Michael Evans

Title - Contemporary Abstract Painting and Spiritual Experience – An Investigation through Practice

Thesis submitted for the award of practice-based PhD

January 2013

Awarding Institution - London Metropolitan University

Synopsis

Title - *Contemporary Abstract Painting and Spiritual Experience – An Investigation through Practice.*

This investigation reaches beyond one single discipline or mode of discourse, exploring current possibilities for contemporary abstract painting and spiritual experience. Types of experience associated with previous 'spiritual' abstract painting are explored in view of the need for new languages for abstraction and spirituality in both word and image. This is developed alongside the recognition of the importance of engagement with the contemporary world for abstract painting (in this case via technology). The investigation is given a theoretical critical context through reference to and analysis of writers such as Donald Kuspit, Peter Fuller, James Elkins and Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe and three leading painters Gerhard Richter, Ian McKeever and David Reed along with a record and analysis of my own painting and digital images.

Abstract painting and spiritual experience are subjected to critique and reinterpretation within this investigation and a contemporary concept of the spiritual emerges through an opening of thought found within postmodernism and a renewed critical interest in negative theology. Negative theology is seen as having similarities to a broader apophatic outlook found both in contemporary thought and art. This leads to a contemporary model of abstract painting and spiritual experience using a language of doubt through terms such as the unknowable, unrepresentable or unintelligible.

The initial process based paintings of this investigation explored problems surrounding authorship and of authorial suspension via process, however a counter and more positive aspect of process emerged from an alternative alchemical or hypostatic view of process painting as a deep engagement with matter. The limitations of process painting are considered, for example, basic repetitiveness, lack of surface and form, lack of imaginative engagement and most importantly the lack of risk on an emotional or psychological level. Previous modernist models of spiritual abstraction are seen to be made problematic by contemporary critical theory resulting in the need for a new, contemporary language for spiritually motivated abstract painting. Through the use of image deconvolution software (normally used within the sciences) relatively formless process paintings gave rise to new digitally generated form. Subsequent paintings were a response to the potential of these digital forms and reintroduced both brushstrokes and form within an abstract, illusionistic space.

This investigation explores a language of the unknown and unfamiliar within a broader context of doubt as positive strategy. Process and technology along with a critical reintroduction of authorial subjectivity and imaginative response gave rise to strange and unpredictable paintings which exist within a contemporary discourse of the apophatic, a mode in which, I argue, a contemporary form of spirituality may also be encountered.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the University of Northampton for its generous support throughout this PhD and Dr. P. J. Hill of The University of Nottingham for all his help and for allowing access to the image deconvolution software. I would also like to thank Jo Love and David Parker for the ideas stimulated by our joint exhibitions and publications as well as Richard Hawkes and Steve Godfrey for their help with the layout and printing of my images.

Thank you to Colin Wilson for starting this journey over 30 years ago when I first read *The Outsider* and most of all thank you to my family who have always supported me and to my two beautiful daughters Phoebe and Isabel who were both born during the writing of this PhD.

Contents

Introduction

> For any number of reasons, religion is no longer an easy subject, and many artists do not link it directly with themselves or their work. The buried spiritual content of modern and postmodern art may be the great unexplored subject in contemporary art history. Still, any book devoted to the subject is bound to fail because it would have to spell out so many things that the artists do not even tell themselves.
> (Elkins, J. 2000:75)

This statement from James Elkins concerning the "buried spiritual content of modern and postmodern art" helps demonstrate the current relevance of this investigation and the need for further exploration into this area of experience. As this PhD is practice-based it is concerned not with the chronicling and interpretation of the spiritual content of past and present artists but rather with finding (through practice) methods for contemporary abstract painting to explore the now problematic area of the spiritual which do not rely on previous modernist models and can move forward within a largely secular culture taking into account what Elkins has elsewhere called "postmodern complications" (Elkins, J. 2004:109).

The investigation is approached over 3 chapters. Before an outline of the reasoning behind them it is appropriate for a brief reflection on the problems that occurred in even framing the research title and the use of the term 'spiritual'. Numerous titles were considered but the problem was whether or how to use the word spiritual. It was concluded that for the purposes of this research a revised definition of the word spiritual is the most appropriate term to be used as this indicates a history and scope which many other terms simply cannot. What I came to understand was that my own anxiety over the use of this term reflected a larger concern - the 'problem' which many modern, western, highly secular cultures have with the term spiritual. It should be clear from this point that the problem of the spiritual exists primarily within these types of cultures where the secular co-exists with the spiritual. It is to this type of culture, where scientific advancement and reason have brought the religious worldview into question, that this investigation is targeted. Should the belief held by some within the scientific and secular community that ultimately reason and enlightenment will erode all religion, eventually be proven correct, then an investigation such as this will have an even wider purpose.

It should also be clear from this point that when using terms such as transcendental, numinous or sublime I do in fact mean spiritual. In chapter 3 (section six) this investigation cautiously defines the spiritual as *an encounter with a profound sense of*

'meaningfulness' in the absence of a rational or conceptual framework with which to define this experience and it is important to bear this in mind throughout. Spirituality is not necessarily tied to religion although it may be encountered via this path but this is only one way of experiencing the spiritual. The psychologist and writer David Tacey provides another useful definition,

> Spirituality is by no means incompatible with religion, but it is existential rather than creedal. It grows out of the individual person from an inward source, is intensely intimate and transformative, and is not imposed upon the person from an outside authority.
> (Tacey, D. 2007:8)

So although the spiritual can be separated from religion (as within this investigation) anyone attempting to raise the issue of the spiritual in a largely secular culture will still encounter difficulties. It would seem that the spiritual runs counter to a number of deep seated beliefs and assumptions of the secular mind and is viewed as incompatible with a materialist, rationalist and scientific/technological outlook. It may even be that when the idea of the spiritual is removed from an accompanying religious system it becomes more troublesome. At this point any sense of certainty is removed and one is forced to confront an experience rather than a set of established beliefs. This is borne out across a number of disciplines and returning to David Tacey working within the field of psychology, he has identified a problem he defines as a "spiritual complex" triggered by contact with the spiritual (in this case identified as the numinous)

> As soon as anyone touches on the numinous, a kind of spiritual complex is triggered in the culture, which immediately sets up a resistance...The ego's anxiety triggers an automatic defence reaction, activating forces of resistance. As with any unconscious complex, the spiritual complex is triggered automatically and is hard to detect.
> (Tacey,D, in Casement. A. and Tacey, D. 2006:219)

There is no reason to assume the art world would be any different. Although there have been many differing theoretical interpretative systems for modern and postmodern art often these have been essentially materialist and unsympathetic to spiritual concerns. Just as David Tacey has pinpointed a "spiritual complex" which lies at the heart of secular culture, James Elkins has encountered something similar in the world of art. In 2009 he published a book called *Re-enchantment* which stemmed from a conference concerning religion and art. In it Elkins tells of his attempt to invite leading art world figures to the conference saying,

> I invited a couple of art historians whose positions against the inclusion of talk about religion in talk about contemporary art are particularly severe and consistent...In different but very similar ways, they both said – in so many words, although one of

> them actually used the word – that it would simply be too "painful" to sit at a table at which people would talk about religion and art at the same time.
> (Elkins, J. 2009:110)

So the size of the task becomes apparent. On the one hand secularists do not wish to hear of the spiritual, it has been passed beyond and is now either openly derided or ignored. On the other hand to the followers of organized religion any attempt to rework the concept of the spiritual is often seen as a direct challenge to their specific religious belief system. This is the difficulty of the task but there are many who do not fall in either of these camps but who quietly may recognize that spiritual experience may still be possible and desirable (even essential) within a secular, rationalist dominated culture. This is the "buried spiritual content of modern and postmodern art" and of our culture. In the coming pages it is argued that it is with a certain type of postmodern thought that gaps or opportunities begin to emerge for a renewed and reworked approach to spiritual dimensions which may allow for a less dismissive or reductive approach and this investigation will explore methods by which abstract painting can explore such a spiritual content in a contemporary context.

Chapter 1 provides a historical and cultural context in order to understand why many contemporary artists and theoreticians struggle with the concept of spirituality and begins by looking at some of the deeper underlying factors which have rendered it problematic. This chapter forms the equivalent of what may in other contexts be referred to as a literature survey although it remains interdisciplinary in nature as this investigation has to maintain awareness that the spiritual (and various attitudes toward it) cannot be neatly confined to a particular discipline or mode of discourse. It is seen as important to investigate these broader cultural and philosophical positions as they can determine to some extent the range of possibilities open to the spiritually motivated artist and how spiritually motivated art is received within the culture of its time.

Chapter 2 takes a step closer towards my own practice using three key abstract painters (Gerhard Richter, Ian McKeever and David Reed) to form a study and comparison of how they view their own abstract painting in relation to culture, technology and spirituality. Both the similarities and also the tensions between their differing approaches are significant in informing my own practice and in helping to place it in a contemporary context with all the attending complexities and tensions which arise when the spiritual is placed alongside the requirement of remaining engaged in dialogue with contemporary approaches to abstract painting. Thus, in this chapter these three painters reveal a variety of possible positions for contemporary abstract painting.

Chapter 3 deals with my own practice and accompanying theoretical concerns. In this chapter various groupings of works have been titled for reference throughout the section and my entire output is listed in terms of exhibitions, papers and publications which have contributed to this investigation and which demonstrate its contribution to knowledge in my field of study. Identifiable groupings of works with similar aims are used as a method of reference rather than individual exhibitions. These groupings of works can be found as multiple image pages in the volume of images which accompanies this text. Where specific works are referred to, these can be found as single, larger images.

Chapter 3 contains six sections which refer to certain key aspects of my practice, these are the fundamental methods used for exploring the research topic through practice. The section headings sometimes emphasize the physical and formal qualities of my paintings while in other sections such as the concluding section on spirituality the emphasis lies on broader conceptual underpinnings. This gives equal prominence to both conceptual and painterly process and acknowledges the importance of the paintings as physical objects, not simply as vehicles for communicating concepts but as objects which open up further dimensions for exploration both in terms of feeling and concept.

The exploration and explanation of these main themes in section three outlines how my practice has been used to explore a contemporary path for abstract painting concerned with the spiritual. Process (as a detached method of painting) is analysed along with the possibility of how other elements of painting may be re-introduced into process-based painting without simply returning to previous modernist uses of surface and gesture. Questions of how painting can locate itself within contemporary culture are approached through my use of technology, while other key aspects of my paintings such as colour and the creation of (illusionistic and imaginative) form within a previously undifferentiated process space are also approached in separate sections. Together all these aspects lead to a concluding section of chapter three where they are viewed within the context of a revised, contemporary notion of the spiritual.

I finally must acknowledge various omissions. Writers such as James Hillman, Mircea Eliade and Michael Tucker (to name but a few) have made significant contributions to the study of both the spiritual and art having written major texts concerning psyche, religion and the shamanic. Given the restrictions of space and the fact that this was a PhD based around my own practice of painting difficult decisions had to be made. My emphasis has been the connections between certain aspects of postmodern thought, apophasis and a form of spirituality which emphasises the unknown or unknowable more attuned to what could be

termed a climate of postmodern doubt. This perhaps demonstrates the difficulty of the task when exploring the spiritual with its many interpretations and rich history, from ideas of connectedness via forms of mystical union and the shamanic, to more transcendentally inclined interpretations closer to Rudolph Otto's "numinous" or "wholly other". However, it should be remembered that the Latin root of the word spirituality is 'spirare' which means 'to breath' and breathing involves both inner and outer. Seen from this perspective even the "wholly other" spiritual experience may involve a form of connection, a sense of a transcendent 'other' but also a 'taking in' of this experience with a subsequent enrichment of both inner and outer realities. The aim of this research has been to investigate such possibilities via my practice of painting while acknowledging the contemporary challenges for both spiritual experience and abstract painting.

Chapter 1
The Decline of the Spiritual

To fully understand the reasons for a decline in the spiritual in contemporary art it is important to understand both the modern and postmodern sensibility and to unravel how this particular cultural situation has come about. The widespread lack of belief in the spiritual is a characteristic of many modern, industrial cultures which are highly secularised and owe much of their worldview to the Enlightenment and to their faith in reason along with technological, scientific and cultural progress. This lack of cultural perspective or meaning beyond the immediate or the rational is countered by a lingering 'appetite' for spiritual meaning made manifest under a number of different guises. It may **use** varying terminology, and may be experienced as a 'displaced' feeling or yearning, a need or emotion which can no longer be assumed to have a language within our culture (or perhaps to exist in a language so radically altered that a form of cultural excavation is needed to offer any possibility of recognition). Worryingly it may be possible that through removing a language which can recognise, articulate and nurture transcendent feeling, we may (as a culture) have begun to diminish the possibilities for the occasion of such experience. I am reminded of an important and relevant observation made by the writer Colin Wilson concerning the psychologist Abraham Maslow's work with 'peak experiences'. Maslow, when questioning his subjects about "peak experiences" (moments of intense life-affirmation) noticed two important things. First, that once his subjects were asked to recall if they had ever experienced any they began to recall forgotten peak experiences and secondly once these experiences were brought to conscious awareness his subjects subsequently reported an increase in their frequency, Wilson concludes that the peak experience can "be amplified or repeated through *reflection*" (Wilson, C. 1982:16). We may draw the conclusion that the potential for a greater frequency of these experiences may have existed all along but given a language of recognition it was brought to conscious awareness and amplified. The opposite then may be true, deprived of a language such experience can drift by, unrecognised, disconnected and lacking in focus. So it may be with the spiritual.

This investigation has to explore two intertwined manifestations of the 'spiritual', in art and religion. Secular forms of discourse have difficulty with religion which in many cases extends to the spiritual and ultimately to art which is said to have a spiritual content. The spiritual is a complex term and can exist under different frames of reference and terminology, the words used may be the sublime, ineffable, numinous, mystical, unknowable, unrepresentable, or non-rational (which is not directly oppositional to the

concept of rationality i.e. not irrational). The list could go on but the point is that there may be commonalities of experience behind the differing historical and cultural terms of reference. Religion once provided a cultural base for spiritual experience and **later** art, once intimately connected with religion became a refuge for spiritual experience in an increasingly secular culture unable to accept the spiritual in fully religious terms. However, the gradual unfolding of the rationalist, secular world view continued and even the domain of art is now subject to materialist, rationalist critique (frequently Marxist or psychoanalytical) which denies or ignores the possibility of the spiritual. For the purposes of this research the relationship of art, religion, modernity and post-modernity must be explored as their fates are intertwined, without understanding modernity there can be no possibility of understanding the postmodern and without this, no understanding of the contemporary possibilities for spiritual experience.

T.S.Eliot expressed a profound disillusionment with the modern world in his poem *Choruses from 'The Rock'* written in 1934,

> The endless cycle of idea and action,
> Endless invention, endless experiment,
> Brings knowledge of motion, but not of stillness;
> Knowledge of speech, but not of silence;
> Knowledge of words, but ignorance of the Word.
> All our knowledge brings us nearer to our ignorance,
> All our ignorance brings us nearer to death,
> But nearness to death no nearer to GOD.
> Where is the life we have lost in living?
> Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?
> Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?
> (Eliot, T. S. 1974:161)

Eliot seems dismissive of the achievements of the modern world, sensing that while society grows fat on the material prosperity of the modern era, it is spiritually starved. The sense of 'meaning', of life affirmation, that life is worth living and has purpose beyond the immediate, the everyday, or the drive for ever increasing efficiency seems to have diminished in inverse proportion to 'progress'. What do the 'poets' of the postmodern say about the situation of postmodern culture? Lyotard tells us that this is a period of "slackening" in which there threatens to be an "end to experimentation, in the arts and elsewhere" (Lyotard [1982] in Harrison and Wood 1997:1009). He goes on to describe in rather negative terms, what he sees as the results of cultural eclecticism which is partnered by cultural relativism, a seemingly inevitable consequence of the logic employed in much postmodern theory. Lyotard states,

> Eclecticism is the degree zero of contemporary general culture: one listens to reggae, watches a western, eats McDonald's food for lunch and local cuisine for dinner...knowledge is a matter for TV games. It is easy to find a public for eclectic works. By becoming 'kitsch' art panders to the confusion which reigns in the 'taste' of the patrons. Artists, gallery owners, critics, and public wallow together in the 'anything goes,' and the epoch is one of slackening...
> (Lyotard, J. F. 1982, in Harrison and Wood 1997:1011)

For Jean Baudrillard the situation is, if anything, worse. Whereas for Eliot, the modern world is intolerable precisely because it has turned its back on depth, truth and authentic existence, for Baudrillard the very concept of truth or authenticity is problematic. Baudrillard would go as far as to suggest that 'truth' and 'reality' are dead or that the illusions we once believed are dead. His example is the Borges fable in which cartographers set out to map an Empire so exactly that they covered the entire territory, during this time the Empire disintegrates and now all that can be observed of the map are small traces found in the desert. Baudrillard tells us we live in the era of simulation,

> Simulation...is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal. The territory no longer precedes the map, nor does it survive it. It is nevertheless the map that precedes the territory...today it is the territory whose shreds slowly rot across the extent of the map. It is the real, and not the map, whose vestiges persist here and there in the deserts that are no longer those of the Empire, but ours. *The desert of the real itself.*
> (Baudrillard, J. 1994:1)

The reader may be forgiven at this stage **for** asking if this concern with the 'real' is not wandering from the point but further investigation reveals the full implications of Baudrillard's parable. He expands on his position concerning simulacra and is drawn to the question of religion referring to the iconoclasts.

> ...their metaphysical despair came from the idea that the image didn't conceal anything at all, and that these images were in essence not images, such as an original model would have made them, but perfect simulacra...Thus this death of the divine referential must be exorcised at all costs.
> One can see that the iconoclasts, whom one accuses of disdaining and negating images, were those who accorded them their true value...
> (Baudrillard, J. 1994:4)

Baudrillard's attitude towards the iconoclasts can be compared to that of Stephen James Newton. Although very different in attitude towards postmodernism and also religion both agree on the power of images. It is this living power of an image, the power to communicate experience in a first hand manner that is the source of the unease. For Baudrillard it becomes the first hand experience simply because there is no referent. For Newton it acts as a way of circumnavigating the conscious, rational mind. This is the core of religious experience for Newton and becomes problematic for organised religion in the sense that it drags religious

experience back to an instinctive, uncontrolled experience as opposed to a rational, dogma-based, controlled experience. Baudrillard goes on to demonstrate the depth of his doubt,

> All Western faith and good faith became engaged on this wager on representation: that a sign could refer to the depth of meaning, that a sign could be exchanged for meaning and that something could guarantee this exchange – God of course. But what if God himself can be simulated...Then the whole of the system becomes weightless, it is no longer itself anything but a giant simulacrum...an uninterrupted circuit without reference or circumference.
> (Baudrillard, J. 1994:5)

Baudrillard's brand of nihilism seems all-pervasive and he must inevitably come into conflict with religion. If one is to fully believe Baudrillard the effect on the religious world view is devastating. Are the implications for art equally devastating? Sure enough we find Baudrillard investigating the implications for art in an essay *Transaesthetics* (1990)

> ...the soul of Art – Art as adventure, art with its power of illusion, its capacity for negating reality, for setting up 'another scene' in opposition to reality, where things obey a higher set of rules, a transcendent figure in which beings, like line and colour on a canvas, are apt to lose their meaning, to extend themselves beyond their own *raison d'etre*...in this sense , Art is gone...There are no more fundamental rules, no more criteria of judgement or of pleasure. In the aesthetic realm of today there is no longer any God to recognize his own.
> (Baudrillard, J. 1993:14)

The groundlessness of art stems from the impossibility of constructing values based on an external reality or truth, or rather many different sets of values may be constructed but no one set has any sovereign claim over truth or reality as all are equally 'real' and equally 'unreal'. So what of art in this situation? Where does this leave the production of art in this valueless new world? If art in its old form is "dead" what are the implications for contemporary practice? Baudrillard believes that the proliferation of artistic movements and styles which co-existed under post modernism is proof that nothing inspires truly and deeply held belief declaring that it is "only because they arouse nothing but profound indifference in us that we can accept them all simultaneously" (Baudrillard, J. 1993:15).

There are numerous other examples of postmodern critics, theorists, writers and artists who have engaged in a critique of modernism and in tandem found it necessary to dismiss religious, spiritual or transcendental aspirations within modernism. Rosalind Krauss gave a harsh account of the relationship between art and the spiritual, saying

> Given the absolute rift that had opened up between the sacred and the secular, the modern artist was obviously faced with the necessity to choose between one mode of expression and the other...In the increasingly de-sacralized space of the nineteenth

> century, art had become the refuge for religious emotion; it became, as it has remained, a secular form of belief. Although this feeling could be discussed openly in the late nineteenth century, it is something that is inadmissible in the twentieth, so that by now we find it indescribably embarrassing to mention *art* and *spirit* in the same sentence. (Krauss, 1985:12)

Krauss is only one of many theorists who see modernism as fatally flawed and the desire for the spiritual as either an unwanted aspect of it, something to be left behind. However, although postmodern thinkers such as Lyotard suggested a "war on totality" was needed, his thoughts are complex and in his book "The Inhuman" at times he does not seem as far from the spiritual/transcendental as would be assumed from earlier comments. Likewise Derrida, a key postmodern thinker has been linked with negative theology by writers such as John Caputo. Donald Kuspit is a contemporary critic/theorist yet he cannot dismiss the spiritual and writers such as James Elkins, Stephen James-Newton, David Maclagan and Peter Fuller all acknowledge the potential within art (specifically painting) to engage the human psyche on a level which lies beyond the grasp of our normal consciousness, even if not all of these writers would use the term spiritual.

Writers such as Krauss have already made the decision to dismiss the spiritual, however, other interpretations of modernism and postmodernism can still leave room for "religious emotion". It must be remembered that Krauss published this book in 1985 and as I will show postmodernism has moved on to the extent where rather than being oppositional to spiritual experience it can help provide a new philosophical (and therefore artistic) space through which it can be explored. One reading of the situation is that theorists such as Krauss still operate within a modern or partially modern mindset, as guilty of a form of 'totalising' thinking as any modernist before her. It may be that the "rift between the sacred and the secular" is not as final or irretrievable as it seemed back in the theory intoxicated days of the mid-eighties.

Perhaps the best place to start in looking at a decline of the spiritual is with the "general culture" as Lyotard called it, and religion in particular. One recent book on this topic is *The Twilight of Atheism* by Alister McGrath (2004). As can be seen from the title McGrath has a different perspective on the problem from some of the thinkers above. Although he would accept that for large parts of the twentieth century atheism was a dominant cultural influence, it is his contention that this is not now the case. He traces the rise of atheism contradicting the idea that it is an 'inevitable' product of the scientific advance of the modern rational world. He states that in 1960 it was estimated that half the population was "nominally" atheist defined as being "the explicit denial of all spiritual powers and supernatural beings, or

the demand for the elimination of the transcendent as an illusion" (McGrath 2004: XI). However, McGrath establishes that when one looks at the history of atheism it is more complicated than this simple definition. He points out that the term atheism is not a new one and in fact it dates back to the ancient Greek, "*atheistos*" which meant something similar to "one who denies the traditional religion of the Athenian establishment" (McGrath 2004:8). He goes on to establish the relationship of the Greeks with their Gods was neither simple nor straightforward. The description of the Gods found in Homer is one that shows human frailties and vices. Later, atheism became a refusal to worship deities of the Roman Empire with the Roman writer Lucretius (c.94-c.50 B.C.) suggesting that we may do better to contemplate the world of natural forces all around us. Atheism then is not a specifically modern phenomenon and is the result of a complex intersection of influences. It had no significant impact in ancient Greece or Rome so this leads McGrath to ask what were the factors that came into play to make it such a force in the modern world?

The Church had undoubtedly performed a function in providing some sense of stability or order during the dark ages and religion by the seventeenth century was an integral part of European life. However, the sheer power of the Church and its incredible wealth brought with it not only corruption but also a tendency to become dictatorial in its attitude toward any challenges to its authority. McGrath asserts that the beginnings of the rise of atheism were probably rooted more in the desire to undermine the power of the Church as an institution rather than in the attractions of Godlessness. However, the sophistication of atheistic arguments grew and gradually atheism gained in authority. Although I will not go into it here, McGrath traces a complex series of intertwined events through the French and American revolutions (also considering that Britain did not have a revolution) pointing out the various interested parties and different agendas that united behind the cause of atheism and the residual bitterness of the post-revolutionary climate.

Of more importance to this study are some of the underlying philosophical challenges to religion and how this can be traced to the modern outlook. Rene Descartes (1588-1648) is a key figure in modernity. Mistakenly some imagine him to have been an atheist, he was however deeply religious. He sought to demonstrate the existence of God through philosophical reasoning but ironically probably achieved more for the opposite view. McGrath states that

> A well meaning defense of God ended up persuading people that the case for God was surprisingly uncertain. Descartes's failed defense of God led to the widespread conclusion that every attempt to prove God's existence was either contradictory or

> unintelligible as a matter of principle, because God simply cannot be related to the world of everyday experience.
> (McGrath, A. 2004:31)

Atheism and religion do not, as it is often simplistically viewed, represent a battle between the dark forces of superstition and 'enlightened' reason resulting in the dawn of a 'rational' era. McGrath points out that so called 'rational' atheistic societies which believed they had gone beyond superstition have been guilty of monstrous crimes against humanity. Somehow, it seems that when mankind kills God and makes a God of 'man' (as Feuerbach suggested) man becomes in the process so much less than Godly. Returning to the point of Atheism being more than a simple two way battle, McGrath also makes an important point about the rise of Protestantism and its links with modernism. The rise of Protestantism was intimately bound to the rise of the middle classes and as such with capitalism. It is the link between atheism and Protestantism that is most important and McGrath attributes this to "the divorce of the realms of the sacred and secular." (McGrath 2004:200). It is possible that the seeds of Atheism are present at least in part within religious thought, or perhaps it would be more accurate to say religious doctrine. McGrath points to the difference between Catholicism and Protestantism and that for the Protestant reformers "an immediate encounter with God through nature was excluded" knowledge of God was to be found in one source only, as "God had chosen to reveal himself through the Bible, and the authorized mode of knowing was through reading that Bible and hearing sermons based on its contents" (McGrath 2004:202). He also points out that the architecture of the Church changes from the altar of worship to the pulpit of exposition and sermon. It is important to understand the full implications of what was being lost or rejected. This was the start of a removal of the sacred from the realm of both world and imagination. He continues,

> ...Where Catholicism allowed a direct encounter between the believer and spiritual realities...[Protestantism] resolutely refused to acknowledge that spiritual realities could ever be known through the material world...in the present...Christ was known only as absence...The rise of Protestantism thus gave rise to an absent God who was known only indirectly – and then only through the mind rather than the imagination.
> (McGrath, A. 2004:202)

With the removal of God from the world a gap is left which invites the question of whether we need God. McGrath frames it as an easy step from "pragmatic atheism" to "ontological atheism", the difference between living 'as if' there is no sign of God and beginning to question if there really is a God. It is appropriate to think back to Baudrillard's earlier comments about the iconoclasts, and the Protestant emphasis on the word (concept) as opposed to the world (nature or experience) easily extended into a mistrust of images. McGrath, rather generously I believe, asserts that Protestantism is not "intrinsically

iconophobic" (McGrath 2004:210) but admits there is a "profound mistrust" of images. Perhaps the important point is why? In discussing John Calvin he points out similarities with Islam forbidding the portrayal of God in human form and makes an important distinction that for Calvin it is not simply that God is forbidden from being pictured but rather that "God is intrinsically incapable of being pictured" (McGrath 2004:210). It is interesting to make a connection here with the concept of the 'unrepresentable' which appears in chapter 3 when considering abstract painting.

Stephen James Newton introduces another level to the argument suggesting that it is the unconscious 'disruptive' force of the image which really sets the iconoclast in opposition to it. He sees the image as involving an unconscious element directly analogous to a state of revelation, he uses the term "ekstasis" from the Greek for ecstasy "to stand outside of or transform oneself" (Newton 2001 :102). This would echo some of Otto's ideas covered in *The Idea of the Holy*. In one sense this returns us to the topic of what is permitted within a religion. If a religion becomes overly cerebral or dogma driven than it could be said to lose its potential for "ekstasis" and thus it is easy to see why such a belief system may find itself on a collision course with the image (if the image is accorded such power). McGrath points out that although mystics such as Eckhart or Dionysius the Areopagite would agree with the earlier statement that "God is intrinsically incapable of being pictured" there is an important distinction, for they do not believe that God is incapable of being directly experienced, rather that this experience 'transcends' the human ability to understand (at least in a rational manner). This is a key distinction, for when I discuss my own abstract painting I would suggest that there is an attempt not to 'picture' spiritual experience but to actually create an experiential zone of transcendence.

It is interesting to discover how McGrath interprets Romanticism saying,

> There is a strong sense of the loss of connectedness...The Romantic poets knew a sense of melancholy, wonder, and yearning, which they believed has its basis in the fundamental displacement or alienation from its true objects of desire. Humanity had become disconnected from its true goals and longings, and needed to be reconnected. Yet this process of restoration was not understood to involve God, being envisaged primarily in terms of the achievement of an individuals true human potential. (McGrath, 2004:118)

He is undoubtedly correct in sensing the melancholy present in much Romanticism. He is again probably correct in attributing this to the subjects "alienation from its true objects of desire." And he rightly observes that the Romantic sense of awe and wonder did not necessarily find its home in a religious world view. What McGrath does not explore further

are the consequences that the "loss of connectedness" and the loss of a recognised religious world view had for the Romantics. For all his love of the transcendent, Keats could still write lines professing he was "half in love with easeful death" in *Ode to a Nightingale* (Keats, [1819] 2003). Many of the Romantics succumbed to illness (both physical and mental), often induced by what we may now call poor lifestyle choices. If we can speak of such dedicated individualists as a group the positive vision of the transcendent seemed to be counterbalanced, if not outweighed by the crushing return to the normal or mundane (the secular). It may be that the undoing of many Romantics was the attempt to live more constantly in the realm of this transcendent spiritual experience through any means necessary (often drug induced), but this may have been due to a mistaken assumption about the nature of the spiritual experience. Previously, religion had provided what could be called a 'map' for spiritual experience. No religious mystic would expect to live in a state of spiritual awareness all the time but religion provided an underpinning sense of meaning when not in a spiritual state and a way of understanding the spiritual experience (even then it is interesting to note the tendency to world rejection in some mysticism). However, the Romantics had no such map. When in the territory of the transcendent spiritual experience they had no certain point of reference, at least not in the sense that one who has religious belief would. For the religious mystic the journey into a spiritual state involves what could be seen as passing a threshold from our reality, the human, shared, everyday reality into transcendent spiritual reality. The religious mystic can simply see this as God's reality, or ultimate reality, it does not so much negate human reality as complete it. However, for the Romantic there is no such underpinning of reality, the passing to a transcendent spiritual state is not necessarily two sides of the same reality, the Romantic may ask which is real? Thus many Romantics find themselves in the position of world rejection and come to see life as a dream or pale imitation of the reality experienced in the transcendental spiritual state.

Romanticism viewed in this manner can be seen as a stage in the unfolding of modernism, part of the modern mindset but not yet fully modernist. Romanticism still clung to an echo of the divine in nature and certainly felt a discomfort with the beginnings of a rapidly approaching industrial age. The melancholia of Romanticism, however, was restrained compared to the modern manifestation of the sense of "disconnectedness", that of nihilism. Whereas Romanticism searched for the spiritual/transcendent in places other than the recognizably religious, nihilism met the challenge of disbelief head on. Existentialism is often associated with aspects of nihilism providing a philosophical working through of many seemingly nihilist attitudes. Camus, Sartre, Dostoevsky and perhaps most importantly Nietzsche, all have aspects of their thought (perhaps in varying degrees) which can be seen as nihilistic. In one sense it is difficult to say whether nihilism is a cause or symptom of a

decline in spiritual experienced. In truth it probably is both, as it is a position which can only be established once religious certainty is gone, but nihilism goes further than just denying religious certainty and actually asserts the fundamental meaninglessness of life. It must deny any recourse to spiritual experience or else view it as illusion. Perhaps the most famous single passage associated with nihilism is the moment when Nietzsche's madman announces that God is dead.

> God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him."
> (Nietzsche, 1882, in McGrath, 2004:150)

By some this is viewed almost with pride as a declaration of man's freedom, the passing of man from childlike dependence to adult independence but if one considers the passage which immediately precedes this declaration the tone is far from joyous,

> ...How could we drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon? What were we doing when we unchained this earth from its sun? Whither is it moving now? Whither are we moving? Away from all suns? Are we not plunging continually? Backward, sideward, forward, in all directions? Is there still any up or down? Are we not straying, as through an infinite nothing? Do we not feel the Breath of empty space? Has it not become colder? Is not night continually closing in on us? Do we not need to light lanterns in the morning?
> (Nietzsche, 1882, in McGrath, 2004:150)

The consequences of God's murder and the subsequent godless world seem to present a grim picture. This shows the full extent of the problem of meaninglessness and nihilism which can result from the death of God and with it a whole range of spiritual possibilities. But what is really meant by nihilism and what is implied by a loss of God, religion and by implication the spiritual? In her book *The Banalization of Nihilism: twentieth century responses to meaninglessness* (1992) Karen.L.Carr traces some of the broader implications of nihilism and most importantly looks at similarities and differences between the nihilism of Nietzsche (modern) and the nihilism of today (postmodern). For Carr, nihilism is linked to modernity and she points to the fact that the term was coined within the last two centuries, probably between 1787 and1797 coextensive with the Enlightenment. It is the change within nihilism or attitude toward it that Carr is concerned with. She perceives a fundamental shift in attitude within the postmodern outlook.

> For many postmodernists, the prescence of nihilism evokes, not terror, but a yawn...the change...is due in part to the recasting of nihilism, understood initially as a historical event, into a phenomena coextensive with human historicity...While the good news appears to be that we no longer need to worry about a situation that we seem unable to avoid, the bad news is that this transformation essentially reifies the present values, beliefs, and judgements of the historical community to which we belong into absolute truths, albeit unintentionally and unconsciously. At its extreme,

> banalizing nihilism – which...takes place in certain postmodern thinkers...paradoxically results in an absolutism at once pernicious and covert. (Carr, L. 1992:7)

It is Carr's contention that nihilism has moved from a state that implied crisis to a position of almost casual acceptance. It appears to Carr that nihilism has lost its 'redemptive' power. This would be closer to how she envisages Nietzsche as seeing nihilism, as a state that is almost a form of illness, which if survived, makes the triumphant sufferer stronger. This scenario played out on a wider cultural level would appear to be the more positive aspect of Nietzsche's vision for western culture (as opposed to decadence and terminal decline). It is perhaps a matter of disposition which interpretation one gives to the fate of Nietzsche's nihilism but it would appear certain that there has been at least a change of attitude to nihilism. It also depends on what one views as the causes of nihilism as to what one sees as unfolding historically and whether there is a glimmer of hope. If one sees nihilism as always tied to the death of God, or to be more specific to the absence of God, then it may well be an inescapable state in our times, such is the power of the secular, rationalist worldview. However, nihilism can be likened to a background noise. If nihilism is the background noise of our culture, the sense of absence or alienation from any source of spiritual/transcendent meaning, then it has suffered from its own constancy and the modern western mind has adapted to it. The modern western mind is now so used to nihilism that it is not even aware of it. Culture simply carries on, on top of nihilism. Nihilism has, I believe, been absorbed by our culture, which in the process of assimilation forgets it is there. But nihilism can remain, not consciously, but silently, 'underpinning' or undermining culture, which in turn becomes repetitive and empty of any real or deeper meaning. The implications for an art that aspires to any spiritual level are profound.

