional, pictorial tradition.

where to locate an artist in work, in this instance suggested by the relative autonomy of latex pours that have a significant amount of self-organisation, with gravity and duration being dominant organisational principles. The role of the artist extends from the authorial control it assumed in previous decades; artist-as-viewer creates another type of path towards a theatre of paint, within which the distinction between maker and viewer is fluid. Paint is not contained upon a wall or supported in a manner that neatly separates object from viewer; its theatrics surround and lay a ground for more immersive experiences.[143] Ideas of embodiment to Benglis are both complex and in some instances conflicting. The locus of the body as the site and object of aesthetic activity was certainly inflected within her practice, but rather than see the art object as a trace or remnant of bodily activity, Benglis also held on to a more expressionist model that understands the art object as a sign of authorial intention and spirit.[144] Rather than see these different models of beholding as conflicting or indeed hierarchical, across various bodies of work Benglis interweaves different histories of beholding in the understanding that what might be generated is a richer and more nuanced approach to image, object and surface.

Michael Fried's rejection of minimalist forms throughout the 1960s and the anti-form utterances of artists like Robert Morris[145] provide a well-rehearsed ground to further a conversation of painterly theatrics.[146] While Fried's objections were laid out in his oft-cited essay *Art & Objecthood*, a more detailed exposition is found in his research around Diderotian absorption and theatricality.[147] Illusion, atemporality and absence are key to an understanding of Fried's complaint against much minimalist work. Fried had foreseen an impasse between the inclusion of the viewer as content of an artwork, its theatrical dimension, and a European and decidedly Diderotian position that separated a viewer from a work of art. The absent viewer was an essential mode of vision in much European painting of this time, as people depicted in painting – caught in moments of introspection – depended upon this very separation in the conveyance of pictorial narrative. British painter Mick Finch details this argument while placing value in the tension between pictorial and theatrical

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[143] Krane, op. cit., p. 29. While Krane acknowledges the bodily references in Benglis's work, priority is given to the affect her work has on the body as opposed to any overarching anthropomorphism.

[144] Linda Benglis and Seungduk Kim, 'Lynda Benglis and Seungduk Kim in Conversation: Liquid Metal', in *Lynda Benglis*, ed. Franck Gautherot, Caroline Hancock and Seungduk Kim (Dijon: Les Presses du Réel, 2009), pp. 163–170. In an interview with Seungduk Kim, Benglis talks about childhood memories informing work, of illusion and allusion. She also discusses the issue of the body as part of her work – not only hers but that of the viewer.

[145] Robert Morris, 'Notes on Sculpture, Part 4: Beyond Objects', in *Continuous Project Altered Daily: The Writings of Robert Morris* (Cambridge, Massachusetts : MIT Press, 1993), p. 54. 'The specific art object of the 1960s is not so much a metaphor for the figure as it is an existence parallel to it.'

[146] Michael Fried, 'Art and Objecthood', in *Art in Theory 1900-2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, ed. Charles Harrison and Paul J. Wood, 2nd edn. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), pp. 835–845.

[147] Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), pp. 31–53

traditions.[148] Rather than finding a linear argument for and against these conflicting positions of viewership, Finch succeeds in creating a more complex and integrated field, one in which atemporality and absence find a place to exist alongside processual and spatial considerations. These theatrical tensions are present throughout Benglis's practice, breaking the Diderotian *fourth wall*[149] by allowing the presence of the viewer into the work itself. This has more recently been commented on by the American artist John Kelsey in his essay on German painter Charline von Heyl.[150] Kelsey exchanges the theatrical fourth wall of Diderot for that of cinema — the before and after takes of Nouvelle Vague film — in asking about the time of painting.[151] This understanding of time, situated in the interstices before and after the camera rolls, is used to understand how painting needs to continually break the *time* of its thought. Yet the time in which one looks directly to, or acts off, camera has become as scripted as the method-like pours of Pollock. In his footnotes, a guiding voice for Kelsey's observations is 'Theologico-Political Fragment' by Walter Benjamin.[152] This short essay has the kind of enigmatic appeal to temporal and eternal ideas of nature and of man as ever plural in its ongoing and unceasing rhythm. What Kelsey takes from Benjamin is both a multiplicity inherent in the singular and the sense of latency to be found within it.[153] In his ending commentary Kelsey cites Agamben, who turns an idea of *happiness* as used by Benjamin into a means-without-end. Kelsey then understands painting as a time-based activity, one that seeks to find its own rhythm amidst the time of painting's histories .[154] For Benjamin, an essential quality of happiness as such is downfall – the perpetually recurring transience of living things. The pure means of Agamben is precisely the rhythm of happiness and downfall encountered in Benjamin's work, and so its appeal to painting – the scaffolding upon which Kelsey bases his essay – is an undoing that is simultaneously a making. This rise and fall is not for the purpose of some end point but for the very articulation of movements which are constitutive of thought. A messianic rhythm that finds its first articulation in Benjamin is further articulated by Agamben in a similarly short

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[148] Mick Finch, *Theatre/Spectacle – Absorption / Lived Time* (2015) <http://www.mickfinch.com/texts/theatre.html> [accessed 15 December 2015].

[149] Patrice Pavis and Christine Shantz, *Dictionary of the Theatre: Terms, Concepts, and Analysis* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), p. 154. The editors quote Diderot: 'Whether you are composing or acting, think of the spectator as if he did not exist. Imagine, at the edge of the stage, a great wall that separates you from the stalls; act as though the curtain would never rise.'

[150] John Kelsey, 'Big Joy Time', in *Rich Texts: Selected Writings for Art*, ed. Daniel Birnbaum and Isabelle Graw (Frankfurt: Sternberg Press, 2010), pp. 33–41.

[151] Ibid., p. 36.

[152] Walter Benjamin, 'Theologico-Political Fragment', in *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, ed. Peter Demetz, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), pp. 312–313.

[153] Judith Butler, *One Time Traverses Another: Benjamin's Theologico-Political Fragment* (2015) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LA8hiT2nIAk> [accessed 20 January 2015]. Butler's commentary has been used here specifically to draw out the relationship between happiness and downfall in Benjamin's essay.

[154] Giorgio Agamben, *Means Without End: Notes on Politics*, trans. Vincenzo Binetti and Cesare Casarino (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), p. 117.

essay on the paintings of Cy Twombly. Agamben sees that moment of equilibrium between rising and falling as a space where painting can find perpetual renewal.[155] To thread these ideas together along the fault lines of viewership offered by Benglis's work is to entertain the possibility of figuring thoughts and objects that are, at first, unseen. In this sense, Diderot's fourth wall is ever present, always shifting from theatre to movie screen, gallery space and pavement to ad space and webspace. The wall, and with it an idea of separation, is never destroyed, broken or transgressed, but is always negotiated. Its materiality is up for grabs in that the nature of its movement — how it separates and by what means — is generative of content. If Benglis has expressed a desire to not be addressed as a performer, and if her work is to remain largely within illusionistic and atemporal traditions of viewership, then the kinds of illusion she entertains are as much Vegas-like magic tricks and movie SFX as they are a painterly mises en scène of introspection. In a word, she paves the way for a distinctly theatrical sense of atemporality and a performative pictorial practice. To view Benglis's work is never just to experience the raw opticality of vision; it is to be both present and absent – held within a space libidinally and temporally but carried away by the allusiveness of material special effect.

The wall becomes a mediator whose image and materiality continually shift. Here, paint has to operate blindly, without a cultural face as substrate. Its skin holds the residue of a phallus and projects towards a sensuous, textural, decorative sensibility that promotes style over content. This mutable and shifting wall can be placed within a tradition outlined in Susan Sontag's 'Notes on Camp'.[156] If camp is indeed a triumph of style over content, of the decorative as philosophical treatise, then Benglis's fluid offerings are best considered via Sontag's paradigm of looking, one that has the work of Paul Thek in clear view.[157] Similarly, paint can be narrativised in a number of ways that resist formalist tendencies and operate within Sontag's playful narrative. Firstly, a pictorial heritage is contaminated though paint's occupation of physical space. Seemingly without support, the viewer is alongside and amid pooled pigment, yet there is a denial of direct representations of the body. Painting is working blindly, applying itself in the making of a substrate, much like the application of make-up to an invisible face, one that never gets *made-up* to the extent that an image or status is ever realised. In other bodies of work, Benglis suspends plastic pours of metallic-looking paint, attached to gallery walls in baroque fashions that border on pastiche. The work approaches a level of farce that does not undermine or contradict the inherent elegance of the endeavour. The ability to collapse views and positions – masculine and feminine, farce and high seriousness – is an example of Sontag's view of camp and the ability of an object or

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[155] Giorgio Agamben, 'Falling Beauty', in *Cy Twombly: New Sculptures 1995–2005*, ed. Edward Albee, Reinhold Baumstark and Carla Schulz-Hoffmann (Munich: Schirmer/Mosel Verlag, 2006), pp. 13–15.

[156] Susan Sontag, 'Notes On Camp', in *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (New York: Picador, 2001), pp. 275–292. It is worth noting that Sontag's whole volume of essays, *Against Interpretation and Other Essays*, is dedicated to Thek, and 'Notes on Camp' in particular appears to be an indirect portrait of his practice and contribution.

[157] Ibid., p. 278.

image to remain ambivalent, both symptom and critique of culture. It also serves a purpose in articulating the means-without-end that Agamben builds upon through Benjamin, and suggests its importance to Kelsey in conveying a painting that has to seek out its own time in order to find thought and agency *outside* a set of cultural codes. Looking back to Sontag through Kelsey, we might imagine that the modus operandi of camp is to look between the cracks of culture, where hidden and devalued forms of looking and being exist. In the context in which her essay was written, there is, of course, the emergence of popular culture entering into artworks after many years of formalist painting. Benglis literally suspends these fragments of culture in a manner that retains the kind of fluidity and sense of contradiction that Sontag describes and which Kelsey is aiming at through his own approach to a suspension of thought. This type of paint has a mutability that links theatricality and absorption to a coupling and uncoupling that plays out across floor space, most prominently in Benglis's poured latex as the material goes to work dissolving former cultural supports. Expression, identity politics and notions of autonomy are conflicting bed partners in work that seems to offer little by way of resolution.[158] Rubber pools circle around but never rest in the stage plays of paint as an embodiment of authorial intention, as mimetic impulses to look *like* bodies or an austere rejection of both, for the advent of spatial and temporal interplay.

This initial fall of paint as it physically holds to a floor is indicative of a different terrain to cross, which is a rising to new, plastic grounds. Mira Schor's essay *Figure/Ground*, while not directly mentioning Benglis, seems to describe her practice as she questions the traditional dichotomy of the figure/ground relationship.[159] Schor's use of *terrains vagues* — a French term that describes patches of land where architectural construction and human habitation are yet to commence — describes peripheral spaces where figure and ground are melded across a *sea of liquidity*, to use Schor's words.[160] Eyes move unconstructed and without injunction in these places, where architecture both literal and figurative is yet to be erected. These observations are Schor's parting thoughts on the potential of painting, and the role of paint, to articulate meaning. She offers a cultural topography on this dualistic aspect of painting's history, yet provides a volatile and productive space for the kind of paint that Benglis has articulated throughout her career. Schor's understanding of painting as having the potential to *flicker in and out of representation*[161] underlines the positive force of Benglis's broader practice and the physical, textual multiplicity of viewing, reading and beholding it encompasses.

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[158] Anne M. Wagner, 'Body Doubles', in *More Than Minimal: Feminism and Abstraction in the '70s*, ed. Susan L. Stoops (Waltham, Massachusetts: Rose Museum of Art, 1996), pp. 32–35. I draw upon the comments of Wagner in her essay, as she details multiplicity — of material and subject matter — in the work of Benglis, Mendieta, Hesse and others.

[159] Schor, Mira, 'Figure/Ground', in *M/E/A/N/I/N/G: An Anthology of Artist's Writings, Theory, and Criticism*, ed. Susan Bee and Mira Schor (Durham, North Carolina, and London: Duke University Press, 2000), p. 124.

[160] Ibid.

[161] Ibid.

