SELF(ISH) – FUSION THINKING AND PRACTICE – A (MAINLY) VISUAL INVESTIGATION OF POLY-MODAL ART-MAKING

by

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DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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ABSTRACT

If it could be seen that a 'body of training' has a crucial impact on a creative practice, my own history of 'training' would be difficult to trace within any specific discipline or mode of self-expression. I have been 'trained' as a visual artist, actor, performance-artist, and to some extent, musician/sonic performer. This coexistence of modalities with associated meta-praxis, has in fact created a set of parallel dimensions embodied within a collective of theories as well as practices.

On the one hand, this collective of practices has involved a view of myself (and what I make) as a form of 'research object'. But on another hand, the very intersection between these modes of practice has inevitably involved a form of experimentation and enquiry that has stretched far beyond the boundaries of 'self'. Not only have these diverse practices 'informed' each other, but the fusion of these modalities has created a set of research questions that interrogate the validity of self (and self-practice) as a form of research outcome.

Consequently, at a key stage of my research, I decided to 'pull focus' on particular disciplinary modes and practices in order to best define my practice and its context within notions of defining a 'self'. This is why the bulk of my practical submission has taken the form of a selected series of mainly large-scale works on paper. At an earlier stage, my visual work was equally disposed of representational (figurative) and non-representational outcomes. However, notions (and questions) of 'self' are capable of presentation in the abstract domain of signs, symbols and 'signals', I chose to represent questions about intuition, emotion, spontaneity and improvisation via the submission of a series of entirely abstract work.

In many if not all cases, the process of execution is as important as the outcome. To this end, where appropriate, I have also chosen to represent 'process' by means of:-

- Reproductions (where appropriate) of sketches and preparatory notations in the form of image, text, video and other forms of documentation, from time to time;
• Installed performance experiments of either a personal or collaborative nature (the latter normally being in the form of collaborations between myself and other visual artists or musicians) and represented by means of edited parts from video documentation;
• Sonic experiments and collaborations between myself in the role of musician, and other musicians (CD submission).

However, and most importantly, the arrangement and ordering of the completed works on paper is also intended to represent a documentation of a process where notions of ‘completion’, via a series, can be seen as evidence of the nature of a continuous and gradually unfolding process of experimentation and ‘testing’. In other words, the entire body of completed works on paper should be seen as an holistic exercise in questioning the position of my own body (and practice) as illuminating the position of my mind and senses within an evolving set of works.

The written thesis follows this same ‘chain’ format. It is constructed in the form of a textual continuum that both spans and links several theoretical and practical discourses. In each case (with the exception of the introduction and conclusion), I have sought to analyse, evaluate, document and criticise the sources, processes and outcomes of each work. I have also taken the view that the series of works beg questions of generic relationships. There is an obvious diversity of ‘idea’ but in the main, the paintings/drawings are represented by a relatively heterogeneous set of stylistic practices.

These heterogeneous elements emerged as a result of a highly personalised journey of exploration. At no point have I taken the view that theoretical contexts (those derived more usually from an historical analysis of past and current trends), will be the determining core of either my practice or my research with and into that practice. The written thesis charts a progression of a body of work that has been practice-led. In so-doing, it also connects several modes of creative self-expression together; most notably, music, theatre and visual-performance. Consequently, and because I believe the process of working to be as significant (if not more so) as the outcomes. The written thesis is both a ‘history’ and a critique of that journey.
All my practice is ‘primed’ by different approaches to research. The written thesis embodies the three stages that articulate the sequencing of my practice, namely;

- Source-research-memory-theory-experience;
- Practice-improvisation- visual experimentation;
- Review and notions of progression/linkage between one state (and stage) of practice and another.

The introduction is concerned with the contextualisation of my practice and descriptions of the ‘ordering’ and determinants for making work. The conclusion concerns itself with the analysis and debriefing that accrues from a body of completed work. But I have also concluded by drawing attention to a poly-modal approach to practice, one that encompasses a ‘collective’ of techniques and artistic languages, across and between one mode of self-expression and another.
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Tom Amos, and in memory of Joan Amos, thank you.
Author's Declaration

At no time during the registration for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy has the author been registered for any other University Award.

This research was supported with a part-time fee bursary and other financial assistance provided by Dartington College of Arts.

A programme of research and practice was undertaken which involved several creative arts modes of self-expression, including; Fine Arts practices (painting, drawing and live-art video installation); collaborative practices (mainly with performing musicians); some text-based installation work and sonic performances using the voice and instruments.