For the modern mind religious certainty has long since become problematic. If one views nihilism as caused mostly by the decline of religion, then this is a relatively straightforward view. However, it would seem that so much more has become problematic for the modern mind. The psychologist Carl Rogers wrote a short essay titled *Do We Need a Reality?* in 1978 in which he rather playfully deconstructs the kind of everyday approach most of us have to reality. He starts by looking at the stars thinking that all this revolves around him. But of course, another part of him knew this not to be true, that he was really on a fast moving planet, which in turn was surrounded by other planets and galaxies all moving at great speed. He comforts himself that at least he can be certain of his own immediate reality – the solid chair beneath him, but again his knowledge of science is enough to tell him that this chair is composed of invisible atoms consisting more of space than matter. Even the seemingly solid earth is only the skin on a slowly moving fluid mass. He states "the

conception of a real world, obvious to anyone, is rapidly slipping completely out of my grasp" (Rogers, C. 2003:422). He comforts himself with the knowledge that he still has the 'interpersonal' world, he can still rely on the reality of family and friends, but no, this too, with the advent of psychoanalysis, is shown to be fraught with uncertainty. The potential for hidden feelings, hopes, dreams, desires, joys and dreads makes even this realm uncertain. He retreats, feeling safe that at least he can be sure of himself. However, he thinks about the range of possibilities for a conception of self, ranging from the behaviourist view that the self is merely a machine responding to an environment to much more complex notions of 'inner realities' which question the boundaries between self and world. He sums up his thoughts on reality saying,

> It clearly does not exist in the objects we can see and feel and hold.
> It does not exist in the technology we admire so greatly.
> It is not found in the solid earth or the twinkling stars.
> It does not lie in a solid knowledge of those around us.
> It is not found in the organizations or customs or rituals of any one culture.
> It is not even in our own known personal worlds.
> It must take into account mysterious and currently unfathomable "separate realities," incredibly different from an objective world.
> (Rogers, 2003:424)

In a semi light-hearted manner Rogers has raised some very serious issues. He has simulated the disintegration of certainty within the modern mind. As the diverse investigations of the Enlightenment project spread ever further it seems no area of human experience, or human reality, is safe from being unravelled. Even if we were to possess an apparently stable sense of reality Rogers goes on to point out a further problem "The ease and rapidity of worldwide communication means that every one of us is aware of a dozen "realities"...no longer can we exist in a secure cocoon, knowing that we all see the world in the same way" (Rogers, C. 2003:424). Rogers is right to point to this historically unique and fragmented moment for the modern mind. It can be seen as the decline of religious certainty which leads to a lack of existential meaning but this could be phrased another way and attributed to the lack of any other source of meaning being able to fill the gap. The gradual erosion of a general sense of certainty or meaning can lead to the rise of nihilism. The question is, has postmodernism taken us beyond nihilism? For some contemporary thinkers the answer would be yes (as we have seen already, it may merely generate a yawn). However, to remember the earlier comments of both Lyotard and Baudrillard, it would seem that postmodern writing itself is sometimes coloured with more than a touch of pessimism. The positive view would be to agree with Rogers that this situation is an opportunity rather than a crisis. He concludes his argument,

> ...if nations follow their past ways , then, because of the speed of world communication of separate views, each society will have to exert more and more coercion to bring about a forced agreement as to what constitutes the real world and its values...We will bring about our own destruction through the clashes caused by differing world views.
> But I have suggested an alternative...if we can see those differing realities as the most promising resource for learning in the all the history of the world; if we can live together in order to learn from one another without fear; if we can do all this, then a new age could be dawning.
> (Rogers, C. 2003:428)

It would seem from events occurring since this piece was written in 1978 that the first scenario of destruction seems to be the more accurate prediction, which returns us to the problem of nihilism. Karen.L.Carr outlines five types of nihilism.

1. Epistemological nihilism (the denial of the possibility of knowledge)
2. Alethiological nihilism (the denial of the reality of truth)
3. Metaphysical or ontological nihilism (the denial of an (independently existing) world)
4. Ethical or moral nihilism (the denial of the reality of moral or ethical values)
5. Existential or axiological nihilism (a feeling of emptiness and pointlessness, stemming from a lack of meaning, and probably the most often recognised form of nihilism)

(Carr, K. L. 1992:17/18)

As Carr astutely points out existential nihilism is the most easily recognised and identified form of nihilism. But existential nihilism is a 'feeling' or 'attitude' which in fact, is a result of, or experience generated by some or all of the other types of nihilism. Doubts over knowledge, truth, ethical values or the nature of what is reality itself can be seen to easily lead to a world where meaning is inclined to struggle to take hold. The intricacy of Carr's argument over which level must precede another level is not necessary here. All that needs to be understood is that as one questions any of the first four levels of nihilism one is moving toward a collapse of meaning and existential nihilism. To grossly simplify Carr's argument, existential nihilists are reluctant nihilists. She argues

> Only if we are unconvinced or reluctant nihilists would nihilism provoke anxiety or discomfort; only if we still believe in truth can our isolation from it provoke discomfort...Existential nihilism, in other words, can only take root if the other forms of nihilism are incomplete or partial...The anti-foundationalists view the absence of truth calmly – as opposed to their nineteenth – and early twentieth-century forebears – because their nihilism is complete...there is nothing to compare our present reality with; consequently, there is no impetus or basis for any feeling of dissatisfaction or despair.
> (Carr, K. L. 1992:129)

So a point is reached where the postmodernist or anti-foundationalist can 'happily' approach the problem of existential nihilism answering "there is no problem". Carr sees this as a

worrying development potentially arriving at a form of absolutism, as for the postmodern nihilist, there is no feeling of dissatisfaction with the world and no concern with the problem of an underlying meaninglessness, simply an acceptance that this is all there is. This is the core of the problem with contemporary or postmodern nihilism as Carr sees it and it separates itself absolutely from the nihilism described by Nietzsche who saw nihilism as a temporary state, a disease, that when conquered would leave the victor stronger. Nihilism was part of the process or method for a 're-evaluation' of 'values', once everything is eradicated by doubt then, from the rubble of the old false values, new values can emerge but when all trace of transcendent truth, meaning or value is removed from this process current perspectives and values become the only perspective and values. As Carr says,

> In the absence of something higher, something larger than themselves, some transcendent horizon, human beings make themselves God...Unless we believe that there is more to the world than that revealed to us by currently existing human discourse and activity, we will believe that the currently existing human discourse and activity is all that there is.
> (Carr, K. L. 1992:137)

What emerges is that it would be desirable (and possibly crucial) to have some kind of transcendent reference point which is in turn dependent on the continued possibility of spiritual experience. This would act as a reminder to humankind, a call for humility in the face of what is, as yet, unknown or possibly unknowable. What may be called unrepresentable, unknowable, numinous, sublime or uncanny is in fact, a form of relationship to a spiritual/transcendent state (to an as yet unknown or unknowable). All these categories involve a relationship with the non-rational (which should not be confused with the irrational). This is a state where there is a feeling which exists beyond, beneath or above, the rational (or perhaps it could be said conscious) mind. Here we can see that what is being investigated takes place at a cultural and psychological level that involves a deep interconnection between what may initially appear disparate areas of thought. The non-rational (as a form of meaning or reality that transcends our normal everyday existence), can be seen to connect all these areas of thought and furthermore provides an important counterbalance to the excesses of the all too rational secular world.

When confronted with the spiritual, in most, if not all its manifestations, the reaction of the rational worldview is to analyse, interpret and reduce this experience. The person committed to spiritual experience would hold that it is irreducible, for to describe or analyse it is to change it. Perhaps it depends on perspective, but the spiritual perspective is not as easily reducible to a psychological disposition as the rationalist approach may assume. Within the rational framework, a concern with the spiritual may be seen as a desire for a return to a

more childlike state, a form of escapism, or superstition. However, it could be seen from the opposite perspective, that a concern with the spiritual is a concern with a deeper underlying reality not an avoidance of it. It is a state that cannot be fully understood by the rational mind and exists beyond current descriptive systems or knowledge. In fact, the rational, and in this sense reductive world-view could be seen itself as a form of thought which longs for simplicity, a deep seated desire for order, for explanation of the unknown, an explanation of that which may not ultimately be explainable. As the writer Colin Wilson points out when writing about the logical posivitism of Moritz Schlick,

> ...anything that cannot be reduced to logic can be dismissed as meaningless. This view clearly stems from the same impulse that induced Marx to explain history in terms of economic conflict, or that led Freud to reduce religion to the need for a father figure. It is an emotional gesture of despair in the face of complexity.
> (Wilson, C. 1991:66)

The complexity of the situation means it is not possible to approach the decline of the spiritual/transcendent from a narrowed particular viewpoint or discipline. It is necessary to understand the larger forces and intellectual movements at work which determine what will exist as spiritual possibilities for the artist. Acknowledging this complexity it is my intention throughout this research to avoid using any one particular interpretative method such as the secularly acceptable language of psychology used by theorists such as Peter Fuller, Donald Kuspit and Stephen James Newton, all sympathetic with spiritually motivated art. All these writers inform this research as do theologically inclined writers such as Rudolph Otto or Hans Kung. The aim of this research is to avoid being easily placed in either form of discourse.

The reductive tendency of psychology often leads to difficulties at a fundamental level with a theological approach as ultimately psychology tends to study the human psyche and this is where spiritual meaning most often begins and ends. For the theological approach there has to be an assumed notion of some external cause, meaning or entity. To the theologian psychology would seem to be reductive and guilty of a secularizing tendency while for the most branches of psychology and for any secular approach to the spiritual to believe in its external origin would be to unacceptably compromise the rational mind. In most cases these two interpretative systems lead in different directions and a simple distinction made by John. W. Harvey in the introduction to the 1959 Edition of Rudolph Otto's *The Idea of the Holy* (1917) is pertinent here. When comparing the work of William James and Rudolph Otto Harvey referred to these differences of approach suggesting that James (as the title of his book *Varieties of Religious Experience* may suggest) was more concerned with experience or 'feelings'. He suggests that Otto although attempting to describe religious feeling suggests

underlying deep similarity rather than diversity and also is concerned with the idea of an external cause of these experiences. One approach (the inner) leads to psychology (as with James), that is, if one is firmly convinced that spiritual meaning is rooted in the psyche, then although it may be important for our wellbeing, it does not necessarily denote a challenge to the nature of reality as such, it could be called 'subjective' in the profoundest sense of the word. The other approach of Otto, is the 'outer', as for Otto the source of numinous experience was external. I would suggest a third option, that irrespective of whether the source of spiritual experience is inner or outer, when one experiences the world through a perception altered by an experience of transcendent meaning, it may in fact question the very basis of our collective understanding of the world, of our sense of self, or our sense of reality. It is here that this investigation takes a different path from writers such as Fuller or Kuspit. Regardless of what the source of spiritual experience may be, rather than to look inward for an explanation (and see such experience as compensatory for the alienation and 'sickness' caused by a grim external reality) the aim here is to look outward and ask what this experience of deeper meaning and the questions which arise from it may tell us about the world and ourselves and how they may enrich us.

All this leads to the problem of dualism. In one sense the previous distinctions of inner or outer are another example of dualistic thinking. By dualism I am implying a state in which the human subject views itself as separate from 'the world' or this could be referred to as a subject/object split. This may appear to be wandering from a discussion of a decline of the spiritual in contemporary culture, however, the experience of spiritual/transcendental reality or meaning can have profound implications for the world-view rooted in dualistic thought. The frequently experienced sense of wholeness, completeness, meaningfulness or interconnectedness that is experienced by many mystics, poets, painters and scientists is an example here. In this state the human subject no longer seems to feel divided from the world or from a sense of reality or meaning. One such approach to this situation could of course be to dismiss these feelings as an illusion, albeit a comforting one. This of course would account for the position of Marxists or Freudians and to some extent it also seems to account for the positions of Donald Kuspit and Peter Fuller with the exception that both Fuller and Kuspit see it as a necessary illusion. However, this view is again premised on a notion of a somewhat agreed and stable external reality in this case a rather hostile and unpleasant one. If a different approach is taken (beginning with the problems of dualism and how we even come to see or perceive reality) then an analysis of our alienated dualistic consciousness may be helpful in establishing a more optimistic, progressive position, one in which spiritual experience may be able to enable us to enjoy and experience aspects of the external world which are not merely consoling illusions. If the insights of non-dualistic consciousness were,

for a moment, treated as having the potential to give us a view of reality which may be equally as important as a dualistic view, or possibly more important as it may 'complete' a partial or incorrect picture, then it may be that the spiritual view of reality has an importance beyond the personal, revelatory experience. It may be able to redress the balance with what Colin Wilson termed an "emotional gesture of despair in the face of complexity" which a rationalistic, materialist and reductive secular outlook represents.

.

Greek philosophy is often cited as the root of dualism in western thought. In an attempt to understand man's relationship to the external world Plato envisaged a world of 'ideal forms', the world which constitutes our external reality is an echo or copy of this (which explains the difficulty Plato had with mimetic art – a double copy). What is important here is the notion that the reality of the external world is somehow 'unknowable' and that the realm of the mind, ideas or concepts exists separately from the external world and in some senses is seen as more important. The influence of this outlook has been of immense importance in the development of the modern western world-view. Colin Wilson points out that "The world-rejection of Greek thought dominated philosophy...for two thousand years. In Europe, it happened to fit in very well with the world-rejection of Christianity." (Wilson, 1991:48) and Ken Wilber has also noted that

> ...dualistic knowledge, wherein the universe is severed into subject vs. object...is the very cornerstone of Western philosophy, theology, and science. For Western philosophy is, by and large, Greek philosophy, and Greek philosophy is the philosophy of dualisms...
> (Wilber, K. 1993:18)

It is with Rene Descartes that modern philosophy could be said to start. Descartes wanted to be certain what we can know. In other words, what are the foundations for a secure knowledge of the world? His method for arriving at these secure foundations was a form of radical doubt. It cannot be underestimated how profound has been the effect of this form of philosophical dualism. Once western philosophy was committed to 'objective' scrutiny of the 'external' world a chain of events that would lead to nihilism and a complete lack of any spiritual possibilities was put in place. Radical doubt, *it seemed*, operated under the same rules of objectivity as science (in fact underpinned it) and it could provide humanity with a tool to doubt *almost* everything. Wilson gives us a flavour of how deep this doubt could penetrate.

> Descartes had at least left a basis for certainty: 'I think, therefore I am.' Hume replied: 'That does not prove that you exist at all.' Berkeley had got rid of the outside world; now Hume got rid of the mind as well. Reason had proved to be a kind of forest fire

> that ended by consuming everything. Descartes' principle of radical doubt left nothing standing.
> (Wilson, C. 1991:51)

So it can be seen where a systematically applied form of critical, dualistic consciousness may lead, to alienation from the world and for Wilson, importantly it may also create an equally important alienation from a sense of inner reality or meaning and a misleading or skewed perceptual orientation. This is why the word 'almost' was placed in italics when talking about radical doubt. It is true it provided a tool for an extensive form of doubt but this doubt did not extend far enough, to the doubter, or to be more specific, to the consciousness or perception of the doubter. For Wilson this problem of how we perceive the world is vital. He does not accept, as Descartes did, that the 'I' in the "I think therefore I am" is a neutral or objective factor in the equation. In brief, Wilson suggests that the act of perception involved in the observation of the outside world involves intention. He insists that perception is intentional and that even if we are consciously unaware of it we project outwards into the world, (Wilson borrows from Husserl and the phenomenologists and also from A.N.Whitehead), in the case of so-called objective perception this awareness is not acknowledged. The implications are important, as if we have to make an intentional act to perceive then the important point for Wilson is that when looking at the world in a passive way (as with radical doubt or the dualistic rational mindset) we simply fail to muster enough intentionality to discover or project 'meaning'. This would not have been a problem for Descartes as the source of meaning was still provided by religion. However, in an age where religion does not provide this underpinning sense of meaning, it can be seen that once this source of transcendental meaning is removed it could become a serious concern if the perceptual mindset of modern man was inclined towards a passivity (under the guise of objectivity) which leads away from the spiritual and towards nihilism. Wilson sees it thus,

> It seems then, that the scientific vision promises something that it cannot accomplish. This is the source of the despair of the nineteenth century...and ultimately of the intellectual nihilism of our own day. Science, it seemed, could not, after all, replace religion; yet its premises have administered a slow poison to religion from which it can never recover.
> (Wilson, C.1991:53)

The ultimate irony is perhaps that science itself, the provider of the dualistic world-view, could go so far with dualism as to begin to unravel itself. Ken Wilber states that classical science has built on Cartesian dualism "a methodology of such persistence that it would eventually crumble the very dualism on which it rested. Classical science was destined to be self-liquidating." (Wilber,1993:21). In *The Spectrum of Consciousness* he compares the dualistic subject/object approach of western scientific thought to a person convinced the

earth is flat. He suggests that if one were so convinced in the belief of flatness the only way to establish proof would be to keep continuing on a course and when you didn't fall off the edge it would possibly cause you to revise your opinion. His point being that by continuing the false belief to its ultimate conclusion it could ultimately be seen to be false.

> ...some of the "purer" forms of science, such as physics and mathematics, and some of the emergent sciences, such as system-theory and ecology, have dealt lethal blows to several long-cherished dualisms. It is these branches that we have in mind when we refer to "science" as being a potent destroyer of dualisms for the west... for those scientists involved, there awaited the shock of their lives.
> (Wilber, K.1993:19)

My intention is not to be sidetracked into a discussion of contemporary science, as fascinating as quantum mechanics may be (and I am aware of its potential parallels with both eastern thought and mysticism), I am simply not qualified to comment on the science involved. It is the broader point I wish to make, that aspects of contemporary science seem in some way to be questioning the limits or validity of a rigidly dualistic world-view and that some scientists feel motivated to speculate in a more philosophical manner concerning the perils of an overly reductive, overly rationalistic and dualistic world view. It may be that this may be part of a more general shift, perhaps the end of a paradigm based on dualism or rationalism, perhaps a philosophical opening paralleled by postmodernism (intentionally or otherwise). However, I do not wish to overstate the case and it would be wise to remember exactly how pervasive the dualistic mode is. This dualistic outlook is so embedded in western thought that it is indeed difficult to see beyond it. As Wilber remarked,

> One of the principal reasons that the dualistic or "divide-and-conquer" approach has been so pernicious is that the error of dualism forms the root of intellection and is therefore next to impossible to uproot by intellection.(Catch-22: If I have a fly in my eye, how can I see that I have a fly in my eye?). To detect this demands a rigorous, consistent, and persistent methodology capable of pursuing dualism to its limits, there to discover the contradiction.
> (Wilber, K.1993:19)

I would like to finish this section by looking at some of the ideas of David Bohm, a physicist who has steadily thought through the implications of quantum physics for the modern world view. Initially one can see his line of thought come from a questioning of the wave particle duality but his thought develops into the wider field of consciousness and ultimately how we define reality. Bohm is profoundly worried about what he calls a "fragmented" world view. First of all there is his view as a physicist,

> The Cartesian order is suitable for the analysis of the world into separately existent parts...both in relativity and quantum theory the Cartesian order is leading to serious

> contradictions and confusion...a new kind of theory is needed...derived from a deeper reality in which what prevails is unbroken wholeness.
> (Bohm, 1981:xiv)

His views go far beyond the realm of physics in their implications. This would be in part his point, that physics has become yet another specialised area of thought thus contributing to the overall fragmentation. Although his ideas may have originated in physics he quickly makes it clear that it is an all pervasive fragmentation which is both, philosophical and social, personal and collective.

> Indeed, the attempt to live as though the fragments are really separate is, in essence, what has led to the growing series of extremely urgent crises that is confronting us today...this way of life has brought about pollution, destruction of the balance of nature, over-population, world-wide economic and political disorder, and the creation of an overall environment that is neither physically nor mentally healthy...Individually there has developed a widespread feeling of helplessness and despair, in the face of what seems to be an overwhelming mass of disparate social forces...
> (Bohm, D. 1981:2)

What has happened to create such a system of fragmentation? I have highlighted the underlying duality of the Cartesian view and its importance to the modern western mindset. However, it seems unfair (not to say a little simplistic) to lay the blame so squarely with the system of one man. It is important to look at some of the underlying problems of western thought at this point. Bohm goes on to analyse what is at work in the process of "division" in our thought. Precisely what are we doing when dealing with a subject and object? Going deeper still he becomes concerned with what relationship thought has to reality, or what we call reality. His ideas have a similarity to Wilson and also Wilber, who are both at times influenced by the ideas of A.N.Whitehead. Whitehead believed that we have two modes of perception, "causal efficacy" and "presentational immediacy", to state it briefly these two modes roughly represent a kind of everyday perception, necessary to get by in the world, and a more 'pure' form of perception, more direct, which incidentally Donald Kuspit when writing about Whitehead calls "primordial perception" (Kuspit, 1995). What concerns this investigation here is the mode of "causal efficacy" which could be defined as a type of relationship to the world based on symbols, where one could say that the reality is mutated into symbolic form rather than experienced directly. Let us again refer to Bohm,

> In essence, the process of division is a way of *thinking about things* that is convenient and useful...However, when this mode of thought is applied more broadly to man's notion of himself and the whole world in which he lives (i.e. to his self-world view), then man ceases to regard the resulting divisions as merely useful or convenient and begins to see and experience himself and his world as actually constituted of separately existing fragments...fragmentation is continually being brought about by the almost universal habit of taking the content of our thought for 'a description of the world as it is'...our thought is regarded as a direct correspondence with reality.

(Bohm, D. 1981:2)

Bohm identifies that a key underlying problem is the mistaking of ideas as reality. Whitehead would see this as relying only on "causal efficacy", Wilson as using only "immediacy perception" as opposed to "meaning perception" and Abraham Maslow as being stuck in "D cognition" (deficiency cognition) as opposed to "B cognition" (being cognition) (Maslow, A. H. 1968). I think all these categories could be described as comparing what could, at one time have been called spiritual feeling, with a more normal, everyday form of consciousness or perception. I have raised two objections in the course of this chapter. If I may refer to the earlier distinction of "inner" and "outer" approaches, one objection is with our western psychology, to our perception and mental workings (although it may yet prove to have significance beyond the subjective), this could be summarised by Wilson.

> It seems simple and obvious to assume that the universe will finally be understood if the mind looks on in a spirit of scientific enquiry. *But making the 'I think' the centre of gravity of philosophy is like making the earth the centre of the universe...* the centre of gravity of philosophy should be the recognition of the 'I' behind the 'I think'. The starting point is still the 'I think', the questioning intelligence. But instead of looking out at the universe from its armchair, it now needs two faces, one to look out, one to look inward towards the 'hidden I', the transcendental ego.
> (Wilson, C. 1991:68)

Wilson is drawing our attention to the problem that in this case what may have appeared good philosophy failed to take account fully of the complexities of the human mind. As he says "The fallacy was not a logical one; rather it was psychological."(Wilson, 1991:67), but it would appear that it is difficult to keep these two areas apart. So with the psychological and the philosophical seen as linked it is with Wilber's notion of 'symbolic' knowledge that I would like to finish.

> Our words, then, our ideas, our concepts, our theories, even our everyday language, are all *maps* of the actual world, of the "territory", and just as a map of America is not the real territory, so our scientific and philosophical *ideas about* reality are not reality itself...Reality, so to speak, lies "beyond" or "behind" the shadowy symbols that are, at best, a second-hand facsimile. Not realising this, man becomes lost in a world of arrid abstractions, thinking only of symbols about symbols about nothing, and reality never gets in at all.
> (Wilber, K.1993:30)

This chapter has come full circle to compare Wilber's map to the earlier map of Baudrillard. As has been shown there is some considerable agreement that the typical western mode of consciousness is a mode which tends to habitually mistake the "symbolic map" for reality. There is also agreement that we may also enjoy 'purer' moments of perception but for Baudrillard there appears no such possibility, or if such a state were to be experienced it would be an illusion. However, it is now possible to view Baudrillard's fatalistic brand of

postmodernism in the light of some of the ideas explored in this chapter. He perhaps may be in the situation which Wilber described contemplating " symbols about symbols about nothing" unable to break free of a mode of consciousness which is circular and self contained created and sustained by and through language and conceptual (dualistic) knowledge. We can also see Baudrillard in terms of Wilson's concept concerning Cartesian dualism, Baudrillard being incapable of encountering a sense of reality or profound meaning due to his essentially divided mind which seems to render him incapable of an act of "intentional" perception which would make deeper meaning possible. I use Baudrillard as my concluding example but as can be seen from the ideas and writers I have surveyed this is a widespread problem. Perhaps the modern mind often mistook the (symbolic) map for the territory but for the postmodern mind to begin to doubt the existence of the territory it would suggest that a kind of conditioning has taken place in which it has become accustomed to a 'background hum' of nihilism, leading to the ability to live (albeit nihilistically) without any form of deeper meaning or reality.

This is one path for postmodernism which needed investigation in order to understand how the spiritual became such a problematic area in contemporary society and art. However, just as the modernist culture of rational progress had another side which was oppositional to its materialistic values, seen in artists such as Mondrian and Kandinsky, so postmodernism has more than one aspect. This investigation will go on to explore another, more positive model of postmodernism (in the concluding section of chapter three), which can provide a much needed space for a reinterpretation of the role of the spiritual in contemporary abstract painting. In the next chapter the focus is narrowed to a study of three contemporary abstract painters and looks at their differing approaches to abstract painting in the postmodern era. There are common problems and approaches, along with some real divergences but the underlying issues and concerns which emerge from the study of these artists help create a context for the third chapter of this investigation which describes my own practice of abstract painting and how it engages with spiritual meaning in a postmodern context.

Chapter 2

A Study of Three Artists – Ian McKeever, Gerhard Richter and David Reed

This investigation now turns to the practice of abstract painting and I will look at three contemporary abstract painters to establish a context within which my practice is situated. These are Ian McKeever, David Reed and Gerhard Richter. Ian McKeever represents an oppositional stance to a contemporary culture which he views as often inauthentic and unable to provide true experiences of depth. For McKeever, painting can and should have a spiritual dimension. For Richter, if painting could not perhaps be called 'spiritual' then it operates in the gap that is left by the withdrawal of spiritual possibilities and if 'doubt' can be called a strategy then his approach may be defined as such. David Reed in contrast believes that painting can enjoy a relationship with technology of the type it once enjoyed with religion. All three of these painters tell us something interesting about the various possibilities for abstract painting and establish a position relevant to this investigation.

Ian McKeever

Ian McKeever was born 1946 in Withersnea, East Yorkshire. He now exhibits internationally and is an RA. His painting has seen a gradual evolution from conceptual beginnings to what is now an intensely romantic and spiritual viewpoint. McKeever has not abandoned concepts or ideas. It is rather that the ideas, or perhaps one should say 'state of being', which McKeever now considers important have changed and he acknowledges that concepts and theory are only able to take him so far. It is revealing to contrast the tone of the younger (more conceptually based) McKeever at the time of "Fields, Waterfalls and Birds" (1979) where he makes a comparison between Turner and Constable (and the respective content behind the approach of each to the landscape) with his later position.

> Now this word romantic is tricky...That which is Romantic is to do with fictions, with spiritual sublime premises that are totally intangible...I think that Constable and Turner present a real divergence as to both the significance of landscape and the nature of painting as an activity. For me Constable is far more significant: there are more questions, fewer metaphysical speculations than in Turner. Fulton and Long have that same quality as Turner in their work, of there being something out there to which they allude, but yet which remains unstated.
>
> *Which, like God remains always off stage. (T.G)*
>
> No, I'm not interested in that at all.

(McKeever, I. interview with Godfrey, T. in McKeever. I, 1979:1)

McKeever speaks of metaphysical speculation as though it were an area of experience to be avoided by an artist and I will compare this with his attitude to spiritual matters a number of years later when "metaphysical speculation" has become a central concern. First, let us hear what McKeever has to say on the "tricky" subject of Romanticism in his book "In Praise of Painting" published in 2005.

> I am a Romantic, I have no time for anything less.
> (McKeever, I. 2005:81)

It quickly becomes apparent that there has been a significant shift. McKeever's attitude towards romanticism has changed but what of metaphysical concerns? When discussing abstraction in his book *In Praise of Painting* McKeever states

> Robert Motherwell stated that all 'abstract' painting was by definition metaphysical and indeed, that would appear to be the case. For in making paintings one is getting at something which is just that: abstract.
> (McKeever, I. 2005:28)

A similarly radical change can be seen to have taken place concerning the idea of the metaphysical. The beginning of McKeever's artistic career overlapped considerably with the era of the dominance of conceptual art. One of his chief influences was the work and writings of Robert Smithson and it is a matter of record that when faced with a choice of only one book to take on one of his frequent walking trips to various remote and inhospitable environments (in this case Greenland) he chose to take Michel Foucault's "The Archeology of Knowledge" a key influence in his thinking ten years prior to this. On this trip McKeever failed to find similar interest in the book and ultimately ended up burying it beneath a rock in what Lynne Cooke (1990b) calls "an unwittingly symbolic act".

McKeever is open about the transition in his thought, Lewis Biggs makes reference to a comment McKeever made in 1984

> The earlier work used to be very conceptually based...[That] conceptual bias is still there and it is still important for me, but I'm actually trying to move away from it ...wanting to deal more with things which appear to be anti-conceptual, like the romantic tradition
> (McKeever, I. cited by Biggs, L. in McKeever, I. 1990a:36)

McKeever made a further movement from Romanticism and landscape, to fully fledged abstraction with an acknowledgment of metaphysical possibilities. It would seem that the

older and more secure in his practice McKeever has become the more open he is to his formative influences and deepest concerns. McKeever is now able to delve into his earliest memories and draw comparisons between painting and religion saying

> ...these two things, the mass and the sea, were both awe-inspiring for me, and probably are at the root of what I am about...To have religious beliefs and to believe in painting both necessitate an act of faith...I have to jump, but tied up here for me, are questions of faith, thresholds, of being an ordinary mortal and a desire for another state...
> (McKeever, I. interview with Lloyd, J. in McKeever 1998:6)

Art and Contemporary Culture

Let us for now look at the views of McKeever on contemporary culture and the role of painting within it. It is not an optimistic view and the following quotation, although lengthy, is worth including as it reads almost as a manifesto for McKeever's later work.

> the painter is like a priest. If that sounds too grand then wait, for I would go even further, in saying that the painter is the true custodian of art. He or she was where true art began and will certainly be there at the end.
>
> For many disciplines, that are now considered art, will slowly become other things, forms of entertainment, tourist attractions or other means of social catharsis. Many artists will increasingly become a part of popular culture, like superstars, like pop stars, working with museums, which abandon art as such and would rather seek to blur the boundaries between entertainment and what was art in order to popularize and appease a bewildered and sceptical audience. Much art will thus become cultural tourism, just more noise in the act of living.
>
> Art that wishes to remain art will yet again become marginalised to survive, to become again its own sub-culture, who's devotees will find themselves with time find fewer and fewer, yet more ardent and faithful in their belief in the sovereignty of art. In this shift paintings orthodoxy and resolve will be an example, will be exalted. Much else that began as art will simply ebb and flow with the with the tide of change...Much else that began as art, will simply ebb and flow with the tide of changes, become change itself for its own sake.
> (McKeever, I. 2002:28)

McKeever sees painting as a path to an experience of 'authenticity' in an increasingly shallow culture, and perhaps more worryingly an increasingly shallow art world. He is not alone in this as Gerhard Richter has made numerous comments as to the shallow nature of the 'art world' and points out that the 'art world' and 'art' are two very different things.

> The much maligned 'art-scene' of the present day is perfectly harmless and even pleasant, if you don't judge it in terms of false expectations. It has nothing to do with those traditional values that we hold high (or that hold us high). It has virtually nothing whatever to do with art... [it] satisfies our need for communication, alongside such others as sport, fashion, stamp-collecting and cat-breeding. Art takes shape in spite of it all, rarely and always unexpectedly...
> (Richter, G. 1993:221)

Richter goes on to focus on the artist him/herself, seeing the bankruptcy to have spread to the very core of our concept of the artist and not simply the more commercial end of the 'art scene'.

> Artist: more of a title than a job description. It's a word that still earns you considerable respect...Understandably, everyone would rather be an artist than endure the shame of some ordinary occupation. But the artist's image is going to be adjusted, sooner or later, when society realizes how easy it is to be an artist, and to set down (on or off the canvas) something that no one can understand and consequently no one can attack; how easy it is to put on an act that will fool everyone else and even oneself. By then, if not before, the title of artist will induce nausea.
> (Richter, G. 1993:249)

It is worrying that highly respected artists can view both the artist and the art world with such a negative attitude. However, there may be a hidden optimism behind the fact that both attach such importance to art and the artist, that they can be so disappointed, apparent cynicism, despair or nihilism can stem from thwarted or frustrated idealism. There is though, a distinct split between the stance of McKeever and a painter such as David Reed. While Richter remains conflicted (and in some cases contradictory), Reed and McKeever represent a divergence on the direction painting should take in relation to contemporary culture.

David Reed

David Reed was born in 1946 in San Diego. He, like McKeever, spent the formative years of his practice working in an artistic environment dominated by minimalism, conceptualism and a post-conceptual environment still unsympathetic to painting. Reed established his reputation developing a highly complex abstraction involving many translucent layers, an emphasis on the luminosity of 'artificial' high key colour and swirling Baroque type marks which often entwine and turn back folding in on themselves, looking more like photographs of marks than physical marks in their own right. The sense of uncertainty with what one is confronted by is described rather beautifully by John Yau who says of Reed's paintings,

> The viscous folds of paint evoke film and chemical emulsions, mutating biological matter, worlds seen through a microscope, bolts of cloth, waves found in cyberspace, cake frosting, melting wax, repeated gestures, close-up photographs, something that is made of light and is, paradoxically, between solid and liquid...the painting is comparable to a film strip blown-up big...a section of a fractured narrative whose beginning and ending can neither be seen nor deduced from what is visible.
> (Yau. J, 2005:75)

This difference between Reed and McKeever presents itself initially concerning the relationship of painting and contemporary culture but stems from a deeper philosophical difference on fundamental questions such as the very notion of what constitutes an 'authentic' sense of self, and indeed, if such an experience of self is now possible. Reed defines his vision for painting saying

> Painting has a rich and varied humanist history as well as the ability, because of its sensitivity, to transform itself and to mutate into something different. Painting is so impure, so corruptible. For a long time it had a parasitic relationship with Christianity. Painting would be completely different without this relationship, as would the Christian religion. Now there's a chance for just as rich a relationship with technology. In many ways, it could be a similar relationship: focusing on forces beyond the human and how to understand them through the humanity of painting.
> (Reed, D. in Ryan, D. 2002: 203)

There are a number of interesting and complex issues that lie behind this statement and they need to be unravelled with care. It is fair and reasonable to assert that painting is capable of being "impure" or even "corruptible", although "impure" is an emotive word, which of course plays on the opposite notion that there is, or has been, something 'pure' (perhaps this should not be taken too seriously as there may be a playful element of humour here as Reed enjoys entering into the new and exciting world of 'corruptible' painting). The two other parts of the statement merit closer attention. First there is the use of the word "parasitic". For many it may hardly be seen as an encouraging aspiration for painting to enter a "parasitic" relationship with technology. Secondly, the word "parasitic" seems to presuppose the notion that painting and Christianity had at heart different ends or motivations. It would appear that painting had its own agenda, quite apart from that of Christianity but can we be so sure? Why would the painter have been separate from the accepted belief systems of his/her age? It is as likely, if not more probable, that the painter of religious themes would have shared the beliefs of the prevailing religious thought and belief systems of the time. If this were true the use of the term "parasitic" is inappropriate as it implies a separation and difference from the 'host' which may in fact not be the case, paintings are made by people, people have belief systems and these in turn enter painting as the activity of painting is given an overall sense (or lack) of purpose by such belief systems. Perhaps most perplexing is Reed's statement about being able to understand forces (presumably technological) which are "beyond the human" through the "humanity of painting". This is particularly interesting as it can be observed in Reed's paintings that he quite consciously creates paintings which give the impression of a reproduction or photograph. He is in fact quite careful not to give an easy route into what has traditionally been understood as the "humanity" of painting stating

> Yes, my paintings have quite a distanced effect. The marks are isolated, removed from the maker, and it may not be easy to identify with them. I hope that eventually the viewer will be able to identify through colour. This feeling of overcoming an obstacle is extremely important to me. It's a choice to become involved. I'm very mistrustful, now, of easy entries into painting, especially through tactile materials, and tactile material gestures. I feel these entries are accompanied by a sense of nostalgia for defined times...Some painters have physically broken out of the frame, not like the Baroque painters through illusion, but materially and literally. I want to break out mentally. The edge of the painting is still there physically, as the wall is, but it's also not there at all.
> (Reed, D. in Ryan, D. 2002:202)

It remains to ask how a "human" activity can tell us something about an experience which is "beyond the human". It would appear that in the case of David Reed a partial answer is for painting to situate itself in close proximity to this "beyond the human" quality, whilst not quite becoming it. The question is that by situating itself thus, does painting simply capitulate to the "beyond the human" and diminish its own humanity, or do the differences become all the more pronounced and effective due to their subtlety?

How McKeever and Reed differ when discussing 'light' offers another example of the difference between the two artists. McKeever views light as an almost spiritual property of painting whereas Reed is temperamentally or intellectually inclined to look to technology. McKeever gives a brief history of light in Western painting

> ...the history of painting is also a history of the loss of light. For slowly but surely, from the omnipresent intensity of divine light in early Byzantine painting, which precede the emergence of Italian painting, to the obscuring chiaroscuro of such painters as Titian and Caravaggio, the light is squeezed out of painting to become finally a mere candle-flicker. A world once full of light becomes a world of shadows.
>
> When the light does eventually re-emerge, as intense light, it is in another country, France, in the 19th century. However, by then the light of God has been replaced by the prosaic light of day.
> (McKeever, I. 2005:62)

Reed's history starts where McKeever's ends as he embraces a new form of light, technological light. Reed sees this as an opportunity for painting to positively engage with the contemporary world.

> During the Renaissance and the Baroque periods they had a wonderful religious light that always came from above. Now we have a technological light, the light of a TV or movie screen, which is directionless – homogenous across the screen – and increases the intensity of each colour. Since we see this light on or through machines, it seems beyond the human, even immortal. To that extent it's similar to the divine light in the

older paintings. Technological light can be suggested in an abstract painting, but made more sensual and material than it is on a screen or in a photograph.
I insist that my paintings have a wide range of light and dark, as well as a wide spectrum of colour. Greenbergian formalist painting suppressed value contrast in order to stress the flatness of the picture, and by doing so it eliminated a lot of the expressive possibilities of abstraction.
(Reed, D. interview with Ellis, S. in Reed, D. 1990:19)

In total contrast, one of the most perceptive and beautiful descriptions of light in McKeever's painting compares his sense of light to the experience of light within Gothic Cathedrals.