Nouvelle Vague and *terrains vagues* meet somewhere between cinematic breaks and undefined spaces of boundaries and peripheries. A shared French etymology becomes a material consideration, of sedimentation and liquefaction. The rhythm of latex and polyurethane forms a play of paint that breaks script, moves walls and casts eyes across spaces where the cinematic and the everyday can no longer be thought of separately. This, however, is not just an appeal to Truffaut or his star, Jean-Pierre Léaud, but a recall of American science-fiction movies of the 1950s, such as Irvin Yeaworth's *The Blob*. The undefined and gelatinous mass of the movie's creature, which increases its size in tandem with the consumption of foreign matter, seems like a worthy support to Benglis's similarly shaped, later biomorphic offerings.[162] This kind of space works at the edges of a paint that generates new supports and in doing so builds another armature for painting – paint and celluloid, the skin of film and the filmic skin of fantastic and alien imagery. Benglis's paint moves away from a singular articulation of biography, namely that of the artist, to a theatre wherein paint straddles the tingling of sensation felt upon a viewer's skin and its extension to worlds of celluloid, a transparent, plastic material forming a synthetic support for the breathing opacity of flesh. These worlds no longer occupy a separate landscape but are fused within a more holistic encounter, one wherein memories of the playground and TV screen inform each other, at once alien and familiar. The temporal rise and fall of subjects subjected to rhythms greater than themselves delineates shifting proximities. Benglis might have stopped painting pictures but she remained committed to picturing supports that captured paint as an embodiment of skin, celluloid and TV screen, at once ecstatic and located within bodily experience. This ground, once covered, falls once more from liquid to stagnant sedimentation, much like the drips of Pollock congealing to erect an architecture of American painting for the 1950s. In this sense, Yeaworth's creaturely invention is an apt allusion to the means by which Benglis's synthetic offerings both absorbed, and engorged themselves on, not only the patriarchy of New York abstraction but the standardised models of viewership and authorial intention that went with it.

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[162] Kelsey, op. cit., p. 36. The French actor Jean-Pierre Léaud appeared many times in Truffaut's films, known for breaking the cinematic fourth wall, a technique used repeatedly by the filmmaker.

Fig. 3

Boston Elbow

From the plastics of Benglis, painting extends prosthetically[163] in culture as ubiquitous materials permeate virtual and physical landscapes of kitchen utensils, sex toys, filmic special effects and cosmetic implants. Prosthetics by definition encounters supplementation and addition, crossing a diverse range of fields such as disability studies, identity politics, feminism, orthopedics, engineering and cultural theory.[164] The prosthetic is an extension not only in cultural terms – its ability to cross differing terrains – but also materially in that it serves to supplement, aid or extend physical bodily function.[165] A vague beginning for an articulation of a prosthetic condition of painting is given in David Wills's account of prosthetics, important on several levels and acknowledged by a range of writers working in different fields.[166] In many ways, his work *is* prosthetic in crossing the void often seen between the medical and social sciences. He provides an example of prosthetic writing in that his text extends and supplements *bodies* of thought, providing a memoir of childhood – giving an account of his father living with an artificial limb – while crossing the terrains of psychoanalysis and cultural theory. Wills joins a number of writers who use the forms of memoir and autobiography in meta-discursive narratives that cross a number of cultural fields. Chris Krauss and Wayne Kostenbaum have created narratives that address the personal, using the first person pronoun as an anchor and foil to discussions as wide-ranging as BDSM, Lacanian theory, Debbie Harry and Art Center's MFA program in the 1990s. Wills's conjunction of memoir with semiotics and psychoanalysis supplements and aids a narrative that questions the agency of a possessive *I* whilst simultaneously amputating theory from impersonal structures that foreground philosophy over social history, providing a model of prosthetic thought that writers such as Celia Lury and others have drawn on.[167] Lury in particular critiques just the kind of possessive individualism that Wills polemicises through his use of memoir. His use of the first person singular is never taken for granted, it never assumes an unassailable ground upon which

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[163] Elizabeth Grosz, 'Prosthetic Objects', in *Time Travels* (Durham, North Carolina, and London: Duke University Press, 2005), pp. 145–152. Grosz's ideas of prosthetic extension have enabled this opening sentence to take form, and will be touched upon later in this essay.

[164] Katherine Ott, 'The Sum of Its Parts: An Introduction to Modern Histories of Prosthetics', in *Artificial Parts, Practical Lives: Modern Histories of Prosthetics*, ed. Katherine Ott, David Serlin and Stephen Mihm (New York and London: New York University Press, 2002), pp. 1–42

[165] David Wills, *Prosthesis* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1995), p. 133. Wills provides an important account of prosthetics across a range of fields. I draw here upon his semiotic and orthopedic comparison – the prefix before a word and an apparatus to replace an absent body part.

[166] Davis, 2006. Grosz, 2005. Lury, 1998. Ott, 2002. Sobchack, 2006.

[167] Celia Lury, *Prosthetic Culture: Photography, Memory and Identity* (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 1.

thought and action can be founded; rather, it becomes the nexus through which are interwoven different kinds of critical thinking and approaches to the material, corporeal and prosthetic.[168]

In the post-war period, prosthetics has held a presence in culture as ubiquitous as silicone's. Its history can be tracked alongside theatres of war, from America during the 1880s to the world wars of the 20th century.[169] A factor in these historical accounts is the role and development of technology in relation to prosthetic limbs and cosmetic attachments. Practical, medical use is perhaps most visible in terms of devices made to compensate for, or enable, bodily function in trauma victims and people of physical disability. Already cited is an important publication that documents these histories — a compilation of essays edited by Katherine Ott, David Serlin and Stephen Mihm that address the various cultural, technological and medical fields that prosthetics covers. Whilst Ott's introductory overview places much emphasis on the material and medical histories of prosthetics, she acknowledges much of the cultural, theoretical terrain that touches upon the prosthetic, namely the prosthetic as used in recent feminist theory, media studies and through historical lenses of post-structuralism.[170] In a similar fashion, contemporary feminist writers such as Vivian Sobchack and others such as Lennard J. Davis provide a rigorous overview of the weight of cultural theory that foregrounds their work on the prosthetic. Their critique largely focuses on an idea of the prosthetic understood through a poetic and metaphorical lens.[171] Sobchack refers to the semi-object of Roland Barthes' *Jet-Man* – the writer as prosthetic wearer – with suspicion, finding in it an all too familiar convergence of the bodily with technology.[172] Sobchack, as a prosthetic wearer herself, underlines the mundane nature of everyday living with an artificial limb,[173] hoping for an absence of the prosthetic in her daily life – a unity between bodily function and normalcy. A bridge between abstract thought and bodily experience is found in an understanding of her prosthesis as a hermeneutic object, not necessarily possessing an agency as such but forcing her to understand the means by which she continually interprets and negotiates its

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[168] Ibid., pp. 1–3.

[169] For an account of the development of prosthetics in the wake of World War Two, see David Serlin, 'Engineering Masculinity: Veterans and Prosthetics after World War Two', in *Artificial Parts, Practical Lives: Modern Histories of Prosthetics*, ed. Katherine Ott, David Serlin and Stephen Mihm (New York: New York University Press, 2002).

[170] Ott, op. cit., pp. 1–42.

[171] Marquard Smith, 'The Vulnerable Articulate: James Gillingham, Aimee Mullins, and Matthew Barney', in *The Prosthetic Impulse: From a Posthuman Present to a Biocultural Future*, ed. Marquard Smith and Joanne Mora (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2006), pp. 46–71. See also Vivian Sobchack, 'A Leg to Stand On: Prosthetics, Metaphor, and Materiality', in *The Prosthetic Impulse: From a Posthuman Present to a Biocultural future*, ed. Marquard Smith and Joanne Mora (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2006),. pp. 19–38.

[172] Ibid., p. 17. See also Roland Barthes, 'The-Jet-Man', in *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Hill & Wang, 1957), pp. 72–73. For a critique of the conjunction of body and machine within cyborg theories, such as Donna Harraway's, see Suhail Malik, 'Between Bodies Without Organs and Machines Without Desire: Deleuze-Guattari's Elision of Prosthetic Actuality', in *New Formations: A Journal of Culture/Theory/Politics* (2002), pp. 34–47.

[173] Sobchack, op. cit., p. 38.

function. In light of this hermeneutic understanding it is interesting to note the naming of artificial limbs after towns and cities, such as *Boston Elbow* or *Seattle Foot*.[174] It suggests a mapping of the body as a naming process, the direct use of a prosthetic enacting an inscription whereby the body, in particular a body like Sobchack's, for example, undergoes an inscription process daily. This is not to abstract or create metaphor but to observe the joining of limbs to foreign matter, their convergence and participation in acts that simply attempt to function in the task of everyday actions. In this sense it is understandable that Sobchack has little time for the cyborg, posthuman speculations of Donna Harraway or indeed Barthes's *Jet-Man*, whereby the binary between body and machine is often a means of speculative transgression of the human. Might it be possible then to combine the kind of emphases on material and biological accounts of the prosthetic with the more speculative imaginations of feminist writers such as Elizabeth Grosz? In terms of the relationship of painting to body, accounts of so-called poetic abstraction and material, social history might in fact be essential to articulate a prosthetic condition of painting today.

In the literature that surrounds the medical model, a prosthetic is generally understood as an object that performs lost or impaired bodily function in the tasks of daily living.[175] Various kinds of materials have been used for prosthetic devices and it is worth pointing out the intersection between function and aesthetics that Katherine Ott details. Often the aestheticising of a prosthetic limb – its merging with human form and skin — diminishes its prosthetic, practical function. Ott cites the use of silicone and rubber as materials used in such aesthetic encounters. The more human a prosthetic appears, the less it is able to replicate human bodily function.[176] Here we have an example of aesthetics at odds with function, a split between surface and depth. The more an object dissolves into the appearance of the body, a kind of prosthetic trompe l'oeil if you will, the less it performs the functions it was designed for. This fissure, however, underscores the push and pull of two different aspects of prosthetics from a material, cultural perspective. On one level, the artificial limb is designed to disappear, to meld perfectly with the body of the prosthetic wearer. This touches upon notions of normalcy and the stigma of dis-abled bodies that often stem from war trauma or birth abnormalities. Marquard Smith details this dichotomy on several levels, perhaps most convincingly by discussing the notion of *passing* within the context of identity politics. He points to the concept of *passing for* the opposite sex as an act of invisibility, another kind of trompe l'oeil.[177] The level at which a prosthetic *passes* for the real limb of an amputee could also be a barrier to the practical function of everyday tasks. Carried out within the history of artificial limbs is a conversation between, and often separation of, embodiment and estrangement, appearance and substance.

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[174] Ibid., p. 30.

[175] Ott., op. cit., pp. 7–8.

[176] Ibid., p. 24.

[177] Smith., op. cit. p. 50.

A significant cultural precursor that Smith mentions is Freud's notion of the uncanny. Although it differs on several levels from what is under discussion here, it is worth bearing in mind the animation of objects that take on human qualities, along with the uneasy relationship that Freud had, in the final stage of his life, with his very own mouth prosthetic and the gaping cavity it concealed.[178] The prosthetic can mobilise a narrative whereby *passing* is a form of embodiment, cosmos and cosmetics drawing from a single cultural well so to speak.[179] The collapse of an inside to an outside, or at least the horror that might ensue from the confusion of one with the other, is alluded to by Freud when he refers to his mouth prosthesis as *the monster*. His oral cavity is a powerful example of the uncanny, namely that of the familiar estranged, an interior that goes through a process of being Other.[180] Smith and Sobchack do well to illustrate the importance of lived encounter and social history within a theorisation of prosthetics. They also converge on an idea of the prosthetic as a form of placement or location. Smith details the etymology of prosthesis (*pros-tithenai*, 'in-addition' and 'place') as that of placement and with it the possibility of replacement and relocation, rebuilding and reconstruction.[181] As previously mentioned, Sobchack has highlighted the naming of prosthetic limbs after places, seeing in her prosthetic limb a hermeneutic encounter. An articulation of the bodily is drawn up from these observations, one that extends and dislocates Freud's uncanny across a corporeal topography whereby *passing* is both spatial and sexual, delineating transience and transvestism. These social and personal encounters of prosthesis supplement an already rich history of the Other, prominent in a history of feminist writing that critiques not only the agency of a sovereign subject but the idea of a body as a self-contained, autonomous object.[182] A prosthetic as understood by these encounters is an object that induces a questioning of the body as a psycho-physiological entity and a culturally designated and designed site. This sense of passing is a conjoining of illusion, ideation and duration, whereby the fragility inherent in mutability is also an opportunity for the construction of new relations, names and places. If these fragile sites of the body are to be places where a prosthetic understanding of painting can occur, then their conjoining is a site of potential, for each to disrupt the other as one

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[178] Marquard Smith, 'The Uncertainty of Placing: Prosthetic Bodies, Sculptural Design, and Unhomely Dwelling in Marc Quinn, James Gillingham, and Sigmund Freud', in *New Formations: A Journal of Culture/ Theory/Politics*, Vol. 46 (2002), pp. 85–102 (p. 98–99).