Some research was undertaken in Thailand and in Europe, including performances and exhibitions.

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INTRODUCTION

Miro offered us the continual changing and infinite flux of nature; faced with immutable laws, (he offered us) the rhythms and spontaneous ebb and flow of the waves in a living world. He showed us that we are all equal because we are all made from the stars themselves.

Antoni Tapies

Beginning my written thesis with a statement about the artist Joan Miro may at first glance (and given the spectrum of visual work by which my research is presented), seem to be slightly incongruous. Certainly, my practice as a visual artist seeks to plumb the spontaneous. It also seeks to embody a kind of natural ‘flux’ by means of a body of work where line (or mark) is a dominant and incessant device and modality for working. Here already, there is a commonality between my own practice and that ascribed to Miro. But my work also relates (to Miro) in my ultimate choice of ‘abstraction’ as a means of expressing myself visually.

From the outset of my research and practice, I knew that I was embarking upon a journey in which a body of practice would serve to liberate me from a form of art-making of a detached yet introspective kind to that of a public ‘performer’; able to execute works in and among the social domain. A visual language has emerged that has revealed itself via a prolific production of work, much of it work on paper. From the outset, I chose a restricted number of mediums with which to make pieces, namely; charcoal, ink, water-based paint and graphite. That this may immediately suggest a parallel restriction of the use of colour, I will deal with later.

All art-making could be said to have ‘a history’ which is another way of saying that the art-maker has had ‘a life’. I happen to believe that everything done (experienced) in that ‘life’ may have an influence on the work that follows the ‘wave-form’ of life itself. My own creative and professional life has perhaps been more in the form of a meander (such as rivers in deltas do) rather than the single energy of a great wave. But

Tapies, A, La Practica dell'Arte, Galeria Contemporanea, Rome, 1970
then, meanders cover a great deal of ground, and I have never wavered from exploring creative possibilities in as many modes and forms of practice as possible.

Drawing has been an enduring and deeply permeating activity since childhood. Using a blue biro pen, my mother showed me how to make a copy of a woman’s face, the face being framed in a 1940’s ‘box’ of curled hair; the torso clothed in a slim-fitting dress with a narrow and belted waist. I also remember making many drawings on my own body, to the dismay and sudden disapproval of my family. Paper was suddenly in abundance and I was free to work in my own visual world for the first time. The gift of a device known (then) as a *Spirograph* led to many years of playful engagement with the swirling vortexes and interlacing lines made so easily possible by the device.²

"*Spirograph*" is a plastic toy that allows the user to create interlocking spirals and curves. It consists of a ring and a disk with hole in it. A pen is put through the hole and guided - by the hole - to leave a spiral, curved drawing. Originally "*Spirograph*" was invented in 1962 by the British engineer Denys Fisher (1918 - 2002), during his research on a new design for bomb detonators for NATO. Fisher's problem was to apply his invention to industrial world, but the family was so excited by Spirograph that Denys Fisher decided to sell it as a toy. In 1965 the new toy was shipped to first customers, it was voted the best educational toy for 4 years in a row (1966 - 1969). Denys Fisher, the inventor of this perfect toy, died 17 September, 2002.³

Plate 1

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² Curiously, much of the work submitted for my final exhibition could be seen to have an abiding relationship with these kinds of 'drawings'. This inevitably leads me to wonder if the work that has been uncovered during the progress of my research is also a form of 'remembering'. It is as Tapies also said (about Miro), "we ought to seek once more for the purity and innocence of the first day'.

³ [http://www.bebits.com/app/3466](http://www.bebits.com/app/3466)
The complex designs created by using Spirograph, captured me. The following plates are photographs of original Spirograph drawings, I made in c.1969. I still have the original Spirograph box, and first works made with this tool, as treasured possessions, that were part of my early days of mark making.

Plate 2

Most of the drawings from my pre-teens and of this kind, were abstract of course. At no time did I ever question the validity of abstraction as a means of expressing myself. Most work done at Primary School was heavily biased towards craft-work, and what little art-work I made was strictly confined to making copies of things and not stepping out and beyond into the kind of fanciful regions of possibility that my work at home allowed me to do. A remarkable woman however, curiously named *Ida Profitt*, came into my life as a High School student. Here was a woman who had been trained at the University of Florence (of all places!), and was both art historian and practitioner. She taught me calligraphy (more abstraction it seems), and frequently emphasised formal and structural aspects of drawing and rendering. But there was never any unnecessary focus on the Renaissance alone. She was constantly reminding
or urging me to look at ‘the moderns’ including the work of Kandinsky, the latter forming a perennial influence on my work ever since.