> If we think of an architecture of light nowadays we probably would think of... modernist architecture...and the way it is used to disclose form: light here is rational and translucent. But McKeever's work is closer to the experience given by Gothic cathedrals, where light arrows into dark, cavernous spaces from pierced, intricate and often coloured windows. There is a great sense of mystery here, shafts of light and dust-mote heavy darkness making an architecture within the architecture – a drama of penetration and interplay. Light here is made palpable. Light here is inspiration, flying down from the heavens. Recall the Renaissance paintings where the beam of light pierces the virgin, impregnating her with divinity. The beam is solid as a golden spear. Light here is above reason, the very image of divinity, the very stuff of transcendence.
> (Godfrey, T. in McKeever, I. 1996a:33)

A parallel could be drawn here between the descriptions of light in Reed and McKeever's paintings and some philosophical descriptions concerning different modes of thought in the modern and postmodern eras. John Lechte when describing the ideas of Gilles Deleuze describes his thought as "radically horizontal". In this context it is interesting to compare the description of light in Reed's painting as "homogenous" to the description of light in McKeever's painting "above reason, the very image of divinity, the very stuff of transcendence" or "flying down from the heavens". One could speculate as to whether Reed arrives at a position similar to 'horizontality' through the "homogenous" nature of his use of light. It is possible to push this scenario a step further when considering the reference to McKeever's use of light as "above reason...the very stuff of transcendence". If we return to the full implications of "horizontal" thought and "vertical" thought, Lechte sees the difference as such,

> The singular aspect of all vertical philosophy is the separation in it of the truth of the concept from the reality to which it refers. Thus for Plato the concept 'good' is distinct from any material manifestation of the good; the world of appearance is deemed to be separate and distinct from the world of essence, or reality. By contrast, Deleuze [via Nietzsche] refuses these distinctions...the apparently 'subjective' world is the only world there is. The vertical axis of objective truth is thus overturned by Nietzsche in favour of the horizontal axis of values...
> (Lechte, J. 1995:103)

The contrast is distinct, the 'homogenous light' of technology or the 'divine light' of the Gothic Cathedral, the television or the stained glass window. It is hard to imagine anyone not feeling some sense of loss in exchanging the stained glass window for the television but it is also easy to observe where the vast majority of western people spend their time in 'worship'. The choice seems quite clear, to view the situation as one of loss or one of opportunity. However, there is another possibility, of viewing light as phenomena, detached from place, location or context, inherently capable of transporting the experiencing subject to an entirely different state of consciousness. The "technological" light which Reed sees as "beyond the human" may in fact, not be so dissimilar to "religious" light, if viewed as simply another manifestation of the phenomena of light, different in local context, but similar in its ability to transport the viewer. Reed's interpretation of "beyond the human" may be a contemporary rationalization of a profoundly moving, disorientating, phenomenal experience. The instance of its encounter different, the means of its conveyance different but the transporting effect very similar, the interpretation may varying according to the underlying philosophical possibilities (and taste) of the prevailing intellectual and cultural climate.

I have emphasised the split between the attitudes of McKeever and Reed along the established lines of a postmodern sensibility compared to what may be defined as a form of romantic sensibility, indeed some may see McKeever as essentially modernist but this would be a mistake as he is considerably more complex than this. He takes a different route around modernism from Reed although his language and references may differ radically the urge to move beyond modernism is similar). However, there are other ways of viewing the differences. For instance, Robert Rosenblum in his book *Modern Painting and the Northern Romantic Tradition: Friedrich to Rothko* (1975) points to an alternative history of modern art quite different from what could be called a French/Italian formalist tradition (which may be viewed as the dominant interpretation up to that point). If one were to view the situation from this perspective then it may not simply be a philosophical difference between McKeever and Reed but one of a 'clash of cultures'. While hard to see where a contemporary American artist such as Reed fits into Rosenblum's scheme it is easy to see McKeever's connection to the Romantic tradition. This demonstrates one of the purposes of this research, to update such historical models in light of postmodern/contemporary developments. It is hard to imagine McKeever has not read Rosenblum when he states,

> ...the French-Italian tradition in painting is about looking outside of oneself, as if you are looking out at an idealized world through a window from the comfort of a secure intellect. The Northern tradition does not have that security, it is steeped more in the individuals belief to be unique and sensate. It is profoundly romantic. Whilst the French-Italian tradition is essentially classical. In that sense I am a Northern romantic painter.

(McKeever, I. interview with Ohrt, K. in McKeever, I. 2000a:42)

Rosenblum suggests that there has existed a sense of spiritual continuity with traditional art forms in Northern European countries. This romantic sensibility combined with a deeply embedded spiritual tradition, he claims, has combined to create an alternative to the French/Italian approach. McKeever senses his place within this tradition recognizing that it is not rooted in formalism. It is driven by an emphasis on the existential import of the artwork, by a world of interiority where the artist is mixed up with the world in which they live, to the Northern European painter the world is not a separate entity which can be coolly analysed and represented, here there is no detached Cartesian observer.

McKeever is not alone in his aversion to the type of formalism that accompanied **some** modernist painting. As Donald Kuspit has pointed out, Clement Greenberg failed to address the psychological, expressive element of modernist painting. There has been a discrepancy between how modernist painting has been critically and theoretically represented and what it may indeed be (or have been). Jill Lloyd encapsulates McKeever's position on formalism saying,

> Formalism, in the modernist sense of the word, is of no interest whatsoever to McKeever because he sees it simply as a new type of academicism that reduces the power and presence of a work of art to an empty shell.
> (Lloyd, J. in McKeever, I. 1998:10)

For McKeever, painting must go beyond the merely formal and involve basic, fundamental notions of 'self', time and spirituality.

The 'Sense of Self' in Painting

The notion of 'self' involved in painting is another difference which emerges from a study of McKeever and Reed. Both may view painting as something which affects the 'sense of self' or calls it into question but again the paths are divergent. Jill Lloyd gives us a picture of the philosophical position of McKeever telling us that he has

> ...moved increasingly further away from a materialist understanding of the world in the direction of a spiritual or metaphysical concept of art...If one speaks to McKeever about philosophy, he is likely to mention Wittgenstein and Heidegger...Like McKeever, Heidegger initially saw his task in non-transcendental terms, and yet moved in the second half of his life towards an increasingly metaphysical stance.
> (Lloyd, J. in McKeever, I. 2003:33)

Lloyd has likened McKeever's approach to Heidegger's concept of "Dasein" (which literally means there-being or existence). She defines "Dasein" as something like a true sense of

reality/existence or self, only encountered by the subject when confronted by its own mortality. Lloyd sees similarities between McKeever and Heidegger and perceptively intuits that McKeever's aim is to create an art that in fact has a strong moral or philosophical imperative, his is not an art of stylistic formalism but instead is intended to offer the opportunity for a potentially life-enhancing experience. Lloyd explains "Dasein" thus.

> ...Facing up resolutely to our own death, moreover, brings about a "moment of vision," which bestows genuine enlightenment because it makes us authentically present to ourselves for the first time. Inauthentic Dasein thinks that only the present is real because the future is not yet and the past is dead and gone; it is obsessed with superficial, passing fashions. On the contrary, the authentic present is the holding together of past and future...
> This philosophical language could be used without too much difficulty to describe the intelligent, creative, forward roll of Ian McKeever's art. By opening himself to thoughts like these and attempting to create an art that is as authentic as enlightened *Dasein*, McKeever has gone against the grain of the fashionable mainstream in contemporary art."
> (Lloyd, J. in McKeever, I. 2004:28/29)

If we took McKeever's relationship to time as an example we would quickly see that time is no detached concept for him, rather it is a lived, existential reality, it may be lived 'authentically' or 'inauthentically' but it cannot be avoided. By simply 'going along' with contemporary culture the individual subject is in fact being drawn into a particular relationship to time and one that I suspect McKeever would class as 'inauthentic'. McKeever has outlined the sense of time he hopes to achieve in his paintings when he stated

> ...I am trying to paint slow paintings, to make them as slow as possible. The paintings ask you to slow down. This whole relationship between painting and time is at the essence of what I do. It is one of the areas where painting can still make a valuable contribution. A painting can say, slow down, breathe, feel time. Paintings can give you back time.
> (McKeever, I. interview with Ohrt, K.2000a:46)

It is important to understand exactly what is at stake here, and exactly how McKeever views the importance of our relationship with time. As is becoming apparent this is inextricably bound up with our notion of self, also. The whole construct of the isolated, time bound individual self comes under question. Lynn Cooke refers to the possibilities of other conceptions of time lying beyond or before modern western conceptions of time and how other societies have been less involved with a strictly linear sense of time, a cyclical approach more open to repetition and recurrence. She points out what a humbling experience such a change in our conception of time may be, radically altering not only our perception of the world around us but also perhaps our fundamental notions of self. If the realization of our own mortality leads to a change of our awareness, then it follows that our sense of time is

inextricably and existentially bound to our notion of self. Cooke sees McKeever's painting as deeply committed to the exploration of this alternative sense of time and self.

Reed also, is concerned with time but for him it raises other issues, again his response points towards contemporary culture and new possibilities, experiences of time which take us beyond the either/or **experience** of time represented on the one hand by contemporary culture and on the other by what may be called transcendental abstraction. Reed tells us

> I want to put time back into abstract painting so that you have to go through a decoding process in order to understand what the painting is about. Mondrian and the other pioneers of abstraction wanted to make abstract painting timeless. When you look at a classic Mondrian you perceive it all at once. Even when you look at a single part, you are still so aware of the whole that you don't get any sense of looking at the painting in time, at one part after the other. But now this desire for timelessness seems nostalgic. I'm surprised there hasn't been more recent abstract painting interested in time. It's not that I want to eliminate this sense of the whole. I want to test it, stress it, see how far it can stretch.
> (Reed, R. interview with Ellis, S. in Reed, D. 1990:15/18)

On the question of the 'self', let us look at what David Reed has to say on the topic. This can be divided into two levels of response, first, a response to the act of making paintings and second, to the act of viewing paintings.

> When I first started working abstractly, part of me would identify with the painting, as if I were inside it working through the forms. Another part of me would stay outside and watch what was happening. I felt split in two. I was afraid that I couldn't come back together again...Finally, I decided that this experience of being split apart was necessary to make a painting. I learned just to grit my teeth and take it. Then in Tom Wolfe's book, *The Right Stuff*, I read about a similar experience. When the test pilots for the X2 got up to the edge of space, they reached a point they called the "break off." The pilot was no longer in his body but saw himself from above and behind at the same time. He felt one with the plane. He belonged in space, not on earth, and could do anything he wanted – then he crashed. I still have to go through that break-off point with each painting, but now I know its part of the process.
> (Reed, I. interview with Ellis, S. in Reed, D. 1990:5)

This is a fascinating insight into Reed's approach to painting. It is intriguing to learn that Reed felt almost threatened by this splitting process. This would appear to be similar to a state which many artists strive to reach and view as desirable (one is reminded of de Kooning's "slipping glimpse" or Pollock's "I am nature") often defined as the loss of an ego bound consciousness. It is equally fascinating that Reed finds reassurance about this state of mind in a passage about test pilots (rather than poets, other artists or religious mystics etc). Let us contrast this with McKeever and how he views the act of painting, and its effect on the sense of 'self', talking about his relationship to his paintings McKeever says

> They are an existential part of my being. Even the canvas itself is like my skin...I have to be able to feel myself moving into the painting and becoming lost.
> (McKeever, I. interview with Ohrt, K. in McKeever, I. 2000a:46)

What is striking here is that McKeever, although acknowledging the element of being 'lost' in a painting, is prepared to see this as an acceptable, even desirable, state of affairs. McKeever also sees painting as a boundary point between different mental states for the painter and between the painter and the world. The difference is striking between McKeever and Reed. McKeever goes on to say

> I am painting my own condition and position which is permanently close to being swallowed up and absorbed by what is around me. I am not separate. Again I think this is a part of the Northern tradition. It is about living in a world where there are no clear distinctions, where the boundaries between our intellect and our emotions are not distinct from the world outside – they are all interconnected...
> (McKeever, I. interview with Ohrt, K. in McKeever, I. 2000a:42)

Perhaps McKeever here gives us one possible clue as to the cause of their different attitudes. Again he makes reference to the "Northern tradition" and temperamentally he can be seen to be different to Reed. Reed is much more at home with the world of mass media reproduction and prepared to engage with photography and film as methods of rejuvenating painting. McKeever could be seen to be closer to the approach of some of the Abstract Expressionists. Rosenblum makes a convincing case for viewing artists such as Rothko, Newman and Still as a continuation of a Romantic tradition and this in turn involves a particular conception of self. It is a sense of self which aspires to go beyond the everyday ego-bound self and not a goal that Reed feels able to share. Reed sees Abstract Expressionism thus

> The goal of the Abstract Expressionists was, I think, to strengthen a sense of self as you stood in front of the painting. I'm afraid my paintings do the opposite. They question the self, and make us aware of how much more fluid a sense of self is now. For better or worse, I feel that I have several possible selves or my 'self' is changeable. From watching films, we're so expert at identifying with various characters. We move and transform through these identifications.
> (Reed, D, interview in Ryan, D, 2002:199/200)

This is very different from McKeever's notions of the 'self' encountered in painting. However, at this point even the word 'self' may need some sort of clarification. It may be fruitful to touch briefly upon a distinction the critic Donald Kuspit makes between 'true' and 'false' self. In using these terms Kuspit is borrowing from the psychologist D.W.Winnicott. The 'false self' is an adaptational self. A self which attempts to negotiate a path for survival through the prevailing culture, it is a self of 'fitting in'. The 'true self' on the other hand, is a spontaneous self. Not guarded, and not concerned with societal expectations but rather with spontaneity and 'self' expression. The idea of self is not so straightforward. However, if one

accepts the ideas of thinkers such as Winnicott and Kuspit then the 'true' self is a necessary balance to the distorting and homogenising sense of self that society imposes on the individual. In fact, although at first glance Reed's idea of self may sound more risky and precarious, if one looks a further into McKeever's notion of self then this may be a situation where there may be greater risk, McKeever recognises this and comments

> ...I try to paint when I'm vulnerable and equally I try to be vulnerable in the paintings. So much we do when we're negotiating the world is about shielding or protecting oneself...
> (McKeever, I. interview with Lloyd, J. in McKeever, I. 2000a:12)

For McKeever the very act of trying to establish a connection with the 'authentic' self carries with it a risk. One has to question some of the assumptions behind Reed's statement about a "fluid" sense of self, based on the ability to have different senses of self (aided in some way by being able to relate to different filmic characters, and ask if this is really a sense of 'self' in any deeper sense). It may be that to view the self in such a transient and fluid way is, in fact, a defence mechanism against acknowledging the painful inner struggle to establish or maintain any deeper sense of self (a quality not necessarily highly valued or easily achieved in our present society). Reed asserts Abstract Expressionism strengthens a 'sense of self' whereas what, in fact, it may have attempted to do was to overthrow a socially produced (and ultimately psychologically crippling) sense of 'false' self. What could be asked in Reed's case is what type of self he wishes to substitute for the idea of self he sees in Abstract Expressionism. Is this a return to a socially compliant self or is it yet another type of self, something new and specific to postmodernism?

How to Paint? (Now)

The questions of time and the experience self in painting inevitably lead to questions concerning the underlying sense of meaning (or lack of meaning) which either supports (or undermines) contemporary painting which aspires to an experience of depth. We have seen the sense of self is problematic but now let us look at the problems involved with actually making paintings. For all three artists the question of what or how to paint is not one that can be simply answered. Indeed, the search for a meaningful 'subject' can itself become the 'subject' in the hands of an artist such as Gerhard Richter.

Gerhard Richter

Gerhard Richter was born in Dresden in 1932 and lived in East Germany until 1961. His immense productivity has seen his painting range over numerous working methods, but he is most famous for his representational 'photo-blur' and 'dragged' abstract paintings. Both working methods involve an element of detachment in the process and a critical dialogue with previous painting methods. Richter says of his problem with starting points,

> 12 October 1986. What shall I paint? How shall I paint?
> 'What' is the hardest thing, because it is the essence. 'How' is easy by comparison. To start off with the 'How' is frivolous, but legitimate. Apply the 'How', and thus use the requirements of technique, the material and physical possibilities, in order to realize the intention. The intention: to invent nothing – no idea, no composition, object, form, idea, picture...I very soon became aware of this problem of having no subject. Of course, I took motifs and represented them, but this was really with the feeling that these were not the real ones, but imposed, dog-eared, artificial ones. The question 'What shall I paint?' showed me my own helplessness, and I often envied (still do envy) the most mediocre painters those 'concerns' of theirs, which they tenaciously and mediocrely depict (I fundamentally despise them for it).
> (Richter, I. 1993:129)

Richter demonstrates exactly how deep this anxiety may run in our culture. He would seem to represent a form of crisis of meaning in our times. Although he has the freedom to use any subject matter, (after all he lives in a postmodern, pluralist culture), this limitless freedom seems to come at the price of a loss of meaning. Even if not all meaning is lost then at least the guarantee of certainty has gone. Certain meaning has gone to be replaced by a plurality of possible options all lacking the security of stable meaning. Of course the uncertainty does not end with subject matter but extends into the area of the formal language of painting, the "How" as Richter puts it (The death of meta-narratives has, for some, left the notion of avant-garde 'progression' as the only remaining narrative. Art becomes its own narrative and this in turn is challenged by some elements of postmodernism). So we have the questions of "How" and "What" which both perhaps beg the further question of "Why"? McKeever has some similar concerns over the use of something as basic as a brushstroke telling us that

> ...today, such a self-conscious act as the broad gestural brushstroke can verge upon the embarrassing, can look academic or at worst naïve. It is as if this act had entered the realm of painting's clichés...If used now, they must be fore grounded, consciously quoted, in order to have validity. Yet, the question of how such things can be used in painting is still a valid issue. As is the need for the painter to be prepared to risk the embarrassment of appearing naïve in going back to some of paintings basic constructs and concerns.
> (McKeever, I. 2005:46)

Richter has also struggled with what is 'permissible' in contemporary abstraction. One of the best known, or perhaps 'infamous' interviews in Richter's long career is with Benjamin Buchloh in 1986. During this interview there is a dispute over the intention behind Richter's

abstract paintings. Buchloh (a Marxist) is keen to classify Richter's abstracts as a kind of 'end game' analysis of painting. But as the critic Donald Kuspit has remarked Richter and Buchloh are "hilariously" at odds. In fact, Kuspit goes much further, saying that

> ...Buchloh, like a commissar, attempts to re-educate Richter, forcing his art to conform to the rigid Procrustean bed of Buchloh's own preconceptions. This amounts to a 'liquidation' of Richter, a term Buchloh uses in a way reminiscent of Communists and Fascists.
> (Kuspit, D.1994:237)

The conflict between the pair centres on whether Richter is a "cynical" painter or not. For Buchloh, as a Marxist, with a political agenda for art (which may see the ultimate goal of art as its own end), Richter is a significant painter because he shows up the "bankruptcy" of abstraction. He sees Richter as demonstrating, simultaneously, all the past options of painting and at the same time, by virtue of their simultaneity, revealing their meaninglessness.

> BB: ...*You were working on two levels at once, and this confused most of your critical commentators, who started to see you as a painter who knows all the tricks and techniques, and who simultaneously discredits and deploys all the iconographical conventions. At the moment, this makes you particularly attractive to many viewers, because your work looks like a survey of the whole universe of twentieth-century painting, presented in one vast, cynical retrospective.*
>
> GR: Now that definitely is a misunderstanding. I see no cynicism or trickery or guile in any of this. On the contrary, it all seems rather amateurish to me, the head-on way I've tackled everything, and how simple it is to read off what I had in mind and what I was trying to do. That's why I don't really know what you mean by the contradiction between figurative and abstract painting.
>
> BB: ...*this is surely one of the great twentieth-century dilemmas: this apparent conflict, this apparent antagonism within painting between the functions of depiction and self-reflection. In your painting, the two run very close together. But aren't they juxtaposed in order to show up the inadequacy, the bankruptcy of both?*
>
> GR: Not bankruptcy, but always inadequacy."
>
> "BB: *So, in the early 1960's you don't see yourself as the heir to a historical dichotomy, a state of fragmentation, in which no strategy is really valid any more?*
>
> GR: And I do see myself as the heir to a vast, great, rich culture of painting – of art in general – which we have lost, but which places obligations on us. And it is no easy matter to avoid either harking back to the past or (equally bad) giving up altogether and sliding into decadence."
> (Richter, G, interview with Buchloh, B, [1986] in Richter1993:146)

The difference of opinion continues, with Buchloh insistent on a particular reading of Richter's work. Richter is clearly unwilling to be constricted by what he feels is a false sense of categorisation and the whole debate reaches a climax.

> "BB: *But you see the role of art as a more important one than that of simply liquidating a false bourgeois cultural inheritance – though that is one of its functions , isn't it?*
>
> GR: Liquidating? Yes, that's part of it.
>
> BB: *But at the same time it also has another function, and that's where the contradiction comes in. What is the other function, if not a political one?*
>
> GR: Above all, art does more than destroy. It produces something, a different image.
>
> BB: *Of autonomy.*
>
> GR: Yes."

The interview continues but reaches a real divergence of opinion on the subject of content,

> "BB: ...*and so the Abstract Pictures too are intended to convey a content?*
>
> GR:Yes
>
> BB: *They're not a negation of content, not painting-as-fact, not an ironic parody of present day expressionism?*
>
> GR: Certainly not! What kinds of questions are these? How can my pictures be devoid of content, and what is this content that the abstract expressionists are supposed to have had as distinct from me?
>
> BB*: They painted with a different intention in mind...*
>
> GR: In my work the principle's the same; it's just that different means are used to achieve a different effect."
>
> (Richter, G. interview with Buchloh, B. (1986) in Richter 1993:150/155)

It becomes obvious that there is a fundamental difference between the pair. In one sense it is tempting, and perhaps too easy, to describe this difference as being the difference between a cold, analytical theoretician and a more emotionally involved practitioner, who is to a large extent working intuitively and analysing retrospectively. These polarities may in a sense be clichés (although they contain more than an element of truth in this case), but there is another, deeper issue. Buchloh's system of interpretation is obviously political, Richter's is not. While Buchloh can clearly be seen to have a political agenda for art, which flavours his entire interpretation, Richter's interpretative 'system' is more difficult to pin down. In

Richter's painting we see a prolonged attempt to engage with 'transcendent' possibilities both lost and still possible and the loss of meaning (or at least sense of uncertainty) which this entails. Let us return for one last exchange.

> BB: *It seems to me that you introduce process-related painting as just one of painting's possibilities, while not insisting, as Ryman did, that this is its only aspect. It's one aspect among others.*
>
> GR: Then why should I go to such lengths to make it so varied?
>
> BB*: Because you're setting out to call off all the aspects there are, like a catalogue; because you're really trying to pursue both a rhetoric of painting and simultaneously an analysis of that rhetoric.*
>
> GR: If all this were just a display of matter – the way the yellow, tatter-edged area rises up against the blue-green background – how could it tell a story or set up moods?...and aesthetic pleasure, too
>
> BB: *That's something different. Aesthetic pleasure I can see, but absolutely not a mood.*
>
> GR: So what is a mood?
>
> BB: *A mood has an explicitly emotional, spiritual, psychological quality.*
>
> GR: That's exactly what is there.
>
> BB: *Fortunately only in the weakest parts.*
>
> GR: Surely you don't think that a stupid demonstration of brushwork, or of the rhetoric of painting and its elements, could ever achieve anything, say anything, express any longing.
>
> BB: *Longing for what?*
>
> GR: For lost qualities, for a better world – for the opposite of misery and hopelessness.
>
> (Richter, R. interview with Buchloh, B. (1986) in Richter 1993:156)

It is clear that Buchloh and Richter are talking a different language and the reason I have dwelt so long on this interview is that it represents (in microcosm) a clash of interpretative systems, which is played out on a much larger scale throughout the art world and can be seen taking place in the clash between the secular attitude and those who still maintain the possibility of any form of spiritual experience. While there are numerous explanations which seek to 'replace' the spiritual or transcendent, most frequently it seems to fall to the interpretative systems of politics (often Marxist), or psychoanalysis (from a Freudian or post-Freudian base). What is intriguing about Richter is the curious mixture of his thought. He clearly detests Marxism, once saying "No religion has ever promised Paradise on Earth; only

the Communists have ever been stupid enough to do that." (Richter, G.1993:244) and it is obvious that his experiences have left him with a lasting loathing of all ideologies no doubt a result of his growing up, first in the aftermath of a Fascist regime and then under Communist controlled East Germany. If Richter can be seen to have any guiding principle it could be said to be a search for a method free of any ideological influence, or if possible, free from belief itself. It is Richter's relationship to belief that I will now examine in all its curious contradictoriness. In the final element of this section I wish to look at how contemporary abstract painters (such as Richter or McKeever) negotiate a relationship with belief in the spiritual, transcendent or metaphysical (all terms used by the above artists) in a cultural climate which can be less than sympathetic.

Painting and Belief

Let us start by excluding David Reed from this part of the discussion. Reed is perhaps more in keeping with the prevailing modes of thought in present western culture and one gets the impression that although he can entertain elements of mystery within painting this does not necessarily point outwards from painting and back to some essential mystery within the world itself. He is perhaps comfortable with the secular world view and would be most likely to see a psychoanalytical model as the best attempt at an explanation of an essentially mysterious activity (art). Reed tells us

> I love Abstract Expressionist painting, but my work isn't involved with this kind of Sublime. Instead, my work's category is the Uncanny or the Fantastic. In this category one can't tell what is physical and what is an illusion; the two become merged... In the Sublime you're involved with a sense of presence. In the Fantastic, there's a loss of presence, something is missing.
> (Reed, D. in Ryan, D. 2002:199)

Reed would assert that he is moving into a territory profoundly different from that of the Abstract Expressionists, perhaps the last recognised grouping of major artists to deal directly with questions of spiritual or transcendental meaning. For Reed the reassurance of Modernist formalism and autonomy is gone, along with the metaphysical consolations of Abstract Expressionism. He states his position for the contemporary painter,

> ...rationality and belief don't work well now for painting. Suspension – doubt – works best.
> (Reed, D. cited in Schiff, R. 2005:42)

It is worth considering here, how much Abstract Expressionism may have worked with doubt as an active principle. Looking at Abstract Expressionism retrospectively it may be a mistake to underestimate the role of doubt around content and meaning and to

overemphasise its formal advances in the language of painting. Although the writing of Greenberg and others may have constructed a coherent framework around the movement, this is not necessarily how it may have seemed to the artists. Many of the 'advances' of Abstract Expressionism were a result of 'doubt' concerning the credibility of the (then) current language of painting to articulate the changing sense of self along with a profound doubt of painting's ability to tell us anything much about the fundamental nature of our reality.

Reed is not alone with doubt. Richter also takes painting forward via doubt, making frequent references to the difficulties for the contemporary painter who strives for the depth or meaning of previous painting. McKeever sees a situation where in European painting, the restless search for a new language of abstraction has led to the fragmentation of the picture, while an American tendency of modernist formalism has led to an artificially unified picture surface, formally unified but not an authentically "complete" surface, that is, not a surface that is 'spiritually' or existentially unifying. One could be categorised as 'Greenbergian' with an emphasis on flatness, alloverness and formal completeness, an inpenetrable surface sealed in its completeness born of a view of painting as an avant-garde, progressive language. The other view (which McKeever articulates) is of a wholeness which may remain fundamentally mysterious, but which beckons the viewer to enter and experience, to leave behind the old 'sense of self' – a sense of wholeness which is existential and impregnated with meaning.

The failure of much contemporary painting to supply a sense of meaning as substantial as past painting is felt by both McKeever and Richter, while Reed seems set on discovering 'new' sources of meaning for painting. Richter's "what" of painting (meaning subject matter or more importantly content) can even be asked of abstraction. However, this is where it becomes difficult, as within abstraction the "what" of painting is inextricably linked to a "how". In fact, the "how" may even become the "what", where form becomes content. Let us look at how each of these painters has approached the "how" of painting and the problems facing painting here. In the case of McKeever, we have a painter who has been said to have "forced himself into the space" between practices (Valjakka, T. in McKeever 1996). This method was highlighted when the critic went on to write about his 'ribbon' paintings.

> McKeever's most recent work consists of ragged, translucent ribbons and shapes arranged in a loose grid of horizontals and verticals. On the one hand, the shapes are too organic to be intended geometrically. On the other hand, the pattern on the canvas is too regular to be absorbed into the history of informalism. The shapes are executed in a cool idiom that precludes any associations with expressionism, yet they are too restless to serve as a foundation of any constructivist utopia.
> (Valjakka. T, in McKeever, I. 1996:17)

We can see here that McKeever adopts a working method which avoids easy categorisation within any pre-existing languages. He uses gesture, and reveals the materiality of paint, but not within the confines of an already well worn modernist language, he can neither pinned down on the utopian conceptual front or in terms of an intuitive expressionist language. Rather than a rejection of either, there is more a refusal to choose, a refusal to make a false choice, to accept a false dichotomy and to reduce the possibilities of painting. Similarly, McKeever refuses to make the absolute distinction between abstraction and representation describing his paintings as

> ...a kind of post-abstract figuration...as if I am trying to sense an image that is on the other side of abstraction and moving away from the abstract rather than towards it. I try to find a point where the prototype of this post-abstract figuration can be sensed lurking, ghosting. Where it's suggesting a figurative edge, an edge of recognition.
> (Lloyd, J. interview in McKeever, I. 2000b:7)

McKeever, puts a critical distance between himself and certain conventions of abstraction and although Richter argues at length with Buchloh about sharing content with the Abstract Expressionists, other comments have shown that he too is concerned about how to move on from Abstract Expressionism referring to his own paintings in an interview with Robert Storr he tells us,

> ...[there is] something about these paintings that sometimes look like great gestural painting but also suggests that there is a lack of conviction that it is possible to paint like that. Unlike people like [Franz] Kline and others who could paint an expressionist painting with conviction – the same kind of conviction in every stroke that he paints. They had the conviction that what they were doing was good and right. And that's it. I lack that in every stroke.
> (Richter, G. interview in Storr, R. 2002:181)

One is reminded here of the particularly apt words of W.B.Yeats who in 1921 wrote

> The best lack all conviction, while the worst
> Are full of passionate intensity.
> (Yeats, W.B.1984:99)

which indicates the problems facing any intelligent artist seeking to make art with any depth in a cultural moment which offers no agreed or certain sources of meaning.

From this perspective in order to remain 'authentic' Richter must arrive at a position where he will "lack all conviction" or at least lack an oversimplified sense of conviction. To understand Richter correctly is to understand that what he is attempting is not a cynical rehash but a genuinely conflicted attempt at trying to find out what is still possible. He is searching for belief and meaning but rejecting the comfort and security of easy answers, a

false "passionate intensity" of the type that so many felt was a fatal flaw of 'neo-expressionism'. Richter talks of his readiness to embrace more detached modes of painting saying

> I was happy to have a method that was rather mechanical. In that regard I owe something to Warhol. He legitimized the mechanical. He showed me how it's done. It is a normal state of working, to eliminate things. But Warhol showed me this modern way of letting details disappear, or at least he validated its possibilities. He did it with silk screening and photography, and I did it through mechanical wiping. It was a very liberating act.
> (Richter, G. interview in Storr, S. 2002:169)

With this, Richter begins to move away from the simple 'expressive' potential of the gestural brushstroke and introduces methods that can contain elements which may be more detached or mechanical. This begins to open up the idea of process (or relatively detached working methods within painting) as relating to doubt. This, in fact, links all three artists, and it is worth following Richter further on this topic, for the idea of detachment is of great importance to him. The question is what did Richter find liberating in the mechanical, the more detached method? There is an interesting interpretation of Richter as a "classical" artist suggested in an interview with Robert Storr (my italics).

> RS: True classical art – as distinct from conservative classical or neoclassical style – may be defined as an art that accepts its own conventions, but does not simply repeat them formulaically. Rather, it uses them to transform itself and extend its range. *A crucial dimension of such classical art, though, is that it is deeply impersonal. Pollock, when he painted the big all over abstractions of the late 1940's and early 1950's, was, for perhaps the only time of his life, free of himself as a painter* and thoroughly involved with the paint and the space and the process. In that sense, his was a classical art...From my perspective though, *the irony is that you have approached a style – expressionism – which for many people cannot, by definition, be classic, and you have demonstrated the contrary, that it is possible to make a visually exciting, physically expansive, even aggressive picture that is classical in that it is not about the painter in any obvious way, and not emotional in the most banal sense.*
> (Storr, R. 2002:182)

There are important ideas raised here, the significance of the "impersonal" and the idea of making expressionist 'type' paintings which do not go through the same psychological processes as an 'expressionist' painter. Here process is crucial and we should remember how both McKeever and Reed also use forms of 'distancing' in their work, allowing for a kind of gap where direct 'expression' is in a sense avoided or prevented. Elsewhere in the interview Richter agrees about the element of expression in his painting remarking that they are "Not expressionist, no. Expressive, yes." (Richter, G. in Storr, R. 2002:180). This begins to relate to Richter's ideas concerning truth (or how painting may attempt get to grips with such a thing) and how painting could attempt to free itself from ideology. In his 'drag' paintings

Richter adopts a mechanical means of making paintings not dissimilar in a sense, to his photo paintings and their mechanical blur – which Richter incidentally once described as helping him to get away from his own subjectivity saying,

> I can paint against my own will, as it were. And that, to me, felt like an enrichment. (Richter, G. 1993:66)

One is reminded of T.S.Eliot who felt one of the fundamental problems of the modern era lay in a split between emotion and intellect, which he referred to as the "dissociation of sensibility", with a split between "sentimental" and "ratiocinative" elements, which Kuspit defines as the "separation of feeling and thinking, passion and intellect" (Kuspit, 2004: 20). Eliot felt that to again achieve a 'whole' or 'healthy' art, these two must be united. This certainly would go some way to explain some of the motives (not necessarily conscious ones) for the feeling of 'detachment' used by all three of these artists in one form or another. Perhaps there is a sense that art may need more than the sole resource of 'emotion' or 'expression' in order to take it forward and that within Abstract Expressionism and in later followers of this movement expressionism and unconscious processes had perhaps been given too great an emphasis. This of course shouldn't be confused with an anti-emotional conceptual stance which of course is part of the "dissociation".

Richter has acknowledged the importance of the readymade in his thinking and has stated that he views paint as a readymade, that is, as a form of already existing external reality, 'objective' perhaps? So Richter is looking for a form of objectivity when he paints.

> ...I don't have a specific picture in my mind's eye. I want to end up with a picture that I haven't planned. This method of arbitrary choice, chance, inspiration and destruction may produce a specific type of picture, but it never produces a predetermined picture. Each picture has to evolve out of a painterly or visual logic: it has to emerge as if inevitably. And by not planning the outcome, I hope to achieve the same coherence and objectivity that a random slice of Nature (or a Readymade) always possesses. Of course, this is also a way of bringing in unconscious processes, as far as possible. I just want to get something more interesting out of it than those things that I can think out for myself.
> (Richter, G.1993:216)

This search for objectivity of course does not necessarily mean that it is a comprehensible objectivity, but for Richter even the freedom from the illusion that we can in some sense 'comprehend' reality is a move forward but this freedom comes at a price. There is freedom from illusion but by gaining this freedom we may in the process lose vital elements of meaning which these illusions previously supplied. Richter explores how we can continue in

this state of uncertainty. Perhaps Donald Kuspit summarizes this dilemma best and understands the full depth of its implications.

> The problem of Richter's art is how to make of this nihilistic condition ...a mature freedom. That is, Richter's art means to articulate and respond to nihilism in an enlightened, mature way, acknowledging the openness it affords, and that is inherent in it, as genuine freedom. The problem is how to transform the terror and depression associated with the nihilism resulting from the loss of centre – the terror and depression informing Nietzsche's famous idea that "God is dead and everything is possible" – into the joy and elation of liberation from the false centre...The initial response to the openness that comes from the collapse or death of the centre – the loss of closure – is not relief, but a sense of persecution...The nihilistic – annihilative – terror also implicitly acknowledges the difficulty of actualizing these possibilities – mastering the new freedom.
> (Kuspit, D. 1994:240)

I have concentrated thus far on doubt but I shall close by looking at other aspects of belief and meaning in McKeever and Richter. It is curious how few critics discuss Richter's references to religious and spiritual matters whereas this is now an accepted aspect of McKeever's thought. McKeever sees that we live in "a society which remorselessly pictures itself through the mass media" and asks the question " Is it enough for painting merely to mirror such 'picturings', or can, indeed should, painting be about something else?" (McKeever, I. 2005:32) McKeever believes painting not only has the potential, but the obligation to be about "something else", that paintings should attempt to be not mere "likenesses" but about the "real thing" telling us that

> ...The question for the painter, in our contemporary world full of likenesses, is not how to make yet another likeness, but how to paint the real thing.
> (McKeever, I. 2005:50)

This seems to be a rallying call against the superficiality of contemporary culture but let us question further. While many can agree on the superficiality of the contemporary world, what is this "real thing" that McKeever would have us paint? It is at this point that I would introduce the idea of the spiritual. In Richter and McKeever frequent references can be found concerning the spiritual, religious or transcendental. McKeever readily acknowledges the spiritual potential of painting in an interview with Jill Lloyd,

> IM: ...We easily forget what a thin tradition of painting we have in Britain and how, with a few exceptions, it's a tradition of salon painting. One has to go back to the Celtic and Romanesque art to find something more simple and felt, something which is about elevating the spirit rather than the mundane or the frivolous. I do believe passionately that painting should aspire to that.
>
> JL: That there is a higher reality?

IM: That there is a possibility to engage with a higher reality.

IM: ...who could paint a crucifixion now and make it meaningful? It would either be crass or it would be considered post-modernist. But actually one couldn't do it....So this whole area of being, the possibility of elevating ourselves, is to a large extent cut off and one appears to be either pig-headed or naïve even to be going back into it. But it is the area I think painting can have an authentic voice in...I'm much more interested in trying to begin to sense something which painting might be able to get at on its own terms.