[179] Michel Serres, *The Five Senses: A Philosophy of Mingled Bodies*, trans. Margaret Sankey and Peter Cowley (London and New York: Continuum, 2009), p. 32. I draw upon an important passage in Serres's *Five Senses,* whereby he poetically speculates about the conjunction of surface and depth, the superficial and the essential.

[180] Smith, op. cit., pp. 98-102

[181] Ibid., p. 89.

[182] In this instance, Julia Kristeva's oft-cited essay on abjection, which is discussed later, and Hélène Sixous' narratives that blend bodies and consciousnesses are examples of corporeal mediations of otherness, while Hannah Arendt and Judith Butler, in different ways, offer work that sees the accountability and constitution of self through a consideration of the other. Both intersecting terrains of thought are a melding of corporeal and ethical accounts of otherness as explored through French and American feminist work. The later work of Butler in particular finds her thoughts impressed upon the content that follows.

passes for and through an Other. This might be explained in more *poetic* terms that keep track of the historical, social accounts of Ott, Sobchack and others.

Elizabeth Grosz's understanding of the prosthetic articulates its capacity for bodily extension, creating a kind of third object from the constitutive parts of body and prosthetic.[183] What Sobchack might refer to as a hermeneutic negotiation is here cast in a decidedly more abstract manner – of what a subject and body might become or, indeed, its capacity or limit, as opposed to what it is. Bodies becomes sites of projection, continually negotiated hermeneutic encounters that keep open the possibility of new horizons, relations, subjects and objects. The conjoining of a pragmatic, daily hermeneutics with more speculative ideas of the prosthetic is itself a site within which the work of Benglis is prostheticised. A paint-prosthetics read along these lines is one that extends the space of the artwork into the space of the viewer, a space whereby skin-on-skin brings to attention physical and cultural porousness. Once more a sense of passing is encountered, a passing on and through previous substrates, suggestive of the kind of potentiality that Grosz has articulated. The *terrains vagues* of a prosthetic paint become a marker and starting point.[184] This type of paint contains a movement wherein an architecture needs further articulation. The tools for this construction are not found in latex and plastic but in other areas of Benglis's work, starting with her video works, which act, much like the *Artforum* ad, as a prosthetic for paint-matter. To align the poured edges of her paint to the stretching out of new space, at their periphery, is also to see these video works at play. The absence of physical paint-supports creates a space for the *Artforum* ad and video works to enter an open field of play. When threaded through a material history of the prosthetic, these surfaces supplement the role and function of paint vis-à-vis the body. The kinds of peripheries that Mira Schor articulates find resonance with Grosz's distinction between an architecture that provides shelter and another approach that sees the construction of buildings as housing the potential to become Other.[185] Benglis's idea of paint is constructed here through these different approaches to the prosthetic; in a word, her use of paint houses these conversations, not on the basis of need or pragmatism, but on the level of thinking about what else painting can be. Painting and body are connected very much like limb and prosthetic device in that one cannot be thought of without the other. Moreover, their irreducibility to themselves – either limb or prosthetic – also forces a questioning of their original positions and roles in the first instance.

Prosthetic paint is already out there. Much like the medical model, which relies on synthetic polymers and thermoplastics such as silicone and celluloid, plastic paint is so embedded in everyday life that the extraction or purging of materials from how they play in culture would be a severing of their cultural history and prosthetic function. In an account of the material history of

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[183] Grosz, op. cit., pp. 151–152.

[184] Ibid., pp. 145–152.

[185] Ibid., p. 152.

plastics, Jeffrey I. Meikle details their myriad and pervasive uses throughout the 20th century.[186] One of the first uses of celluloid, before it became a synonym of film, was as a substitute for ivory and amber, an illusionistic trick that relied upon its ability to pass for the look of other materials.[187] Embedded in the history of celluloid is a double illusion in that it carried moving images through to the 1950s while also forming surface textures that replicated other objects. Similarly, Stephen Fenichell talks about plastic heralding a *Plastic Age* where, in the late 1970s, the global production of plastics was higher than that of steel.[188] In a passage that has more than a passing resemblance to Sontag's description of camp, Fenichell describes a synthetic century where the abundance and perhaps dominance of plastic was a triumph of package over product, style over substance and surface over essence.[189] The cultural and aesthetic territory that Sontag details here finds a material counterpart in the passage of plastic through the last 100 years and into the early 21st century. We can look across its various terrains and construct out of these divergent narratives a revised anatomy for paint and, by association, painting. Benglis's work provides an example of how such a practice can be seen differently through a lens of the prosthetic and of plastics. Her work provides a foundation upon which a prosthetic *condition* of painting can be seen today. This condition is foregrounded upon plastic as a material and, simultaneously, as a state of adaptability and potential.

Catherine Malabou has written extensively about plasticity as a site of transgression. Narratives of moulded plastics, packaging and household implements can only offer a partial story of what plastics can offer. The differing terms 'plastic' and 'plasticity' do however share a Greek root in *plassein* — to 'model' or 'mould'.[190] Malabou takes advantage of both etymology and philosophical history to understand plasticity as an object that can both give and receive form; a plastic psyche or brain is one that is poised between its capacity for change and an ability to retain form.[191] What Malabou succeeds in pointing out is the problem of thinking of form and essence separately, whereby a change in appearance — a physical metamorphosis — takes place but leaves the subject intact.[192] Her charge, explored at length in *Ontology of the Accident*, is that a change in a subject must also be that of a change in relations. We return once more to the kind of problem raised by Ott in the division between aesthetics and physical function, the same kind of issue approached, from a different angle, by Sobchack in her desire for day-to-day normalcy. Surface and

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[186] Jeffrey I. Meikle, *American Plastic: A Cultural History* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1995), pp. 2–3.

[187] Ibid.

[188] Stephen Fenichell, *Plastic: The Making of a Synthetic Century* (New York: HarperCollins, 1996), p. 5.

[189] Ibid.

[190] Catherine Malabou, 'The Future of Hegel: Plasticity, Temporality, Dialectic', in *Hypatia*, 15.4 (2008), pp. 196–220 (p. 203).

[191] Catherine Malabou, *Ontology of the Accident: An Essay on Destructive Plasticity*, trans. Carolyn Shread (Cambridge, England: Polity Press, 2012), p. 5.

[192] Ibid., pp. 17–18.

essence, appearance and substance, have to be thought differently; in other words, it is a problem of relation. The case of self-determination that Malabou explores is one where there is an unfolding of substance and subject.[193] If we replace these last two words with an unfolding of *body* and *paint*, then we approach far more closely the movement of that which is encountered in Benglis's early latex offerings. Plastics and plasticity gather at the centre and surface of a prosthetic understanding of paint-matter and discourses of painting of which the work of Benglis a significant precursor. What is important to consider is that a *plastic* encounter, such as the one that Malabou explores, is one where neither site — body/paint — is either given or concrete, both being provisional and having the capacity to change and adapt in relation to each other so that their identities evolve over time. A prosthetic condition of Benglis's work is inherently plastic in this way, not only in the use of new paint-materials, a kind of paint plastic already out there in culture, but through the way in which our understanding of body and paint *in relation* has the capacity to be remoulded, reconfigured and dislocated. This question of relation — which a prosthetic understanding of Benglis's work throws open – traverses the histories of plastics like celluloid, the bodily-hermeneutic inscriptions of Sobchack and more speculative offerings of Grosz and Malabou. A holistic, self-contained body is not to be found or articulated across this terrain; in fact there is reason to believe many of these narratives seem to operate in the articulation of Schor's *terrains vagues*. Particularly compelling is Malabou's temporal understanding of plasticity, namely the function of plasticity as the instance which gives form to the future.[194] Here the idea of relation is cast in terms of movement, as one type of paint-matter detaches itself from one set of relations only to find in that dissolution the seeds of another future, a different set of limits and capacities for painting, one that is distinctly prosthetic.

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[193] Ibid., pp. 206–207.

[194] Ibid., p. 201.

Fig. 4

Fête Galante

Echoes of Freud's oral prosthesis find an abject counterpart in Caravaggio's *The Incredulity of Saint Thomas*. Michael Newman has commented on the importance of this painting in terms of the wound of Christ providing a transgression of interior and exterior bodily space.[195] He articulates a history of painting's relationship to flesh and skin, locating within this genealogy volatile and mutable human bodies.[196] His understanding of vision as deficient, whereby touch is adjoined to sight, is a significant point.[197] If an aspect of the prosthetic is its inherent supplementarity — its ability to conjoin, add and replace — then the subject of touch could also be supplemental in this way.[198] St Thomas's doubt about what lies before him orchestrates a narrative that gathers both sight and touch together, to make sense of what initially might seem nonsense. What Laura Marks has called *haptic* vision is not one in which either vision or touch holds supremacy; their differences are duly observed in terms of their attention to near and far bodily proximities.[199] Marks locates her understanding of the haptic in relation to the moving image and her use of it is very much an adjoining of one sense with another. Freeman and Marks converge from different perspectives in their polemical attitude towards the dominance of sight, with Marks in particular noting the use of sight as a form of cultural objectification and control.[200] Doubt is cast upon the efficacy of vision itself, providing a location where the supplementarity of touch offers itself. Newman aligns belief with *being touched* in the full sense of its meaning,[201] and so an aspect of touch is also its ability to engender emotion and belief, to compensate for a lack within sight alone. The finger of St Thomas becomes more than bone, skin and flesh with its insertion into the open wound of Christ. The allusion to knives and scalpels is evident, particularly the latter in its role as a

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[195]Michael Newman, 'Wounds', in *Wounds: Between Democracy and Redemption in Contemporary Art* (Stockholm: Moderna Museet, 1998), p. 2. Newman inserts his narrative into a history of abjection that recalls Kristeva's notion of the *abject* and Bataille's *informe*. This leads to Newman reading this painting relationally, as touch informs sight and provides an understanding of the porousness of agency and bodily matter.

[196] Ibid., p. 2.

[197] Ibid., p. 3.

[198] Lev Manovich, 'Visual Technologies as Cognitive Prosthesis: A Short Story of the Externalisation of the Mind', in *The Prosthetic Impulse: From a Posthuman Present to a Biocultural Future*, ed. Marquard Smith and Joanne Morra (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2006), p. 203. Manovich gives a lucid description of both the sense of lack and addition inherent within prosthetic limbs, while also drawing parallels with Marshall McLuhan's relation of the prosthetic as furnishing cognition via technology – in McLuhan's case, the belief that the media and technology are inherently *prosthetic*. See also Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: Signet Books, 1964), p. 204.

[199] Laura U. Marks, *The Skin of Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2000), pp. 131–132.

[200] Ibid., p.131.