If it is possible to see juvenile work as ‘seminal’, an ‘A’ level art-piece, a painting called The Garden Wall, was taken from a back-yard source at home. First, I had taken rubbings from the red-brick wall and then painted over the textured and planar base of it. The method called frottage is a process in which a sheet of paper is placed on the surface of an object and then penciled over until the texture of the surface is transferred. The German painter-poet Max Ernst pioneered this method, although at the time I was using this at school, I had no reference to him, and only through research at a later date, did I discover the Ernst name for this method.

This was one of a series of ‘studies’ that I made on this theme. The painting itself gained me a ‘D’, which was nothing less than a terrible shock and disappointment to me at the time. My passion and enthusiasm for the work had been shattered by the severity of the criticism.

I then moved to a Foundation Year at Liverpool Polytechnic and came under the influence of a brilliant painter, Sam Walsh. He and another painter, John Baum, acted as mentors and gurus for the entire year, constantly confronting me with new ways of seeing, and a great diversity of mediums and methods with which to develop an emergent visual arts practice. John Baum’s work was highly graphic and ‘flat’ in nature, mainly concerning itself with various aspects of portraiture (albeit in a Hockneyesque style of execution).

I can’t be sure how I came to be interviewed for admission to a graphic arts degree programme at Manchester Polytechnic, but perhaps the 80s were, after all, already foreshadowing the dominance of graphic art that was to become the ‘hallmark’ of the Saatchi-empire a little later. Here it was that I was working in advertising, illustration and art-direction, yet for the entire time there, I longed to gravitate to fine arts. Perhaps the biggest and most significant body of learning from this course was the work done in ‘problem-solving’ on paper and work undertaken in visual composition.

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4 I ended up doing a short placement with the Saatchi and Saatchi Advertising Agency in London, in 1986!
Personal entanglements led me back to Liverpool (from a short time in London) to join with the rock music world. Living as I was with a successful rock musician, his own practice infected me with a desire to play myself. I am tempted to describe a period of ten years in the loosest terms because perhaps ‘loose’ would seem to fit well in terms of my being able to focus on any particular mode of self-expression beyond being keen to try just about every possibility imaginable. This was a period in which a kaleidoscope of activities ‘happened’—model; actor, work in television, band singer, researcher for a magazine and presenter for a travel programme that never went to air!

The death of my mother in 1996 caused me to stop the journeying with a jolt. It took me two years to recover from the event, during which time I travelled in Japan and Mexico, and began to take a grip of issues of self-expression and fulfilment that the previous frenzy had obscured and ‘darkened’. The last theatre company, in which I worked as an actor/director, employed a person who had studied at Dartington College of Arts for a degree in theatre. It was she who advised me to consider applying to take a Taught Masters degree. The ‘visual performance’ elements at the College attracted me a great deal, seeming to encapsulate many of my earlier life-experiences and acquired life-skills. Whilst on the one hand I felt comfortable, even ‘at home’ with the practical work, on the other hand I struggled desperately with the academic aspect of the course. Clearly a whole body of languages and scholarly contexts were being bandied-about in a form that left me as an outsider. A ‘rite’ of contextualisation and theoretical orienteering was essential and with an appropriate body of readings to accompany it.

I realised quickly that though I had considerable experience as a studio-worker and practitioner, I had all-to-little experience of ‘study’ itself. Methodological considerations, the essential work in setting bibliographical traces, was perhaps ‘dissonant’ with what I had come to believe to be the real basis for a viable and ongoing practice. Learning of this kind begged serious and key questions of practice and technique. I had to learn the discipline of reflective analysis and criticism in order to create a new theoretical framework for a set of creative (and practice-based) investigations.
On reflection, a great deal of the performance-work completed at that time was concerned with death and remembrance, especially associated with the unresolved processes of grieving about my mother's death in particular. However, a process such as that could rightly be seen as a personal embodiment and one that does not necessarily engage in 'reach-out' beyond my own world. Change, for that is what in fact was taking place, is seldom free of catharsis. Within years of theatre practice earlier, I had always had the 'presence' (veil) of a script or character behind which to hide or with which to disguise myself. But the performance-work that was starting to happen was tangibly exposing and revealing.