JL : So it has to do, in the end, with a spiritual aspiration?

IM : I think painting has to have that. In the end I wouldn't be able to envisage a painting that didn't aspire to that. For me it would be bankrupt...My interest is in trying to open myself as much as possible to this territory...You remember when Brancusi spoke about how an artist needs to forget the ego or Franz Kline speaks about how painting is not about taking or receiving but about giving. For me it's about trying to enter this kind of state. And I think in the end I would have to call it a state of grace. (McKeever, I. Interview with Lloyd, J. in McKeever, I. 2000b:10/11)

McKeever has gone beyond merely thinking it may be possible for painting to engage with the spiritual to demanding that it does so. His position is that any art which does not attempt to provide this kind of depth is "bankrupt". However, it involves further investigation to deduce what form "spirituality" takes in the painting and thought of Richter who made this notoriously enigmatic statement as far back as 1966,

> Now that there are no priests or philosophers left, artists are the most important people in the world. That is the only thing that interests me.
> (Richter, G.1993:58)

In 1972 a reference was made to this statement. Richter was being questioned about what he saw as political art and pointed to Barnett Newman as having a content which was 'political' in a sense meaningful to him. The interviewer senses a contradiction between 'pure' painting and any political aspiration. This swiftly leads to a reference to Richter's "no priests" statement.

PS: *This inclination towards pure painting contradicts your own words: 'Painting is a moral action,' and again, 'Now that there are no priests or philosophers left, artists are the most important people in the world.'*

GR: I don't think so. Art does have a moral function; it is a kind of substitute religion; it can transform, shape, investigate, delight, show, provoke and what have you. But this does not mean that art can be expected to do any kind of social work, or expose abuses, or unmask intrigues, or anything like that.
(Richter, G.1993:69)

We see in Richter a refusal to separate the specialist fields of art, religion and politics, a separation that in a sense represents the gradual unfolding of Enlightenment reason. Richter

refuses to see painting as an activity which can avoid questions of meaning, belief or faith and equally, refuses to accept that politics exists outside of a need for meaning or is any different from a form of faith. The next quotation begins to show in greater depth what Richter means when he talks about religion and art.

> Art is not a substitute religion: it is a religion (in the true sense of the word: 'binding back', 'binding' to the unknowable, transcending reason, transcendent being). This does not mean that art has changed into something like the Church and taken over its functions (education, instruction, interpretation, provision of meaning). But the Church is no longer adequate as a means of affording experience of the transcendental, and of making religion real – and so art has been transformed from a means into the sole provider of religion: which means religion itself.
> (Richter, G.1993:38)

Richter is felt by many to often be contradictory. In one sense I would not dispute this but his contradictoriness is not the product of a lack of clear thought. I would describe his thought as conflicted but not confused. In this sense he acts out a broader cultural conflict which besets the modern mind which needs faith, belief, meaning (things once supplied by religion) but which remains hopelessly divided, torn asunder by the inexorableness of its own logic of analysis and doubt. A modern mind which may wish to have meaning but everywhere it turns its analytical focus finds meaning disappearing, gone, just out of reach, a space always recently vacated. Let us look at two statements both made by Richter in 1988, first a statement of his despair.

> 13 January 1988. Art is wretched, cynical, stupid, helpless, confusing – a mirror-image of our own spiritual impoverishment, our state of forsakenness and loss. We have lost the great ideas, the Utopias; we have lost all faith, everything that creates meaning.
> (Richter, G.1993:171)

The second statement reflects another side of Richter, that of hope. As some previous statements have also indicated Richter on numerous occasions likens painting and religion, the contrast with the first statement is pronounced.

> 3 January 1988. Art is the pure realization of religious feeling, capacity for faith, longing for God.
> (Richter, G.1993:170)

This then is the paradox of Richter. It is the contradiction that he is prepared to work with, as I suspect it is what he sees as the closest to the reality that is lived in current western culture. He demonstrates both the longing for meaning but also the inability to embrace it without conditions. Richter may encounter a sense of the transcendent through painting which feels real, important and meaningful but on the other hand, he is a product of his time, a secular

era shaped by Darwinism, the legacy of Freud and ideological political systems such as Marxism or Fascism. The following statement only further underlines the contradiction found in Richter,

> By the age of sixteen or seventeen I was absolutely clear that there is no God ...By that time my fundamental aversion to all beliefs and ideologies was fully developed... And on the other hand the knowledge that we need belief – which I sometimes refer to as a mania, an illusion that we need in order to survive or to do anything, a prime mover. And at the same time this vulgar materialist view that we do not essentially differ from the animals, that there is no such thing as freedom or free will...those convictions were established very early on
> (Richter, G.1993:251)

Although there has been comparatively little discussion of the spiritual aspect of his work when Richter has gone as far as to make this more specific critical reception has been mixed. Robert Storr in an interview with Richter pinpoints how difficult it is now to refer to faith, belief or religion.

> ... This is a period where there is almost no room for the kind of words you have used recently to discuss the October paintings, like *faith* or *belief*, or as far back as the early 1960's when you talked about art as being a substitute religion. Using such vocabulary or making allusion to such traditional symbols or iconography is extremely provocative, given its misuse by fundamentalists or people in positions of power. You can be misunderstood in many, many ways.
> (Storr, R. 2002:185)

What has been interesting to observe is how much artists such as McKeever and Richter have changed their intellectual and artistic positions over the years. If one searches Richter's writings and interviews it can clearly be seen that on numerous occasions he has made statements about his work that sound dramatically indifferent, even nihilistic, while in reality (in a later interview with Robert Storr) he hints that he was merely 'buying himself time', creating a space to be uncertain within. Encouragingly as they have grown older both artists have found themselves able to speak more openly about the spiritual or transcendent aspect of their work and it is to be hoped that this reflects a gradual opening within the critical environment to the spiritual possibilities in contemporary art.

All three artists remain committed to an art which avoids a repetition of previous forms, for all three painting constantly needs to be rejuvenated. The difference lies with how this is achieved. In the next chapter concerning my own practice I will explore how painting can engage with contemporary culture, seen as essential by Reed, while maintaining the contemplative, spiritual depth pursued by McKeever within the critical context of doubt found in Richter.

Chapter 3

A Record and Analysis of my PhD Practice Based Submission

Chapter 3 is an analysis of the practice based element of this PhD investigation dealing with my own paintings and digital works. These are treated as distinct 'bodies of work' or as a series as this is seen as the best method of grouping for analysis.

Once the grouping has been identified the individual works have been titled and numbered, these can be found in the accompanying volume of images. Exhibition titles are in italics and each series of works will be denoted in its abbreviated form (e.g. the Abstract Unconscious grouping becomes AU and a specific painting from this series as AU, No1.etc).

Throughout these groupings of artworks certain key themes and methods emerge which are explored in the six main sections of this chapter. These may occur in only one body of work or may be common to all (e.g. the role of 'surface' within various groupings of paintings changes whereas colour can be dealt with across my work as a whole).

Before listing and briefly describing the groups of paintings and digital images I have provided a list of exhibitions, conference papers and publications. This catalogues my practice based activity throughout this PhD study and helps demonstrate the validity of this work as research which has been 'externally recognised' and has made a contribution to knowledge within my field.

Exhibitions

2005 *When Science meets Art*, in collaboration with Dr.P.J.Hill, Wrexham Arts Centre

2005 *Common Ground* (1), three person exhibition, Rugby Museum and Art Gallery.

2006 *New Paintings (work in progress)*, one person exhibition, St. Bartholomew's Hospital (with Vital Arts)

2007 *Twelve Views*, group exhibition, University of Northampton/Camberwell College of the Arts

2008 *The Abstract Unconscious*, two person exhibition with David Parker, Gallery 103, Glyndwr University, Wrexham.

2008 *Common Ground* (2), three person exhibition, Rhyl Museum and Art Gallery.

2008 *The Abstract Unconscious*, two person exhibition with David Parker, University of Northampton Gallery.

2009 *Grey Matters*, two person exhibition with Jo Love, Aqffin gallery London.

2010 *Separation Anxiety*, one person exhibition, The University of Northampton Gallery.

2011 *Viewfinder*, Group Exhibition, Artspace Gallery, Seoul, South Korea.

2011 *Viewfinder* 2, Group Exhibition, Ruskin Art Gallery.

Papers/Conferences/Publications

2008 Paper, *The Abstract Unconscious*, Plenary Speaker, *Psyche & Image* Conference, San Francisco, organised by Art & Psyche Group/San Francisco Jungian Society, published in The Archive for Research in Archetypal Symbolism
(A.R.A.S.) published on line for the San Francisco Jung Institute extended education programme and available at: http://aras.org/artandpsyche.aspx

2009 Interview, *The Vital Image*, joint interview (with D.Parker), Interview published in The University of California Press Jung Journal Summer 2009, Vol. 3, No. 3, Pages 87–115, http://caliber.ucpress.net/doi/abs/10.1525/jung.2009.3.3.87

2009 Paper (unpublished), *Lost for Words: Lost in Words (Abstract Painting and the Unspeakable Unconscious)* at 'Psyche, Power and Society', IAJS Conference, Cardiff University.

2010 Paper (with Jo Love) *From the Representation of Emptiness to the Emptiness of Representation*, Symposium "Land and the Metaphysical", University of Plymouth. http://www.landwater-research.co.uk/lw.php?pg=land-and-the-metaphysical

2010 Paper, *Art & Otherness: An Enquiry into the Experience of the 'Other' in Painting*, at *Psyche and the 'Other'*, joint IAJS/JSSS international conference, Cornell University, USA, published as joint paper with D. Parker in JSSS journal in *Conversations in the Field* (JSSS) and linked to the JSSS website is available at: http://www.thejungiansociety.org/Jung%20Society/Conversations/2011/Parker-2010.doc.pdf

2010 Paper, *Out of Nothing* (to be submitted for publication June 2012), *Contemplations of the Spiritual in Contemporary Art*, Liverpool Anglican Cathedral.

2011 Paper, *New Possibilities for Contemporary Abstract Painting* (unpublished), *Digital Hybridity* Symposium, Derby University.

2011 Panel session, *Enchantment & Disenchantment: The Psyche in Transformation*, IAJS conference, The School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London.

Summary of Groupings, Numbers and Sizes (H x W)

RE Series, 24 Process Paintings, 41" x 33", acrylic on canvas

Large Process Paintings, 17 Process Paintings, 72" x 48", acrylic on canvas (5 reworked for SA series)

Deconvoluted images, Digital Images, series 1&2, each series 24 images (size variable)

Composites digital images 1 and 2, each composite combining deconvoluted images from the RE paintings (size variable)

Composite No. 2 (sequence), digital sequence showing the creation of compositeNo2 in 22 layers (size variable)

St.Bart's Paintings, 9 paintings, 36" x 66", acrylic and oil on canvas

Abstract Unconscious series, 24 Paintings, 30"x20", acrylic and oil on canvas

Separation Anxiety series, 17 large scale paintings, in various sizes, oil and acrylic on canvas, No's 1-3 all 78" x 48", No's 4-6 all 96" x 48", No's 7&8 72" x 48", No9 78" x 48", No's 10&11 72" x 48", No12 36" x 24", No's 13-15 78" x 48", No's 16&17 48" x 36"

'RE' Paintings (RE)

All the paintings are grey which was to remain the colour for every other grouping of paintings included in this research. They were produced via a process method and have no trace of the hand-made mark. They formed the basis for further research using 'image deconvolution' computer programmes. They represent a period of painting and thought in my work which was moving away from the last vestiges of reference to the external world and remove two of the factors which had aided a 'representational' view of my previous paintings i.e. colour and texture (surface). Process was used as a 'way out' of a number of concerns no longer wanted within the paintings and of removing everything that had come to seem 'inauthentic' as method or subject matter for painting.

Large Process Paintings (LPP)

These were produced using the process based method of the paintings from the 'RE' series and mark the final group of paintings produced during this research using only the process of pouring and tipping paint **with** no direct intervention of the hand. The largest format they were shown in was as one continuous run measuring 32'x 6'.

Deconvoluted Digital Images (Decon's)

The term 'decon' is a simple abbreviation of 'deconvoluted images' which is the process performed by the image analysis software used in this research. There are two series of deconvoluted images each consisting of individual deconvoluted interpretations of the RE paintings. Images of paintings from the RE series were interpreted via an 'image deconvolution' programme. This is software normally used for interpreting microbiological images by Dr.Hill (Nottingham University). His normal purpose would be to enhance the information content of a microbiological image and improve its clarity by using this software to 'tighten up' parts of the images lost through blurring due to the non-static nature of the organisms he is recording and the high magnification used. The images he works with are

black and white (colour is later added for information purposes). The Decons appeared to attempt to define form and started to show possibilities for form within the paintings.

Composites Digital Images (Composites)

These combine the deconvoluted images into one 'composite' image in a number of superimposed layers. Within science this software may be used on sequential images combined in one image containing the optimum information across the whole series. Two composite images were selected and printed as large format digital prints.

Previously my paintings presented space with no clearly definable or differentiated form, the composite images created a dense, packed space, full of form which tugs at the possibility of recognition. They presented a problem for my painting, how to approach these images without simply replicating them, and how to engage with the new possibilities of form using a process method inclined toward the indefinite.

Composite No.2 Sequence (Digital Images)

This is a sequence of images which build to the creation of "Composite No.2". Each frame shows the addition of the 'new information' from an individual deconvoluted image and its effect, stage by stage, on the composite.

The St. Bart's Paintings (SB)

These paintings were my first attempt to intervene into the process-made surface of my paintings. These were deemed failures for a number of reasons. The long thin horizontal format was an attempt to mimic on a smaller scale the format of the 32'x6' LPP's exhibited at Rugby. Also the manner of intervention onto the process ground suffered from two important weaknesses. The intervention itself was often too timid and was also reminiscent on a number of occasions of 'biological' type imagery perhaps in this instance the result of my collaborating with a microbiologist and exhibiting within a hospital.

The 'Abstract Unconscious' Paintings (AU)

These paintings were the first successful attempt to move beyond 'pure' process painting. In these paintings a variety of strategies for hand made 'intervention' were employed, ranging from flat hard edged areas of superimposed grey/black, thinly-glazed layers of translucent oil

paint and thicker brushstrokes of opaque black/grey oil paint. These were the three main strategies which emerged from this grouping and all involved an intrusion into the pure process ground of the paintings along with another new development, a more overt reference to form in the paintings.

Separation Anxiety Series (SA)

These paintings employ all three formal strategies for intervention outlined in the AU series but combine it with the scale of the earlier LPP series. They represent the return of the 'hand-made' to the paintings and continue a shift to an approach which allows subjective response to play a part in painting and for an imaginative creation of form and increasing use of surface and mark. They can be divided into three categories. Category one being a simple flat shape intervention in one layer, category two is an overlaying of shapes using translucency and category three is the use of brushstrokes to suggest and/or accentuate form.

Key Methods

A number of formal/visual/aesthetic/conceptual strategies have been used within my research. Some have been consistent across all 'bodies of work' and some have changed in response to my ongoing investigation. These different aspects of my work have been divided into six sections (listed below) and form the basis of chapter three.

Colour
Process
Surface
Technology
Form
Contemporary Abstract Painting and Spiritual Experience

Chapter 3, Section 1, Colour

In this section I will analyse the reasons for, and effect of, my use of black, white and grey (B/W/G) throughout my paintings. Although some aspects of my practice can only be discussed in relation to specific bodies of work the use of grey (in varying tones and later hues e.g. AU series) has been relatively consistent. Therefore it is possible to discuss the role of colour in a general sense within my work.

Across successive bodies of work using B/W/G the reasons for its use have mutated. It could be classified as falling into two main categories within my research, both as a method of engaging in dialogue with technology (initially photography, then the digital image through 'image deconvolution' software) and as an exploration of how abstract painting can pursue what were once called 'spiritual' possibilities via a distancing from our diverse everyday experience of colour and an engagement with the 'other' (as defined by Rudolph Otto in *The Idea of the Holy* 1917).

The use of grey in my work dates back to the RE series. In these and in the later LPP series the decision was made to work entirely with B/W/G paint in a process manner, the result of which was a series of 'grey' paintings of varying tones and contrast. Initially the use of B/W/G was to avoid association with natural phenomena e.g. to avoid the paintings reading as 'skies' when painted in blues etc. but also formal reasons such as the question of contrast which reached a potential maximum when working with B/W/G were a consideration.

Another initial motive for the use of B/W/G was to enter into a dialogue with photographic practice albeit within the framework of abstraction and process. This intention still resides within the work although it has become a more complex relationship in conjunction with the digital (deconvoluted) image whose first manifestation is via the computer screen. Interestingly (while on a tour of Dr. P. J. Hill's laboratory at Nottingham University) I learned that his initial deconvoluted images are in fact, black and white. Colour is added later. This has interesting parallels to my painting practice. There would seem to be no problem with asserting that colour is 'added' to the digital scientific images (for purposes of clarifying information). Whereas, the initial response of many viewers confronted with my paintings is to assume I have 'removed' colour, colour being the expectation and 'norm' for painting. As I continued with the use of grey I came to see it not as a reduction from full colour but rather as the most appropriate form for the paintings to assume. Even in paintings within the AU series limited use of warm and cool grey is not an exploration of colour.

Rather it is a limited introduction of warm and cool greys to increase the range of spatial distinction within the paintings.

Colour, Contemporary Culture and Technology

The use of grey has placed my work in an interesting position in relation to some of the artists I have discussed earlier in section two. David Reed in particular has strong views on the contemporary painter's duty towards colour.

> I was never interested in purity. A certain red/green relationship, for example, might refer to Delacroix as well as to the colours used in swimsuits...We've become much more sophisticated now in our awareness of colour. Is the TV scene black and white because it is an old show? Because it's a documentary? Because it's information provided in a documentary style?...Newly invented pigments are all around us. Lately, I've become interested in the new colours in comic books...It's fantastic stuff, very sophisticated. Painters should use the new pigments and define the meanings associated with these new colours. But we have to act fast, otherwise the comic book colourists are going to define the colours for us.
> (Reed, D. in Ryan, D 2002:201)

This is a challenging statement from Reed. Certainly Reed has set his sights high in wishing to compete with colour as created via contemporary technology. This may be either the colour of a 'swimsuit' or as Reed stated earlier (chapter two) the kind of light given off by a computer screen. Perhaps the important term to remember in Reed's statement is 'colour references'. Painting can, and Reed would assert has to, reference the 'technological' colour that surrounds us in order to remain relevant. However, in some cases this can indeed only be a 'reference' as colour in painting simply cannot replicate that of an electronically back-lit screen. If painting were to seek a direct attempt at challenging or mimicking this type of colour it would surely fail. As Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe has usefully pointed out a video of 'mud' can itself, never be 'muddy' (Gilbert-Rolfe, J.1999). Painting must work obliquely and in a tangential relationship to this kind of technological achievement and this would be closer to the relationship I seek to establish.

B/W/G and 'Otherness'

As will be discussed further in the *Contemporary Abstract Painting and Spiritual Experience* section of this text, the route taken to creating the sense of experience once described as 'spiritual' is one of a search for new language and a sense of 'strangeness'. The paintings have to approach the sensation of 'otherness' similar to that defined as the "wholly other" or

"numinous" by Rudolph Otto (1917) in order to achieve the desired effect of 'strangeness'. The use of B/W/G has become central to this aim. This restricted (one could even say 'unnatural') palette grew in meaning, implication and association with each successive body of work. At the time the *Abstract Unconscious* paintings were made, the grey of the paintings had come to mean more than just the presence of a technological association. Rather, by this point it was the very strangeness of the grey spaces which began to establish itself as being of primary importance.

There is a history of association between the 'transporting' mystical insight and luminous, high key colour (not least associated with the taking of hallucinogenic drugs). These high key colours are often seen as an indication of another (possibly higher) realm. They appear to signify the transporting nature of the experience. For many painters from Van Gogh or Kandinsky through to Rothko it is fair to say colour has had a profound importance which stretches beyond the descriptive. Perhaps one of the most famous examples in literature of the religious and spiritual significance of colour is Aldous Huxley's *Doors of Perception/Heaven and Hell* (1960). In this book Huxley refers to that place which is inhabited by these luminous colours as the 'antipodes of the mind'. This is the site of the mystical or spiritual experience which Huxley (not being a mystic) accesses using mescalin. All this of course would point to the necessity for the use of colour as a mystical/spiritual vehicle. However, Huxley raises some interesting questions concerning the modern experience of colour (and it must be remembered this book was published in 1960). He tells us that historically colour was both rarer and more valued than in our contemporary world of mass production,

> ...At the antipodes of every mind lay the Other World of praeternatural light and praeternatural colour, of ideal gems and visionary gold. But before every pair of eyes was only the dark squalor of the family hovel...hence the overpowering effect produced by such colours...Today the chemical industry turns out paints, inks and dyes in endless variety and enormous quantities...
> Familiarity breeds indifference. We have seen too much pure, bright colour at Woolworth's to find it intrinsically transporting...by its amazing capacity to give us too much of the best things, modern technology has tended to devaluate the traditional vision-inducing materials...Today the fairies are gone. Neon is everywhere, has no effect upon us, except perhaps to make us pine nostalgically for primeval night...The fine point of seldom pleasure has been blunted. What was once a needle of visionary delight has now become a piece of disregarded linoleum. (Huxley, A.1982:92/93/94)

This over familiarity may explain why Huxley needed mescalin to intensify or refresh his experience of colour. This puts the problem in a different perspective. If intense and luminous colour were once rarely enough experienced as to be 'transporting' then with the

advent of modern industrialized society predicated on mass consumption and production it is colour itself that has lost its sense of 'otherness' or strangeness and with it its capability of transporting the viewer to anywhere like the 'antipodes of the mind'. The use of colour for such ends is now more problematic and it cannot be assumed to suggest 'otherness'. Colour can still beautify and entertain but it has to work much harder for its sense of 'mystical strangeness'. It would seem that the very competition with technologically produced colour which David Reed suggests may only succeed in taking painting further away from any spiritual possibilities. This returns me to my use of B/W/G. If the human relation to otherness can be seen as dynamic rather than fixed then this allows a key role for greyness within my paintings. I mean by this that our path to a sensation of something approaching 'otherness' may not necessarily be a fixed one (this is not to open up the question of whether the actual 'other' – if there is such a thing – is fixed or dynamic, or even actual) the approach (from high colour to grey) may indeed have to change due to a form of cultural 'inoculation' against the strangeness once seemingly inherent in an object, property or quality, due to its over-familiarization. The very presence of high key colour everywhere within our society necessitates that in order to achieve any sense of the unfamiliar colour is excluded.

Grey in one sense removes the paintings from 'nature' (replete as it is with manifold colour). While it is not impossible to find grey within nature, within the context of my paintings to find an equivalent space, surface, or greyness within nature becomes difficult. I would suggest the important factor here is to remove the paintings from 'nature' and move them from 'place' (recognizable) to a sense of no place or unknown place (not recognizable or only partly capable of association with any experience of a known place or phenomena). Where the paintings (via B/W/G) do tug at our experience it may be through examples of a reality mediated by technology, beginning with photography and ending with the computer screen and digital image. In this case it may be a computer screen that shows the product of a digital deconvolution programme, itself presented as an 'interpretation' of 'reality', reality being mediated by the very technology that makes it 'visible'.

In another twist it may be observed that in a secular age the seemingly infinite spaces of a Friedrich, Turner or Rothko painting are now replaced by images which arrive with us via the microscope or telescope in black and white, we add colour later according to taste or usefulness. It is worthy of note that both the peculiarly small and large were examples of the sublime as far back as 1757 according to Edmund Burke (Burke, E. 1992)

Thus, grey in my paintings from the AU series onward becomes the suggestion of otherness, another place, another possibility, and when it touches on reference it may be to a world only

visible through the intervention of technology where the digital image that we 'see' is what we cannot see with the naked eye (for a further exploration of the implications of technology within this work see the section titled "Technology").

Grey in Richter

To finish on the role of grey within my work an observation made by Gerhard Richter is pertinent. For many years Richter has painted grey 'photo paintings' which borrow from the tradition of black and white photography but he has also worked with grey in his abstract paintings. Richter said of his relationship with grey,

> I have a special relationship with grey. Grey, to me, was absence of opinion, nothing, neither/nor. It was also a means of manifesting my own relationship with apparent reality, I didn't want to say: "It is thus and not otherwise." And then perhaps I didn't want anyone to confuse the pictures with reality.
> (Richter, G. 1993:70)

This idea, of not wanting anyone "to confuse the pictures with reality" is important. It is close to the position of asserting grey as having the potential to evoke an experience of 'otherness', although of course typically Richter is more ambiguous in his phrasing. It is clear from the rest of the statement that it created space between his paintings and "apparent reality". This I would echo and amplify with particular emphasis given to the notion of "apparent reality". It may be that abstract painting can now no longer offer with conviction the hope of another, higher reality but it can offer an alternative to 'apparent' reality which suggests that our current concept of 'reality' is at least incomplete or partial.

Chapter 3, Section 2, Process

> You must realize that...we felt a moral crisis of a world in shambles...and it was impossible at that time to paint the paintings that we were doing – flowers, reclining nudes, and people playing the cello. At the same time we could not move into the situation of a pure world of unorganized shapes and forms, or colour relations, a world of sensation. And I would say that for some of us, this was our moral crisis in relation to what to paint. So that we actually began, so to speak, from scratch, as if painting were not only dead but had never existed.
> (Newman, B. 1992:287)

With this statement in 1967 Barnett Newman pointed to a crisis in painting experienced by the post-war generation of painters referred to as the Abstract Expressionists. In order to fully understand one role process plays within my painting the nature of this crisis and subsequent developments arising from it must be understood, **for it** is within this arena of doubt that my initial thoughts concerning the use of process began. It may be argued that the historical remoteness of this 'crisis' renders it invalid and irrelevant for contemporary painting but I believe that these movements concerning the 'meaning' or 'meaningfulness' of painting are tectonic shifts, movements which originated before the Second World War, the influence of which can still be felt today. If there were sufficient room here one could chart a gradual emergence of this crisis of meaning back to the Romantics as Robert Rosenblum has done in *Modern Painting and the Northern Romantic Tradition* (1975) and a continuation of this through the Expressionists (Cardinal 1984) to the first generation of abstract painters such as Kandinsky and Mondrian and the later Abstract Expressionists (Kuspit, D. 2000b). To return to Newman's statement that the Abstract Expressionists felt "a moral crisis in relation to what to paint" the fundamental concerns behind this statement are brought into a more contemporary time frame by returning to a statement made by Gerhard Richter one of the most critically acclaimed and celebrated living painters, concerning what and how to paint.

> 12 October 1986. What shall I paint? How shall I paint?
> 'What' is the hardest thing, because it is the essence. 'How' is easy by comparison. To start off with the 'How' is frivolous, but legitimate. Apply the 'How', and thus use the requirements of technique, the material and physical possibilities, in order to realize the intention. The intention: to invent nothing – no idea, no composition, no object, no form – and to receive everything: composition, object, form, idea, picture. Even in my youth...I very soon became aware of this problem of having no subject. Of course, I took motifs and represented them, but this was mostly with the feeling that these were not the real ones, but imposed, dog-eared, artificial ones. The question 'What shall I paint?" showed me my own helplessness...
> (Richter, G. 1993:129/30)

All aspects of painting are implicated and interlinked here. 'Meaning' of enough significance to sustain the activity of painting has to emerge in order for painting (of the depth that both Newman and Richter are concerned with) to take place. Without this the slide into meaninglessness (and therefore arbitrariness) can happen quickly. Richter has encountered this saying,

> To me, this arbitrariness has always seemed the central problem in both abstract and representational painting. What reason is there, other than some stupid system or the rules of a game, for placing one thing next to another in any particular format, any particular colour, with any particular outline, with any particular likeness...
> (Richter, G.1993:87)

The problem is a problem of meaningfulness, of how to proceed in the making of paintings without the feeling of 'meaningfulness' or any sense of certainty - without this underlying feeling arbitrariness is inevitable. Newman was insistent that this crisis was primarily one of 'content'. However, with hindsight it would seem almost impossible to divorce form and content and meaning/meaningfulness in this area. Thus the problem also manifested itself in the 'form' of the painting which in this specific instance I take to mean the 'formal language' of a painting. This is the visual language, strategy or method adopted by the artist in the production of paintings and may be impasto expressionist brushwork, drips, dragging, or any number of approaches. I use the term 'visual language' with some measure of reservation as in some important ways the visual could not be said to constitute a 'language' in the sense that we would normally understand it in terms of writing and speech. To return to the question of form (as visual language) Richter perceived these problems as being inherent within Abstract Expressionism.

> ...I realized, above all, that all those 'slashes' and 'blots' were not a formalistic gag but grim truth and liberation; that this was an expression of a totally different and entirely new content.
> (Richter, G.1993:133)

One could also say the opposite of course, that this was an expression of a totally different and entirely new 'lack' of content.

This leads to one of two choices which confronted me in my early use of process. I have crudely categorized these into positive and negative reasons for the reliance on process as a primary method of painting. My decision to use process initially was one developed through a gradual reduction in the possibilities I felt available to me within painting at the time of the 'RE' series. To use Richter's terms once I felt the "what" to paint disappear (the subject matter e.g. landscape), then the "How" was not far behind, for without any meaningful source of reference to underwrite the decision making process for marks, gestures,

brushstrokes etc. arbitrariness seemed the inevitable endpoint. The crisis of Newman and his colleagues may seem historically distant but in another sense without what Peter Fuller has called a "shared symbolic order" (Fuller, P. 1985) it is entirely possible that each generation of painters, in fact each individual painter must revisit this problem. Lacking as we now are any clear or shared sense of deeper meaning or symbolic language to articulate such meaning and with which to pass this on, every painter concerned with this deep level of meaningfulness is faced with a problem in an individual and existential sense. Although the Abstract Expressionists may have started from a position of doubt involving broader themes and traditional subject matter for painting they could be said to have withdrawn to an area they felt still offered the potential for deeper experience along with a continuing sense of security and validity. This could be defined as the 'self' as subject matter (or possibly the unconscious - seen as embodying the deepest aspects of self). This was articulated most clearly by Barnett Newman in his 1948 essay *The Sublime is Now.*

> We are freeing ourselves of the impediments of memory, association, nostalgia, legend, myth, or what have you, that have been the devices of Western European painting. Instead of making cathedrals out of Christ, man, or "life", we are making [them] out of ourselves, out of our own feelings. The image we produce is the self-evident one of revelation, real and concrete, that can be understood by anyone who will look at it without the nostalgic glasses of history.
> (Newman, B. [1948] 1992:173)

The viewpoint of the Abstract Expressionists has now been replaced by the ironic or relativistic gaze of our postmodern present and it is clear from the remarks of Richter and Reed in chapter 2 that they do not share Newman's sense of certainty, with Richter commenting on the Abstract Expressionists,

> They had the conviction that what they were doing was good and right. And that's it. I lack that in every stroke.
> (Richter, G. in Storr, R. 2002:181)

and Reed saying,

> The goal of the Abstract Expressionists was, I think, to strengthen a sense of self ...I'm afraid my paintings do the opposite. They question the self, and make us aware of how much more fluid a sense of self is now.
> (Reed, D. in Ryan, D. 2002:199/200)

Although the point is made that things have indeed moved on and become more complex since Abstract Expressionism there is a danger of caricaturing or over simplifying the Abstract Expressionist position. When Reed asserts that they "strengthen the sense of self" and Newman says "we are making [Cathedrals]...out of ourselves, out of our own feelings."

the subtlety of the idea of the self can become lost or confused. It is equally important to note that Mark Rothko, Newman's contemporary, specifically stated,

> I don't express myself in my painting. I express my not-self.
> (Rothko, M. in Taylor, M.C. 1992:93)

This leads to a question of what is mean by 'self' and I would point to the distinction C.G. Jung felt it necessary to make between the more surface, ego-orientated sense of self and a deeper level of self which he designated 'Self' assigning a capital letter to this more profound sense of self which lies much deeper in the psyche than ego bound personal identity. This was also acknowledged in chapter 2 in reference to D. W. Winnicott's notion of the true and false selves. There remains the question of whether Rothko's (and others) sense of "not-self" in fact implies a certain relationship with 'self' which acts as a binary opposite giving us only a choice of either/or. It may be that the binary opposite of self/not self an either/or situation existed under modernism and that now with postmodernism there is the possibility of "as well as". There are implications for both 'self' and 'not-self' here but this is for another piece of research to explore. I would go only as far as suggesting that what is needed is a way in which we can combine Rothko, Newman and Reed to make 'Cathedrals' of our 'fluid' sense of 'not-self'.

This sense of doubt about even the deepest notions of self found in both Richter and Reed has developed in an intellectual climate dominated in recent years by postmodernism and deconstructionism and this is the background to the original development of my first process paintings. One of the key areas of interest for postmodern/deconstructionist thought has been the "death of the author". This has more often and more directly been analysed within the field of literature however, it was very much an issue which filtered through to painting and was perhaps one of the main reasons many painters since Abstract Expressionism have had difficulty with what they see as the excessive claims for individuality and personal expression within Abstract Expressionism. Many struggle with both the overt use of the broad gestural brushstroke and the very notion of what is often referred to as a 'signature style' which has become highly problematic within contemporary painting. Artists such as Peter Halley (1991) mused on the issue as to why a certain set of postmodern and poststructuralist texts became of such relevance to painters during the 80's but here it is enough to establish that they were of importance and that we are now working through many of the related issues.

Seen in the broader context of these cultural and intellectual developments another level of my decision to use process is established (or following the logic of my section on my use of

colour – my decision not to use many of the other devices traditionally open to painting such as expressionistic use of brushstrokes and surface etc.). This was a decision that led to the 'RE' series of paintings and extended through the LPP series until the AU paintings. This 'problem' for painters concerning the idea of gestural painting was summed up well in a statement in a catalogue essay by Timo Valjakka discussing the paintings of Ian McKeever.

> The question is: how does one proceed in a situation where virtually all gestures and marks have been used, becoming inscribed into the long history of painting? How should one spread paint on the canvas to ensure that the spectator sees the painting as it is, and not just as a web of references, quotations and pre-existing meanings? ... (Valjakka, T. in McKeever, I. 1996b:16)

The answer arrived at in my later paintings (AU series onwards) was that one needed to proceed with less certainty concerning the 'self' and less 'expressive abandon' in the method of painting than the Abstract Expressionists. Acknowledging contemporary problems concerning the expressive gestural brushstroke and the accompanying concept of self but without slipping into a mode of never ending self-conscious referencing, typifying one of the more destructive aspects of postmodernism within painting. But to return to my use of process, the 'double crisis' of 'what' to paint and 'how' to paint now combined to facilitate the conditions for my process paintings. By working predominately with process i.e. pouring paint and allowing areas to move around and blend via the 'tipping' of the canvas and the use of sprayed water to prolong and control the procedure, I created two series of paintings, the RE and LPP series. These avoided the problematic use of gestural brushstrokes, external subject matter and also the very notion of 'authorship' as the paintings in a sense 'made themselves', involving large degrees of chance and randomness via the movement of the paint (for an example of my process method see Studio Image No. 001, p81 which shows a painting on my studio floor, this method of horizontal tipping is how these early paintings were created). I must stress that it was not a 'rational' or 'coolly' premeditated decision to stop using the brushstroke, it was rather, a result of the inability to make decisions. Deprived of any seemingly meaningful external referent (I had for many years prior to this been a landscape painter) I no longer had any basis on which to make decisions concerning brushstrokes. Why go up? Why go down? Why Left? Why Right? How thick? How thin? How long? In the absence of Fuller's 'shared symbolic order' or Richter's "What?" and "How?" process offered a provisional and limited means through which to carry on painting without making arbitrary decisions and completing a slide into meaninglessness.

At this period of my painting from the RE paintings through to the LPP's it seemed more honest (authentic) to make no brushstrokes, to depict no forms and to create no surface rather than to do any of these with no good reason. To have done these things with no purpose in

mind would have been to have used them for aesthetic purposes only, for a form of visual entertainment, and to work with a sense of arbitrariness of which I wasn't capable. In order to continue making paintings without a feeling of compromise it became necessary to adopt a method where the painting "made itself" so to speak. It may be claimed that to rely on process is to embrace arbitrariness but this would be a misunderstanding. The challenge for these paintings was to find a way for me to avoid making paintings in a 'self-conscious' way and to sidestep what Stella once called 'relational painting' (the constant tinkering, moving and balancing of compositional elements in order to gain an aesthetically satisfying work) or put more extremely by Richter to find a way out of the "stupid rules" concerning composition etc. The 'arbitrary' route would have been to make paintings based on my actions and taste when there was nothing to underpin these decisions. The adoption of process involved a giving over of part of the creative process to the material and method of production itself. Richter has referred to such strategies in his work as 'objective', although in partial agreement with him I would use the word 'detached'. The implications behind the use of the word objective stretch too far for me to explore here (but it makes perfect sense for Richter), however the term detached can help highlight that for me I was detaching myself, my 'self' but not necessarily my 'Self' (following C.G.Jung to distinguish between an everyday conscious 'self' and a deeper, more profound 'Self') from stages in the creative process where it had become an obstacle.