[201] Newman, op. cit., p. 3.

surgical tool. Getting under the skin, seeing behind the veil so to speak, is intrinsic to, yet also partially destructive of, bodily matter. This sense of destruction is similarly found in a trail of prose that stems from Julia Kristeva's curiosity about Louis-Ferdinand Céline's disgust for humanity and through Bataille's *Story of the Eye,* itself formative of bodily disruption and sensory polymorphism. The double meaning of an *I* that is the locus of both sight and self is constitutive of the way boundaries dissolve and shift in Kristeva's powerful essay.[202] She compares Céline's *Journey to the End of the Night* to a wound in that it works at the gaping edges of subjects and objects, like flayed skin allowing us to see inside the aspects of our darker humanity. The sense of touch is also one, as Kristeva has pointed out, of tenderness and violence — a capacity for caress and disembowelment. The kinds of responses that Caravaggio's painting elicit, not least Newman's, are propelled by an ongoing fascination with the materiality of bodies and the means by which we come to know anything about them. The type of wound that Kristeva talks of finds solace in the conclusion of Newman's essay, in that the wound comes to embody a perpetual revealing of that which is often unseen.[203] Newman's claim is that art has the capacity to reveal in this way and that the proverbial wound, by not healing as such, causes a perpetual and ongoing means by which we confront self and other, the seen and unseen. Touch is then an adjoining of these things, where a body reaches out in curiosity, touching another in the elementary formation of a community, a body of people and of knowledge. Reciprocally, in being touched one finds the capacity for being affected. To be touched by something, someone or an event is to understand the peripheries and boundaries of self and other. The image that Caravaggio gives us finds a modern counterpart in Kristeva, acknowledged by Newman, in that the world itself is the blurring of self and other, where bodies of knowledge might be disrupted in the advent of new ground.

Within a prosthetic understanding of the open wound is a sense of dislocation where one body finds confusion in being other. To be *touched* is a form of maladjustment, of not knowing whether one is touching or being touched. The finger of St Thomas moves underneath the skin of the performance artist Orlan. Her surgical performances enacted during the 1990s offer another kind of theatrics, one where body, image and touch shift and transform. Surgical implants were placed under her skin with the scripted guidance of historical depictions of women as portrayed by canonical male painters such as Boucher and Botticelli.[204] The baroque heritage of Caravaggio's painting can be channeled through Orlan's subterranean forms. Embedded silicone prostheses change the very status of skin itself, a mutation of skin to make-up from the inside. This interior mapping is a literal

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[202] Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), pp. 135–136.

[203] Ibid., p. 135. See also Newman, op.cit., p. 7.

[204] Annamari Vänskä, 'A Heroic Male and a Beautiful Woman: Teemu Mäki, Orlan and the Ambivalence of the Grotesque Body', in *NORA: Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research*, 10.3 (2010), pp. 154–167. Vänskä provides an overview of Orlan's theatrical, prosthetic surgeries and points to her referencing of painters, from Botticelli to Boucher. For an account of Orlan's placement within a canon of feminist performance, see also Jill O'Bryan, 'Saint Orlan Faces Reincarnation', *Art Journal*, 56.4 (1997), pp. 50-56.

interiorising of normative images of beauty, images that were culturally projected back upon female bodies by male painters. The ritual that Orlan inverts is that of the cosmetic procedure itself, which relies on secrecy and veiling in order for the *work* to be carried out.[205] As previously mentioned with Marquard Smith's use of *passing,* the secrecy of cosmetic work runs in tandem with this sense of invisibility. This culture of illusion and secrecy finds its theatrical inversion in the very public operations that take a feminist agency of bodily ownership and tactility to a place where the body is open to violent revision, becoming provisional and volatile.[206] Public-versus-private plays out in an analogous manner to the abject confusion of inside and outside bodily space. Orlan takes this to a level where the cosmetic and the prosthetic touch and blend – a real-time conflation of surface and substance that inverts the kind of binary metaphysics that Catherine Malabou has detailed in her essay on destructive plasticity.[207] The change in Orlan, so to speak, is happening not only from the outside but also from within, simultaneously. Here the work of Benglis forms only a distant palette to the kind of surgical incisions which make public that which remains dark even to ourselves. The gaping wound of Christ shares a cultural topography with the face of Orlan, connected through a narrative of the unseen made tangible and visible, yet finger and scalpel function as a corrective to visuality as lack. This deep distrust of looking is a suspicion of what *looking good* might mean and a fundamental doubt about precisely what we are looking *at.* What Orlan and Céline accomplish, through very different means, is the understanding of normalisation in how we think, look and act. Skin when considered in a contemporary context is, as Orlan's work reminds us, not only that within which we live and feel but also one of projection, from the fantasy of film, make-up chair and surgeon's scalpel. A material and figurative gel for these issues can be found in the history and creation of a synthetic polymer that Orlan had used in her surgical theatrics – silicone.

Silicone had been used in various forms for breast augmentation as early as the mid-1940s, not long after Dow Chemicals and the Corning Glass Company merged to form the Dow Corning Chemical Company and, with it, the invention of silicone.[208] According to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the cultural categorisation of silicone, as the word polymer might suggest, has not been entirely singular or consistent. In 1964, silicone's categorisation by the FDA had shifted from an implant material to a drug, in an attempt to stem its growing and often illegal use in the burgeoning industry of breast enhancement.[209] Elizabeth Haiken details its use and history in the development of cosmetic surgery in the U.S., noting shifting cultural trends in female body

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[205] Vänskä, op. cit., p. 163.

[206] O'Bryan, op. cit., p. 54.

[207] Malabou. *Ontology of the Accident.* op. cit., pp. 17–18.

[208] Elizabeth Haiken, *Venus Envy: A History of Cosmetic Surgery* (Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), p. 246.

[209] Ibid., p. 247.

image during the 1950s, with public figures like Marilyn Monroe playing a significant role.[210] The illegal use of silicone fluid, injected directly into bodies, had led to widespread issues with infection and resulting amputations, yet the insertion of silicone gel, contained in a rubberised silicone sac, soon provided a more stable and safe alternative to prior liquid injections. Silicone also found applications in its ability to mimic human cartilage and bone, major arteries and, of course, human soft tissue[211] By the time Orlan had come to perform her public, theatrical operations, silicone had already developed a long and complex history within the worlds of fashion, cosmetic surgery, prosthetic devices and surgical reconstruction. In many instances, the material itself is hidden within culture, quite literally within bodies, but also through its ability to mimic and perform the tasks of other objects. By inserting this plastic material into her own body, Orlan creates a drape out of her own skin, forming a prosthetic paint in the sense that she understands the site of the female body as one subjected to images and ideas of beauty within a predominantly male, phallocentric culture. Skin is here supported by prosthetic armatures that show their contour and shape but not their actual image and material constitution. Pigmentation is the uneven and porous outer layer of the artist whose medium is not only subterranean and embedded forms but also the images of female bodies handed down through the likes of François Boucher, *Vogue*, TV commercials and beauty products. As Martin Jay has pointed out in his exploration of vision across key historical moments, vision is something that can impose an image or narrative upon a subject, making someone subject to its image, while at the same time offering its own subordination to other senses such as touch.[212]

It is perhaps telling that Orlan should use an image of Boucher's *Europa* as one marker among others in a prosthetic mapping of her own body. In many respects, the lineage of her work relies not only upon the feminist body art of previous decades but also upon the baroque heritage of the aforementioned Caravaggio. A direct line of thought can also be gathered around the 18th-century visual idiom of the *fête galante*, itself a sub-genre within the broader movement of the Rococo. The conflation of skin and make-up, even the confusion of one with the other, is evident in Boucher's work and adds another quality to the open wound of Caravaggio's Christ.[213] Boucher can preface a conversation regarding qualities of paint and surface as a dialogue between skin and finery, even skin as finery. The importance of Boucher's work rests in the relationship between its subject matter — French high society, pomp and spectacle – and the use of paint as a physical embodiment

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[210] Ibid., p. 243

[211] E. E. Frisch, 'Silicone in Artificial Organs', in *Polymeric Materials and Artificial Organs*, ed. Charles G. Geblein (Washington, D.C.: American Chemical Society, 1984), pp. 70–90.

[212] Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth Century French Thought* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1993), pp. 381–434.

[213] Donald Posner, *Antoine Watteau* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1984), pp. 128–182. Posner provides a detailed overview of the origins of the Féte Galante and of Boucher's debt to Watteau.

of that social moment. The inherent theatricality of Boucher's application of paint, at once fanciful, seductively polychromatic, loose and gestural, opens onto a possible world of interpretation that anticipates perceptual immediacy. His *fête galante* happens at the surface of the event, with a consideration of paint itself. The make-up of Madame Pompadour, his muse and significant patron, runs deep within the society he portrays, and in turn creates, for the viewer.[214] Both make-up and make-believe form the genealogy of another consideration of surface in painting. In order to develop this a little further we can look to Boucher's criticism in the hands of a critic of his own time, Denis Diderot.

In Diderot's account of the 1765 Salon, he reserves particular venom for what he considers the artificiality and insincerity of Boucher's contribution, likening the painter's depiction of clouds to the pomp and powder puffs of beauty spots, rouge and the make-up vial.[215] Yet this polemic could also be used as an observation for an approach to painting that links Boucher to an understanding of a physical activity that in turn appeals to the senses. The powder puffs that Diderot speaks of all happen at the surface of the work, made up from an understanding of paint as inherently theatrical, a sense of make-believe, of paint-as-make-up. The physical qualities of Boucher's paint make us acutely aware of its own construction. We could then take this notion of the *fête galante* from its original designation as a portrayal of the *ancien régime* of Parisian culture, to physical qualities of paint itself. Boucher's use of paint performs a masquerade of roles; where linen, cloth and clouds provide a means to address bodies. Figures are defined through what they wear – the unnatural pinkish flesh that Boucher so adores becomes mask-like in comparison to the kind of detail the artist pours into lace and fine fabrics. Georges Didi-Huberman lays out a sense of distrust through the recognition of a fundamental paradox between looking and knowing, namely that knowledge of greater detail, of knowing more, has the potential to cut up, tear apart, and fragment both subject and object.[216] What Didi-Huberman suggests is that knowing more is also an initiation of aporia or a dismantling of the very object that one seeks to know more about. Within the context of Boucher's paintings, the kind of detail lavished on finery, frocks and make-up serves not only to destroy the body – of flesh, bone and bodily matter – but ultimately become its surrogate. Here the act of looking is also a surrogate or substitute for knowing, where the make-up vial becomes the very depth and essence of the culture it so convincingly veils. Essentially, what we have in Boucher is a world at the surface, a thin layer that so convincingly embodies the powder puff, much like

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[214] Melissa Hyde, *Making Up the Rococo: Francois Boucher and His Critics* (Los Angeles: Getty Publishing, 2006), p. 128.

[215] Denis Diderot, *Diderot On Art 1: The Salon of 1705 and On Painting: Salon of 1765 and Notes on Painting v. 1*, ed. John Goodman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), p. 23. '*He can show me all the clouds he likes, I'll always see in them the rouge, the beauty spots, the powder puffs, and the little vials of the make-up table.*'

[216] Georges Didi-Huberman, *Confronting Images: Questioning the Ends of a Certain History of Art*, trans. John Goodman (University Park, Pennsylvania: Penn State University Press, 2005), p. 231.

Orlan opening a vision onto a word of silicone-gel sacs, glossy magazines and the imperialism of images that govern a view of our own bodies.