Here was an emergent practice that engaged with issues of acting and action. I sought in fact, a practice that would slide between the two modalities. Acting, within the modality of theatre-performance, is an additive process in which the actor 'fattens', or enhances notions of the 'role', normally based upon the text of the play (action). In a sense, acting is a process of removal from notions of an authentic 'self'. Even within the contexts of Devised Theatre, there seemed to me to be too many shifts into a personification of a proscriptive type. The 'action' of a piece of devised theatre was still partially confined within contexts from the work of an actor upon a stage and not a realisation of my own persona.

Rather than come back to a text considered as definitive, it is important above all to break the slavery of the theatre from the theatre, and to find again the notion of a kind of unique language that lies suspended between the gesture and thought...a situation prior to and able to choose its own language; music, gesture, words...to create beneath language an underground impression of harmony and analogue.

Antonin Artaud

I wanted to make work that formed the basis of a kind of absolute reality. Rather than 'fabricating' (or merely decorating) a text or an idea expressed in symbols (created by someone else). I wanted to create work that interpreted (or represented) a personal reality. In a sense, I am suggesting that the only absolute reality is that contained within the mind of the thinker/maker. More, however, I am suggesting that notions of reality are bound to be subjective. To rely on another's 'version' of reality, would turn

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cognition into a received and once-removed kind of knowledge or experience. I will develop this idea further a little later and below.

Reliance upon personal experience and observation carries a potential for vulnerability. Such a vulnerability seemed (to me) to be never more exposed than when I was working in terms of representational visual models. Curiously then, such moments of vulnerability and exposure led me back to notions about the value of abstraction and mark-making. Much acting (in the traditional sense) is in fact a denial of reality. But I wanted to pull myself into an ultimately ‘real place’; a place where the interrogation of the relationship between work and self is authentic.

Whoever is capable of listening to himself, recognising his own instincts, and also engrossing himself reflectively in every problem, will need not such crutches (Schoenberg is referring to releasing oneself from taught skills and upbringing). One does not need to be a pioneer to create in this way, only a man who takes himself seriously and thereby take seriously that which is the true task of humanity in every intellectual or artistic field; to recognise and to express what one has recognised.

At the moment of turning outwards (away from the purely reflective and subjective), my practice perhaps for the first time began to combine and fuse elements of the intellectual with that of the expressive. My art-making was no longer just about me.

every painter ‘au fond’ is a voyeur, the question is whether he has a vision

Curiously, a key moment in which I remember this new ‘outlook’ taking place, was a collaborative work with two cellists and the installation artist, Chris Sacker. Five minutes before their ‘performance’, I was given a text composed by Chris Sacker, to read during the performance. I was given ‘complete freedom’ to read the text at any time during the piece. I did not even have time to read the text before the performance began. I had no idea what was going to happen beyond a natural expectation that the two cellists would ‘bounce’ sonic ideas off each other and that Chris Sacker would simultaneously generate a series of visual responses to and interactions with the acoustic invention of the two musicians.

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7 Terenzo, Stephanie; The Collective Writings of Robert Motherwell, Oxford University Press, New York, 1992, page 153
The only instruction given (by Sacker), was that I was to take part in a textual confrontation between Sacker and myself (he was also reading from a text). A process of alternation took place between the two ‘reciters’, but at a certain moment, Sacker left the seat opposite me, and moved to the wall to start making marks. I continued to sit at a table and read from the text before me.

What I sought (even then), was a type of performance in which action (my action) was paramount. Introspection (always a self-conscious act) may be acceptable in terms of interpretation in the role of an actor, but too much introspection can presumably lead to a denial of the ‘authenticity’ of the role being enacted. I wanted to make work that had an absolute reality within it. Where it seemed that my own sense of reality collided or differed from the ‘external’ forces of text or theatrical devising, I sensed a removal from a role in which I could portray my own actions.

To have simply read the text (as one might read a set of instructions from a manual, for example), would have been a form of ‘action’ that was limited by a specific context in which I would not have expected to ‘act’. I knew at once that I had moved beyond ‘reading’ to acting.8 There is, it seems to me, always a persona at play within any act of reading, even when reading something from a technical manual telling me how to repair a broken bicycle. It is virtually impossible to ‘wear’ the neutral mask during an act of reading, even with no audience present. I found myself trying to find a ‘sense’ in the text that was not infected by my personal history.