The process paintings were far from arbitrary in a number of ways, for instance, the choice of black/white/grey, the consistency of surface (even when I say they have no surface it is a relative statement as any object has a surface and not creating an impasto expressive surface is in itself a choice), and the use of identical dimensions and format across whole groupings of paintings. What has taken place is the removal (or suspension) of a number of 'expectations' of painting, the personal, emotional or expressive use of colour, composition, surface/facture and creation of form. The idea of detachment (never complete) would be a stepping back from painting (not dissimilar to Newman's idea of starting again) and seeing what could enter the work, what is needed, rather than starting with an unquestioned practice which simply accepts given languages, methods and processes, which deal with the already known. My decision was to work with what was 'not known' and in an important sense I would say that this is a factor in giving abstract painting a 'spiritual' dimension, that it has to extend into the unknown (perhaps unknowable) and this is a source of its numinous potential.

With my use of process for 'authorial suspension' other issues begin to emerge from my research and I now return to the role of postmodernism/deconstructionism. It is undeniable

that for many in the 1980's and 90's the idea of problems surrounding the 'author' were key issues (these had emerged within the literary field with texts by writers such as Barthes, Foucault and Derrida and can be seen as in one sense developing within painting via artists coming after the Abstract Expressionists, Lichtenstein, Warhol, Rauschenberg, Johns etc becoming central for later painters such as Peter Halley). Many artists happily went about the dismissal of authorship. However, some voices of dissent were raised and some began to suggest hitherto unsuspected causes or 'motives' behind this dismissal of the author. Remembering that my research aims to explore notions of contemporary spiritual possibilities for abstract painting it is interesting to observe how the writer Sean Burke views the 'death of the author'.

> The death of the author might be said to fulfil much the same function in our day as did the death of God for late nineteenth-century thought. Both deaths attest to a departure of belief in authority, presence, intention, omniscience and creativity. For a culture which thinks itself to have come too late for the Gods or for their extermination, the figures of the author and the human subject are said to fill the theological void, to take up the role of ensuring meaning in the absence of metaphysical certainties. The author has thus become the object of a residual antitheology, as though the Satan of *Paradise Lost* had suddenly redirected his rebellion against the unsuspecting figure of Milton himself.
> (Burke, S. 1992:22/23)

The idea of "residual antitheology" provides a context for the depth of meaning or perhaps depth of meaninglessness, which I assign to certain aspects of heavily process based painting. It is a complex web to unwind but I believe we find ourselves in a situation where in defining problems with the notion of the 'author' such an 'anitheology" may indeed have been at work. Not necessarily consciously but by the time the influence of these (originally literary) ideas fully extends to the visual arts beyond artists such as Halley and into the next generation of painters what we see is a type of erosion of the 'self' within art but without any conscious realization of why. This brings me to the connection between author, self, process and the role of doubt. To conclude this section on the use of process for 'negative' reasons I would briefly like to explore a few ideas from a book titled *The Minimal Self* (1984) written by Christopher Lasch.

Lasch is concerned with the 'survival' or mutation of the sense of self in our time. He sees contemporary society as perpetually in crisis both real and imagined and this as having a negative impact upon the sense of self of the individual (his book was written in 1984 but who could argue that things have only become more problematic since then?). What is of interest to this research is when Lasch touches on the arts, with particular reference to minimalism. In the sense that Lasch refers to minimalism or the "minimalist sensibility" a

line of thought is created which can connect to some of the previous ideas discussed surrounding "residual anitheology", authorial crisis and by implication, process. He sees the broader sweep of the minimalist sensibility as working within a number of other artistic movements and describes it thus,

> Minimalism and pop art are not alone in their attempt to demystify art and the cult of the artist. The same impulse informs most of the other schools and would-be schools of the sixties and seventies: systemic painting, optical art, process art, earth art, conceptualism. The 'Minimalist Style,' as John Perrault has remarked, is only one expression of a "larger tendency that might be termed the Minimalist Sensibility." This sensibility has shaped not only painting and sculpture but much of contemporary literature, music, and dance as well. Its hallmark is the deliberate depersonalization of the work of art, the elimination of craftsmanship, the elimination of the artist himself or at least a drastic reduction of his role as an interpreter of experience.
> (Lasch, C. 1984:142/3)

The problem can be seen to extend beyond painting however, as when one looks at the implications for painting, process-based paintings can be viewed as part of this larger cultural movement. The 'theological' side of the issue has been discussed but there are also implications for the self. The whole process can of course be seen as one glorious forward march for the forces of reason and the gradual diminution of the remnants of illusion, unreason and superstition (those of a Freudian or Marxist persuasion would no doubt concur). However, there is another perspective, rather than a brave and rational confrontation with, and rejection of, our human, irrational past the opposite may be true. It may prove to be the case that what emerges is a turning away from uncertainty and the unknown, but also from the new and from future potential. Lasch certainly sees a problem emerging.

> ...modernism in its most "advanced" form no longer explores new frontiers of sensibility, new dimensions of reality, but, on the contrary, undertakes a strategic retreat from reality and a regression...
> (Lasch, C. 1984:152)

This problem emerges at a tipping point between modernism and postmodernism and again casts a new light on process based painting. In one sense it could be viewed as a part of the process of "turning away" rather than an avant-garde exploration of new territories. The very act of reliance on a 'detached' use of process could be a form of psychic protection, a survival strategy. An avoidance of the painful process of confronting the loss of certainty and meaning which any artist must either confront or 'turn away' from. Lasch describes this avoidance as a quality of late modernism saying,

> late modernist art unmistakably expresses the "numbed emotional aura" of the age, as Carter Ratcliff writes in an essay on Robert Morris: the "stasis or numbness induced by the refusal to risk the pains of self-revelation."
> (Lasch, C. 1984:151)

This is what is at stake with the use of process based abstraction. For many artists the price of "emotional numbness" is a price worth paying for the avoidance of the "pain of self-revelation" and to link my investigation here back to concerns with spirituality I would assert that many do choose "emotional numbness" over "the pains of [spiritual] self-revelation". Clearly I am asserting that 'emotional numbness" and the avoidance of depth experience are wider cultural phenomena but that they quite understandably find their way into artistic modes of discourse. For Lasch the contemporary artist (and contemporary art itself), seem able to survive only with a "drastic restriction of its field of vision" which is really a "survival strategy par excellence", given that "Even ...embattled self-assertion... a typical defence against an "unreal environment" has proved impossible to maintain."
(Lasch, C. 1984:131/2)

The idea of a "residual antitheology" operating through or behind the anti-authorial threw a new set of questions into my use of process. Although my decision to use process was in part motivated by this climate of doubt it was not the only factor and it certainly was not a decision to incorporate elements of an "antitheology" whether knowingly or not. My research also extends into the positive aspects of process as a method and as I continued both my practical and theoretical research it became apparent that there was a parallel view of process within my work which could be defined.

The Positive aspect of Process

> The very fact that a painter continues to paint, continues despite everything, can be the expression of an ultimately sustained basic trust.
> (Kung, H. 1981:33)

In this statement Hans Kung succinctly defines one aspect of what I consider to be the positive role of my use of process. Although the thin, matte surfaces of my pure process paintings could be interpreted as a move toward a minimalist aesthetic (in Lasch's terms) an alternative reading could be made from the perspective of Kung's assertion. The sheer fact that I continued to paint, that I found a way or method through which to continue even without subject matter, narrative or any stable system to underwrite deeper levels of meaningfulness can open these process paintings to a positive reading. They can be viewed as "an expression of an ultimately sustained basic trust".

In the next section *Surface* I will chart the reasons for my movement away from the (relatively) empty surfaces of my process paintings and my gradual reintroduction of the brushstroke. This movement began with the feeling of dissatisfaction which developed with the limitations of a purely process method. However, as I eventually came to view my use of process not just as a method of working with doubt but as an engagement with the materiality of paint (in a limited sense) I came to see this aspect as a vital factor through which painting can engage with deeper levels of meaning. To explain the next phase of my research I will use terminology taken from Donald Kuspit's essay *Concerning the Spiritual in Contemporary Art* (1986) where he claims that there are two paths to the spiritual in abstract painting, these being "silence" and "alchemy".

Chapter 3, Section 3,
Surface (Silence and Alchemy)

This section investigates two different approaches to the use of surface in my paintings and explores the aspects of my work which I define as emptiness and physicality also using the terms 'silence and alchemy' referencing Donald Kuspit who has formulated a division of painting similar to my own of physicality and emptiness. Silence and alchemy represent a divergence in approaches to 'spiritual' abstraction for Kuspit. This section will be structured around key terms from the theorists relevant to both my practice and theoretical underpinnings. First the term 'silence' is explored through Donald Kuspit, Peter Fuller ("kenosis") and Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe ("blankness") and secondly the term "alchemy" is explored as used by both Kuspit and James Elkins with reference to Peter Fuller's idea of "redemption through form".

The categories of silence and alchemy describe not just the two paths for spiritual abstraction in general but are also specific to two aspects of my own painting. One approach uses a lack of physical surface, evoking emptiness and the other emphasizes the materiality and physicality of paint. In my paintings this generally means either the initial process layer of acrylic paint, left at a stage approaching silence or emptiness, or from the AU series onwards added layers of paint and sometimes impasto brushstrokes - the physical or alchemical route. Further complicating this initial description is what happens when one approaches my paintings as an imaginative or illusionistic space as well as a physical surface. When my paintings (or any paintings) are viewed in this way the space or surface created by a specific type of paint application and/or use of process becomes important. If it is a brushstroke it becomes important if it is mechanical, repetitive, expressive or expressionistic, it matters if a brushstroke is large or small in relation to the scale of the painting or how many brushstrokes are used. Brushstrokes in some of my paintings (and some areas of my paintings) have a fluctuating relationship with 'form', sometimes implying form, sometimes denying form (see section on Form). As my paintings require a dual reading as surface and space this means that surface (considering the painting as a physical entity) is inextricably mixed up with illusion (the painting seen as imaginative space which may contain form/s) and there are elements of interconnectedness within my work between process, surface, illusion and form, which can be followed in the other sections in this chapter.

Silence and Alchemy

Kuspit sees two methods as the spiritual paths of abstract painting,

> ...the means by which today's best abstract art achieves its spiritual integrity are the same as they were when abstract art first originated, but they are now insisted upon with great urgency: silence and alchemy.
> (Kuspit, D. 1986:314)

Silence within my work has an ambivalent function which can touch on negative or reductive aspects but in other contexts can become a spiritual or contemplative tool. The alchemical approach makes the physical nature of paint its focus as a material capable of producing feeling of a spiritual nature, although sometimes as a by-product, not necessarily a consciously acknowledged aim in the case of many artists it is however, attributed profound importance by critics such as Fuller, Kuspit, Elkins, Newton and Maclagan. Within my work the alchemical (or physical) approach to painting acts as a counterpoint to the silent or empty but stops short of being an end in itself.

I have already discussed one manifestation of the physical/alchemical impulse i.e. the use of the physical, painterly gesture (and the problems which surround it). However, if one moves beyond the gestural brushstroke and into a deeper or broader sense of physicality in painting this may offer a way to circumnavigate the seemingly inescapable semiotic entanglement of gestural painting. It is here that the alchemical approach offers a more positive interpretation of process, physicality and surface in painting.

Silence

For the contemporary abstract painter there are two possibilities open for the interpretation of the silent or empty painting, the spiritual and the secular (Elkins, J. 2009:166).While it is the purpose of this research to investigate ways in which abstract painting can explore contemporary spiritual possibilities it is not its purpose to study the already well documented methods employed by previous abstract painting which approach the spiritual via silence or the alchemical. My task is to look more closely at the problems which exist now for these two approaches. To look at what has added to the complexity of the situation and why what once were radically spiritual or avant-garde strategies are in danger of becoming stylistic devices, or empty clichés, where a once meaningful emptiness may now have become empty of meaningfulness or the previous spontaneity of the expressive or highly physical surface become an over familiar indicator of expressive 'angst', 'authenticity' and a type of mannerism. This is the point of entry for my painting, with a search for a contemporary route which can attain the depth of meaningfulness evoked by previous abstract painters without

replicating them (in the knowledge that in replicating a previous strategy one is unable to use this strategy to the same effect).

The problems with silence involve two types of (over)familiarity. When Mondrian or Malevich emptied out painting it was radical, perhaps shocking. Even in the era of Rothko and Newman it was still a challenging strategy and could be felt by a viewer to be making a radically different demand on their sensibility. Due to our familiarity with this type of painting its radical nature can no longer be assumed. Familiarity breeds indifference both to the signature style of Rothko or Newman but also in a wider sense with radically emptied out painting. The second problem lies with another form of over-familiarity but this time lying outside of art. This problem again robs the empty abstract painting of it potential radical difference from the world that surrounds it. There is not the previous feeling of shock or 'otherness' in this type of painting as it is now surrounded by a world of empty or 'blank' surfaces as noted by Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe (Gilbert-Rolfe, 1999). Emptiness according to this logic no longer has a privileged place either within painting or in the wider world and may no longer hold the required 'otherness' to become a catalyst for spiritual experience.

Peter Fuller – Kenosis (self-emptying)

For Peter Fuller the emptying out of abstract painting was a problem from its very beginning, this strategy he maintained may only have been of use at a particular historical juncture (within modernism) and becomes subject to increasingly diminishing returns. Fuller saw 'empty' painting almost as a symptom of modernism which in turn he saw as inextricably bound to capitalist culture. As his Marxist origins would compel he was keen to place this aspect of abstract painting within a social, political and materialist context, whether from a Marxist base or a psychoanalytical one. He was uneasy moving beyond a materialist stance (although he was later drawn to writers and painters concerned with the spiritual). Fuller refers to the process of the 'emptying out' of painting as "kenosis", a term he borrows from theology and uses it to describe

> ... the apparent relinquishment of ...skills by Fine Artists and to the abandonment of the omnipotent power the painter once seemed to possess to create, like God, a whole world of objects in space through illusions on a canvas. I see this general kenosis as having been ruptured at various points...by tremendous outbursts of expressionism in which artists attempted to find ways of speaking meaningfully of their experience, including historical experience, once more. Nonetheless, the process of kenosis, with these occasional regenerative hiccups, proceeds.
> (Fuller, P. 1983:145)

Fuller sees some of the work of an artist such as Rothko as part of a "regenerative hiccup", devoting a large portion of *Art & Psychoanalysis* (1980) to an analysis of Rothko's later paintings. However, by the time of his late grey paintings Rothko is also seen as having succumbed to a negative 'kenosis', relinquishing the expressive potential of painting. Fuller is here approaching empty painting from his own psychoanalytical route and as such would see the empty painting as pointing to a negative position in terms of the human psyche. Fuller sees this emptiness in painting in terms of an inner psychological, or spiritual emptiness (to Fuller the spiritual can be explained in terms of the unconscious). However, viewed from other positions the quest for a silent painting can be read as a spiritual goal not necessarily rooted in something essentially negative and not so easily presumed to be explainable by psychology.

There is a sense in which all painting which tends toward emptiness gives up many of the attributes which mark it as a significant expressive form but of course giving up one set of expressive potentialities may be for the purpose of using different potentialities, presumably for Fuller these new methods did not compensate for what has been given away. Fuller is correct in seeing a broader cultural perspective implicated in the self-emptying of painting, perhaps the secular counterpart to a spiritual emptying within the broader culture continued through an emptying out of human subjectivity under postmodernism. However, he is clearly wrong in one area, if he were alive today he would see no lack of paintings filled with forms and objects (in abstract and representational painting), although Fuller would of course have questioned whether paintings which are simply full of objects contain any meaningful imaginative or spiritual dimension. Now, when many painters again feel free to use imagery from any source (e.g. advertising, mass media, the internet etc) for representational painting or to create paintings which are essentially constructed from collages of already existing languages within abstraction the opportunity or even the desire to find silence has been eroded.

Kuspit – Complicated Silence

If one still believes that silence still holds some spiritual potential the problem now is that silence becomes increasingly difficult to use. Silence has become complicated. This is bound up with the radically reductive nature of silent painting becoming historically intertwined with avant-garde painting. Once this strategy becomes familiar, new and more radical strategies have to be explored. If one employs this logic of avant-gardism then one has to run simply to stand still. Kuspit acknowledges this increasing difficulty observing,

> The problem is how to create essential silence in abstract art today. Abstract art must pursue ever more complicated ways of becoming silent...Many abstract artists have increased silence by abandoning even geometry, except for the minimal geometry of the canvas shape, which is sometimes echoed in the order of a grid, as in works by Agnes Martin. Touch itself exists under enormous constraint; it often becomes increasingly inhibited. As Adorno wrote, "The more spiritual works of art are, the more they erode their substance." In the case of Robert Irwin and James Turrell the works seem almost substanceless. Silence can be understood as the eroded substance of the completely spiritual work of art.
> (Kuspit, D. 1986:314/315)

This is a problem for any artist who ultimately views painting as a physical entity dependent on its manifestation through paint (this may seem a true-ism but for some 'painters' it is far from obvious). How far can painting erode its physicality yet still physically exist and how many times can this journey into silence be taken without the resulting outcome becoming merely a stylistic device? What now may be the "ever more complicated ways" for painting to become silent? Secular painting can find an infinite number of ingenious strategies to become 'silent' but the issue is whether the use of silence or emptiness is as a path to some kind of profound and important experience, which could be termed spiritual, rather than the tiny, incremental advance of an avant-garde language. A silence charged with spiritual meaning and depth as opposed to a silence which is used as a stylistic device or through an allegiance to a critical/theoretical position.

Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe – Contemporary Blankness

Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe complicates the picture further. If one combines Fuller's concerns of a historical dead-end with Kuspit's concerns over the increasingly 'difficult' nature of silence (silent painting which may ultimately erase itself) then the situation seems bleak. Add to this the way in which Gilbert-Rolfe uses the term 'blankness' rather than silence. He has something altogether less profound than silence in mind for the 'blank' painting.

> ...the contemporary is the witness to the end of blankness as absence...I'm interested in what blankness looks like now as opposed to a hundred years ago. I think its appearance has changed and so has what it appears to be...Where it once marked the absence of the sign by being a sign for absence, it is now the sign of an invisible and ubiquitous technological presence.
> Where blankness used to be excluded from the world, it is now everywhere and in everything. The difference between the late nineteenth and the late twentieth centuries is the difference between wallpaper and the blank wall...from a *horror vacui* to a displayed blankness, and which is also the passage from the mechanical to the electronic, from the steam engine and the mechanical calculator to the jet aircraft and the computer from the visible to invisible energy and activity.
> (Gilbert-Rolfe, J. 1999:111/2/3)

The empty, silent or blank painting now has many problems with which to contend.

Here it may be timely to make one point which redresses the balance in terms of emptiness. This focuses on the nature of what is meant by empty, blank or silent. In a reference to apophatic discourses (see section on contemporary spirituality), which are often attracted to near nothingness as an indication of the limits of language and discourse William Franke makes an important point about absolute silence, saying

> ...the silence we can talk about and objectively experience is relative. For silence per se, without relation to any order of sound, cannot be perceived. The absolute Nothing, taken for itself, is an abstraction: we hear Nothing only as in and around sounds that attenuate and tend *toward* elimination of themselves. It is always some particular relation to Nothing that is experienced, never the Nothing pure and simple. (Franke, W. 2007b: 46)

There is a strong tendency among critics to approach silence, blankness or emptiness from the direction of the absolute and this is no surprise as it is often a stated intention accompanying many artworks. Taken as an idea this may be appropriate, however, when encountered through an artwork it is not only the idea that is important. I would contend - and this is central to the movement away from emptiness in my own work - that it is not the erosion toward nothing that is important but the physical trace left behind. It is the 'not nothing' left in the progression toward the idealised nothing that bears scrutiny here, the "relation to Nothing" as Franke puts it. For Gilbert-Rolfe and his omnipresent techno-emptiness, blank painting at this point must concede defeat to the blankness of the technological surface and thus understand itself as always presenting a surface which falls short of perfect blankness. Painting under these terms cannot be 'not of this world' but rather re-enters the world of surfaces. For the most part it would seem Gilbert-Rolfe is correct. However, I would refer to my previous point regarding emptiness always being an ideal rather than an achievable goal. It may be that the inability of painting to ever actually achieve true emptiness is crucial but even this inability to achieve total emptiness does not necessarily mean it cannot approach the 'idea' of emptiness. The situation of an apparent emptiness being presented within a painting only on further inspection to be seen to contain 'something', possibly barely perceptible, hinting at the possibility of a 'something' a 'not nothing' or a "relation to Nothing" may indeed be where the spiritual charge of apparently empty abstract painting is located. This places it in a different position from the 'actual' emptiness or blankness of the technological surface which may achieve this aim but has nothing to communicate having achieved it. Thus abstract painting can be capable of being

able to both reference a spiritual history of 'emptiness' while simultaneously being aware of its dual function, as contemporary surface.

My (relatively) empty process paintings (RE series and LPP's) offered a partial route out the difficulty of how to continue painting once all external sources of reference which I had come to doubt had been removed (in my case landscape) along with the removal of the possibility of certain methods of painting (the painterly and/or expressive brushstroke) which also became questionable and unusable for me. What was left was a kind of minimum working hypothesis. With interventions of my hand largely removed I had only a detached role in the painting. This could be seen as negative but I came to view it as extremely positive because approached from another direction process also placed a great emphasis on the material.

Although process in my earlier paintings (RE and LPP series) involved an 'emptying out' it was not always (or even initially) from a position of certainty in the merits of silence, (itself problematic) but as part of a clearing out of what seemed untenable. As I proceeded with my process paintings (particularly by the time of the LPP series) I saw the 'silent' potential of the work and one aspect of my use of an overtly process based method was my "increasingly complicated" method of moving toward silence in a contemporary manner (remembering Kuspit) but always alongside it was the stimulus of doubt. As my research continued a possibility emerged that even a relatively silent painting still has a physical aspect and that this could also be read in terms of the alchemical approach. This brings me full circle and locks my paintings into a more complex question of what an 'empty' or 'silent' painting may be. I observed the contradiction that while on one level my paintings were emptied out of form and gesture the close attention to the material of paint via a process based method began to hint at an alchemical, physical, or material reading alongside the alternative reading of the empty, transcendent or immaterial.

Kuspit sees a divide between the alchemical and silent, with the alchemical ultimately being the less reductive or destructive,

> The alchemical approach offers a different way of using abstract art to articulate the spiritual...This is less destructive of art itself, using its material nature to extend its spiritual possibilities rather than obliterating both."
> (Kuspit, D. 1986:315)

I would suggest that in linking my emptied out process based abstractions with the physical qualities inherent in process (however minimal) Kuspit's dichotomy is called into question. Scientists describe the change when water becomes ice as a 'phase transition' (who can say

at what precise moment the transition takes place?) and I would suggest that the attention to even the limited physicality of a minimal process involves a 'phase transition' between silence and alchemy – no longer simply binary opposites it becomes a matter of how one is viewing them. With this in mind I will now explore the alchemical approach.

Alchemy

Kuspit defines the 'alchemical' aspect of painting saying,

> The alchemical approach emphasizes art's transformative power. Art has not only the power of transforming materials by locating them in an aesthetic order of perception and understanding but also of transforming the perception and understanding of different kinds of being by making explicit their hidden connection. Both silence and alchemy are spiritual in import, but where silence is an articulation of the immaterial, alchemy is a demonstration of the unity of immaterial and material.
> (Kuspit, D. 1986:315)

This is alchemy in its broadest terms, and my use of the term alchemy is derived from both Kuspit and Elkins. Neither really is interested in alchemy on its own terms and certainly not the accompanying theological or symbolic systems it employs. Neither pursues the exploration of alchemy in Jungian terms, a strange omission as Jung is perhaps the most celebrated modern thinker in this area. However, they do seem to share a profoundly important concern of how we relate to substances, of how we come to imbue an apparently inert substance such as paint with a level of what I can only describe as profound meaningfulness which can be read as spiritual. Fuller is again relevant here and although he never uses the term alchemy (his Marxist past coupled with his resolutely materialist outlook, backed up by his allegiance to a psychoanalytical model of the unconscious, would never permit this) he does cover similar areas of thought. Although Fuller defines the transporting and transforming power of paint as "redemption through form" stressing the importance of 'working' the material in question, interestingly both he and Elkins use the term "hypostasis" when talking of paint. This is another term borrowed from theology and loosely speaking refers to how an earthly material may come to be imbued with "spirit" (initially I believe, a reference to Christ as a divine embodiment in physical form).

Other writers and theorists such as David Maclagan in *Psychological Aesthetics* (2001) and Stephen James Newton in *Painting, Psychoanalysis and Spirituality* (2001) also deal with the importance of the physical nature of a painting – its facture. In Fuller and Newton there is a tendency to equate expressive physicality in painting with an expressionist possibility for expressive even spiritual possibilities. This is a tendency which I do not share and one aim of this research is to open up the use of 'empty' surfaces along with the use of an overtly

physical painted surface to a position which is one of reconciliation both in theory and practice and to establish a position for spiritual abstraction which is more able to acknowledge contemporary developments in both painting and theory. To this end the ideas conveyed in *Beauty and the Contemporary Sublime* (1999) by Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe become important, particularly his ideas concerning surface in contemporary painting and its relationship with technology. These two opposing types of surface, the expressive painterly modernist surface or the often smoother, seemingly more mechanically produced 'postmodern' surface begin here to be seen in broader theoretical and cultural terms - of the 'modern' and 'postmodern' and this acts as a subtext to the differing notions of surface in this section.

Identification with the Medium

For Donald Kuspit one of the key factors which gives painting the potential for transcendent experience and the capacity for a therapeutic role with regards to the modern, alienated sense of self is the capacity for "identification with the medium" (Kuspit, D. 1995). In an essay *Why Painting?* (Kuspit, D. 2000) he observes that painting has a kind of primary power to express physically and directly connects with something fundamental in the human psyche. I believe this to be a capability of process based paintings also and not merely a property of expressively worked paintings. Although a process dominated approach to painting throws into question the 'worked' material of paint, no doubt imbued with subjective power via this working, an engagement with paint via certain types of process may allow paint to behave 'spontaneously'. Process based paintings may be able to escape the formulaic or self-conscious restrictions of other approaches. This leads to the question, if one was to stake meaning on the expressive or expressionistic working of the material then can an experience of meaningfulness come from a detached process driven work? And if so where does this come from if not the author/painter? I would suggest that what is subject to change here is the relationship between painting, painter and viewer. The detached painter becomes less the author of the work but enables or facilitates the coming into being of a work, just as the gardener is not the author of the flower. The painter co-operates in partnership with materials and assumes the role of editor as much as author. The painter of a process painting when it is used in this manner (as this is not true for all process painting) becomes, oddly, their own audience, watching paintings come into being and acting in an editorial fashion deciding which should survive, which is meaningful and which are empty of meaning. I think this goes a long way to explaining what Gerhard Richter was referring to when he talked about paint being a "readymade" and his abstract paintings aspiring to be like a "slice of nature".

> ...I want to end up with a picture that I haven't planned. This method of arbitrary choice, chance, inspiration and destruction may produce a specific type of picture, but it never produces a predetermined picture. Each picture has to evolve out of a painterly or visual logic: it has to emerge as if inevitably. And by not planning the outcome, I hope to achieve the same coherence and objectivity that a random slice of Nature (or a Readymade) always possesses. Of course, this is also a way of bringing in unconscious processes, as far as possible. I just want to get something more interesting out of it than those things that I can think out for myself.
> (Richter, G.1993:216)

Even within a largely empty or silent painting or a painting dominated by its process based method of production there is still that whisper of materiality, a gentle tugging toward the realm of the physical. For Kuspit it would appear that it is in the meeting of body and mind (on varying levels) that painting achieves its particular affect involving levels of spontaneity that we are not used to and demanding engagement with the intuitive or seemingly non-rational. Kuspit understands this is no casual achievement, and not simply an arbitrary or commonplace form of spontaneity.

> The spontaneity necessary to make a convincing painting is hard to achieve; dis-inhibition – the shedding of collective ideals and expectations – does not come easily, especially after spending so many years of one's life learning to obey them. Spontaneity is only possible when there is a return to the lived body...The most convincing modern painting is a symbolic attempt to revitalize the body, that is, to make it, and with it the psyche inseparable from it, feel alive again.
> (Kuspit, D. 2000:4)

The physicality of painting links body and mind. It allows access to intuitive or unconscious processes that may normally be held in check by the individual. The type of experience which takes place within this type of painting can be classified as 'non-rational' and can be seen as capable of offering a form (or forms) of transcendence.

Kuspit has distinguished between modernist and postmodernist types of relationship which artists may have with the medium of paint. For Kuspit the postmodern neo avant-garde have given up on the modernist pursuit of the "primordial" and have instead pursued a narcissistic agenda which leads ultimately to a form of nihilism, as art is stripped of therapeutic power. Modern art deals with what he calls the "primordial medium" the modern artist, is characterized as someone who sees or feels more deeply than others, he is in touch with "primordial experience" (Kuspit,D. 1995:5). But for Kuspit there is also a modernist tendency to overestimation of the artist. Kuspit is uneasy with such idealization and feels uncomfortable with the artist becoming the only source of "direct sense perception" and therefore by implication reality. For Kuspit this proposition seems too extreme. He struggles to accept fully the proposition that the 'primordial' may lie beyond the reach of

interpretation. We can see what Kuspit thinks is at stake when the artist identifies with the medium.

> The avant-garde artist's sense of the primordial embodies itself in what Herman Broch calls "mysticism of the medium". In objectifying his expression in the medium, the artist invests it with his primordial sense experience and sense of self, transforming it into a primordial substance, as it were, which seems the mythical whole of experience...it becomes external and internal object in one...indeed, mysticism of the medium means fusing symbiotically with it, establishing a unity of internal and external values...The medium becomes the perfect transitional space, not unlike Leonardo's wall; it induces hallucinatory images that are as much representations of internal reality (fantasies) as of external reality (descriptions). Indeed art's aim is to fuse both seamlessly.
> (Kuspit, D. 1995:8)

When considering Kuspit's ideas it is important to remember his adherence to a form of psychoanalytical interpretation. It then makes perfect sense that Kuspit needs to bring the artist 'back' from any notion of being 'beyond' society. The artist is human, which means to be vulnerable, 'ill' and in need of a 'cure'. Thus art, although it may be an illusion when it presumes spiritual or transcendental dimensions for Kuspit remains a 'necessary' illusion. Seen from this perspective art can be permitted within the secular world, its use value that of an antidote to the often unbearable reality (similar to the views of Fuller). But this is to privilege psychoanalysis as a mode of discourse and to deny art the possibility (however small) that it does provide a glimpse of something other than our 'everyday' reality. It is to deny that, in however a modest manner it may sometimes provide a deeper or more meaningful glimpse into our world, our nature, our reality. I would also point to disciplines other than fine art, e.g. religious mystics, some schools of psychological thought/theory and some scientists (often physicists) all may share the feeling that it is possible that we do not always see things (or feel things) the way they really are and that this may be a challenge rather than a compensation. It is perhaps an inbuilt assumption of psychoanalytically minded thought that we are in need of a cure or compensation for an unacceptable world or our unacceptable selves, whereas the artist may be startled that the inherent beauty of the world or self cannot be seen more often.

Peter Fuller – Redemption through Form

Fuller came increasingly (and it has to be acknowledged rather dogmatically) to view the spiritual potential of painting as lying in its expressive potential as a 'worked' medium. He saw psychoanalysis (albeit post-Freudian) as a modern, materialist method for investigation of the "aesthetic emotion" and valid for a whole range of experiences including the sublime,

the numinous and religious/mystical experience in general (significantly his explanation of the most profound experience of art is also his explanation of religious experience).

Fuller draws heavily on a wide and sometimes surprising range of influences. He refers to Marion Milner, Melanie Klein, and D.W.Winnicot within psychology, while other relevant figures range from Burke, Otto, Berenson and Kant through to Greenberg and importantly Herbert Marcuse and his concept of the "aesthetic dimension". But it is chiefly the school of British Object Relations psychology which holds his interest and perhaps D.W. Winnicot could be pointed to as the pivotal figure. The progression in his thinking in terms of art runs from an initial interest in Roger Fry and Clive Bell with "significant form" and the "aesthetic emotion" which moves through Burke and Kant on the sublime and passes quickly beyond the formalism of Greenberg to establish a psychoanalytical interpretation of late modernist abstraction via Milner and Winnicott. He locates this within a wider cultural and political arena via Marcuse and his concept of the "aesthetic dimension".

There are a number of interlinked ideas important to an understanding of Fuller, I will look briefly at the terms 'significant form', 'aesthetic emotion' and 'potential space', in an attempt to understand what Fuller means by 'redemption through form'. Perhaps it is best to follow, where possible, the sequence of events that surround the experience of a painting for Fuller from the material object through to its cultural reception. Significant form denotes the formal attributes of an artwork e.g. line, colour, surface etc. that crucially point beyond mere pleasure. Significant form can give rise to 'the aesthetic emotion'. This is the next step along Fuller's terminology. Significant form and thereby 'aesthetic emotion' seem (for Bell and Fry) to give rise to something like a spiritual experience.

Fuller further explores this realm of ideas concerning inner/outer or subjective and objective space through the work of D.W. Winnicott and British Object Relations psychology. It is perhaps here that Fuller explores the central psychological ground of his theories. For Winnicott (and therefore for Fuller) the earliest experiences of the infant when it experiences the mother as "object mother (and her object parts)" and "environment mother" when it is still in a state of fusion between self/world and inner/outer, leave us with the "potential space". A space, which in Fuller's opinion, not only explains the "aesthetic emotion" but also the numinous, the sublime and even religion. Fuller is clear these profound experiences are accessed in art through aesthetic experience and not via a conceptual or theoretical approach. For Fuller, art is tied to its material qualities and it is through these material qualities that access to the aesthetic realm in gained. Now we have reached "redemption

through form". Fuller's most evocative use of this phrase comes when considering the work of expressionist painter Chaim Soutine.

> Even when the subject matter is morbid, or downright ugly, a good Soutine picture commands, not sickening revulsion, but rather a giddy exhilaration, a sense of relish in the possibilities of life...the picture strains towards an actuality all of its own. It bears witness to a secular sense of re-ligion (or re-binding): a kind of healing fusion in which tortured self and degraded world are both merged and surpassed through the redeeming power of form. And it is this 'new reality' within the picture which we find exalting – regardless of the artist's *angst*, or the tawdriness of what is shown.
> (Fuller, P. 1990:51/52/53)

The power of Soutine's painting lies not in subject matter but in the "redeeming power of form", a crucial point for Fuller as it separates painting from much contemporary art, typically installation art, photography, or art relying on the 'readymade', that is, art which does not contain the same vital dimension of material, aesthetic and imaginative transformation. However, this does not mean that all painting simply gains access to these deeper levels of meaning merely by virtue of its having been made with paint. Fuller points out that

> Paint itself is not a magical or fetishistic substance whose mere application endows special qualities. Paint demands profound transformation through imaginative and physical *working*...
> (Fuller, P. 1990:9)

So, although painting provides the opportunity for "aesthetic emotion" (a type of spiritual experience) it can only be arrived at through "profound transformation", it is by this process that the deepest, most profound aspects of art and the human psyche can be accessed. However, it is whether this profound transformation of paint may only manifest itself via an expressionistic, gestural surface that I dispute. When the method of transformation becomes over familiar or repetitive then truly profound transformation must lie elsewhere, somewhere less familiar. Openness to the necessity for change rather lacking in Fuller provided my practice with the impetus to move towards process dominated painting and later again provided philosophical space and the accompanying aesthetic alternatives to introduce new, unexpected and unpredictable elements of the hand-made mark into this process ground. Earlier the issue of how silence as a path to the spiritual may be in need of reassessment was discussed but also there is an urgent necessity for a revaluation of the physical/alchemical approach to the "profound transformation" and "working" of paint as a material which may achieve a spiritual potential in a contemporary context. Both Fuller and Kuspit have a tendency toward reductionism (from the point of view of this investigation) due to their adherence to modes of thought underpinned by various types of post-Freudian

psychoanalytic theory. In order to move beyond the psychoanalytical outlook this section ends by looking at the theorist James Elkins who has no particular allegiance to psychoanalytical modes of discourse.

Elkins and Alchemy

James Elkins also has written about painting in terms of alchemy. His book *What Painting Is* (2000) is a sustained attempt to approach painting from the point of view of its physicality, both as a substance and as a physical activity and to understand why this may be of importance to us. Thus Elkins muses,

> How do substances occupy the mind...How do substances speak eloquently to me without using a single word? How do my eye and finger know how to read paint? ...Something about paints and colours must work on us without consciousness being much involved.
> (Elkins, J. 2000:98/101)

As with Kuspit there is a very specific interpretation of alchemy, Elkins is concerned with the aspect of alchemy where a person could become almost 'lost' in a substance. But in the case of Elkins the substance of interest is paint. We see from the above statement that Elkins does not hurry past the medium in order to 'explain' these often non-verbal, non-rational feelings. He is prepared to stay with the substance of paint and discuss how it is that it makes us feel. He proceeds to tell us that

> Thinking *in* painting is thinking *as* paint.
> (Elkins, J. 2000:113)

It must be noted here the similarity to something said by the artist Gerhard Richter when discussing how painting relates to thinking in its normal usage.

> Painting has nothing to do with thinking, because in painting thinking is painting.
> (Richter, G. 1993:13)

The similarity is striking and it can be seen both are keen to maintain the integrity of painting as another way of thinking, of being, or feeling and experiencing the world, a mode of experience which has its own uniqueness and integrity. This is a step away from Kuspit of course. Essentially Kuspit, by moving perhaps too swiftly to a set of psychoanalytically underpinned interpretations engages at heart in a form of reductionism. However, Elkins is content to swim in the sea of dizzying confusion and seemingly endless possibilities which surround painting. He goes as far as to suggest that

> It could even be said this way: substances not only occupy the mind, they become the mind."