Boucher's use of paint is reminiscent of Bruno Latour's playful exploration of ideas surrounding the relationship between fact and fetish.[217] Latour considers various etymological nuances of the word 'fetish', the most striking being its connection to the past participle of the Portuguese word for 'make', *feito*. He aligns this notion of fetish with making or construction to ideas of truth. Latour continues to pursue the relationship of *feito* in its *adjectival* form – which relates also to notions of fabrication, artifice and the synthetic – as a means to express a coexistence with the concrete. The cultural and physical construction of an object can exist as both concrete form and, at the same time, an acknowledged fabrication. The implication here, explored at some length by Latour, is that fact and fiction, the empirical and imaginary, are composites of the same fabric. The word 'fact' seems to point to external reality, and the word 'fetish' seems to designate the beliefs of a subject. Within the depths of their Latin roots, both conceal the intense work of construction that allows for both the truth of facts and the truth of minds.[218] Latour's playful etymological ethnography can be folded around a decidedly more phenomenological account of bodily, sensorial understanding with Merleau-Ponty's influential essay 'The Intertwining – The Chiasm'. Merleau-Ponty explores issues regarding the body as it is sensed through, and is constitutive of, subjects, in the process reconsidering the binary of mind and body as one of entwining or entanglement.[219] Of particular use in regard to touch is the sense of ambiguity inherent in whether a subject is touching or being touched, either object or subject. Merleau-Ponty creates the possibility of the object-subject as entwined, holding a tension wherein complexes of sensations and experiences cannot be bisected or dichotomised within a mind/body understanding.[220] Considered together, both Latour and Merleau-Ponty traverse what Andrew Strathern has understood as the complexity of embodiment today – namely, that it moves in one direction to cover more abstract and theoretical terrain (Latour) and in the other direction to encounter the material and physical (Merleau-Ponty).[221] In other words, the term itself seems to have been bisected into two very different cultural bodies. Returning once more to the *Incredulity of St Thomas* as depicted by Caravaggio, we can use this image as a conjoining of elements – Boucher's make-up vial as the ultimate fetish of the Ancien Régime intertwined with Orlan's public display of private bodily oppression. Both operate upon and flay open their visible sense of construction and artifice as an open wound. Their perpetual opening, to once more recall Newman's observation, is to reveal their constructions

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[217] Bruno Latour, *On the Cult of the Factish Gods*, trans. Heather MacLean and Cathy Porter (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2010), p. 3.

[218] Ibid., p. 3.

[219] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, ed. Claude Lefort, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1968), pp. 147–148.

[220] Ibid.

[221] Andrew J. Strathern, *Body Thoughts* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1996), pp. 195–196.

enacted though continued attempts to veil. This is a final yet restless articulation of the *fête galante*, understood as if intersected by Caravaggio and Orlan, of bodies cast upon sites of doubt and oppression in order to reveal to us just what they look like, and this *looking-like* is the indirect access we need in order to see surfaces as ultimate depth, where subjects-as-objects show their agency and depth. Michel Serres considers this conflation of surface and depth in *Five Senses: A Philosophy of Mingled Bodies*, through the shared etymology of cosmos and cosmetics, whereby the order of our world and an art of adornment hold equivalence.[222] Boucher's *fête galante* has movement across generations in the sense that every cultural moment generates events that offer glimpses of essence though the very trinkets that turn our attention in another direction, onto the surface of our things. Orlan offers plastic interiors in the multiple sense of an 'other' that is internalised psychologically yet opened out physically by the material, plastic prosthetics that transform her bodily surfaces from within. Cosmos and cosmetics are here twinned through doubt as to where our bodies dwell and to whom they belong. Serres's comment that nothing goes deeper than decoration is manifest in the most immediate manner in Orlan, where her deepest parts are the playthings that populate the surfaces of our culture.

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[222] Michel Serres, op.cit., p. 32.

Imi

British curator Penelope Curtis has noted that palindromes extend beyond Imi Knoebel's name to inflect a reading of his work.[223] Pertinent to her observation is *Raum 19*, first conceived and assembled while Knoebel was a student at the Düsseldorf Academy in 1968. This work, having undergone at least 10 re-enactments since its first installation, is accompanied by varying interpretations in the U.S. and Europe.[224] Curtis's reference to palindromes is key to the manner in which other accounts, such as that of Wouter Davidts, have realised *Raum 19* as programmatic — offering a rule and measure through which to interpret Knoebel's practice as a whole.[225] Movements forward and backward over a series of letters allude to a possible grammar through which to create other work, in turn offering counterpoints to the 1968 installation. Moving across Knoebel's entire practice, *Raum 19* suggests moments of punctuation and rupture across different decades. A sense of visible construction is further acknowledged by Knoebel's birth name being Klaus rather than Imi, linking him to the more visible theatrics of his professor at the Düsseldorf Academy, Joseph Beuys.

The re-staging of *Raum 19* at various junctures and sites over Knoebel's career places it partially within a *mytho-poetic* tradition of Beuys.[226] The emphasis is on work as a *working-out*, or as Nancy Spector has observed of Beuys, a practice steeped in process and transformation.[227] Rather than draw upon the mythological and theological histories of Beuys, Knoebel has instead looked to process itself as integral to its work. Eyes are cast upon the same inventory of objects, back and forth over familiar surfaces and shapes that hold pictorial and architectural qualities. Iteration, as it might pertain to ritual in a Beuysian sense, here renounces its central attachment to autobiography, one that Beuys cultivated and refined throughout his career.[228] Beuys's repeated use of materials

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[223] Penelope Curtis, *Imi Knoebel: Primary Structures 1966/2006* (Leeds, England: Henry Moore Institute, 2006), p. 8.

[224] Curtis, 2006. Davidts, 2008. Williams, 2011.

[225] Wouter Davidts, 'From Painting to Sculpture and Back Again (And Again, and Again): On Imi Knoebel's Raum 19', *Afterall*, 19 (2008), pp. 123–129 (p. 129).

[226] Nancy Spector, 'Matthew Barney and Joseph Beuys in Absentia', in *Barney/Beuys: All in the Present Must Be Transformed* (New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications, 2006), p. 17. I draw upon Spector's observations of placing Beuys's practice across traditions of Christian ritual, Greek mythology and German Romanticism, in defining the *mytho-poetic.*

[227] Ibid., p. 17.

[228] Ibid., pp. 19–20. Here too Spector understands the use of autobiography as intrinsic to the threading of narratives in Beuys's work.

such as felt and fat are holistically conceived within an intersubjective mythology through which the autobiographical is woven.[229] Myth and ritual, connected as they may seem to be, do not however hold equivalency. As Uwe Schneede has pointed out in an essay on Beuys, while myths are set apart from life, rituals are intrinsically connected to the everyday.[230] We might see this oscillation between narratives familiar and strange as being bridged by the artist's use of repetition — connected through iterative actions that transform the everyday into objects, actions and images of unfamiliarity. Scheede refers to the different experiences of time in Beuys' performances, through speeding up or slowing down familiar actions or tasks.[231] The sense of being in or out of time is related to spaces of myth and ritual, occuring in everyday time yet undertaken by Beuys in a manner that places them decidedly out of their familiar contexts of production and reception. This type of transformation is enacted in *Raum 19*, whereby action has moved from canvas to body and back once more to the architectural unit of the room, containing residues of layered histories, bodily addresses and modes of looking, inhabitation and inscription. What David Moos has called the narrative complexity of Beuys is retained by Knoebel through the inflection of painting in sculpture and architecture.[232] This complexity, however, is not one that retains the bodily or pedagogical role of the artist as its central or dominant motif. Knoebel's attention to the complex history of abstraction within the first half of the 20th century supplants the kinds of mythologies encountered through Beuys. *Raum 19* mythologises or performs through materials such as hardboard, ubiquitous in its use for building construction, theatre design and as a support for painting. To explore the relation of artist to art object further, we can look at two connected overviews of abstract painting that create a support for the kinds of territories *Raum 19* covers.

British painter Daniel Sturgis observes several major genealogies within 20th-century Western abstract painting, cited in an essay for his curatorial project *The Indiscipline of Painting*.[233] One has its roots in Russian constructivism, others stem from the Bloomsbury circle of painters and writers such as Clive Bell, and in the U.S. through figures such as Clement Greenberg.[234] What Sturgis suggests across these different histories is the way in which painting forms a relationship to culture,

[229] Nat Trotman, 'Ritual Space/Sculptural Time', in *Barney/Beuys: All in the Present Must Be Transformed* (New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications, 2006), p. 138. Trotman also points to the importance of the body and performance in Beuys's practice, adding further significance to Spector's acknowledgement of autobiography as material process.

[230] Uwe M. Schneede, '"It's About the Whole of Reality": Myth And Ritual In Beuys' Actions', in *Mythos: Band/Volume 2*, ed. Eckhard Schneider (Bregenz: Kunsthaus Bregenz, 2007), pp. 152–153.

[231] Ibid., p.153.

[232] David Moos, 'Locating Imi Knoebel', in *Imi Knoebel; Ich Nicht: New Works* (Stuttgart: Hatje/Cantz, 2009), p. 140.

[233] Daniel Sturgis, *The Indiscipline of Painting*, ed. Martin Clark, Sarah Shalgosky and Daniel Sturgis (St Ives: Tate Publishing, 2011), p. 7.
[233] Ibid., pp. 7–8. Sturgis points to the influence upon Greenberg of Gotthold Lessing's 1766 essay *Laokoon*, on the limits of painting, poetry and sculpture.

[234] Ibid., pp 7-8.

whether it be wedded to a sociopolitical movement, or, in the case of Greenberg, turning inward towards a consideration of its own materiality.[235] Sturgis sets these histories apart, and while he does not quite dichotomise in the manner implied in this overview, he does create clear distinctions between them in order to show that the *indiscipline* of which his project speaks gives way to more porous and permeable boundaries. Of particular note is the recourse to Gotthold Lessing's *Laokoon,* which had a considerable influence on Greenberg's similarly titled essay of the same name, published in 1940. *Raum 19* stretches across these histories as outlined by Sturgis, retaining a kind of *pregnant moment* of assembled objects that recalls Lessing's use of the term *peripeteia,* yet maintaining a hybrid collage of painting and sculpture in the process.[236] If Lessing had intended this mode of viewing as being an event that conjured unseen images in the mind of the viewer, then a movement from imagination to presence, picture to object, is perhaps telling of the moves held within *Raum 19.* Not only does it encompass moments of painting's recent past through objects *pregnant* with their history, it constantly brings to attention the machine-made surfaces and ubiquitous materials of their industrial construction – a sense of presence through industry in the full sense of the word. Importantly, this sense of industry is not that of the individual hand, but of industry in a wider context of production, both industrial and cultural.

Thomas Lawson's essay *Last Exit: Painting* also acknowledges divergent histories within modernism that gather around a declarative immediacy on the one hand and a distancing from self – towards a critique of self-production – on the other.[237] His critique follows a similar path to Sturgis's, seeing within the American avant-garde a degradation of its utopian gestures, namely that it had grown out of its emancipation from European picture-making to become a practice of presence, and most importantly the presence of the artist.[238] He sees this initial liberation as sowing the seeds for its eventual collapse into mannerism, forming cults of self that found their way into the American mainstream from the late 1950s onwards. With its increasing divorce from everyday life, Lawson understands the demise of New York School abstraction as losing its social, revolutionary character, thus amputating it from the potential to critique culture in any meaningful way. Both Sturgis and Lawson understand these implications for painting in terms of the triadic relationship of artist, art-object and culture. It is worth keeping in mind that Lawson's essay was written at a time when he and other artists such as Sherrie Levine, Louise Lawler and Barbara

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[235] Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Laocoon: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry*, trans. Edward Allen McCormick (Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), p. 22.

[236] Thomas Lawson, 'Last Exit: Painting', in *Thomas Lawson Mining For Gold: Selected Writings (1979-1996)*, ed. Lionel Bovier and Fabrice Stroun (Zurich and Dijon: JRP/Ringier & Les Presses du Réel, 2004), pp. 53–54.

[237] Ibid., p. 54.

[238] Ibid., p. 64. Lawson's idea of a re-politicised painting or – more broadly – art practice follows an idea of camouflage. He builds upon the claim by Douglas Crimp that the most potent means for an artwork to remain politicised is for it to act in complicity with the very institutions of power that authorise it. In this sense, Lawson sees painting as a ruse of authenticity, possessing the potential to dislodge notions of painterly expression and authenticity from within its own discourses.

Kruger were critiquing the aesthetic hermeticism and commodification of minimalist work through practices that sought to explore and question the sociopolitical make-up of photography, advertising and artistic expression.[239] Lawson's articulation of events creates an opening into the machinations of the *Pictures Generation* of New York city in the late 1970s and early 1980s, but his assessment of earlier avant-gardes serves us well in considering Knoebel's work as straddling both declarative and non-declarative traditions in a broad sense. What *Raum 19* seems to undertake is an unmooring of traditions by encompassing antithetical stances. This takes form through iterations of immediacy that eschew both the presence of the artist and illusionistic or pictorial space. Yet at the same time, through the use of stacked picture frames and basic geometrical units, there is an allusion to the workshop or artist's studio as a site of production – in short, a place of work. Unlike Beuys's fusion of art and life, Knoebel succeeds in melding an interdisciplinary outlook, stretching across different histories to create an understanding of work as an interpretive tool through which we might look at the ideas of material specificity and the interdisciplinary through a skewed lens. If Lawson's idea of painting as a subversion from within still holds some value, then it might be useful to see *Raum 19* as a ruse, via its connection to histories of abstraction that have renounced history, to the model of the artist-studio. Much like the performances of Beuys, these connections to painting's history undergo a performative mythologising that estranges their reception.