I had worked with the company Theatre de Complicite, in a residency course at the Everyman Theatre, in Liverpool, some ten years previously. The understanding and experience of the work during this time period, has never been forgotten, where I was working with the company, and investigating the neutral mask. The idea of using a neutral mask to train actors was first introduced by Jacques Copeau at The Theatre du Vieux Columbier. Copeau started with hoods, to move to a blank form, and then discovered the need for a mask that represented neutrality. It was Jacques Lecoq, along with the Italian sculptor Sartori, who progressed these training methods, and

8 Sacker’s text was in the form of a kind of appraisal of a long-term relationship that he had had.
advanced the neutral mask itself, for developing actors. The neutral mask is without expression, it is mask of calm and represents a being that has no past and with no thought of the future, but exists only in the present.

"The neutral mask, when placed on the face, should enable one to experience the state of neutrality prior to an action, a state of receptiveness to everything around us, with no inner conflict."

Jacques Lecoq

Within the Sacker text and performance/action, I decided to use the neutral mask as a device that would enable me to 'put the words out' into and from a significance of their own. By this means, I assumed that I would be putting the words into the performance without a specific characterisation being imposed (by me), and that the text would appear as 'read', but not by someone with a specific role in some form of 'drama' or 'play'. The two cellists were sitting, back to back, thus accentuating the need to listen to each other without visual cues. There was no musical score. Sacker too, had his back to the two musicians and myself. I was, in fact, the only person in the 'quartet' that was looking-in, and yet I was the only one there with a pre-written script from which to work at this point. It was not that I felt the need to 'improvise' as the other three were; rather I wanted to restructure the text in an unexpected way. In this context, for example, some lines had a resonance or form that caused me to repeat them many times, though not asked-for in the text itself. By this time, I was aware of the rhythmic patterning between the two cellists and selected key lines from the text with which I could engage in a kind of sonic interplay with the instrumental 'music'. I was now using my voice as a third improvising instrument. The text, by this time, was as much a sonic 'score' as it was a piece of writing.

In this context, there was a sense of displacement of 'self' in which I became more an instrument for the inherent (implicit) passage of the words, without needing to 'place' myself in the role of 'reader'. A kind of flux appeared, where I was at times 'reading the script' and at other times, 'performing' it. If it might be possible to consider any piece of text as 'knowing' something, my role was occasionally one of simply registering what the script embodied, but at other times I imposed a contextual-shift

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9 http://www.movingword.org/workshop.htm
that was the result of a decision to engage with the performance as a whole and not with the script alone. I couldn't do this without taking the role of 'actor' rather than 'reader'.

The difference between acting and action (in the context of that performance), was not just a matter of modalities of delivery. My presence alternated between acting (which is surely often also 'reaction'?), and trying to find an action that was not governed by text or context in the usual sense. Acting has obvious and even traditional performance-modalities and contexts. Action is much more phenomenological, and can be removed from the usual paradigms of script and narrative that forms the basis of even some of the most 'modern' forms of theatre.

The different sections and style of writing was also an indicator as to how I would 'perform/act', or read the words, with a difference being between prose and metered poetic writing. Sometimes I chose to repeat or re-phrase words, copying my own rhythmic patterns, and adding varying intonations and phrasing. Sometimes I altered the meaning of the words, or gave a new slant to what was said, by changing the dynamic and timbre in how it was said and performed. For example, in the following section, the words 'creatures' and 'brass' were repeated for maybe a dozen times, until the voice became a sound; a part of the overall sound being produced by the cellists and the sounds created by Sacker as he banged his head and body against the wall.

Head Three, text written by Chris Sacker; (section).

He arrived in a beautiful garden filled with red and white roses, as he walked through the carpet of roses a wonderful calm prevailed. As he was enjoying the beautiful fragrance a wind began to blow from the north which moved the many roses creating a myriad pattern of changing form in his vision... there appeared out of the midst of the tempest in the distance four creatures in the likeness of a man, but all had four faces;... he noticed that each creature was the colour of brass...

Had I chosen to simply read the Sacker text, I would have been reading the words as though they were an action in their own right. And, sometimes that is what I actually did. But at other times, I was aware of the actions of the other three, who had no script; could not see each other, and who didn't know what was going to happen next.
In order to join them in this unscripted space, I had the choice to abandon the script altogether or to treat it in a way that went beyond the script itself. This is why I employed the neutral mask, because by using it, I could reconfigure the script to form the basis of improvisations of my own. These improvisations were also interactive with the workings of the other three performers.