(Elkins, J. 2000:116)

We now enter the physical/alchemical aspect of painting from another direction, that of uncertainty. It may be possible that paint can become the attenuated substance of mind. For Kuspit our relationship to the substance of paint is viewed through the prism of psychoanalytical thought but the opposite may be true. Instead of the rational mind rendering painting understandable via psychoanalytical theory, it may be possible to proceed from the uncertainty of paint back to our entire assumptions about our world, matter or reality and this may yield radically different results. When Elkins speculates on the meaning of paint as substance really he is questioning our relationship with matter, the world and potentially with spirit or transcendence. Elkins is prepared to entertain the idea that we may know nothing about painting, that all our seeming certainties can be washed away in one illuminating insight. It is not difficult to take this one stage further and actually apply it to our most fundamental relationship with the world. As Elkins says

> When nothing much is known about the world, everything is possible,
> (Elkins, J. 2000:193)

Is it too fanciful to extrapolate the ideas of Elkins from the realm of painting to a deeper form of questioning? The previous quotation suggests it is not. One passage of Elkins' book stands out above all others.

> Alchemy is the record of serious, sustained attempts to understand what substances are and how they carry meaning. And for that reason it is the best voice for artists who wrestle every day with materials they do not comprehend and methods they can never entirely master. Science has closed off almost every unsystematic encounter with the world. Alchemy and painting are two of the last remaining paths into the deliriously beautiful world of unnamed substances.
> (Elkins, J. 2000:199)

This brings into sharper focus what may be at stake in understanding what can take place in painting – and in paint. The intuitive, unconscious element of painting and our response to paintings provides us with another form of experience quite apart from our normal everyday experience. I would go as far as to suggest that painting which touches on these hard to define non-verbal experiences could even provide the possibility of a different form of knowledge of the world, a different way of 'knowing' and of 'being' in the world. Not necessarily unique, but radically different from a rationalist, logic centred approach, which seems at present to dominate the western secular mind. This would be "unsystematic" due to its largely intuitive nature and non-rational (unscientific) in its "rulelessness" as Elkins would put it. It may be close to what some may define as a spiritual experience but an embodied one due to the physical nature of its communicative substance, although intriguingly via illusionism (not necessarily representation) the painting can be both present

and absent, in a sense. It can be both the illusion of some other space or place (possibly even a non-space or non-place) but also at the same time an immediately present object with varying degrees of physical insistence.

As Elkins notes by the nature of it being a static object painting forces the viewer into the role of 'imaginer' thus performing the dual act of not only apprehending the painting but also 'imagining' its meaning at any given time or its potential to be other than how it is. It is in this contradictory duality that we are placed in an active role (psychologically and perceptually) and again our certainty about our knowledge of the world (in the microcosm of the painting) is called into question. De Kooning refers to something similar as "slipping" and Richter as being "lost". Let us return to Elkins one last time and his summation of this peculiar quality of painting, of how it lets us "dream" its potential changes.

> ...alchemists were right to imagine fixation as a violent process. Imagination is fluid, or it wants to be, and the very act of painting is an act of violence against the liquidity of our thoughts. A painting is frozen, and its permanence is very much unlike our evanescent ideas. That is one of paintings powers, since the stillness of painting can reflect in ways that volatile arts, such as movies and plays, cannot. A film bombards the senses with new configurations, while a painting remains still, waiting for us to dream the changes it might possess.
> (Elkins, J. 2000:124)

In finishing I would like to return to a previous quotation from Donald Kuspit which presents silence and alchemy as opposites.

> Both silence and alchemy are spiritual in import, but where silence is an articulation of the immaterial, alchemy is a demonstration of the unity of immaterial and material.
> (Kuspit, D. 1986:315)

In this section I have demonstrated that in both theory and practice silence and alchemy were in need of revaluation from a contemporary perspective which maintains some sympathy with the possibility of art achieving levels of spiritual meaning. Where I believe Kuspit has made an error is in his belief that these two approaches are separate, for if one views alchemy as the closest form of scrutiny of the world of "unnameable substances" then even the thinnest of paint traces falls into this category and as I have earlier argued the totally 'silent' painting is a fiction, an idealized notion, it resides in the conceptual realm not in the world of matter. The next challenge within my paintings was exactly how to use a physical approach to painting without falling back on familiar 'expressive' models of gesture and surface or how to use a (relatively) empty process space without falling prey to problematic previous uses of emptiness. The next chapter introduces the use of technology into my work which provided a way forward out of these two seemingly opposite approaches.

Chapter 3, Section 4,
Abstract Painting and Technology

> It seems to me that the modern painter cannot express this age, the airplane, the atomic bomb, the radio, in the old forms of the Renaissance or of any other past culture...Each age finds its own technique...
> (Pollock, J. [1951] in Varnedoe, K. 1999:55)

Pollock's statement helps establish that there has been a relationship between technology, culture and abstract painting for a considerable time (even in an implicit negative form in artists such as Kandinsky with his staunch anti-materialist position). The differing responses of abstract painters to contemporary culture and technology demonstrate a deep ambivalence, on the one hand there can be a profound dislike of the dehumanising effects of technology while this may be balanced against an avant-garde inclination to engage with all that is new and which offers new possibilities for painting.

Pollock thought the artist was obliged to engage with his/her time and as it has been noted earlier contemporary painter David Reed sees the future of painting in its relationship with technology. Although historically distant both establish the relationship between painting and technology and both give an important role to the process or formal characteristics of painting in generating particular meaning or interpretation. The relationship between the formal characteristics (technique) of my paintings and technology as represented through photography and digital images using image deconvolution software is another important reading of my process paintings (RE and LPP series).

Initially in my paintings (the RE series and LPP paintings) one purpose of my particular use of process process was establish a dialogue with the technological via associations with photography. These paintings were created using a detached process-based method of pouring and tipping paint, creating a 'blurred' grey ground, devoid of handmade gesture or mark which had similarities with photographic surface and space (in terms of blurring and flatness). Later the method chosen for the exhibiting of these works (*When Science Meets Art* – WSMA 001 p67and *Common Ground* – CG 002 p69) involved the close hanging of identical sized paintings and the continuous hanging of a number of large paintings. Part of the intention behind this was to evoke some sense of 'frames' either photographic or filmic and the continuous joined paintings pushed in the direction of the cinema screen in terms of shape and size (384"W x 72"H). At this point my work explored the territory opened up by David Reed and Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe in terms of the relationship between painting, technology, photography and the role of surface in painting.

The Technological and the Alchemical (non-dichotomy)

Process at this point evolved to hold a dual meaning in my paintings, holding in balance the wish to engage with the impassive surfaces of technology and its sense of detachment, while at the same time involving an alchemical, hypostatic awareness of materiality and what may be called a 'pre-technological' state. One aim of this research is to partially reconcile these seeming opposites. As I have already covered in the section on silence and alchemy it is with the gradual re-sensitizing of what may appear to be a detached method of process that some new possibilities for forms of spiritual experience within a postmodern context can emerge and that this sense of an inescapable dichotomy can be overcome. Eventually the need for a more active surface within my paintings would culminate in the reintroduction of the brushstroke but alongside this development there was the question of what the brushstroke would be used for? Was there any place for the brushstroke within these 'empty' spaces? This now leads me back to the introduction of deconvolution and the path forward it helped to provide.

Reasons for the Use of Technology

There is one simple aspect to my use of technology and that is that one motivation for using image deconvolution was due to it being a current, cutting-edge technology. If as Pollock stated "each age finds its own technique" then this is in part my response. It is undeniable that one of the most significant aspects of our present culture is the rapid proliferation and development of the computer and digital technology and this would seem to be a sensible area within which to find the 'technique' of our age. However, there is another more specific purpose behind my use of deconvolution technology and this lies in what I came to perceive as one of the shortcomings of process-based painting.

The introduction of digital technology helped me to escape what I had begun to feel was a basic repetitiveness within my use of process resulting in very similar 'formless' spaces. This sense of doubt had developed alongside the questioning of a purely process produced surface. In the previous chapter I have charted my reintroduction of the more physical surface as a response to this. The new possibilities for more distinguishable forms presented by deconvolution also provided another way of escaping the lack of form and differentiation within the 'pure' process paintings and of introducing a greater degree of difference into individual paintings.

Finally, what is really important in the use of this technology is its unpredictableness. This will be touched on a number of times and returned to in the last section but briefly it is in the new form created by deconvolution that a sense of strangeness and otherness is found and this is important when viewed in the context of a revised concept of the spiritual in the last section.

Specific Technology within my Work

There are two levels on which the use of technology can be approached within my work. There is the specific use of image deconvolution technology and a broader level of theoretical response to the use of technology and painting, what this may mean and the deeper issues which emerge. This section will initially look at my specific use of deconvolution and then move on to some of the broader theoretical concerns informing my use of technology.

I will begin by establishing the currency of the technology involved and the 'uniqueness' of this research. Concerning the use of this particular type of technology James Elkins has referred to image deconvolution as recently as 2008 saying,

> ...the greatest advance in light microscopy in the last thirty years has been image analysis starting with the discovery that a video camera could be used to augment contrast. Today the emphasis in light microscopy is on image-analysis software, including deconvolution, image simulation, and image combination – all techniques of image altering that are largely unknown in the humanities.
> (Elkins, J. 2008:128)

In part this investigation helps rectify the lack of knowledge concerning image deconvolution within the humanities and specifically the arts. In my research I have used it to generate digital images or, in later paintings (AU and SA series) sought to respond to it via painting. Deconvolution has formed a pivotal part of this research and the fact that it is "largely unknown" outside of the sciences makes it of greater interest and importance within this work. However, it should be pointed out that we all 'know' (have seen) types of deconvolution and image analysis in some way as these are techniques used in Hubble telescope images and frequently within the world of microbiology. While we have seen the results what may shock those unfamiliar with this technology is the way in which such programmes can be used to generate images from what may sometimes seem to verge on 'nothing'. Elkins has written about the minimal or formless nature of many of the starting points for image analysis such as deconvolution.

> Image analysis has reached the point where electron microscopists routinely begin with images that are essentially invisible...The astonishing fact about such work is that it has become routine, for the first time in the history of science, for scientists to begin with images that they cannot see. Ever since telescopes were created, instruments have been providing images the naked eye could not have perceived; and ever since ultra-violet microscopes and X-rays, instruments have been generating images the eye cannot perceive. But in those cases the images that the instruments delivered were themselves visible. Electron microscopy routinely begins with images that are scarcely distinguishable from random noise.
> (Elkins, J. 2008:129/132)

One of the aims of my early process paintings (RE series and LPP) was in one sense to dissolve form. There are in many of my process paintings suggestions of form through tonal contrast but due to blurring and the subtle gradation of tonal transition these 'potential forms' never reach resolution, edges are never defined, there is no definite form to be separated from the space or ground and there is ultimately no figure/ground relationship. At one time this was my aim, to produce paintings which were continuous but which may suggest the very beginning possibilities of form emerging. In a sense it could never go beyond this as I had no forms to paint. The suggestion of form could reach a certain point, a point which was both generated and determined by the process I was using.

One of the possibilities which emerged though image deconvolution was to enhance what could be called the almost spectral forms within my paintings. What was of the utmost importance at this point was that any suggestion of form arrived within the paintings from the detached process method. These forms were not generated via 'unconscious' processes and did not in any way represent or come from my unconscious. This separated my work from a type of abstract painting which was dependent on the unconscious for the generation of form. However, this began to become a severe limitation for my paintings as they could only be developed up to a certain point using this process method. This was the point at which deconvolution proved valuable. I was able to use current technology as a form of 'process' (if by process one means the giving up of authorial control to an unpredictable outside agent). Deconvolution served to 'form' my paintings, giving increased contrast and definition to individual images and altering the space and structure. This is the purpose of deconvolution software, to take 'low' quality images and to enhance them and create more useful, higher quality images. To a microbiologist such as Dr.P.J.Hill who generously allowed the use of the software, this type of process helps him to clarify sequences of high magnification images where the slightest fluctuation or movement of bacteria can cause areas of images to blur or lose quality.

An interesting question raised through my use of the software is one of direction. For Dr. Hill (or science in general) the use of deconvolution software is practical and serves the purpose of clarifying the images 'back' to a point where they achieve a level of mapping with reality. The images become useful when they map to the point of origin as closely as possible. However, by attempting the same with my paintings we cannot proceed backwards to some more distinct point of origin as there is none. So I would suggest the movement in this context is the opposite of a point of origin, it is forwards to the creation of new form.

If one accepts the idea that this method of using deconvolution technology can in fact create new form there is an interesting question of who has created this form? George Steiner has anticipated this question,

> Anthony Gormley's projected "Quantum Cloud" is too complex for purely "human" engineering. The sculptor used a state-of-the-art scanner which, in twenty seconds, created an image consisting of 30,000 digital coordinates in three dimensions. This "image" of his body was then transferred to specially designed software matching the artist's vision to parameters of visual feasibility. The programmes contained 75,000 lines of commands to help achieve "an energy field in flux. It is the symbiosis of old physics and new, of art and science.
> In the architecture (and sculpture) of today and tomorrow, discriminations between human creativity, technological invention and controlled experiment, such as they operate in the sciences, are being blurred. The brilliance of this blurring poses philosophic conundrums of the highest interest. Should the gold medal go to the builder or to the software?
> What then of authorship?
> (Steiner, G. 2002:254)

These questions of authorship and the role of artistic creativity when used in conjunction with scientific technology are important and my work in this area exists on one level as a further provocation on this subject. However, there are other more primary concerns for this research and ultimately the use of image deconvolution is a tool to explore these and not an end in itself.

It is when the deconvoluted images are combined to make what I have termed 'Composites' that the use of this technology really began to feed back into my paintings. Through a virtual stacking of individually deconvoluted paintings (stacks of 24) strange new composite images were created (see 'Composites' No's 1 p32 and 2 p33). These new forms (No's 1 and 2) went far beyond any suggestions of form within the original paintings. What I was presented with at this point was a type of opposite to one of the early intentions of my initial process paintings (RE series). One of my initial aims had been to 'dissolve' form. I had no external forms from which to work at this point so clear, referential form disappeared. However, over a period of time this had come to seem constricting and a diminution of the possibilities of

painting. The composites and deconvolution images provided form which in one sense came from 'nowhere', form with no external referent. Even the space of the early process paintings (RE and LPP series) was radically different from the space of Composites 1 and 2. The paintings had previously been capable of multiple spatial readings ranging from a smooth undulating surface to a billowing, distant romantic space. However, Composites 1 and 2 presented a compacted, dense space which felt claustrophobic. Thus the use of this technology led me to re-evaluate the paintings.

I arrived at a position where the possibilities for new form within my paintings was being suggested by the form generated via a combination of computer software and my paintings themselves. This ultimately was to lead to the AU series and all subsequent bodies of work since then have built from this point. In the AU series I began to attempt to 'find' my own form within my paintings, in a type of analogue equivalent of the digital process of deconvolution. This was taking place on two levels concurrently. I wished to build on the emergent possibilities for form discovered via deconvolution without merely mimicking it and also to allow the possibility for the spontaneous generation of form and surface to return within the work. However, it is significant that for every series of paintings after the RE series the composite images were visible within my studio. At this point I may only speculate about the role of the unconscious as it cannot be verified, however, if I was in some way unconsciously absorbing and reflecting aspects of the deconvolution and composite imagery via my unconscious then what could be said to be the source? As stated earlier in a different context my work often functions as a provocation. Here the possibility exists that a loop has been created in which process generates initial paintings, technology plus process generates form and this form is experienced by me over a period of time and absorbed on conscious and unconscious levels (as I have an intimate familiarity with these images developed over a number of years). This form seeps back into my paintings over time as I 'find' form within them. Is this newly discovered form within my paintings form with no origin? There is in one sense no external reference in terms of 'real' objects and it is entirely possible that an aspect of my unconscious recognition stimulated by the paintings has effectively been placed there (created?) by technology. As stated this is a provocation, this is not an attempt to answer these questions in my research but I am asking them in a manner which places my work a contemporary context.

Lyotard – The Inhuman (two opposites resolved) Kuspit, Steiner, Rolfe

The broader context in which my work has engaged with the technological can be clarified by referring to Jean Francois Lyotard's concept of the 'inhuman'. Lyotard's idea of the

inhuman is a type of dual concept which in one sense encapsulates the ambivalence behind my use of technology in relation to my painting. Lyotard defines it thus,

> ...what if human beings, in humanism's sense, were in the process of, constrained into, becoming inhuman (that's the first part)? And (the second part), what if what is 'proper' to humankind were to be inhabited by the inhuman?
> Which would make two sorts of inhuman. It is indispensible to keep them dissociated. The inhumanity of the system which is currently being consolidated under the name of development (among others) must not be confused with the infinitely secret one of which the soul is hostage. To believe, as happened to me, that the first can take over from the second, give it expression, is a mistake. The system rather has the consequence of causing the forgetting of what escapes it. But the anguish is that of a mind haunted by the familiar and unknown guest which is agitating it, sending it delirious but also making it think – if one claims to exclude it, then one doesn't give it an outlet, one aggravates it. Discontent grows with this civilization, foreclosure along with information.
> (Lyotard, J. F. 1991:2)

Lyotard here defines the "inhuman" in two distinct ways. These two distinctions go to the heart of my research. His first definition is the "inhumanity of the system". This is the system of research and development which takes place under the guidance of what he terms "techno-science". A science not so much engaged with the unknown or the expansion of knowledge but of increasing efficiency. The second "inhuman" is "the infinitely secret one of which the soul is hostage" and importantly Lyotard describes the rational and technological system seeking to move beyond this second inhuman as being in the state of "a mind haunted by the familiar and unknown guest which is agitating it, sending it delirious but also making it think". Lyotard suggests that the second type of the inhuman (which I shall refer to as the 'unknown inhuman' and the former as the 'techno-inhuman') is a type of remainder, something which is left over from the 'civilizing' of the humanist subject. This 'unknown' which to this civilizing force would appear inhuman, it could be surmised, exists within what we may term the unconscious, being both "familiar and unknown" and sounds similar to aspects of the Freudian unheimlich or uncanny.

The two types of inhuman, for the purposes of this research represent the technological and the unconscious. This pairing often seem to be cast as opposites, some theorists wishing to re-write the unconscious to bring it in line with technology and others seeing technology as a threat to the unconscious. Donald Kuspit tells us

> Technology is the last valiant attempt to discredit and devalue the unconscious, while offering an alternative inspiration. It is a deliberate assassination under the guise of re-modernizing modern art, presumably passé and old-fashioned in postmodernity – a retooling of modern art to bring it in line with what appears to be the dominant concerns of society. But fear of the unexpected and uncontrollable – all

> that Redon meant by the unknowable and mysterious, and what the everyday mind thinks of when it thinks of the unconscious – underlies the postmodernization of art. It has to be turned into socially transparent and manageable postart if it is to be brought under control."
> (Kuspit, D. 2004:106)

For Kuspit there is some form of alliance between technology, conceptual and technologically based art and a semiotics based branch of postmodernism which combines to attack an originally modernist, unconscious based art which is often also concerned with spiritual possibilities. For him the term "postart" (borrowed from Allan Kaprow) signifies an art that turns its back on the unconscious and aesthetic aspects of art (and this also means the spiritual possibilities of art when one takes in the full range of Kuspit's writing.)

> The most crucial thing about postart is that it signals the end of the cult of the unconscious. Without the unconscious for inspiration, art begins to run on empty, which is what much of it is running on today. The belief that the unconscious is a social construction – a bourgeois ideology – is an attack on it. Conceptual art, which lacks unconscious import... is in the forefront of the attack...Technologically orientated art is also in the forefront. Indeed, technology has come to replace theory, social criticism, and the unconscious in postart, which is why it seems increasingly impossible to be an artist without also being – indeed, first being – an engineer, computer whiz, or video technician.
> (Kuspit, D. 2004:105)

Kuspit sees this as a choice between two types of art but I have sought to demonstrate throughout my research that this dichotomy is not as inevitable or irreversible as some such as Fuller, Kuspit or Stephen James-Newton may think. Before making direct reference to my own practice I wish to place both a practitioner and theorist in direct contrast to the previous position of Donald Kuspit. If for instance, one were to start with a statement by Gerhard Richter, who has definite interests in 'spiritual' matters concerning painting (I will define this notion of spiritual in the last section), it is clear that for him the mechanical (which can be read as an equivalent to, or aspect of, the technological) is far from negative.

> I was happy to have a method that was rather mechanical. In that regard I owe something to Warhol. He legitimized the mechanical...Warhol showed me this modern way of letting details disappear, or at least he validated its possibilities. He did it with silkscreening and photography, and I did it through mechanical wiping. It was a very liberating act.
> (Richter, G. in Storr, R. 2002:169)

It should be further noted that on a broader cultural level Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe has written persuasively on the attraction of technology and of the technological surfaces which now pervade (or constitute) our 'reality'. He interestingly deals with the photograph firstly as a surface to be encountered by the painter, rather than as an image or semiotic puzzle.

> Photography, considered as the industrial realization of the possibilities of drawing, was from the start the culmination of the history of art as the history of the visually legible...It is not photography's final realization of the demands of the graphic that make it so attractive to painting; it is its surface. Out of photography as the graphic there emerges, I think, a contemporary sublime made out of photography's intractable scrutiny, its foundation in empirical reason and its realization in and as technology; but on its surface, in the photograph as light or lightness, the photo rather than the graph, one finds a question about beauty. That is a question about beauty's completeness, and the attraction that photography holds for painting, (Gilbert-Rolfe, J. 1999:23/4)

Here, for Gilbert-Rolfe technology holds not threat but attraction and gives us another surface (and space I would add) which the unconscious in some way encounters and forms relationships with. Having been established these relationships become part of an extended set of possibilities for painting to draw from and an extended dialogue with the unconscious (hence my earlier point concerning the seepage of technologically created form into my unconscious/intuitive painting process from the AU series onwards). This is an important point as for theorists such as Peter Fuller and Stephen James Newton there seems to be a systemic inbuilt notion of a particular type of process and surface being able to access the spiritual/unconscious via painting. This resides more often than not in a painterly, gestural type of approach where form eventually emerges from what I would term an unconscious matrix of marks. This critical position evolves from Anton Ehrenzweig's ideas concerning "inarticulate form" (Ehrenzweig 1965). However, this approach may be rather static in its regard to the *content* of the unconscious. While it recognizes the structure of the unconscious in a helpfully post-Freudian way (and this *structure* may be so deep rooted as not to change) I would tentatively suggest that the contents, rather than structure, may be more receptive to change. While deep structures such as ego, superego and id (if one accepts them, of course) may have little reason to change, the world of experience has changed. New technologies have created new experiences, new relationships with 'reality' and in some senses, new realities. As Gilbert – Rolfe has suggested there are technologies emerging that do not simply evolve to replace old technologies (CD replacing vinyl recording) but provide new experience beyond that of the old (such as the internet and virtual realities). In this context the surfaces of technology are one such addition to our reality and provide another experience which we can respond to consciously or unconsciously, we cannot avoid responding to these new experiences and we are changed by them whether we are aware of this or not.

The question of how we may be changed by our encounters with technology impinges on fundamental assumptions surrounding creativity, authorship, the imagination and by logical extension the artwork. Previously safe assumptions surrounding the art work and the

unconscious begin to become more complex and less certain while the role of technology can be seen to be decidedly ambivalent. The fears of writers such as Kuspit are understandable however it is worth considering two more optimistic approaches as a conclusion. Referring back to David Reed in chapter two, Reed demonstrates a new confidence for painting and technology saying,

> Painting has a rich and varied humanist history...For a long time it had a parasitic relationship with Christianity...Now there's a chance for just as rich a relationship with technology. In many ways, it could be a similar relationship: focusing on forces beyond the human and how to understand them through the humanity of painting.
> (Reed, D. in Ryan, D. 2002:203)

For Reed the purpose of painting may be to "humanise" the technological, in a sense to make our experience of technology more understandable to us. In the final analysis the answer may be less serious and less fatalistic than anticipated in the worst fears of Heidegger or Kuspit. I will here finish with Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe and a sense of optimism when confronted with the technological. He offers this possibility when talking of technology that it may offer something new but not necessarily bad.

> Martin Heidegger...hated technology, which he identified with America and with converting the world into a picture of itself and, in doing so, leading thinking astray...Heidegger's postwar writing on the subject has set the terms for a great deal of subsequent discussion of technology and cultural life because his prognosis that a technological image of the world would come to conceal the world from itself seems to me to have become true. But it is not clear to me that this is a bad thing, as he thought it must be. It could just be a change, bound up in a joke about the idea of authenticity and origin so central to his thinking.
> (Gilbert-Rolfe, J. 1999:24)

It is within this broader context of the individual, individualistically orientated art and its relationship to techno-scientific, rational and logocentric culture at large that this research operates. On one hand are fears that technology will undermine subjectivity and/or the unconscious, on the other is the more positive embrace of technology as offering pathways for potentially new and exciting interconnections. This investigation has explored some of the areas of doubt and fear surrounding technology and its relationship with painting but in a manner which has not led to the role of painting becoming merely an adjunct or servant of 'new technology' and in which painting can begin to explore a contemporary relationship with spiritual possibilities via a sense of strangeness and otherness at least in part created by technology.

Chapter 3, Section 5, Form

The use of the word 'form' in relation to my paintings is a term in need of explanation. Although 'form' may be used to refer to the form of a painting (the form a painting takes) i.e. the visual language, surface or facture employed within any given painting, I am using form, within the context of this particular section as a reference to form 'within' a painting. That is, to create form in what otherwise would be empty or void. The distinction 'within' (rather than 'of') immediately implies some level of engagement with illusionistic visual strategies. This is important as it allows 'abstract' painting to reclaim both space and 'form' in an illusionistic context. When form is used in the sense in which I use it here ('within' the painting in an illusionistic sense) then it is specific to the painting in question (i.e. not generalised) and implies an imaginative creation of 'form', illusionistic and indicative of an imaginative dimension within painting which can involve the viewer (and painter) in an empathic response rather than a response which is (if it is even possible) concerned primarily with the 'language' in which the painting is executed, the painting becoming a non-illusionistic, referential object in this scenario (referential to other 'languages' of art).

To understand more fully the use of form within my later paintings from the AU series onwards (although it could be argued the suggestion of form has always been there) it is necessary to fully distinguish my work from the idea of form, surface, expression and the spiritual/unconscious present in some key theorists in this area. I would take the ideas of Peter Fuller (1983) and Stephen James Newton (2001) to represent here a certain type of theoretical approach that while different in some key areas also shares some fundamental underlying assumptions about spirituality, the unconscious, surface/facture and expression within painting. The key similarities for me lie in their commitment to a post-Freudian psychoanalytical underpinning and a commitment to the creative model of the unconscious proposed by Anton Ehrenzweig (1967). This leads on to another commonality concerning how the 'spiritual' may be approached via painting. Both subscribe to what could be called an expressive (expressionist?) model of painting, whereby the clotted surface of a painting built from a (semi) chaotic unconscious matrix of marks eventually gives rise to form. For Fuller this eventually came to be seen to be needed to occur in partnership with an attempt to describe the external world, as in the Ceret landscapes of Soutine. For Stephen James Newton painters such as Georg Baselitz (in a semi-abstract painting such as *The Nurse* 1990-1) and Philip Guston (in his abstract paintings such as *Dial* 1956) also signify this struggle.

My use of the term struggle is quite deliberate, as it is through this struggle with a form of chaotic surface that both expressive form and expressive surface is created. For Newton and Fuller this surface is indicative of what Ehrenzweig calls "inarticulate form". This is a key concept for Newton as an engagement with and working through of inarticulate form, creates some of the conditions for a spiritual experience in painting. Ehrenzweig is important here for Newton as he proposed a structured unconscious differing from the vision of Freud which lacked a dimension which would allow a space for both religious and artistic experience without it merely being another infantile, primary experience, repressed and consigned to the chaotic unconscious.

The proposition of a structural unconscious which may allow 'higher' feelings some sense of dignity and importance is not disputed here. However, the temptation to claim 'knowledge' of the structures of the unconscious is more problematic and to a large extent cannot be anything other than speculative. Things become even more problematic when the structured unconscious, allied to inarticulate form becomes attached to particular ideas of expressive surface and the emergence of form via a kind of 'hard won' image (or non-image). Thus, what in some respects starts out as a potentially liberating idea becomes an idea which constricts the methods by which the unconscious and/or the spiritual can be approached through painting and once these privileged methods become over familiar then a serious problem emerges.

There are other problems with this approach. It does not anticipate the full extent to which previously spontaneous, expressive modes of painting can be incorporated into a 'semiotic' approach to painting and simply become another option on an increasingly lengthy visual menu. Also, it treats the unconscious in a static manner. Although now more subtly structured than the Freudian unconscious this newer model does not seem to allow much possibility for new experience or change within the unconscious. As suggested in the section on technology there are numerous new surfaces and experiences of space and time available through technology and contemporary culture, although these may not alter the *structure* of the unconscious (but we cannot be certain of this) they may indeed add to the *contents*. The problem comes when an expressive approach in certain types of modernist painting is somehow privileged as being closer to the workings of inarticulate form and a structural unconscious. This is a difficult area to unravel but the problem lies somewhere with the role of the artist as maker or the role of the artist as both editor and viewer.

It is possible to make highly controlled paintings which create complex spaces capable of engaging aspects of the unconscious and inarticulate form – but without recourse to the

modernist, expressive surface or what could be called 'ecstatic' or expressionistic process. David Reed has demonstrated this consistently in his work. The creation of Reed's paintings is meticulous with Reed taking years on some works. The surface is glass-like and marks often feel illusory or ghostlike. The power of such work lies not in a struggle with a viscous, sticky, chaotic and expressionistic surface crowded with brushstrokes but in the gradual and painstaking build up of surface and spatial complexity into an utterly beguiling painting. The confusion concerns where and when spiritual depth may be experienced in and around painting.

The type of expressive modernist painting to which Newton refers (and I count Baselitz as modernist in this sense) seems to offer a spiritual or depth experience for the artist within the making of the picture which seems in turn to act as guarantor of this experience (and authenticity) for the viewer if the viewer is capable of sufficient empathic response. In the case of a more calmly constructed painting the experience lies at the end of the painting – in what is achieved and in how the painting acts upon both artist and viewer. It is possible for the painter to act as an editor in one sense, gradually building a painting over a period of time and allowing certain elements to stay and others to be removed. The painter would work *towards* making something which he/she does not know or fully understand instead of being 'immersed' in this unknowing from the inception of the work and attempting to give form to a chaotic state in the resulting painting. The 'feeling' comes from the overall execution and not from the particularities and stages of the process of its making. In fact, it is possible to imagine this the other way round. There are, no doubt, many abstract/unconscious/gestural paintings which have provided a deep sense of spiritual meaning to their makers during the process of making. However, these may offer nothing to a wider audience simply because the paintings are not very good (to the maker the paintings may always be seen as successful, although this may only be through association with the 'good' experience of the making – a good memory rather than a successful painting). While the process of creation may touch deeply upon the creator the final object may not communicate what was at work during these moments. This would illustrate the difference between art as cultural phenomena (capable of communicating to others) and art as therapy (of use to the artist/creator). Both approaches are legitimate but essentially different.

Fuller, it must be said, also acknowledged another method of approaching the spiritual in painting, that of the 'emptied out' abstract painting for him typified by later Rothko paintings. However, Fuller seemed to view this approach ultimately in a negative way. If, as Fuller termed it, such paintings were 'emptying out' then perhaps a sense of loss is

inevitable. However, this can be viewed another way. First, when something is seen to be 'emptied out' it pre supposes that there was something there to begin with which is why loss quickly becomes associated with this process. But there is another way of viewing an empty painting. Elsewhere I have discussed emptiness as being synonymous with silence, silence perhaps does not carry the same sense of loss and it is worth remembering that Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe would use the term "blankness" removing both the spiritual implications associated with silence and the existential drama of emptiness. Returning to the apparent emptiness of some of my earlier paintings (RE and LPP series) here the suggestion of form within these paintings could as easily be interpreted as emergent form, a potential form, rather than a dissolving form. Just as there is a point in dense mist or snow when one cannot tell if something is moving either towards or away, so it can be with a painting, in fact more so. Given the static nature of a painting any uncertain, emergent form is always suspended at the threshold of dissolution or emergence with the viewer never able to ascertain which may be taking place. Within these groups of paintings and within the more successful later paintings of the AU and SA series there was an attempt to hold form at this threshold state, even when form became more defined in some areas.

Within this research there has been an effort to resist both the essentially modernist engagement with the gestural, 'expressive' surface (as an assumed and 'given' path to unconscious/spiritual experience) and the negative reading of the 'empty' surface (although in this case in conjunction with the knowledge that 'emptiness' can suffer from over familiarization also and that to simply create an empty painting does not mean to create a spiritually charged painting). Before finishing exclusively on my own paintings two examples of how abstraction can be redeemed from both the modernist 'purist' models and postmodern 'textual' models must be noted.

Reading in – Form, Imagination and (incomplete) association

Two of the artists analysed earlier in regard to this question are again relevant here. First, Ian McKeever responds to questioning about his position on abstraction and makes a clear distinction between his painting and any kind of modernist abstraction associated with 'purity' or a deliberate rejection of any kind of association with the external world.

> "In a way I would see it as being a kind of post-abstract figuration. It is as if I am trying to sense an image that is on the other side of abstraction and moving away from the abstract rather than towards it. I try to find a point where the prototype of this post-

abstract figuration can be sensed lurking, ghosting. Where it's suggesting a figurative edge, an edge of recognition."
(McKeever, I. 2000:7)

This is a different approach to abstraction than that of Mark Rothko or Barnett Newman and reverses Greenberg's notions of abstraction. This approach to abstraction could be seen as trying to reverse the emptying out of modernist art. Gerhard Richter also shares a sense of the difficulty involved in creating an abstract art which is not in some way referential, this may not be intentional at the start of a painting but for Richter it would seem near impossible not to seek to relate paintings to previous experiences. In an interview with Robert Storr he recalls the distain with which Benjamin. J. Buchloh treated his interpretation of one of his own abstract paintings when he attempted to explain imagery he saw within it. Richter tells Storr that Buchloh "was appalled" telling Richter "You can't be serious! That's not true", eventually Richter is placed in an awkward position and goes on to tell Storr "I replied, "No, it's true!" As if a child said, "Look mom, that's red rain, those drips right there." (Richter in Storr, R. 2002:178) This perhaps indicates a pressure within the art establishment (or critical establishment) to disengage abstract painting from any type of 'soft' association with the external world. One can only assume that this would make it weak, emotional, sentimental and not representative of a critical, intellectual and political position which serious art must assume.

For Richter no-one can escape this human trait of association and interpretation even paintings as seemingly removed from 'reality' as Robert Ryman's are ultimately capable of being compared to our experience of the world (ultimately even art becomes part of our experience of the world and monochrome painting can thus be compared to other monochrome painting). As Richter says,

> 20 November 1989...Even when experience or consensus more or less forbid this comparative scrutiny, we compare a white painting by Robert Ryman not with a whitewashed wall but with an intellectual experience of the history of monochromy, and with other problems in art theory: and even then it fundamentally functions in the same way. We still compare it with snow, flour, toothpaste and who knows what else."
> (Richter, G. 1993:182)

By far the most important of Richter's assertions for the purposes of this section of the investigation is his (seemingly contradictory) assertion that some paintings do resist association using Malevich as an example where Richter speculates on the continuing power of such paintings being their resistance to interpretation. Richter arrives at a position where he concedes that it is the confrontation between the 'elusiveness' of certain artworks when

confronted by the 'inevitable' human urge to make sense of visual experience (by association and comparison with prior experience) that gives abstract painting its enduring power.

> ...we are not able to see in any other way. We only find paintings interesting because we always search for something that looks familiar to us...When we don't find anything, we are frustrated and that keeps us excited and interested until we have to turn away because we are bored. That's how abstract painting works...You can interpret the *Black Square* of Malevitch as much as you like, but it remains a provocation; you are compelled to look for an object and come up with one...Even those paintings that are supposed to be nothing but a monochrome surface are looked at in this searching manner. The effect of these paintings depends on that mechanism. I don't even know how it would work otherwise.
> (Richter, G. in Storr, R. 2002:178)

The key concepts at work according to Richter are searching (for the familiar) and frustration (at not being able to find the familiar). This tension results in excitement at the search and the painting exists as a form of provocation for Richter. I hope by now the similarities with what I have called the dissolution or emergence threshold for form can begin to be seen. This is the mechanism of searching, excitement, frustration and provocation. To return to my own paintings this section will finish by looking specifically at how I have negotiated and used this threshold of form/non-form and how it has contributed to this research.

Form(s)/Non-form

As stated earlier the RE and LPP series function through form being suspended between emergence and dissolution. One struggle within my work since the AU series has been how to incorporate a greater range of process and surface (including the brushstroke) into my painting. After the introduction of more physical aspects to my work through the return of the brushstroke the challenge for my painting was to combine the physical mark with process based surfaces without simply encasing forms and removing the potential for them to be other than one, fixed reading. The introduction of brushstrokes in some paintings was taken to the point of an almost entire encasement of process areas of the paintings (AU No 012 p45) but more frequently suggested the possibility of an edge only to be cancelled by some other internal logic of the picture taking over from it (AU No 010 p48). The avoidance of 'outlining' forms was also achieved for instance, by my use of thicker brushstrokes within a tonally similar area of ground. Often the thickest most physical part of the painting would be 'hidden' within the ground e.g. thick black brushstrokes over a thin black ground or floating grey brushstrokes over a grey ground. In this way occasionally edges and forms could be glimpsed but not from all angles and not in all light conditions. To add to the perceptual uncertainty, in a painting such as (AU No 011 p49) the brushstrokes are frequently not used

to define form at all but in some areas simply float within the painting. Thus the viewer is again given the cycle of searching, excitement, frustration and provocation.