Frames and forms have been cultivated to transform windows into doors, where an open roof becomes an upward-glancing view to another interior, providing a glimpse outwards to another landscape. The structures of *Raum 19* provide a continually shifting grammar that can be approached from an idea of the anecdote, one that remains closer to its etymological meaning than its more familiar usage today as an informal personal story or amusing aside. Its Greek root reveals a different narrative, more akin to *unpublished* or *not given*. The revisiting of the 1968 work seems to offer its continued formation and transformation as an anecdote of how we come to look at, interpret and inhabit spaces, images and objects. The frustration that ensues in looking at and being with *Raum 19* is that its subject is an anecdotal self – a subject withheld, provisional and projective. We fail in an attempt to throw our subjectivity upon the work. Similarly, there is a desire to adorn the work with the subject of the artist, which leads to similar results. As the palindrome *Imi* implies, the room runs again and again across different spaces and locations in order to throw a rule and measure over an awaiting public. To be withheld from such consumption or at least to offer a resistance to it is part of the nature of *Raum 19*, continually on the move from a cobbling together of self or its attempted renunciation in favour of autonomy. It does this by offering a space that is all potential and measure, looking outwards at what it can inflect, interpret and transform. It is an

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[239] Gregory H. Williams, 'A Glossier Shade of Brown: Imi Knoebel's Raum 19', in *Regarding the Popular: Modernism, the Avant-Garde and High and Low Culture* , ed. Sascha Bru, Laurence Nuijs, Benedikt Hjartarson, Peter Nichols, Tania Ørum and Hubert Van Den Berg (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 2011), pp. 275–276.

anecdote in the true sense of awaiting a public, problematising the engraved historical canonicity that Sturgis and Lawson both account for and ultimately locate themselves within.

Gregory Williams acknowledges the sense of potential or withholding in *Raum 19* while pointing to the phenomenological, bodily space that it offers.[240] Knoebel's choice of objects and materials alludes to their futurity – simply resting and awaiting some further instruction or guide. With this in mind, any sense of a 'body' as given would be a mistake. Williams's comments about phenomenological experience do not quite measure the sense of potential he points to in other parts of his essay. It would seem apt to conjoin experience and latency in the realisation that the futurity of the objects on offer affects an experience of *Raum 19* – these objects cannot singularly be experienced *as is.* Williams, like other commentators, gives some consideration to the influence of Kasimir Malevich upon Knoebel.[241] Both Davidts and Moos mention Malevich, albeit briefly, while Williams gives more space to this division within Knoebel's work, between two types of what he calls *utopian aspirations.*[242] Williams's understanding of Malevich resides in the connection of painting to an interdisciplinary, earthbound sociopolitical climate, one to which Malevich responded with non-objective painting – his purging of painting's European ancestry and refusal of illusionism. These residues of transcendence form part of the cultural composition of *Raum 19*, generating an oscillation akin to the palindrome in that there is a continual movement towards material – the industrially designed economy of familiar-looking objects — and simultaneously their disavowal by the replication of frames and a coupling of objects that lean and rest against each other. We find ourselves in the discomfort of inhabiting a space that holds the promise of an elsewhere, but with no closure of delivering it as a finality. Yet rather than a perceived failure of utopian avant-gardes, as Williams and Lawson would have it, the 'failure' here is the site where a room might find greatest potency.

Failure in this context is synonymous with incompletion, and through this Knoebel's work draws from the second type of *utopian aspiration* — Beuys's project of perpetual flux.[243] Initially this flux can be thought of in *Raum 19* as a clearing, a showing of history and a task of purging or clearing those histories. Martin Heidegger's etymological play on *raum* as this very 'clearing' is conveyed through his later essay collection *Poetry, Language, Thought*.[244] He locates the room as being simultaneously a place to dwell and a clearing-away for thought for further dwelling. Within this

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[240] Ibid., p. 275.

[241] Ibid.

[242] The use of the term *perpetual flux* is a further allusion to Beuys's Graecophile roots via Heraclitus, Heidegger and the Jena Romantics, which is further explored at a later juncture in this essay.

[243] Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), p. 154.

[244] Ibid.

understanding of room as both clearing and dwelling is an attention to limits, or boundaries. Heidegger's comment on the boundary as 'that from which something *begins its presencing'*[245] has a correlation with Beuys's sense of flux. Both articulate movement towards something, but fundamentally with no promise of finality. *Raum* is a perpetual dwelling and clearing-away, of sensing limits only to have them move once more, permeable and shifting boundaries. *Raum 19* can be understood in just this way — articulating aspects of painting's near histories, sites that it dwells in and upon, if only to empty them of their original intentions and sites of production.

Knoebel's construction has risen back to the room, which suggests an architectural origin in its formation. Deleuze and Guattari's oft-cited publication *What Is Philosophy?* can provide a provisional base for these insights, as they define architecture as the foundation of other art forms.[246] Architecture is considered not only as housing the possibility of painting and sculpture but also as a site that organises sensations, governing the percepts and affects that *Raum 19* might generate.[247] As discussed previously, Elizabeth Grosz makes this distinction between architecture as shelter and architecture as a site that offers the potential and capacity to become other.[248] Grosz builds upon Deleuze and Guattari's insight into architecture as the first art by shifting focus to its potential for prosthetic extension. She echoes the insights of Serlin, Ott and others in realising the purpose of shelter and prosthetic limbs as providing practical, day-to-day provision and function. She places more emphasis, however, on architecture and the prosthetic as a mode of self-making. In a more in-depth essay, *Architecture from the Outside,*[249] Grosz explores the idea of architecture as becoming other, using elements of Deleuze and Michel Foucault's work in order to help articulate its implications for conceptions of subjectivity and physical space.[250] If we step across both essays by Grosz and supplement her conclusions with the an aspect of Foucault that she did not mention

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[245] Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, trans. Graham Burchell and Hugh Tomlinson (London: Verso, 1994), pp. 164–187. The acknowledgement of this text as *well known* stems from a number of sources already present in this writing. The work and research of Simon O'Sullivan — who has explored Deleuzian theory extensively in the context of aesthetics and subjectivity — is prominent in a UK context. See Simon O'Sullivan, *On the Production of Subjectivity: Five Diagrams on the Finite-Infinite Relation* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

[246] Ibid., pp. 164–187. This important text by Deleuze and Guattari has also had an impact in the US. See Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2002). Massumi has been formative in the so-called *affective turn* in cultural theory. See Patricia T. Clough, 'The Affective Turn: Political Economy, Biomedia and Bodies', in *The Affective Theory Reader*, ed. Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2010), p. 206.

[247] Elizabeth Grosz, op. cit., p. 152.

[248] Elizabeth Grosz, 'Architecture from the Outside', in *Space, Time, and Perversion* (New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 131–137.

[249] Ibid.

[250] Foucault, op. cit., p. 320. It is worth noting that Foucault considers askesis not as a reduction or purging of self but rather, as he cites Seneca, *instructing* a subject; both equipping and providing an instruction. We could focus on one of those words here as it applies to Grosz, namely that a prosthesis might *equip* a subject to become other.

— the notion of self-making through askesis – Knoebel's *anecdote* takes on a different dimension.[251] As its continued re-staging might imply, the work moves from a series of static environments to a proposition of work as an askesis. Within this understanding is Knoebel's true affiliation with Beuys and the transformative, plastic qualities he offers. Beuys's pedagogical impulses, fused within a holistic conception of *Gesamtkunstwerk,* is also found in an idea of exercise — that an artwork asks something of those that look upon it, and is transformative of subjects and art-objects in the process.[252]

Frederick Beiser's in-depth analysis of the Jena Romantics is key to understanding the German roots of *Gesamtkunstwerk* or total-work-of-art. Of particular note is the view among figures like Friedrich von Schlegel that an essential part of *romantische Poesie* is its sense of *becoming*.[253] This is connected to the sense of futurity and process within Knoebel and also to Beuys's fundamental interdisciplinarity. As Beiser points out, the modus operandi of the Jena Circle was to fuse ethics, politics and philosophy under an aesthetic conception of the human subject. In this sense, Beuys's pedagogical impulse was a motor for perpetual evolution, what he termed *gestalung* – 'in-formation'.[254] The objects in *Raum 19* have the appearance of order, of sharp edges and elegant geometries, but they hold an indifference that undercuts such appearances. These objects help construct a room that suggests an exteriority that has uncoupled itself from an interior. What is left is a sense of what these constructions once were – doors and frames, windows and floors, that have looked out upon buried genealogies of painting, environment and structure, yet they propose a plasticity whereby these histories are malleable once more.

If Williams is keen to point in one direction across *Raum 19*, to its sense of potential, he does so at the expense of seeing within that latency the seeds of other pasts. Beiser's overview of the Jena Circle's *anti-foundationalism* is an idea of philosophy that has always begun and has no ending, finding in its flourishes a melding of literature, poetry, ethics and aesthetics.[255] Not only does *Raum 19* contain within it the seeds of other pasts – the ability to see another Beuys or Malevich – in doing so it possesses what Agamben has called the *prolegomena* of works yet to be written.[256] In his *Notes on Gesture*, Agamben observes an obsession within a given era for the very gestures it

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[251] Frederick C. Beiser, *The Romantic Imperative: The Concept of Early German Romanticism* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2006), p. 57.

[252] Beiser, op.cit., p.17.

[253] Amnon Barzel, 'Conversation between Joseph Beuys and Amnon Barzel at the Venice "Biennale di Venezia", June 1976', in *Joseph Beuys: The Image of Humanity*, trans. Sabina Fata (Milan: Silvana, 2001), p. 89.

[254] Ibid., pp. 108–110

[255] Agamben, op. cit., p.3. 'Every written work can be regarded as the prologue (or rather, the broken cast) of a work never penned'.

[256] Ibid., p. 151.

has lost.[257] As a prologue to a potential aesthetics, Beuys too can be considered in this place of lost gestures, having developed particular obsessions with what George Maciunas has polemically observed as church procession, medieval fairs and expressionism.[258] The obsessive enactments within Beuys's performances could be read in this way – that in enacting mythologies of cultures past, their gestures find a recovery pregnant with this loss, that within every attempted recovery is the irretrievability of an object, its essential lostness. This obsession might have an equivalence to an idea of precision in the context of *Raum 19*, with both words retaining a similar determination if not quality. What Agamben can help highlight is the loss of 20th-century utopian avant-gardes' emancipatory gestures as outlined earlier by Lawson and Sturgis, whether through the attempted fusing of art and life, a striving towards transcendence and purity or the coming of social revolution. These *lost gestures* are exacted with precision in *Raum 19,* providing an askesis for the production of another future. It becomes a prologue that works transversally, supplementary to another Beuys and Malevich having produced other kinds of texts, images and objects for us today. To explore this further we can look to a later work by Knoebel, one that might create different intersections, points of contact and divergence.

Knoebel's *The Latinists,* a work made in 1987, can be approached through the recomposed frames of *Raum 19*. This later work augments an understanding of the use and organisation of materials that are not structured through a relationship to an authorial voice. *The Latinists* is comprised of five works with accompanying titles — conjugations of the verb *live*, notably omitting the first person singular, *I* live. An encounter with these assemblages is given further inflection in that the titles are written in Latin rather than Knoebel's native German. The use of a dead language to title works in which an authorial self is staged as absent, or present only as part of a collective, acts as a veil of sorts. The five segments of *The Latinists* are not rooms but separate assemblages, interstitial and fragmentary yet possessing a sculptural stillness. Christoph Schenker, in a *Flash Art* essay from 1991, describes what he terms the utopian quality of Knoebel's work, producing a type of painting practice free of words but importantly not free of speech.[259] It might be worth picking up on Schenker's comments as having a correlation to the utopian projects of Knoebel's two most notable influences, which Williams pointed out in his own narrative. This utopian aspect of Knoebel's work is a residue of those emancipatory projects, in which simply looking is not quite enough. Schenker's recourse to linguistic analogy might be largely incompatible to the kind of bodily appraisal of Williams but they both converge around the acknowledgement of construction, where looking gives way to action or participation. Speech might here be referred to as an utterance, which has a connection to iteration in being an act rather than script or program. *The Latinists* gives us a dead language, and so we cannot attend to its structures through the languages that have

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[257] Trotman, op. cit., p. 142.

[258] Christoph Schenker, 'Imi Knoebel: The Limits of Communicability', *Flash Art*, 161 (1991), pp. 103–107 (p. 105–106).

[259] Imi Knoebel, *Imi Knoebel: Works 1968–1996* (Ostfildern: Cantz Verlag, 1996), p. 35.

perviously created them. Strewn material awaits forms of enactment, means of transformation, where language has to gather itself again and be put to work.

The type of work undertaken is approached through what Knoebel has named *Zwischenbild* (intermediate work) in the process of working out its function or ideas.[260] It holds a sense of latency in which an askesis needs to be undertaken for meaning to unfold. This has some relation once more to Agamben's idea of *work-as-prologue* in that use and function are prioritised over the production of objects. Although Knoebel has pointed out that the term refers to works that remain in the studio for periods of time unresolved, it alludes to the way in which a work, or series of works, can act as a bridge to the realisation of other works. Intermediate works can thus be seen to hold an inherently hermeneutic function.[261] Work-as-intermediary becomes a way of approaching Knoebel's practice, in that we look to the overall project of which individual works comprise constitutive parts. Here too is the *Gesamtkunstwerk* of Beuys once more offloaded from the biographical onto the idea of total painting – peripatetically holding tension between the pictorial, the architectural and the sculptural. These intersections might be considered further by an unlikely object, an essay by the British art historian Paul Hills, which focuses on a history of the veil in Europe, from the early-14th-century paintings of Bernardo Daddi through to Titian's *Diana and Callisto*. Hills's appreciation of veils acts as a prosthetic, a provisional and supplemental object that accounts for the shifting role of the veil, in turn making it a transitional and intermediate object that has a connection to Knoebel's *Zwischenbild.*

Hills begins by noting the advances in weaving technology during the Middle Ages, resulting in the production of translucent veils.[262] He adjoins this social and material event to a shift in theological thinking, from the veil as opaque covering to translucent material, a movement from divinity concealed to one visualised within pictorial narrative.[263] The transparent veil that Hills sees as ushering in a new type of visuality in the paintings of Duccio, here forms another kind of relation to transparency — of an architecture that contains a vision of both its inside and its outside. Knoebel's deployment of intermediacy finds one part of its genesis in European painting and its veils that speak of becoming, of possibility, and yet also strive towards shadows and obfuscation. What Hills undertakes in a consideration of Titian's *Diana and Callisto* is the veil's evolution from sacred presence to discovery, from picture-making to painting — the performative aspect of gesture that foresees modernism. *Raum 19* seems to undergo a similar type of journey across its various sites. What was once a sacred space of experience — the type of phenomenological space that

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[260] Ibid., p.35. 'Zwischenbild is a picture that hasn't worked out, where I'm trying to convey an idea but haven't found the right means to do so.'

[261] Paul Hills, *The Renaissance Image Unveiled: From Madonna to Venus* (Edinburgh: National Galleries of Scotland, 2010), p. 12.

[262] Ibid.

Williams has pointed out — gives way to a measured relation with works such as *The Latinists*. Painterly gestures once embedded in the manipulation of paint are now transferred to the inclusion of viewers, not in a physical sense but through what Foucault has termed acts of self-making. These works, which have little connection to Knoebel as authoring them, become prostheticised via *Imi*. *Raum 19* and *The Latinists* do not offer the theological shifts that Hills has articulated, yet similarly they debunk temporal, phenomenological space as sacred, in an attempt at more profane relations. They exist in spaces where the workshop is a place of everyday industry, of repetition and boredom, but simultaneously the most dynamic type of workshop that casts our eyes upon new boundaries.

Fig. 5

Conclusion

Many of the moves undertaken in this work have remained implicit and, as previously mentioned, subterranean. The decision behind this was both structural and subject orientated, namely that a writing or address to Calvino's memo had to have a fidelity not only to its absence but that absence had a direct relationship to the kind of Oulipoian restraints deployed by Calvino, Perec and others. This does however pose problems for a research project where an essayistic and, at times, poetic account for structural restraints and prosthetic conditions of painting may be at risk of appearing so oblique as to remain ultimately amorphous and mysterious. In a gesture towards memory and recovery, what follows is a moving back and forth through the text in order to make sense of how the soft-restraint-as-askesis has worked itself upon, and been worked upon, by a prosthetic understanding of the artists and artworks encountered throughout. Whilst this account is by no means exhaustive or overtly analytical, it is a revisiting of moves that gives clarity to a reader not as familiar with the material, both painterly and literary.

The first two chapters of this text are intimately connected in that the first is an exploration of qualities and functions of the herm, whilst the second is an exercise in how those qualities can be put to work. In short, what is undertaken is an askesis, or as Hadot has called it, a spiritual exercise. The correlation between qualities and uses are then played out across the remaining essays in a fashion that takes advantage of Catherine Malabou's notion of plasticity — a giving and receiving of form — in order to understand that the herm and the soft restraint can both be imposed upon subjects but reciprocally can be touched, and modified, by them. For the purpose of further understanding the dynamic, plastic qualities of the soft restraint and herm-as-askesis, I will undertake just what this give and take is and how transformations have occured throughout this research.

Of significance in the essay on Lynda Benglis is the idea that a soft restraint is not one that is imposed from outside or indeed predetermined. As I had mentioned in the previous chapter, the soft restraint is performative, fuzzy and prone to mistakes. This gives some clarity to how the herm, as a spatial marker that resides at crossroads and boundaries, allowed me to interpret the wealth of material on Benglis as giving shape to an artist that straddled European pictorial traditions and the the theatrical, phenomenological mind-set of minimalist concerns arising from the 1960s. Of particular note is the fourth wall of Nouvelle Vague, a cinematic boundary, and that of Diderot's painterly subject absorbed in moments of introspection. The soft restraint here transforms into a threshold-as-shapeshifter. Irwin Weoworth's amorphous alien creature in *The Blob* replaces the

fixity of actors looking directly to camera, or Pollock's painterly actions remaining primarily fixed to the indexical as opposed to the prosthetic. In this instance the prosthetic function of Benglis, the intersection of the soft restraint and the prosthetic, is the mutability of a wall that can transform its means of separation but even more importantly, the wall is both mediator and hermeneutic tool for the articulation of the importance of mediation itself. The mutable wall sheds light on the importance of relation; the meeting, conjoining, supplanting and extension of boundaries. Here Benglis' work is filtered through the soft restraint as it maintains a memory of the herm as boundary marker and hermeneutic tool, yet reciprocally its plasticity allows it to absorb Benglis' work as it crosses from painting to theatre and film, from Nouvelle Vague to B-movie horror.

The second essay performs the soft restraint in a different way. Here the components that benefit from border-crossing are the surgical performances of Orlan and paintings of François Boucher. I should point out that in each essay I stepped into the unknown with these subjects, not knowing from the outset where one paragraph from the next would lead. What unfolded as this essay developed was a fixation on Diderot's observation and critique of Boucher's paintings as the very essence of the Ancien Régime. What Diderot perceived as both superficial and therefore of little cultural or intellectual value, in fact became the most astute commentary on a painter whose fetishistic obsession with fashion and status paves the way for the plastic implants of Orlan. At this juncture — the conjoining of Orlan and Boucher — the soft restraint becomes the beholding of surface as the ontological plain upon which a given culture can find depth. Maintaining the idea that, as Michel Serres has observed, nothing goes deeper than surface, Orlan's skin transforms to the make-up vial that Boucher's palette initially created, in contribution to a legacy of male patriarchy, one that comes full circle with Orlan's prostheses. If the essay on Benglis focused on aesthetic boundaries and shifting partitions, Orlan and Boucher engorge themselves on the herm as outer skin — the virile shaft as patriarchal marker and apotropaic object — to be touched and to touch in return. What remains implicit in this essay is that whilst the Ancien Régime is conveyed across the surfaces of Boucher's paintings (much like the Fête galante plays across the surfaces of gentile society), Orlan's embedded prosthetics talk to us about a kind of world that internalises self-image and value through invisible forces of patriarchy, amongst the lure of self-modification and even mutilation. Equally subtle but present, silicone objects are surgically implanted in Orlan's body as subterranean markers. I here envisaged the herm made literal through silicone implants, the soft restraint works in the conjunction of one distant culture to another, connected by Orlan's fascination with male generated images of women's bodies as a form of patriarchal control, embodied through embedded implants that are at once metaphorical, plastic and bodily. The soft restraint retains is suppleness and plasticity in traversing the twinned notions of plastic, in a material and metaphysical sense. The soft restraint is manifested in both a material cultural sense

and through issues of patriarchy — physical self-modification and power relations are embedded in notions of beauty.

The final essay that encounters the work of Imi Knoebel is a different kind of writing that, at the outset, proved harder to make sense of. It was only after some time and distance, and several re-readings, that I began to understand that my frustration in making sense of *Raum 19* was in fact an achievement of the essay. What has been of particular note is the way that Knoebel's work, and perhaps broader project, is unlike the other essays in that *Raum 19* itself becomes a herm that is brought to the immediate histories and figures that it touches. In this sense it might even be misleading to say that the subject of the essay is Knoebel at all. Its title, *Imi,* is telling in an attention to a palindrome that stands as an Oulopoian marker — the herm as trickster and prankster. Knobel's birth name is not that of the essay's title, and its ending which speaks of translucency and veils is metaphorical of the kind of veiling and dress-up that *Raum 19* undertakes of figures such as Joseph Beuys. What is uncovered is that the herm and soft restraint can inhabit a host, *Raum 19,* in a fashion it had not in the previous essays. It is *Raum 19,* through repeated incarnations across various decades, that is the traveller across time and aesthetic thresholds. What I found particularly alluring is that Knobel's work remains aloof and enigmatic, much like herms and Hermes, and that it only gains momentum and shape when brought to other subjects. The soft restraint finds itself reversed in its final incarnation in this research project — it takes on a host that moves around and enacts itself upon other subjects, such as American and Russian abstract painting, Beuys and the significance of veils and translucency in early Renaissance painting.

What these essays have undertaken and ultimately achieve is a critique of the rigidity and imperialism of the Oulipoian hard restraint; that which is imposed at the outset and from outside. That alone however is not enough. What the soft restraint has done is to govern and shape a discourse from within, performatively, about prosthetic conditions of painting which has allowed me to see that the nature of relation itself — the intersections and interfaces between subjects and objects — is the engine room for content, where new subjects can be proposed. This leads me to the difficult topic of contribution to knowledge within the context of UK arts research. I have already pointed out the difficulty of defining a cogent field for painting in this work's introduction. Even the histories of expanded field painting are somewhat porous and mutable depending on what artist, curator or institution one cares to research in regard to these territories. What I have undertaken then is to supplant the word 'expanded' with prosthetic, initially to critique curatorial projects such as Katherine Wood's at Tate Modern and, at the turn of this century, Simon Wallis' project at Tate Liverpool. The suppleness and plasticity of the subject / object interchange has been given fuller definition by the mingling of actions and qualities exchanged through the herm, soft restraint and painterly prosthetics. I have acknowledged that these three elements or structures have

soft and porous edges, and they have moved through and with each other in this journey of writing. This research finally comes to a fragile resting place in a frozen moment where the exchange between a subject that makes and an object that receives is open. The historical fixity upon which expanded painting exhibitions have been founded is clear, because ultimately they go no further in interrogating the prosthetic gaps that this research opens up between its subjects and objects — of the mediation of subjectivities within a prosthetic understanding of painting. This resting place is then one of openness and fragility, one that might resemble the abstract speculation of a prosthetic body as articulated by Elizabeth Gross, yet this would simply be the surface of it. In accounting for material histories of plastics and by touching on issues of bodily normalcy, I have gestured towards a future of bodies and paintings, where painting is located in its continued reinvention, herm-like, by inserting itself restlessly into their relation. And so frozen here at the end of these words is merely the understanding of prosthetic relationality as the means by which we can think and be other.