The importance of the suspension of form between dissolution and emergence is given an appropriate critical context and depth when considered in relation to George Steiner's ideas concerning abstraction. Steiner says in *Grammars of Creation* (2002),

> Arguably, therefore, it is non-objective and minimalist art forms which take us nearer to the fabric of creation...Non-representational, minimal art is always prefiguration. It implies, it is an annunciation of, unbounded possibilities of representations in advent...Thus the abstract and the minimalist arts recuperate that which was prior to the local, and presumably ephemeral, options which inform our particular universe. They infer that infinity of the possible, of the alternative – an infinity which crucially comprises that of not being at all – from which our world is anthologized. Representation necessarily bears witness to the mosaic of the actual, a mosaic formally and existentially reductive and beggarly, whatever our everyday impressions of its prodigality. Representation is an inventory of the choices made, whereas abstraction narrates the abyss of total freedom which preceded and contained these choices.
> (Steiner, G. 2002:115)

If abstraction in its purest form is seen as empty and therefore an "abyss of total freedom" then there is a double bind here for my work. As stated elsewhere 'empty' abstraction for critics such as Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe now no longer avoids being dragged into a critical and associative web. The space of my paintings can be neither empty, denied by Gilbert-Rolfe and re-cast as blankness or given form to the point where they become "reductive and beggarly", the simple "inventory of the choices made" by representation in Steiner's terms.

This is the critical intersection between emptiness and form in my work and although this overlaps with the earlier section dealing with silence and alchemy there is a difference here, in the earlier section the choice is more between empty surface or a more physical engagement with surface concerned with a closer relationship with the matter of a painting. There is at work within my paintings from the AU series onward an idea of form which is partially bounded and visible yet which remains unplaceable and uncrecognizable. This is fluctuating or emergent form, unstable and capable of alternative interpretations. This form can exist in potential, it can be glimpsed, lost and then return to be viewed differently. This is form suspended at the moment prior to becoming fixed or form fixed just prior to its becoming completely lost. This is the type of form which I have negotiated from the AU series onwards into my last SA series of paintings.

Chapter 3, Section 6,

Contemporary Abstract Painting and Spiritual Experience

Defining the Spiritual

The introduction contained a brief definition of the 'spiritual' but in this final section it is important to explain in greater depth the definition of a 'spiritual' content within my work. This area of my research deals with hard to express concepts and feelings and necessitates that there will be less specific reference to particular artworks. The framing of a contemporary spiritual position within abstract painting underpins my entire project, all of my practice and theoretical explorations (what I claim for a contemporary spirituality I am claiming for my paintings). It is important from the outset to establish that spiritual experience is not synonymous with religion. Religion can provide and encourage encounters with spiritual experience but this is not the only place or way in which the spiritual can be encountered. Religion serves multiple purposes, spiritual, social and political and can be seen as a structure, built around various aspects of the spiritual which sadly can enable the forgetting of the original spiritual content of religion and become a system or form of dogma. The mystic or religious heretic is perhaps, more likely to experience the spiritual dimension than one who follows the dogma of a religious system. Andre Comte-Sponville has persuasively argued for an atheist spirituality and declares that

> ...we are finite beings who open on to infinity...we are ephemeral beings who open on to eternity, and relative beings who open on to the absolute. This 'openness' is the spirit itself. Metaphysics means thinking about these things; spirituality means experiencing them, exercising them, living them.
> This is what distinguishes spirituality from religion, which is merely one of its possible forms...All religions involve spirituality, at least to some extent, but all forms of spirituality are not religious.
> (Comte-Sponville, A. 2008:136)

So the spiritual within the context of this investigation is not a belief system as with religion it is an experience which may or may not be encompassed within some form of belief system. The term transcendent is frequently used to refer to this area of experience is another possible reference point but even this is problematic. Transcendence usually appears as the opposite of immanence where the spiritual is concerned. However, just as a painting is physically present but can transport the viewer to another imaginative realm so the transcendent and immanent become difficult to disentangle. Experience may be rooted in

immanence but the type of meaning experienced may be transcendent or may *feel* transcendent. This investigation can only go so far as to assert that there is a human tendency for a type of *experience* which may *seem* or *feel* transcendent. This raises the question, transcending what? It is one thing to assert that one has transcended the self but quite another to assert that there is a transcendental reality, truth or being which can exist outside of history and causality. It can only be asserted here that there is such a thing as a transcendental feeling, which would appear to give rise to transcendental meaning or a sense of meaningfulness which feels transcendent and there should be caution when asserting that any experience is an opening to the transcendent viewed as something external. William Franke has pointed out there exists the possibility in spiritual, religious or mystical experience to view it as either an experience of a radically 'other' God or as a sense of 'mystical wholeness' or 'oneness'. For Franke both experiences lie beyond words or effective rational analysis and exist within the domain of "what cannot be said" (Franke, 2007). For Franke there is a deeper mode of apophatic thought and experience which can contain both these experiences and which would invalidate neither as it is a form of discourse comfortable with paradox (see negative theology and apophasis later in this section).

Here lies the difficulty in secondary elaboration and investigation of these experiences, the problem may lie with the explanation, not the experience. The task of this investigation both in writing and painting has not been to defend these experiences, as if some form of final description could be found which would prove their worth to the secular and/or rationalist critic. Rather the task has been to find new and more appropriate (sustainable) ways to explore such feeling and to do these feelings justice in a language which is non-reductive. The aim has been to find both a verbal and visual language for this area of experience. Crucially this research has attempted to find, create and use languages which do not diminish this experience and which do not make false or misleading claims for it. Starting from a position similar to Otto's numinous, which he viewed as underpinning all religion, it would be the underlying feeling which is important to this investigation, the secondary elaborations may differ but should not be seen to invalidate the core experience of the spiritual or numinous (secondary elaborations include psychology, critical theory and philosophy).

If one accepts that some aspect of varying religions would appear to be consistent (culturally) and persistent (historically) it becomes important to ask what has become of this type of experience and how it can be located and articulated in current western (predominately secular) culture in a postmodern era? It would require more space than can be given here to fully explore this but I would like to approach some key possibilities. The

secular world has struggled to identify and explain this area of experience and to find language to articulate it (and by this I do not mean reductive explanations, here there is no shortage of 'explanations'). If one saw secularism as providing 'alternatives' to a religious definition of spiritual experience then the sublime is explored via the discipline of philosophy, the discourse of psychology offers the psyche and unconscious along with a host of terminology which seem to touch on (formerly) spiritual experience including, the oceanic, the numinosum etc.

With the advent of deconstructionism and postmodernism a plethora of new terminology emerged much of it still not clearly defined or agreed on and often given the label critical theory. Tellingly a postmodern thinker as important as Lyotard openly acknowledges that within his own work many terms may refer to a common factor saying,

> ... I find I have always tried, under diverse headings – work, figural, heterogeneity, dissensus, event, thing – to reserve: the unharmonizable...a senseless difference...so threatening that the reasonable mind cannot fail to fear in it, and rightly, an inhuman power of deregulation.
> (Lyotard, J, F. 1991:4/5)

Although there are lengthy discourses and separate schools of thought which emerge around many postmodern and deconstructionist theorists, it may be that these are all terms for something (or things) which remain beyond words. If one starts from the premise of an unknowable/unspeakable/unrepresentable aspect or aspects of reality then many contemporary thinkers and terminologies could also be seen as similar to religions in one sense. For the secular mind it is easy to see individual religions as expressions of something very similar, as a host a variations of an essentially similar illusion. It is only to the believer of a particular religion that the minor difference of interpretation, language, custom or nomenclature is important. However, to one who would apply a similar scepticism or distancing from psychology, philosophy and various types of postmodern and deconstructionist thought the same may be true. These many different phrasings for an unknown or unknowable may read as importantly different to 'believers' but as expressions of something very similar to the sceptic. This is a key problem with any discussion around the spiritual or any feeling concerning the 'unknown', the fragmentation (one could go as far as to say competition) both within and across discourses.

Problems for a Contemporary Terminology of the Spiritual in Art

James Elkins has touched on this fragmentation when discussing the difficult issue of what is acceptable terminology for the previously spiritual (or for Elkins religious) content of art in a

secular culture saying "The sublime and postmodern sublime are useful concepts, based as they are on an acceptably secular discourse" but that "it would be best to have words that are indigenously religious" (Elkins J. 2004:105)

It seems clear that Elkins would wish terminology to come from religious discourse but he finds himself entangled from the opposite perspective, saying that both the numinous and mysticism are "tainted by their association with the major Western religions" (Elkins, J. 2004:106/7). He seems to desire a form of clarity which philosophy or psychology can bring and the academic respect this provides,

> ...academic conversations employ the words "transcendental" and "enchantment" instead. That, it seems to me, is the most sensible way to proceed...transcendence has an impeccably philosophic degree, and enchantment hails from psychology rather than Theology.
> (Elkins, J. 2004:82)

However, as I have argued earlier the term 'transcendental' brings with it many problems as it begins to imply 'another', another place, time, event or reality, this then denies the reality of our present world and defers meaning. There has been enough psychologically inclined writing around this subject for it to now be apparent that in our experience of transcendence something changes in terms of our relation to the world. Through transcendental experience what we may learn is that we are not fully 'present' within the world much of the time, or that the world is not fully present for us...this is a form of transcendental experience which is built on a relationship between knower and known, which moves beyond dualism.

A Working Definition of the Spiritual

It is my aim to claim no more for spiritual experience than is absolutely necessary. The term spiritual is specifically used as this gives historical (and cultural) continuity to the type of experience I am referring to. For the purposes of this research I have defined the term 'spiritual' as being *an encounter with a profound sense of 'meaningfulness' in the absence of a rational or conceptual framework with which to define this experience and the feeling that this experience is irreducible to any other mode of discourse.*

Spiritual Possibilities in Modernist Painting

Having now established what I mean by the term spiritual it is time to take a brief look at how it has fared within modernist abstract painting. Developments in much of western intellectual thought seem to have been moving in a direction opposite to 'spiritual'

possibilities and it now seems a word that can even by its utterance, provoke hostile or negative associations. Anything to do with 'spiritual' experience has become deeply problematic for contemporary western intellectual culture. Examples from respected critics such as Rosalind Krauss find her referring to the spiritual as "inadmissible" (Krauss, R. 1985). James Elkins has reaffirmed the depth of the dislike of this subject to many in the professional fine art world when he revealed the intensity of feeling behind some of the negative responses to his invitation to participate in a recent conference on this topic (Elkins, J. 2009). Donald Kuspit has observed the increasing difficulty for the spiritually motivated artist, tracing a path from its early modernist roots, saying,

> ...for Kandinsky and Mondrian spirituality means overcoming modern materialism, while for Rothko and Motherwell it means overcoming modern alienation. No doubt Kandinsky and Mondrian felt alienated from the modern materialistic society in which they found themselves, but it was the society's materialism that disturbed them more than their alienation from it. They took alienation for granted; it came with spiritual superiority. They wanted to save society through their spiritual example...
> (Kuspit, D. 2000a:65)

Kuspit has written extensively on the subject of painting and spiritual experience, for him the spiritual becomes increasingly difficult to achieve within painting and to reconcile with an increasingly secular and materialistic society. Kuspit charts the decline of the early zeal with which the pioneer abstractionists worked in a spirit of active engagement and detects a fundamental shift in the emotional tone of the whole project of transcendental abstraction. If Kuspit is correct then the important issue for later abstractionists became 'self' preservation. The focus becomes survival, survival of a part of the psyche or psychic experience which is under threat within an overtly materialist, secular culture. His stark conclusion demonstrates how seriously he views the change.

> Where Kandinsky and Mondrian wanted to save materialistic society, Rothko and Motherwell wanted to save their own souls."
> (Kuspit, D. 2000a:66)

Thus Kuspit establishes an increasingly difficult and stressful aspect to the pursuit of spiritual possibilities in abstract painting in the later modernist era.

The Spiritual Possibilities for Postmodern Abstraction

What possibilities are left or emerge for the contemporary abstract painter concerned with spiritual experience? And what sort of approach to spiritual matters has any chance of a broader critical or cultural acceptance beyond the realms of abstract painting? Two key areas

of thought can help to chart this new territory, the tradition of 'negative theology' and a broader interpretation of the underlying discursive method of negative theology, 'apophasis'. What is important here is the relation both these areas of thought are said to have with aspects of postmodernism.

Critic Suzi Gablik proposed that, "...there are two postmodernisms – a deconstructive and a reconstructive version" (Gablik. S, 2002:21). Although there are problems with Gablik's analysis of modernism and therefore also with her vision of a 'reconstructive' postmodernism there is an important element of truth to her observation that postmodernism is not one single strategy, movement or outlook. However, rather than divide postmodernism into two camps these tendencies can be seen to exist in tension within postmodernism as a whole and even within the work of specific individuals. A more complex approach would acknowledge elements of reconstruction within the act of deconstruction, viewing deconstruction not as destruction but as an attempt to move around or beyond modernism in order to create space for alternative or new strategies of thought.

Negative Theology

It is often assumed that deconstructionism and postmodernism signalled the end of a spiritual dimension that had become increasingly embattled in the modernist era but to mourn or celebrate the passing of the spiritual would now seem premature. If postmodernism can be viewed as moving modernism 'to one side' rather than as destroying or discrediting it there are still connections to be made between pre-modern, modern and postmodern thought. The use of the word spiritual is entirely deliberate in this context as the experience referred to here is not specific to any of these three periods of thought. Within each era the experience exists, what changes is the language available to describe it and the conclusions which can be drawn from it. Writers such as John Caputo, Bulhof and Laurens, Michael. A. Sells, Mark. C. Taylor and others, have detected similarities between aspects of the deconstructionist project and negative theology. It is here that a seemingly unlikely contemporary path for the exploration of spiritual possibilities for abstract painting, acceptable to current practitioners and theorists within the arts and crucially to the postmodern, secular mind may begin.

To return to the search for acceptable terminology James Elkins has suggested that negative theology may be the most promising direction for contemporary discussions of the spiritual in art, saying,

> ..The best option, I think, is to find concepts that are at once religious and also removed from recognizable affinities with organized religion...It may seem the optimal solution is to remain silent about what is transcendent...With that in mind I propose the best answer I know, apophatic or negative theology (*theologia apophatike*).
> (Elkins, J. 2004:106/7)

This is promising after so many other terms in the opinion of Elkins fail to operate within both a religious and secular framework. Elkins, however, hints at "postmodern complications" (Elkins, J. 2004:109) for negative theology. The remaining task of this section of the investigation is to go beyond the start made by Elkins and to demonstrate how these ideas may be approached through contemporary abstract painting. First a definition of negative theology is needed in order to understand which elements may be useful for a future direction and which are impossible to work with given our "postmodern complications".

Negative theology may be seen as exactly the opposite of what it initially promises. It is negative in method i.e. it speaks in denials and denies the possibility of describing or understanding God via human reason or language (even the act of naming may become problematic). However, (and this will be of importance shortly) it remains essentially hyper-positive as this is a method through which to attempt to describe an ultimately indescribable being or essence which never the less constitutes ultimate reality and underwrites the meaningfulness of existence. Bulhof and Laurens the editors of a recent book which looks at connections between negative theology and contemporary thought define it thus,

> ...Negative theology's emphasis on the unknowableness, the unutterableness, and the deep darkness of transcendent Being elicits the idea that transcendence is best approached via denials, via what according to earthly concepts *is not*. Hence the name '*negative* theology.' Denying what is given, speaking in contradictions...means for evoking transcendent or hidden entities.
> (Bulhof, I.N. and Laurens, K.T. 2000:5)

The comparison between transcendental abstraction and negative theology is easy to make and can be found in any abstraction that feels the only way of communicating profound truths is to abandon representation as it is inadequate to communicate deeper truths. This reaches its clearest connection in painter Ad Reinhardt who not only wrote in a manner of 'denial' but actually made reference to certain mystical texts key to negative theology. However, the path of negation used by previous 'empty' abstraction is now much more difficult as established earlier but a further exploration of negative theology and apophasis points to new possibilities for abstract painting.

To return to negative theology and its "postmodern complications", one critic of the assimilation of negative theology into contemporary thought via postmodernism is Didier

Maleurve who sees an absolute distinction between the negative theology of old and its newer manifestations within deconstructionism. Maleurve objects, saying,

> The new face of negative theology, the one propounded by the likes of Derrida, Marion, or Caputo, also holds that God is not; they, however, mean it...The old negative theology was driven by respect...it made a religion out of reality. The new negative theology, on the contrary, is a sonorous celebration of language, of the vacuum around human consciousness, of the world's nonexistence. Most likely it is a way of gilding atheism with heroic solemnity. How glorious, how brave it is to be alone, godless, and therefore godlike in apprehension of the infinite reaches of silence around us. Our loneliness is our throne, our smallness is our greatness. (Maleuvre, D. 2006:120/121)

Maleurve has a point if one believes that many postmodernists or deconstructionists intend for their work to be taken as a form of negative theology. However, Derrida perhaps the most famous example on the topic is careful to provide a point of distinction between his work and negative theology. He observes that negative theology (in its original form) demonstrates a kind of hyper-essentialism (Derrida in Coward, H and Foshay, T, 1992). Rather than ultimate denial, the final goal of true negative theology is to affirm – beyond words – the omnipotence of God. It is speech and human reason that is inadequate for the negative theologian, inadequate for the description of an ultimate reality. For the deconstructionist, speech may also be inadequate but there is no automatic guarantor of meaning (i.e. God) at any deeper level. Maleuvre may be unfair in assuming certain deconstructionists wish to be read as negative theology and also rather rigid in his interpretation of negative theology. Not all thinkers in this area share his interpretation of negative theology as Bulhof and Laurens demonstrate, saying,

> The term 'negative theology' is easily misunderstood. We must think less in terms of a religious current and more in terms of a tradition of reflection on Being, God, humanity, and religion.
> (Bulhof, I. N. and Laurens, K. T. 2000:4)

Many postmodern thinkers may indeed be fascinated by the *method* of negative theology while not necessarily accepting its faith, or theological dimension. Maleuvre makes a point of the drama associated with what he sees as a form of "gilded atheism" in contemporary negative theology pointing to Nietzsche's madman who proclaims the death of god as demonstrating "...the pathos of grandstanding emptiness, of human solitude, of self-clasping existential rapture. No sooner begun than the twilight of the idols spawned the idol of twilight." (Maleuvre, D. 2006:120). Again he may be unfair in his characterization of the newly atheistic 'negative theologian'. He takes the example of Nietzsche but of course the writing of Nietzsche is now distanced by history and one could easily take examples of 'grandstanding, self-clasping, religious rapture' if one were to plunder history and give no

consideration to changes of language, style and taste. If one were to allow 'religious rapture' some freedom for a dramatic use of language why then would one not afford the same freedom and scope to "existential rapture" or using the earlier position established by Comte-Sponville" an 'atheist-spiritual rapture'? However, Maleurve raises important issues. If some deconstructionists are fascinated by negative theology why should this be so for those who consider themselves atheists? And if there is to be an attempt to talk of similar issues with similar methods what should be the proper context and language for this thought?

James Elkins has acknowledged the role of apophaticism in negative theology but does not go on to explore any real distinction between the two. The difference between negative theology and apophasis mirrors the difference I earlier proposed between religion and the spiritual, by not establishing a difference between apophasis and negative theology one runs the danger of leaving room for exactly the sort of paralysing stalemate just discussed. What is needed is a further refinement of the terminology used which may help thinking in this area to avoid an either/or stalemate around the emphasis on theology. The theorists William Franke has made a significant contribution in moving terminology beyond negative theology and identifying apophaticism as the underlying principle in his book *On What Cannot Be Said (Apophatic Discourses in Philosophy, Religion, Literature, and the Arts* (2007).

Apophasis

The distinction needs to be made between apophasis and negative theology, which uses apophatic method but which is only one manifestation of such a method. William Franke has traced a comprehensive history of apophaticism in (mostly western) thought and defines it thus,

> ...it indicates an utter incapacity of language to grasp what infinitely exceeds it, a predicament of being passed irredeemably by what it cannot say. "Apophasis" reads etymologically, moreover, as "away from speech" or "saying *away*" (*apo*, "from" or "away from"; *phasis*, "assertion," from *phemi*, "assert" or "say"), and this points in the direction of *un*saying and ultimately of silence as virtualities of language that tend to underlie and subvert any discursively articulable meaning.
> (Franke, W. 2007a:2)

Although a writer such as Derrida is fascinated by the apophatic strategies of negative theology he must part company with its assumption of an ultimate reality or God. On the other side of this debate lies Maleurve who sees a fundamental betrayal of negative theology by the postmodernists and deconstructionists to perform a covert form of the enthronement of the individual human subject, through the emphasis of the omnipotence and omnipresence of the 'text' (a human creation, a product of mind and however presented, still emblematic of

the human subject). However, if one sees negative theology as only one manifestation of an apophatic method important distinctions can be made. Franke clearly demonstrates that apophaticism can be found in forms other than negative theology and this recognition allows contemporary thought to move beyond the theological divide.

Apophasis can be seen to exist outside of its purely theological use and to continue to flourish after the era of negative theology as the dominant mode of apophatic expression, existing in our present times in certain types of postmodern thought. He clearly makes an important point that although close to mysticism (therefore religion) in many ways, apophaticism can be used in a non-mystical or even anti-mystical manner.

> One outstanding problem is to situate apophasis with relation to mysticism...Mystic discourse, in cancelling itself out as discourse... is meant to suggest this "beyond" of language...Mysticism presents one of the avenues followed by apophasis, though to say by not saying, or not to say by saying, are not necessarily mystical operations and can even be given an anti-mystical turn, especially by modern writers like Samuel Beckett and Georges Bataille.
> (Franke,W. 2007a:5)

This is an important point regarding a contemporary form of spirituality sustainable within a largely secular age and can be of use to contemporary abstract painting. It may appear I have made a digression from my own practice but this groundwork in a reworking of spiritual possibilities is a vital underpinning for my final SA series of paintings. It is of key importance to my own painting to provide a more stable platform from which to explore this type of depth experience.

Previously it has been demonstrated that the term spiritual, while giving some kind of historical continuity is also flexible enough to incorporate 'atheistic spirituality', following Comte-Sponville. Contemporary interest in negative theology via postmodernism and deconstructionism has been noted along with the problems inherent in a largely sceptical and doubting postmodern outlook for the religious aspect of negative theology. The seemingly insurmountable obstacle of faith which lies between religious belief and postmodern doubt can be overcome by an emphasis on apophatic method or discourse rather than negative theology. With all of this in mind I wish to look briefly at some examples which mirror this type of reasoning within the practice and theory of contemporary abstract painting. These examples throw up some interesting similarities in terminology and provide a suggestion of the language which either emerges or remains as an acceptable description for an apophatically inclined, postmodern, 'spiritual' art.

The Unintelligible, Unrepresentable, Incomprehensible and Unknowable

In the book *Signs of Psyche in Modern and Postmodern Art* (1994) Donald Kuspit outlines a thesis that unintelligibility, far from something to be overcome in modern art is instead a vital factor. He gives us a historical account of some of the reasons why unintelligibility has been ignored as a positive factor and a recommendation as to the way forward saying,

> ...Clement Greenberg's...dismissal of a whole side of art's import, not to speak of the gross misunderstanding of the preconscious and unconscious order of effects...it implies, is one of the great crimes perpetrated upon modern art. But...it tells us what door we must go through to truly understand the unintelligibility of modern art. We must look for the depth in the unintelligible.
> (Kuspit, D. 1994b:116/117)

Kuspit leaves the reader in no doubt as to the importance of the unintelligible. It becomes a mode of resistance to a society which demands a particular type of conformity and Kuspit senses the two are in conflict where we have an art which can celebrate the unintelligible but a society which moves in the opposite direction as Kuspit states "...the inclination to enigma is generally suspect in the modern world..." (Kuspit, D. 1994b:114).

James Elkins has acknowledged the importance of the "unrepresentable" which can be likened to Kuspit's unintelligible. In his book *Pictures and the Words that Fail Them* (1988) Elkins asserts the importance of the aspect of art which can reach beyond semiotics and interpretation, saying,

> These notions about religion, the sacred, and what can be represented constitute one of the central conversations in both Western and non-Western image making...I suggest...that we are on the edge of a much larger phenomenon, one that involves many kinds of historically specific decisions and will resist any one special explanation. What is happening...has to do with hypostasis, with apophatic thinking, and with immanence...I want to suggest that the fundamental desire ...is unrelated to the immediate role of religious questions, and it is better described as the fitful and ultimately impossible move toward representing the unrepresentable.
> (Elkins, J. 1998:250)

Elkins tries hard not to become entangled with religion, but it is impossible not to feel some connection between his "unrepresentable" and much of the thought that emanates from negative theology. My previous line of thought concerning apophatic discourse and a definition of spiritual experience as not necessarily synonymous with religion again can be applied. It is quite clear in stating that there is an intention towards "representing the unrepresentable" artists would be moving close to the territory of paradox and contradiction which are the favoured modes of discourse for the negative theologian and apophatic thinker.

Elkins has called for a new terminology to emerge which would guide a future discussion of the spiritual aspects of art and from Elkins and Kuspit we have the unintelligible and the unrepresentable.

Moving from two theorists to two contemporary painters, further similarities of thought and language can be found. Gerhard Richter has on many occasions remarked on the non-verbal, unknowable and incomprehensible nature of abstract painting. Nowhere is he clearer on this topic than in the following quotation where he places this obsession with the unknowable in a clear historical context saying,

> Abstract pictures are fictive models, because they make visible a reality that we can neither see nor describe, but whose existence we can postulate. We denote this reality in negative terms: the unknown, the incomprehensible, the infinite. And for thousands of years we have been depicting it through images such as heaven and hell, gods and devils.
> In abstract painting we have found a better way of gaining access to the unvisualizable, the incomprehensible; because abstract painting deploys the utmost visual immediacy – all the resources of art, in fact – in order to depict 'nothing'...we accept that we are seeing the unvisualizable: that which has never been seen before and is not visible. This is not some abstruse game but a matter of sheer necessity: the unknown simultaneously alarms us and fills us with hope, and so we accept the pictures as a possible way to make the inexplicable more explicable, or at all events more accessible.
> (Richter, G. 1993:100)

The British painter Ian McKeever, like Richter, sees the importance of the unknown and he has pointedly contrasted the attitude of our current society and culture towards the unknown to that of the abstract painter, saying,

> Our society and our culture are increasingly predicated on the supposedly known. We now comment on everything; very little is left unsaid...The mystery of the unknown, on the other hand, is now more or less considered worthless. Yet, attempting at least to make ourselves partly sensitive to things we cannot know, is perhaps one of the great freedoms still available to us.
> In painting a painting one does not set out to paint what one knows, but rather tries to touch those things which one does not know and which perhaps cannot be known."
> (McKeever, I. 2005:61)

McKeever (along with the others listed) would clearly seem to see some benefit in a recognition of the importance of this "unknown". It can be seen even from this brief excursion into these four figures that language with profound similarities is being used. I would conclude by summarizing that if the discursive method which may move us beyond an intellectual and spiritual impasse is apophasis, then the significant terminology used within this method with regards to abstract painting and a contemporary approach to the

spiritual may well include at its very heart words such as, the unknown, the unrepresentable, the unintelligible and the incomprehensible and that in the spirit of apophatic thinking these terms rather than being negative as they may first appear, act in a positive way. Such terminology and accompanying outlook can help to preserve certain types and areas of experience and thought which have struggled to be seen as legitimate from a secular perspective and also to extend them into a territory beyond the previously established theological and religious explanations.

The Separation Anxiety Series and a Contemporary Language of the Spiritual

What remains in this last section after a lengthy exploration of some of the deepest issues surrounding a contemporary interpretation of the spiritual is to return to how this is approached within my own painting.

The last group of paintings which constitute the PhD segment of this investigation are the Separation Anxiety paintings (SA). This group of works developed an appropriate and forward looking way for abstract painting which both wishes to engage with the contemporary world and engage with what I have defined as 'spiritual' experience. These paintings represent a consolidation of some of the pathways opened up by the AU series. It is also vital to the understanding of these works and of my project as a whole, that value lies in creating areas of uncertainty. The role of the work in establishing a 'spiritual' dimension (defined earlier) lies with the creation of doubt and uncertainty both perceptually and conceptually. This is no easy task within fine art or specifically painting as so many options now seem hopelessly familiar. What is recorded in these paintings is my attempt to move beyond the over familiar in terms of style or painterly approach but to acknowledge a sense of a difficult to place, distant familiarity in the finished painting. This is a different type of familiarity from a cultural referencing and recognition of similarities of style and language between paintings. The sense of similarity or half recognition I am concerned with is an 'intuited' sense of similarity or half recognition, involving the tension between something/nothing, or somewhere/nowhere, it is the possibility that these paintings may suggest something or somewhere beyond painting. These paintings are situated as to involve some sense of 'almost' recognition but ultimately to deny complete or permanent identification.

The SA paintings all involve an intervention into the process ground or space (which constituted the whole of the painting in the RE and LPP series). There are three main

methods indentified in the AU series which have been taken forward in these paintings. There is the simple intervention with a flat, hand-painted grey or black shape which gives rise to the question of whether the grey and blurred ground becomes figure or ground or can be read either way (as in SA No.001 p53, No002 p59, No, No004 p60, No 005 p54, No 006 p54). The second type of intervention is the creation of a series of translucent, often loosely overlapping washes of thinned paint. Again these washes mostly suggest edges or forms, sometimes they can move beyond this to be quite definite in places but are never logically consistent across the whole painted surface in the establishing of a securely bounded form. In this way the viewer is always turned back to themselves and the painting to start again in a search for a secure or stable form or object (as in SA No007 p55, No008 p61, No009 p55, No010 p56, No011 p62, No012 p56, No014 p57, No015 p63). The third type of intervention is that of the physical brushstroke. These paintings (SA No017 p64 and SA No016 p58) are not as large as the rest of the series, as at present, scale has presented an obstacle in relation to the size of the hand painted brushstroke. The tiny traces of the brushstroke left in oil paint which so sensitively act as a record of human movement and touch and which give it its unmistakeable physicality have a tendency to become lost or increasingly insensitive as the paintings become larger. There is an additional problem of the seepage of oil from brushstrokes into the acrylic ground over longer periods of time, this occurs with thicker, more oil laden brushstrokes and in order to scale up to the larger paintings the thickness of brushstrokes would need to increase. This is a technical obstacle that will need to be overcome after this investigation. In order not to entirely abandon this line of enquiry on a larger scale some paintings in the SA series (such as SA No010 p56 or SA No009 p55) contain less physical or tactile traces of brushstrokes which still hint at but never firmly establish form. The technical and formal systems now having been defined, this last group of paintings will be examined from the perspective of my previously established position of an idea of the spiritual which is not necessarily religious and which encompasses an apophatic approach.

Negative theology, apophatic thought, the via negativa, the end of emptiness and the need for "monsters"

As discussed earlier an established method for abstract painting to approach the transcendent or spiritual was that of the empty painting. As I have demonstrated the empty abstract painting no longer necessarily opens on to the infinite unknown but is in fact rather well known - as a strategy of abstraction. It reflects back to a cultural situation and now does not so much present presence through absence as it presents emptiness as entirely present. This

has been a crucial question in this investigation, if the empty abstract painting no longer takes us to an unknown beyond language, but rather presents another clearly defined language, then how does the abstract painter proceed? The answer explored through the paintings of the AU and SA series was that although apophatic possibility may now no longer reside in the absence of form e.g. emptiness (as emptiness is familiar) the apophatic (and by now this can be read as the spiritual) resides with the lack of a recognized language, it is through this that abstraction gains its sense of otherness or strangeness, by ridding itself of the familiar and this includes recognised languages of construction. This is what avant-garde art once attempted and precisely what isn't achieved by the sort of art Donald Kuspit has frequently called pseudo avant-garde, pseudo avant-garde art being a surface re-ordering or ironic riposte (being novel rather than new) to the previous approaches of modernism. Empty abstract painting never was about simply emptying painting of representation or of worldly objects. Its radical spiritual side worked through emptying painting of a language of known form (in nature or art). Now the empty painting is a 'known form' and as an established language this strategy itself becomes something to move beyond. This is where my work is situated, at the horizon of this type of painting, again including form and mark within my work and allowing a new and 'strange ' language to be built. It is in the unknown of the not yet established language that the spiritual can be encountered where painting can again be (if only for a limited time) in Lyotard's words "formless", a "monster". Lyotard tells us

> 'Modern painters' discover that they have to form images that photography cannot present...These painters discover that they have to present that there is something that is not presentable according to the legitimate construction. They begin to overturn the supposed 'givens' of the visible so as to make visible the fact that the visual field hides and requires invisibilities...These works appear to the public of taste to be 'monsters', 'formless objects', purely 'negative' entities...When the point is to try to present that there is something that is not presentable, you have to make presentation suffer...In the techno-scientific industrial world, there can be no stable symbols of the good, the just, the true, the infinite, etc...The unrepresentable is what is the object of an Idea, and for which one cannot show (present) an example, a case, even a symbol. The universe is unpresentable, so is humanity, the end of history, the instant, space, the good, etc...So one cannot present the absolute. But one can represent that there is some absolute. This is a 'negative'...presentation.
> (Lyotard, J. F. 1991:125/126)

There is a rather dramatic tone to Lyotard's use of the word "monsters". If the earlier thoughts of Gerhard Richter are remembered when he speculated about the process of interaction with an abstract picture being one of searching, excitement, frustration and provocation (in terms of recognition) the language used perhaps becomes more helpful than "monsters" or "formless entities". Similarly Ian McKeever's ambitions for abstract painting which resides in an area of uncertainty are delivered in a less dramatic tone when he asserts,

> I prefer that painting exist in the gap between what we know and what we don't know: let it take us beyond the security of the world we already inhabit. (McKeever, I. 2005:85)

The key issue here is that the artist is prepared to move beyond "security" and that painting should exist in the gap between known and unknown. There is not a rejection of all possibilities of recognition or form but an acceptance that this must always remain only partial. Painting which aspires to this rather than being formless would contain strange or elusive form. There may indeed be times during the process of the painting (and I am speaking of my later SA paintings now) where the painting is indeed formless (not empty but without form) however, through the process of painting the goal of all my later paintings was to establish a relationship with each individual work and to begin to find an appropriate form for (and forms within) the painting. The resultant painting could not be called formless but neither could it be pinned to a stable reading or recognition.

One of the starting points of this research was the (inappropriate) use of technology to generate form from relatively formless paintings. This was a type of form created by the interaction of computer software and my process based paintings. My participation in terms of creating form was minimal. Once I had access to the more 'formed' technological interpretations of my paintings I had to assess the further role of painting in this scenario. My decision was to engage more with the physicality of the paintings themselves and also to attempt to develop form from within them, this was being performed as a response to the digital interpretations which were conspicuously visible within my studio. In one sense I became a type of slow, uncertain (human) analogue equivalent to the digital, technological programmes I had used earlier.

The introduction of my hand and decision making process into the paintings had inevitable consequences. These works manifested my search for a visual, apophatic statement, a statement that didn't simply reference spiritual art of the past but which arrived at its own (verbally and visually elusive) spiritual statement using contemporary methods. In the search for a sense of newness or strangeness it became necessary for me to work with technology and processes outside of painting and to approach abstract painting very differently from early or late modernist painters. Also in order to give shape to what a contemporary form of spirituality useful for abstract painting may be, I again had to search beyond typical notions of spiritual and religious experience. This journey can be summed up very well by Gerhard Richter,

> Strange thought his may sound, not knowing where one is going – being lost, being a loser – reveals the greatest possible faith and optimism, as against collective security and collective significance. To believe, one must have lost God; to paint, one must have lost art.
> (Richter, G. 1993:15)

In the later PhD paintings process has been used but it becomes only a part of the painting, these paintings are resolutely not a hands free, emotion free and ultimately risk free method of painting. I have engaged with technology which although it challenged my status as author ultimately re-engaged my imaginative processes. I have also re-introduced the hand-made brushstroke. These are not reintroduced in an expressionistic way but rather in a tentative and doubtful way. They have been described by one viewer of my work as "homeless brushstrokes" and this seems an absolutely accurate description. If my brushstrokes are seen to represent the personal or subjective then it is re-introduced without a declaratory fanfare and exists within a climate of doubt and uncertainty (see AU No. 011 p49). I have also shattered the unity of the process ground or space to introduce the possibility of form within the paintings. This stems from my experiments with technology. There are some very interesting (if unanswerable) questions concerning how the technologically produced form of the deconvolution software may have influenced my search for form in my last paintings. Am I sole author of my own form? As discussed previously George Steiner has touched on this very question of authorship when art and technology interact, questioning who may be the author when he asks "Should the gold medal go to the builder or to the software? What then of authorship?" (Steiner, G. 2002:254)

However, authorship has never been such an obsession for the religious or spiritual artist as it is for the secular individualist. In a way any religious artist is not 'sole author' of his/her work. So in this sense the question concerning authorship does not matter to me. Just as many spiritual abstractionists would wish to act as a channel for the spiritual rather than be the author then in some aspects my aim is close to this. However, if I consider myself as a channel rather than author then the real question and "postmodern complication" is "a channel for what?" For the Romantic the answer could still be a form of divinity. For the depth psychologist or psychoanalyst the answer is psyche or the unconscious and for the conventionally theological, simply God. As I have shown the idea of the numinous or "wholly other" opens up the theological route as does negative theology while the apophatic, without an assumed theological dimension seems the closest to an acceptable contemporary position.