This recounting of the text has also shed light on the realisation of studio-practice-askesis. Prior to this project there was a somewhat fixed relationship between subject and object, in regard to authorial intention and material object production. I know reside at a new threshold whereby the intersection of different kinds of making (digital photography, screen-printing, painting and object-making) is a process of self-transformation, the result of which is a stepping into the unknown. Part of the task of understanding a prosthetic condition of painting is to realise its capacity in allowing us to think and produce ourselves differently. In this sense my research ends with an opening onto distant horizons.

Appendix I

Work From the Polari Range. 2003. FA Projects, London. Pigmented silicone,
synthetic flowers and expanded foam on MDF. 122cm x 213cm x 30cm

Work From the Polari Range. (Detail)

Work From the Polari   *Range.* (detail)

Hermes. 50-100 A.D. Getty Villa. Los Angeles. USA
Marble. 149cm x 24cm x 21cm

Fanestra &
Works. 2009.
Gallery
Installation
Dimensions

Other
New Art
Walsall, UK
View.
variable

Fanestra & Other Works. (detail)

Untitled Studio Work. 2010. Pigmented silicone & steel
46cm x 30cm x 10cm

Herm 0513. 2013. RCA, London. Pigmented silicone and mixed media
Dimensions variable

Herm 0513. (Detail)

Delft Prosopon. 2014. Los Angeles. Pigmented silicone and MDF
48cm x 36cm x 23cm

Prosopon 0314/1. 2014. RCA, London. Silicone image transfer on pigmented silicone & MDF
48cm 36cm x 15cm

Herm 0714. 2014. Loudhailer Gallery, Los Angeles. Pigmented silicone & mixed media
Dimensions variable. (Installation view)

Herm 0714. (Detail)

Herm 0714. (Detail)

Prosopon Lorn. 2015. Silicone image transfer on pigmented silicone, styrofoam and MDF
91cm x 69cm x 36cm

Prosopon Interior. 2015. Silicone image transfer on pigmented silicone and MDF
89cm x 61cm x 43cm

Prosopon 0515. 2015. Silicone image transfer on pigmented silicone, styrofoam and MDF
101cm x 91cm x 36cm

Untitled
 Studio Work (Prosopon Series). 2016. Silicone image transfer on pigmented silicone, styrofoam &
MDF. 56cm x 30cm x 10cm (left). 43cm x 30cm x 10cm (centre). 56cm x 30cm x 10cm (right)

Untitled Studio Work (Prosopon Series). 2016. Silicone image transfer on pigmented silicone, styrofoam & MDF. 56cm x 30cm x 10cm
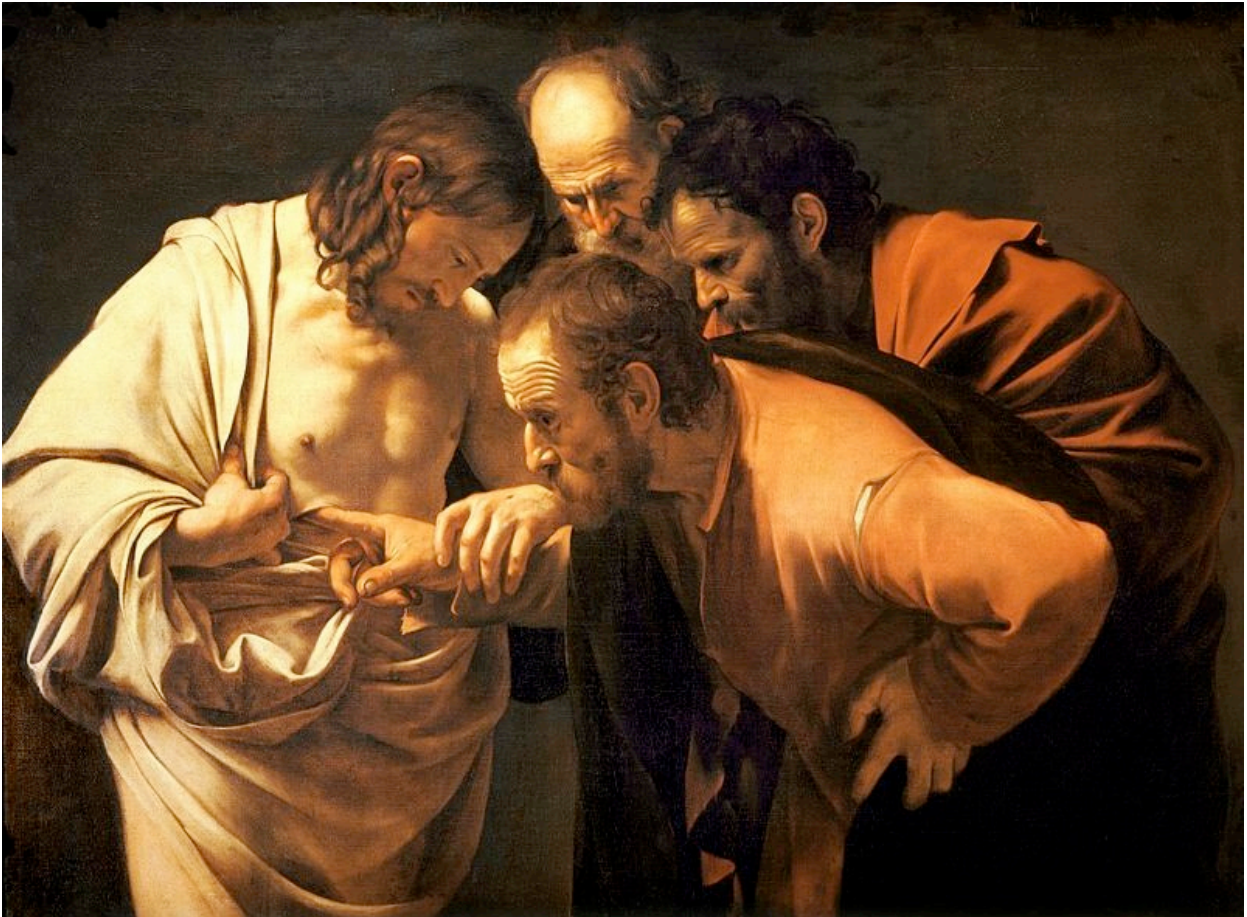
Herm Marker 0117/01. 2015. 2016. Silicone image transfer on pigmented silicone, styrofoam &
MDF. 25cm x 122cm x 28cm

Prosopon 0416/01. 2016. Silicone image transfer on pigmented silicone, styrofoam & MDF
183cm x 122cm x 30cm

Prosopon 0416/02. 2016. Silicone image transfer on pigmented silicone, styrofoam
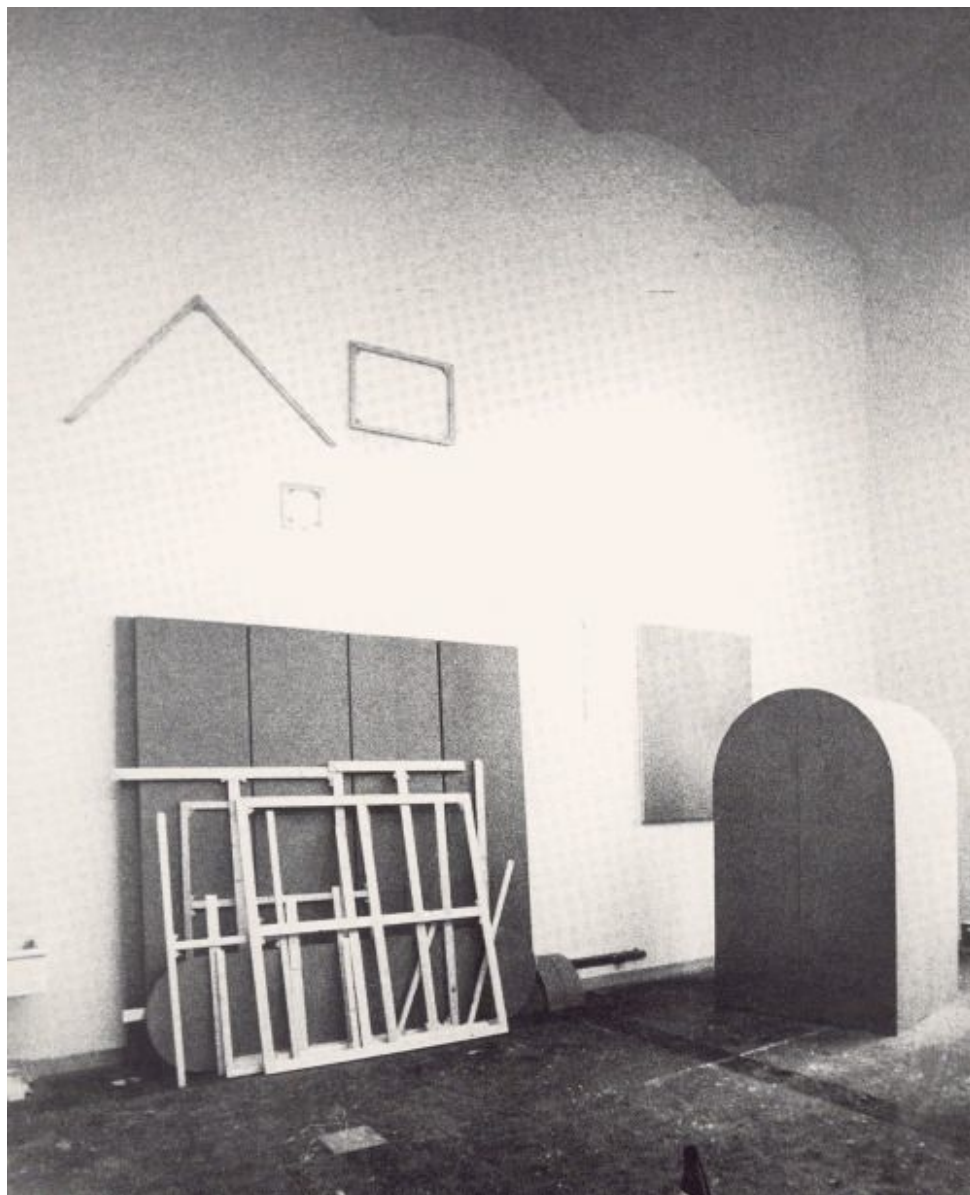& MDF. 183cm x 122cm x 30cm

Untitled
Studio Work (Prosopon Series). 2015. Silicone image transfer on pigmented silicone, styrofoam &
MDF. 63cm x 36cm x 23cm

Appendix   II

Lynda
Benglis.
UNTITLED
(From the
SELF

PORTFOLIO). 1970-76
Portfolio of 9 pigment prints. 86cm x 58cm each

Lynda Benglis. 1974. Advertisement in: Artforum, November 1974, Vol. 13, No. 3, S. 3-4
26.7cm × 26.5cm × 0.5 cm

Caravaggio. *The Incredulity of St Thomas.* 1601-02. Oil on Canvas
107cm x 146cm

Orlan. *Omnipresence.* 1993. New York. (9th surgical Performance. Image still)

Orlan. *Omnipresence.* 1993. New York. (9th surgical Performance. Image still)

François Boucher. *Madame Bergeret.* 1766. Oil on Canvas
105.4cm x 143.5cm

Imi Knoebel. *Raum 19.* 1968. Dusseldorf Academy, Germany
Fiberboard & wood. Dimensions Variable

Imi Knoebel. *Raum 19, 1968*. 2017. Dia: Beacon. New York, USA
Fiberboard & wood. Dimensions Variable

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