I conclude with a thought on being a channel for a *sense* of the unknown or the as yet unknown. I stress the word *sense* as without this qualification there again emerges an

intimation that the unknown exists as some form of external entity and a type of theological dimension which I am trying to avoid returns. The sense of the unknown of which I speak is not necessarily an unknown of absence at least not in the sense of the withdrawal of divine presence as for this to occur it seems to pre-suppose some form of belief in an original presence. My commitment to an unknown remains impartial, it may be an unknown created by the withdrawal of a previously all encompassing divine meaning (George Steiner's "as if") but equally this unknown could involve emergence as much as disappearance. I do not assume that spiritual experience lies completely behind us with nothing ahead. This source of the unknown, of 'otherness' is what I have worked to establish in the AU and SA paintings (and throughout my research), it is an experience which has deep historical precedents but one which stretches to the present day. In this PhD I have attempted to point the way towards a contemporary route to this experience.

Conclusion

PhD research title - *"Contemporary Abstract Painting and Spiritual Experience – An Investigation through Practice"*

In order to undertake this investigation my research was divided into three chapters each reflecting an aspect of this investigation. Chapter one established the broader cultural and historical factors which have led to current attitudes towards spiritual experience within predominately secular cultures. Chapter two narrowed the focus to investigate current abstract painting in a comparative study of three contemporary abstract painters. The study showed a diversity of response concerning what challenges face abstract painting both in a broader cultural context and from within painting itself. Differing attitudes towards the experience of 'self' (in painting), possibilities for spiritual experience and the relationship of painting with contemporary technology and culture were all important considerations in this chapter. Chapter three continued narrowing the focus of the investigation to my own practice and explored my use of grey, the initial use of a 'detached' process based painting method, the gradual introduction of brushstrokes and of illusionistic and imaginative form alongside the use of cutting-edge digital image analysis technology. Chapter three concludes by exploring possibilities for contemporary forms of spirituality and how my paintings function within this context.

Conclusions for Chapter 1 and 2

Chapter one established the broader underlying causes for a decline in spiritual experience in broadly secular western culture. The general decline in religious belief and with it the possibilities for spiritual experience (religion being one of the main disciplines through which the spiritual can be encountered) was initially traced back to the problems religion and spirituality encountered in a technologically driven, scientifically dominated culture from the advent of the modern, scientific, industrial era onwards. However, chapter one concludes by establishing that the causes of a spiritual decline and the difficulties the spiritual has faced in secular societies started well before the industrial revolution and the rise of modern science as we now know it. The dualism of Greek philosophy is seen to lead to the subject/object split that enabled the founder of modern philosophy Rene Descartes to establish his philosophical position of radical doubt. This in turn provided an underpinning method for modern philosophy, western technological and scientific culture and most importantly, secularism. In chapter two various methods by which abstract painting can disrupt the subject/object dualism are investigated including alternative experiences of self and time and the relationship of painting to the 'unknown'. Although the artists concerned may theorise

these experiences differently they all have something to offer in terms of an alternative to the subject/object dualistic form of consciousness and it is apparent that abstract painting can play a role here if engaged with establishing a relationship with the 'unknown' or 'other'.

Issues central to my own practice emerge in chapter two, namely the relationship of painting with technology (as explored by David Reed) and how painting can approach spiritual possibilities without retreating to previous modernist strategies while maintaining a depth experience similar to some of the great modernist spiritual abstractionists (explored by McKeever and Richter).

Conclusions for Chapter 3

Process

Initially process based painting provided a form of 'provisional certainty' which enabled a way to paint in a climate of radical doubt concerning painting procedure, subject matter and content (RE series). This became an unsupportable position, one half of an equation to which a delight in the material process of painting was the other (AU and SA series).Although the more positive 'alchemical' view of process itself, allied to an increasing ability to manipulate process in terms of contrast, complexity and scale provided a number of further process paintings (see Common Ground exhibition CG No. 002 p69), eventually process came to feel a limitation rather than liberation although it still provides one potential avenue of spiritual exploration for the contemporary abstract painter. The conclusion that process could become entangled in repetition and over familiarity led to the next phase of my work with technology which provided the impetus to explore new, unexpected paths for further development within painting.

Technology

My use of technology (image deconvolution) acted as an extended form of process and both process painting and the use of deconvolution technology can now be viewed as attempts to make images which feel both strange and 'other' (drawing on Rudolph Otto's use of the term the 'wholly other'), in some sense not made by me. The specific use of technology in this investigation i.e. the task it performed, was to find strange and new form, form which I did not create and did not (could not) anticipate. These forms were an 'other' which stemmed from technology rather than my unconscious but which strangely, due to my familiarity with

the digital images produced and the constant presence of them in my studio may well have fed back into my paintings influencing the later AU and SA paintings.

Gesture and Form

With both gestural and empty forms of modernist abstraction established as problematic and no longer providing an accepted route to spiritual experience in the AU and SA series I developed a modified method of abstract painting. This approach allowed for elements of detached process and relative emptiness but now alongside an engagement with material referred to as 'alchemical' within an illusionistic space which prevented the paintings being viewed as simply objects. Each painting in the AU and SA series involved a more convoluted decision making process and a higher risk of failure but with a greater sense of meaningfulness when successful (as with AU No.11 p49). This new model for abstraction reconciled process painting and the hand-made mark (along with compositional decision making).

The use of brushstrokes in the AU and SA paintings performs a dual function. In certain paintings in both AU and SA series brushstrokes simply perform the practical function of being able to engage with the complexities of form suggested in the digital *Composites* which was simply not a possibility using an entirely process based method. The brushstroke has also been used in my work as a way of preserving rather than celebrating the individual (see AU series No's 7 to 12 p44-45 and SA series No's 16 and 17 p58). The brushstrokes in these works were once described as "homeless brushstrokes". They were tentatively made, not the large gestural sweep of a previous abstraction celebratory of the self or the ironic referencing of an emotionally detached form of postmodern practice but rather the first step toward a preservation of some notion of the validity of the self and of the worth of attempting to make an uncertain subjective mark.

Form, Strangeness and the 'Other'

In the digital images a computer programme had created new and interesting form from my paintings. In the paintings of the AU and SA series this was used as a starting point for further exploration of imaginatively generated forms within my paintings. It must be stressed that the intention was never to mimic the digitally generated form rather the digitally generated form suggested a possibility for form to emerge from my paintings. The digital images created something, new, strange and 'other' and the AU and SA series of paintings produced something similar within painting. The concluding series of paintings evoked a

sense of partial recognition (or of wanting recognition) but could never be pinned down to anything specific, this is what gives them strangeness. If not pictures of 'here' then they must be somewhere else, something else, the unknowable, unrepresentable, or the 'other'. Ian McKeever has talked about the possibility of the "figure beyond" abstraction (McKeever, I. 2005:87) which alludes to a sense of recognition which is always anticipatory and never complete, it is precisely the impossibility of full recognition which gives the form of abstraction I have worked with its spiritual dimension within the realms of the apophatic.

Summary

To summarize my practice based submission I would point to how I have addressed my research title. The use of process placed my work in dialogue with contemporary abstraction and the use of only black/white/grey in all my paintings helped to create associations with photography and the digital image. The intervention of technology helped to extend the idea of process further and to suggest a way forward from the limitations and repetition of process while placing the work firmly in a contemporary context.

The introduction of illusionistic form and of brushstrokes was an acknowledgement that contemporary process based painting has major limitations and easily becomes repetitive. In order to approach aspects of spiritual experience a more complex and emotionally involved approach to painting was identified as being needed. The use of the painted gesture and illusionistic form returned to my work for the specific purpose of creating this dimension within my paintings. The concluding section of chapter three has argued that a contemporary form of spirituality must take into account the 'unknowable' and the unrepresentable, in short the apophatic dimension.

Even though previous forms of modernist abstraction have relied on an element of the 'unknown' or "unintelligible" (Kuspit, D. 1984), these strategies often become familiar and lose part or all, of the 'unknown' element. Two remarks, one from Richter and the other from McKeever concerning the possibility of painting like Caspar David Friedrich "today" show how both are aware of this problem. Richter suggests that what is past "is only the set of circumstances that allowed [a Friedrich] to be painted: specific ideologies, for example..." (Richter, G. 1993:81) and McKeever observes that the question "for the painter, in our contemporary world full of likenesses, is not how to make yet another likeness, but how to paint the real thing." (McKeever, I. 2005:50)

The same holds true for abstract painting. If one were to imitate the previous languages of spiritual abstraction one would have created the empty shell of external appearance while the inner spiritual experience would be lost. It is not with gestural expression or radical emptiness that abstract painting achieves its spiritual charge but rather with a sense of 'strangeness' or 'otherness'. This involves creating abstract paintings that do not seem fully intelligible, that go beyond the familiar languages of spiritual abstraction and this was the aim and intention behind both the AU and SA paintings

In chapter one I referred to a lost language of the spiritual and how Abraham Maslow's students became more aware of peak experiences once they were prompted to look for them or given a language with which to recognise and articulate them. In this investigation I have established a language of abstract painting varied enough to withstand the threat of instant familiarity, the AU and SA paintings avoid repetitiveness and are capable of evoking a sense of 'otherness'. Alongside this I have defined a concept of spiritual experience which can be more readily accepted within secular culture, in tune with many developments in postmodern thought and as can be seen in the concluding section of chapter three uses a language in accord with leading contemporary abstract painters and theoreticians. By achieving this I have placed my abstract paintings in a position where in both theory and practice the 'other', the unknowable, the unrepresentable, the numinous or the spiritual is not approached uncritically but is articulated in contemporary terms and is not allowed to simply slip past, largely unnoticed with no contemporary language of description available to help recognise it.

References

Baudrillard, J. (2006), *Simulacra and Simulation* [Simulacres et simulation]. Translated from the French by Glaser, F.G., Michigan: University of Michigan Press.

Baudrillard, J. (1993), *The Transparency of Evil* [La Transparence du Mal].Translated from the French by Benedict, J. London: Verso.

Bohm, D. (1981), *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd.

Bulhof, N. I. and Laurens, T. K. (eds.) (2000), *Flight of the Gods (Philosophical perspectives on Negative Theology*, New York: Fordham University Press.

Burke, S. (1992), *The Death and Return of the Author (Criticism and Subjectivity in Barthes, Foucault and Derrida)*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Cardinal, R. (1984), *Expressionism*. London: Paladin.

Carr, K. L. (1992), *The Banalization of Nihilism (Twentieth Century responses to Meaninglessness)*. New York: State University of New York Press.

Casement, A. and Tacey, D. (eds.) (2006), *The Idea of the Numinous (Contemporary Jungian and Psychoanalytical Perspectives)*, London and New York: Routledge.

Comte-Sponville, A. (2008), *The Book of Atheist Spirituality*. London: Bantam Press.

Cooke, L. (1990b), A History of Rocks: Meta Incognita, in *Ian McKeever: A History of Rocks*. Waldkirch: Waldkircher Verlagsgesellschaft.

Ehrenzweig, A. (1993), *The Hidden Order Of Art, (A Study In The Psychology Of Artistic Imagination)*. London: Weidenfeld.

Eliot, T. S. (1974), *Collected Poems 1909-1962*. London/Boston: Faber and Faber.

Elkins, J. (1998), *On Pictures and the Words that Fail Them*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Elkins, J. (2000), *What Painting Is*. New York: Routledge.

Elkins, J. (2004), *On the Strange Place of Religion in Contemporary Art*. New York: Routledge.

Elkins, J. (2008), *Six Stories from the End of Representation*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Elkins, J. and Morgan, D. (eds.) (2009), *Re-Enchantment (The Art Seminar ; vol. 7)*, New York: Routledge.

Franke, W. (Ed) (2007a), *On What Cannot Be Said (Apophatic Discourses in Philosophy, Religion, Literature, and the Arts)* Volume 1 Classic Formulations. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press.

Franke, W. (Ed) (2007b), *On What Cannot Be Said (Apophatic Discourses in Philosophy, Religion, Literature, and the Arts)* Volume 2 Modern and Contemporary Transformations. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press.

Frankl, V. E. (2000), *Man's Search for Ultimate Meaning*. New York: Basic Books.

Fuller, P. (1983), *Art and Psychoanalysis*. London: Writers and Readers.

Fuller, P. (1990), *Images of God (The Consolations of Lost Illusions)*. London: Hogarth Press.

Gablik, S. (2002), *The Reenchantment of Art*. London: Thames and Hudson.

Gilbert-Rolfe, J. (1999), *Beauty and the Contemporary Sublime*. New York: Allworth Press.

Godfrey, T. (1996a), The Marks on the Trail and the Light in the Trees, in *Ian McKeever: Works on Paper 1981-1996*. Brighton: Contemporary Art Books, G&B International and University of Brighton.

Halley, P. (1991), *Peter Halley Collected Essays*. Zurich: Sonnabend Gallery/Lapis Press.

Huxley, A. (1982), *The Doors of Perception/Heaven and Hell*. Granada.

Keats, J. (2003), *The Complete Poems*. London: Penguin Books.

Krauss, R. E. (1985), *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press.

Kung, Hans. (1981), *Art and the Question of Meaning*. Translated from the German by Edward Quinn. London: SCM Press.

Kuspit, D. (1986) Concerning the Spiritual in Contemporary Art, in Tuchman, M. (1986), *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890-1985*. New York: Abbeville Press.

Kuspit, D. (1994), *Signs of Psyche in Modern and Postmodern Art*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kuspit, D. (1995), *The Cult of the Avant-Garde Artist*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kuspit, D. (2000a), *The Dialectic of Decadence (Between Advance And Decline In Art)*. New York: Allworth Press.

Kuspit, D. (2000b), *The Rebirth of Painting In The Late Twentieth Century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kuspit, D. (2000c), *Psychostrategies of Avant-Garde Art*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kuspit, D. (2000d), *Redeeming Art: Critical Reveries*. New York: Allworth Press.

Kuspit, D. (2004), *The End of Art*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lasch, C. (1984), *The Minimal Self*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.

Letche, J. (ed.) (1995), *Fifty Key Contemporary Thinkers (From structuralism to postmodernity)*. Routledge.

Lloyd, J, in McKeever, I. (1998), *Ian McKeever: Twelve x Eight and other Woodcut Monoprints 1997 – 1998*. London: Alan Cristea Gallery.

Lloyd, J. (2004), in *Ian McKeever: Recent Paintings and Ten Years of Drawing*. Cambridge: Kettle's Yard and University of Cambridge.

Lyotard, J. F. (1991), *The Inhuman* [L'Inhumain]. Translated from the French by Bennington, G. and Bowlby. R. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Maleuvre, D. (2006), *The Religion of Reality (Inquiry into the Self, Art, and Transcendence)*. Washington, D.C.: Catholic University Press.

Maclagan, D. (2001), *Psychological Aesthetics (Painting, Feeling and Making Sense)*. London: Jessica Kingsley.

Maslow, A. H. (1968), *Toward a Psychology of Being*. New York: D.Van Nostrand Company inc.

McGrath, A. (2004), *The Twilight of Atheism*. London: Rider.

McKeever, I. (1979), interview with Godfrey, T. in *Fields, Waterfalls and Birds*. Bristol: Arnolfini Gallery.

McKeever, I. (1990a), *Ian McKeever: Paintings 1978 – 1990*. London: Whitechapel Art Gallery.

McKeever, I. (1990b), *Ian McKeever: A History of Rocks*. Waldkirch: Waldkircher Verlagsgesellschaft.

McKeever, I. (1996a), *Ian McKeever: Works on Paper 1981-1996*. Brighton: Contemporary Art Books, G&B International and University of Brighton.

McKeever, I. (1996b), *Ian McKeever: Paintings 1990 – 1996*. Nottingham: Angel Row Gallery.

McKeever, I. (2000a), *Ian McKeever: Malerier/Paintings 1993 – 2000*. Odense, Denmark: Kunsthallen Brandts Klaedefabrik.

McKeever, I. (2000a), The Slowness of Colour, interview with Ohrt, K. in *Ian McKeever: Malerier/Paintings 1993 – 2000*. Odense, Denmark: Kunsthallen Brandts Klaedefabrik.

McKeever, I. (2000b) interview with Lloyd, J. in *Ian McKeever: Paintings and Works on Paper*. London: Alan Cristea Gallery.

McKeever, I. (2002), *Ian McKeever: Paintings from the Four Quartets Series*. Horsens: Horsens Museum of Modern Art.

McKeever, I. (2003), *Ian McKeever: Watercolours and Gouaches 1993 – 2003*. Skarhamn: Nordic Watercolour Museum.

McKeever, I. (2002), *Ian McKeever: Paintings from the Four Quartets Series*. Horsens: Horsens Museum of Modern Art.

McKeever, I. (2005), *In Praise of Painting*. Brighton: Centre for Contemporary Visual Arts and University of Brighton.

Newman, B. (1992), *Barnett Newman: Selected Writings and Interviews*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Newton, S-J. (2001), *Painting, Psychoanalysis and Spirituality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Nietzsche, F. (1882), The Gay Science, in McGrath, A. (2004), *The Twilight of Atheism*. London: Rider.

Otto, R. (1959), *The Idea of the Holy* [Das Heilige]. 14th edition. Translated from the German by Harvey. J. W., London: Pelican Books.

Reed, D. interview with Ryan, D. (2002), *Talking Painting: Dialogues with Twelve Contemporary Abstract Painters*. London: Routledge.

Reed, D. (1990), interview with Ellis, S., *David Reed*. Los Angeles: WSB Foundation and ART Press.

Reed, D. (2005), *David Reed, Leave Yourself Behind: Paintings and Special Projects 1967 – 2005*. Wichita: Ulrich Museum of Art.

Richter, G, (1993), *The Daily Practice of Painting (Writings 1962-1993)*, London: Thames and Hudson/Anthony d'Offay.

Rogers, C. (Ed. Kirschenbaum. H.) (2003), *The Carl Rogers Reader*, London: Constable.

Rosenblum, R. (1994), *Modern Painting and the Northern Romantic Tradition (Friedrich to Rothko)*. London: Thames and Hudson.

Schiff, R. (2005), Love Her as Herself, in *David Reed, Leave Yourself Behind: Paintings and Special Projects 1967 – 2005*. Wichita: Ulrich Museum of Art.

Steiner, G, (1991), *Real Presence*. London: Faber and Faber.

Steiner, G. (2002), *Grammars of Creation*. London: Faber and Faber.

Storr, R. (2002), *Gerhard Richter, Doubt and Belief in Painting*. New York: MOMA.

Richter, G. (2002), interview in Storr, R., *Gerhard Richter, Doubt and Belief in Painting*. New York: MOMA.

Tacey, D. (2007), *The Spirituality Revolution*. London: Routledge

Taylor, M. C. (1992), *Disfiguring (Art, Architecture and Religion)*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press

Lewison, J. (1996b), Between Black and White, in *Ian McKeever: Paintings 1990 – 1996.* Nottingham: Angel Row Gallery.

Lloyd, J. Drawings from the Last Decade, in McKeever, I. (2003), *Ian McKeever: Watercolours and Gouaches 1993 – 2003.* Skarhamn: Nordic Watercolour Museum.

Lyotard, J. (1982), What is Postmodernism? in Harrison, C. and Wood, P. (eds.) (1997) *Art in Theory 1900 – 1990.* Oxford: Blackwell.

Ohrt, K. (2000), Room for Silence, in McKeever, I. (2000a), *Ian McKeever: Malerier/Paintings 1993 – 2000.* Odense, Denmark: Kunsthallen Brandts Klaedefabrik.

Pollock, J. (1951) in Varnedoe, K. (1999) *Jackson Pollock.* London: Tate Gallery Publishing.

Valjakka, T. (1996b), Painting has a Body, in *Ian McKeever: Paintings 1990 – 1996.* Nottingham: Angel Row Gallery.

Wilber, K. (1993), *The Spectrum of Consciousness.* 2nd edition. Wheaton, Illinois: Quest Books.

Wilson, C. (1991), *Beyond the Outsider.* New York: Carrol &Graf.

Wilson, C. (1982), *Frankenstein's Castle.* Sevenoaks: Ashgrove Press.

Yau, J. (2005) A Painter of Post-Modern Life, in Reed, D. (2005), *David Reed, Leave Yourself Behind: Paintings and Special Projects 1967 – 2005.* Wichita: Ulrich Museum of Art.

Yeats, W. B. (1971), *Selected Poetry.* London: Macmillan.

Bibliography

Antoine, J. P., Koch, G., Lang, L. (1995), *Gerhard Richter*. Paris: Dis Voir.

Ashton, P. W. (2007a), *From the Brink (Experiences of the Void from a Depth Psychology Perspective)*. London: Karnac Books.

Ashton, P.W. (ed.) (2007b), *Evocations of Absence (Multidisciplinary Perspectives on Void States*. New Orleans: Spring Journal Books.

Batchelor, D. (2000), *Chromophobia*. London: Reaktion Books.

Baudrillard, J. (2006), *Simulacra and Simulation* [Simulacres et simulation]. Translated from the French by Glaser, F.G., Michigan: University of Michigan Press.

Baudrillard, J. (1993), *The Transparency of Evil* [La Transparence du Mal]. Translated from the French by Benedict, J. London: Verso.

Beckley, B. (ed.) (1998), *Uncontrollable Beauty*. New York: Allworth Press.

Beckley, B. (ed.) (2001), *Sticky Sublime*. New York: Allworth Press.

Benjamin, A. (1996), *What Is Abstraction?* London: Academy Editions.

Burke, E. (1992), A Philosophical Enquiry. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Burke, S. (1992), *The Death and Return of the Author (Criticism and Subjectivity in Barthes, Foucault and Derrida)*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Bohm, D. (1981), *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd.

Buchloh, B., Chevrier, J., Rochlitz, R., Zweite, A. (2000), *Photography and Painting in the Work of Gerhard Richter*. 2nd ed. Barcelona: MACBA.

Bulhof, N. I. and Laurens, T. K. (eds.) (2000), *Flight of the Gods (Philosophical perspectives on Negative Theology*. New York: Fordham University Press.

Caputo, J. D. (1997), *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida (Religion without Religion)*. Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

Caputo, J. D. (2001), *On Religion*. London: Routledge.

Cardinal, R. (1984), *Expressionism*. London: Paladin.

Carr, K. L. (1992), *The Banalization of Nihilism (Twentieth Century responses to Meaninglessness)*. New York: State University of New York Press.

Casement, A. and Tacey, D. (eds.) (2006), *The Idea of the Numinous (Contemporary Jungian and Psychoanalytical Perspectives)*. London: Routledge.

Cheetham, M.A. (1994), *The Rhetoric of Purity (Essentialist Theory and the Advent of Abstract Painting)*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Comte-Sponville, A. (2008), *The Book of Atheist Spirituality*. London: Bantam Press.

Coward, H. and Foshay, T. (eds.) (1992), *Derrida and Negative Theology*. New York: State University of New York Press.

Derrida, J. and Vattimo, G. (eds.) (2003), *Religion.* Cambridge: Polity Press.

De Kooning, W. (1990), *The Collected Writings of Willem De Kooning*. 2nd edition. Madras & New York: Hanuman Books.

Ehrenzweig, A. (1993), *The Hidden Order of Art (A Study in the Psychology of Artistic Imagination)*. London: Weidenfeld.

Eliade, M. (1991), *The Myth of The Eternal Return, or, Cosmos and History* . [Le Mythe de l'eternel retour: archetypes et repetition].Translated from the French by Willard. R. Trask. Bollingen Series 46/Princeton University Press.

Eliade, M. (1987), *The Sacred and The Profane: The Nature of Religion* .Translated from the French by Willard. R. Trask. New York: Harvest/Harcourt Inc.

Eliade, M. (1985), (ed. Apostolos-Cappadona, D.). Symbolism, the Sacred, and the Arts. New York: Continuum.

Eliade, M. (2004), *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ectstasy.* [Le Chamanisme et les techniques archaiques de l'extase].Translated from the French by Willard. R. Trask. Princeton: Bollingen Series 76/Princeton University Press.

Eliot, T. S. (1974), *Collected Poems 1909-1962*, London: Faber and Faber.

Elkins, J. (1998), *On Pictures and the Words that Fail Them*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Elkins, J. (2000), *What Painting Is*. New York: Routledge.

Elkins, J. (2004), *On the Strange Place of Religion in Contemporary Art*. New York: Routledge.

Elkins, J. (2008), *Six Stories from the End of Representation*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Elkins, J. and Morgan, D. (eds.) (2009), *Re-Enchantment (The Art Seminar; vol. 7)*. New York: Routledge.

Fer, B. (2004), *The Infinite Line (re-making art after modernism)*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Franke, W. (ed.) (2007a), *On What Cannot Be Said (Apophatic Discourses in Philosophy, Religion, Literature, and the Arts)* Volume 1 Classic Formulations. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press.

Franke, W. (ed.) (2007b), *On What Cannot Be Said (Apophatic Discourses in Philosophy, Religion, Literature, and the Arts)* Volume 2 Modern and Contemporary Transformations. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press.

Frankl, V. E. (2004), *Man's Search for Meaning*. London: Rider Books.

Frankl, V. E. (2000), *Man's Search for Ultimate Meaning*. New York: Basic Books.

Freud, S. (2004), *Civilization and its Discontents*. London: Penguin Books.

Fuller, P. (1981), *Beyond the Crisis in Art*. London: Writers and Readers.

Fuller, P. (1983a), *The Naked Artist (Art and Biology)*. London: Writers and Readers.

Fuller, P. (1983b), *Aesthetics after Modernism*. London: Writers and Readers.

Fuller, P. (1983), *Art and Psychoanalysis*, London: Writers and Readers.

Fuller, P. (1990), *Images of God (The Consolations of Lost Illusions)*. London: Hogarth Press.

Fuller, P. (1988), *Theoria (Art and the Absence of Grace)*. London: Chatto & Windus.

Gablik, S. (2002), *The Reenchantment of Art*. London: Thames and Hudson.

Gamwell, L. (2002), *Exploring the Invisible (art, science and the invisible)*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Gamwell, L. (2000), *Dreams 1900 – 2000 (science, art and the unconscious mind)*. New York: Cornell University Press.

Gilbert-Rolfe, J. (1999), *Beauty and the Contemporary Sublime*. New York: Allworth Press.

Golding, J. (2002), *Paths to the Absolute*. London: Thames and Hudson.

Gooch, T. A. (2000), *The Numinous and Modernity (An Interpretation of Rudolf Otto's Philosophy of Religion)*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.

Halley, P. (1991), *Peter Halley Collected Essays*. Zurich: Sonnabend Gallery and Lapis Press.

Halley, P. (1997), *Peter Halley Recent Essays 1990-96*. New York: Edgewise Press.

Harris, J. (ed.) (2003), *Critical Perspectives on Contemporary Painting (Hybridity, Hegemony, Historicism)*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press and Tate Liverpool.

Harrison, C. and Wood, P. (eds.) (1997), *Art in Theory 1900 – 1990*. Oxford: Blackwell

Hertz, N. (Ed.) (1985), *The End of the Line (Essays on Psychoanalysis and the Sublime)*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Hickey, D. (2009), *The Invisible Dragon (Essays on Beauty)*. Chicago:University of Chicago Press.

Hillman, J. (1997), *The Thought of the Heart & the Soul of the World*. Connecticut: Spring Publications.

Hillman, J. (1997), *Archetypal Psychology*. Connecticut: Spring Publications Inc.

Hillman, J. (1979), *The Dream and the Underworld*. New York: HarperPerennial.

Hillman, J. (1994), *Insearch - psychology and religion*. Connecticut: Spring Publications Inc.

Hillman, J and Ventura, M. (1993), *We've had A Hundred Years of Psychotherapy and The World's Getting Worse*, New York: Harper-One.

Hillman, J. (1992), *Re-Visioning Psychology*, New York: Harper Perennial.

Hillman, J. (1989), (ed. Thomas Moore). *A Blue Fire (the essential James Hillman)*, London: Routledge.

Huxley, A. (1982), *The Doors of Perception/Heaven and Hell*. London: Granada.

Keats, J. (2003), *The Complete Poems*. London: Penguin Books.

Krauss, R. E. (1985), *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press.

Kung, H. (1981), *Art and the Question of Meaning*. Translated from the German by Edward Quinn. London: SCM Press.

Kuspit, D. (1993), *The New Subjectivism: Art in the 1980's*. New York: Da Capo Press.

Kuspit, D. (1994), *Signs of Psyche in Modern and Postmodern Art*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kuspit, D. (1995), *The Cult of the Avant-Garde Artist*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kuspit, D. and Gamwell, L. (1996), *Health and Happiness in 20th Century Avant-Garde Art*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Kuspit, D. (2000a), *The Dialectic Of Decadence (Between Advance And Decline In Art)*. New York: Allworth Press.

Kuspit, D. (2000b), *The Rebirth of Painting In The Late Twentieth Century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kuspit, D. (2000c), *Psychostrategies of Avant-Garde Art*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kuspit, D. (2000d), *Redeeming Art: Critical Reveries*. New York: Allworth Press.

Kuspit, D. (2004), *The End Of Art*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lasch, C. (1984), *The Minimal Self*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company

Letche, J. (ed.) (1995), *Fifty Key Contemporary Thinkers (From structuralism to postmodernity)*. London: Routledge.

Lipsey, R. (2004), *The Spiritual in Twentieth-Century Art*. New York: Dover.

Lyotard, J. F. (1991), *The Inhuman* [L'Inhumain].Translated from the French by Bennington, G. and Bowlby. R. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Maclagan, D. (2001), *Psychological Aesthetics (Painting, Feeling and Making Sense)*. London: Jessica Kingsley.

Maleuvre, D. (2006), *The Religion of Reality (An Inquiry into the Self, Art, and Transcendence)*. Washington, D.C.: Catholic University Press.

Malpas, S. (2003), *Jean-Francois Lyotard*. London and New York: Routledge.

Marcuse, H. (1978), *The Aesthetic Dimension (Toward a Critique of Marxist Aesthetics)*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Maslow, A. H. (1968), *Toward a Psychology of Being*. New York: D.Van Nostrand Company inc.

Maslow, A. H. (1977), *The Farther Reaches Of Human Nature*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.

McGrath, A. (2004), *The Twilight Of Atheism*. London: Rider.

McKeever, I. (2005), *In Praise of Painting*. Brighton: Centre for Contemporary Visual Arts and the University of Brighton.

Newman, B. (1992), *Barnett Newman Selected Writings and Interviews*. Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press

Newton, S. J. (2001), *Painting, Psychoanalysis and Spirituality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Otto, R. (1959), *The Idea of the Holy* [Das Heilige]. 14th edition. Translated from the German by Harvey. J. W., London: Pelican Books.

Reinhardt, Ad. (ed. Rose, B.) (1991), *Art as Art: The selected Writings of Ad Reinhardt*. California: University of California Press

Richter, G. (1993), *The Daily Practice of Painting (Writings 1962-1993)*. London: Thames and Hudson/Anthony d'Offay.

Rogers, C. (ed. Kirschenbaum, H.) (2003), *The Carl Rogers Reader*. London: Constable.

Rosenblum, R. (1994), *Modern Painting and the Northern Romantic Tradition, (Friedrich to Rothko)*. London: Thames and Hudson.

Rothko, M. (2004), *The Artists Reality (Philosophies of Art)*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

Ryan, D. (2002), *Talking Painting: Dialogues with Twelve Contemporary Abstract Painters*. London: Routledge.

Sarup, M. (1993), *Post-structuralism and Postmodernism*. Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf.

Sells, M. A. (1994), *Mystical Languages of Unsaying*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Schumacher, E. F. (2004), *A Guide for the Perplexed*. New York: Harper Perennial.

Sedlmayr, H. (1957), *Art in Crisis (the lost centre)*. London: Hollis and Carter.

Siegel, J. (1999), *Painting after Pollock (Structures of Influence)*. Singapore: G & B Arts International.

Sim, S. (1992), *Beyond Aesthetics (Confrontations with Poststructuralism and Postmodernism)*. Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf.

Steiner, G. (1972), *In Bluebeard's Castle (Some Notes Towards the Re-definition of Culture)*. London: Faber & Faber.

Steiner, G. (1991), *Real Presence*. London: Faber and Faber.

Steiner, G. (2002), *Grammars of Creation*. London: Faber and Faber.

Storr, R. (2002), *Gerhard Richter, Doubt and Belief in Painting*. New York: MOMA.

Tacey, D. (2007), *The Spirituality Revolution*. London & New York: Routledge

Taylor, M. C. (1992), *Disfiguring (Art, Architecture and Religion)*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Tuchman, M. (1986), *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890-1985*. New York: Abbeville Press.

Tucker, M. (1992), Dreaming with Open Eyes (the shamanic spirit in twentieth century art and culture). San Francisco: Aquarian/Harper SanFrancisco.

Wilber, K. (1993), *The Spectrum of Consciousness*. 2nd edition. Wheaton, Illinois: Quest Books.

Wilson, C. (2001), *The Outsider*. London: Phoenix.

Wilson, C. (1991), *Beyond the Outsider*. New York: Carrol &Graf.

Wilson, C. (1979), *New Pathways in Psychology (Maslow and the Post-Freudian Revolution)*. London: Victor Gollancz Ltd.

Wilson, C. (1982), *Frankenstein's Castle*. Sevenoaks: Ashgrove Press.

Yeats,W.B. (1971), *Selected Poetry*, London: Macmillan.

Zukav, G. (1984), *The Dancing Wu Li Masters (an overview of the new physics)*. London: Flamingo.

Catalogues and Monographs

McKeever, I, (1979), *Fields, Waterfalls and Birds*. Bristol: Arnolfini Gallery.

McKeever, I. (1981), *Ian McKeever: Islands and Night Flak*. Liverpool: Walker Museum and Art Gallery.

McKeever, I. (1990a), *Ian McKeever: Paintings 1978 – 1990.* London: Whitechapel Art Gallery.

McKeever, I. (1990b), *Ian McKeever: A History of Rocks*. Waldkirch: Waldkircher Verlagsgesellschaft.

McKeever, I. (1994), *Ian McKeever: Hartgrove Paintings1992 – 1994.* London: Bernard Jacobsen Gallery.

McKeever, I. (1995), *Ian McKeever: The Marianne North Paintings*. London: Matt's Gallery.

McKeever, I. (1996a), *Ian McKeever: Works on Paper 1981-1996.* Brighton: Contemporary Art Books, G&B International and University of Brighton.

McKeever, I. (1996b), *Ian McKeever: Paintings 1990 – 1996.* Nottingham: Angel Row Gallery.

McKeever, I. (1997), *Ian McKeever: Colour Etching.* London: Alan Cristea Gallery.

McKeever, I. (1998), *Ian McKeever: Twelve x Eight and other Woodcut Monoprints 1997 – 1998.* London: Alan Cristea Gallery.

McKeever, I. (2000a), *Ian McKeever: Malerier/Paintings 1993 – 2000.* Odense, Denmark: Kunsthallen Brandts Klaedefabrik.

McKeever, I. (2000b), Ian McKeever: Paintings and Works on Paper. London: Alan Cristea Gallery.

McKeever, I. (2002), *Ian McKeever: Paintings from the Four Quartets Series*. Horsens: Horsens Museum of Modern Art.

McKeever, I. (2003), *Ian McKeever: Watercolours and Gouaches 1993 – 2003.* Skarhamn: Nordic Watercolour Museum.

McKeever, I. (2004), *Ian McKeever: Recent Paintings and Ten Years of Drawing.* Cambridge: Kettle's Yard and University of Cambridge.

McKeever, I. (2004b), *Ian McKeever: Sentinel, Recent Paintings and Works on Paper.* London: Alan Cristea Gallery.

Reed, D. (1990), *David Reed.* Los Angeles: WSB Foundation and ART Press.

Reed, D. (1998), *David Reed Paintings: Motion Pictures*. San Diego: Distributed Art Publishers.

Reed, D. (2001), *David Reed: You Look Good in Blue*. Hannover: Verlag fur Moderne Kunst Nurnberg.

Reed, D. (2005), *David Reed, Leave Yourself Behind: Paintings and Special Projects 1967 – 2005*. Wichita: Ulrich Museum of Art.

Richter, G. (1991), *Gerhard Richter*. London: Tate Gallery.

Richter, G. (1995), *Gerhard Richter: Painting in the Nineties.* London: Anthony d'Offay Gallery.

Richter, G. (1998), *Gerhard Richter: Landscapes.* Ostfildern-Ruit: Cantz.

Richter, G. (1998), *Gerhard Richter 1998.* London: Anthony d'Offay Gallery.

Richter, G. (1998), *Gerhard Richter: Documenta IX 1992.* New York: Marian Goodman Gallery.

Richter, G. (1996), *Gerhard Richter 100 Pictures.* Ostfildern-Ruit: Cantz.

Richter, G. (1996), *Gerhard Richter 100 Pictures.* Ostfildern-Ruit: Cantz.

Periodicals/Journals

Frieze: journal of contemporary art & culture, (2010), *Religion & Spirituality.* Issue No.135.