Sacker’s script may have been performed by me as just that - a script. In which case I would have had to act-out what that script suggested that I do. If this were so, what he gave me to do was to play the role of ‘actor’ and to perform the text as an actor would. However, as Chris himself said, ‘what you are taking part in is not a performance, but an action.’ Had I read the script as a script, I would have performed it, but it would not have been an action. In making the shift between reading the text and ‘acting’ with it, I made the leap between acting and action which is the domain of any actor working in a piece of theatre that has a setting and a context.

Head Three; script written by Chris Sacker; (section)

Sight does not see any longer.
Speech does not speak any longer.
Our communication is a communication break down.
Perception is an enemy to us.
It does not report what a man feels or thinks.
What a man is hoping or suffering.
Language is a second hand instrument.
It only transports words used by others
And experiences used by others.
What we see is not what we want to see.
What we speak is not what we want to speak.

The action of this ‘action-piece’ was (it seemed to me) something in which I could abstract myself from the conventions of the script and the actor. I was uniquely placed to see and hear what was taking place, and I wanted to join myself with and to that set of actions; with and beyond the script. Sacker had given me a ‘script’ to read in a performance context. I had worked with him, and the two musicians before, so I already knew that what was expected (of me) was more than a recitation. The way in which the performance unfolded and developed gave me some new insights into the nature of collaboration in a context like this.
Here, there were four performers, (Plate 3) two of whom being acoustic performers with instruments; a third with an opening to be able to work with mark-making, and me with a script! In fact, even setting-aside my own involvement with the piece, there were three 'makers' at work at the same time, and not always making things that related in a homogeneous way. It is possible that all three (four including me) could have made this performance independently, thus viable as four solos.

What then was the 'point' in bringing these four elements (performers), together? One of the main forms of causation for the piece was the element of confrontation and collision. If there were disparate (and different) elements at work, an attempt to make them coalesce would be both confrontational and a form of conflation. This is what actually happened during the piece. The text took several 'identities'. The words were written by the visual artist, so it was possible to perceive the text as 'his' narration. But by the time he was engaged in mark-making, the text had established itself as one telling its own 'story'. It was at this point that I felt a shift of focus between reading and acting.
Maybe my performance and rendering of the text was in the form of an accompaniment to the sounds being generated. Sometimes this might have been the case, but it was also possible to consider the instrumental sound as a form of background to the movement of the text and the creation of visual marks. At times, however, in moments of great rhythmic focus for example, I found myself acting or performing (via the text) more as a musician than a reader.
This move to action rather than acting, encouraged me to review the visual works - video, drawing, photography - and to look again at how real or absolute these works were. With my own self-developments and progressions, I realised the authentic and the real, had to be reflected within the work, the work had to be closer to what / who I am.

The function of the artist is to express reality as 'felt'

The action-work with Chris Sacker and the two musicians; the new understanding of being within the absolute present moment when making work, began to show itself in my paintings. It was at this point that my visual work moved towards visual realisations by means of abstract mark-making. I realised that 'to know the work', I needed to know my self, and that in a sense, 'the work was to know me'. To be authentic, I had to make work that was, for me, absolute art; a term I coined to capture the new understanding I had for making work. The work, and me making it, had to be as real as a text read in an action made in the moment (i.e. not acted). The abstract paintings had to be made within the immediate moment, and not as a devised or rehearsed piece to be played out at a later time. I suppose I was trying to release my

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10 The above plate No., is the final wall painting, created by Chris Sacker. The materials used by Chris Sacker are lard, with black powdered pigment, that produces a mixture that will never 'set', the idea being the work - the painting, can never be sold. Sackers' view on art is that it happens at the 'point of creation', the moment it happens, and is not a tangible form that can be sold as a commodity. The image was taken from a video frame. The added titles are the names of the artists involved.

11 Op Cit. Motherwell, page 28
self from the formal and contextual conditionings and conventions one is taught from an early age, and to have an open mind that could operate within a set of creative paradigms that are relatively free of the received and taught.

I cannot rid myself of such conditionings, whether they are cultural or otherwise, but make use of them, and use the conditions, that are learnt to survive in a particular cultural paradigm, alongside the genetic, sensory, perceptual and cognitive capabilities. That is, to run the un-conscious alongside the conscious – with an awareness that these two ways of thinking and being are both being used; the left/right side of brain; the skills taught with primal untaught ‘instinctive’ skills.

I suppose I wanted to find the way of working that was natural and ‘right’ for me, not being contrived, or following other methods and developing within mimicry, but knowing myself and the work enough to be a genuine and authentic maker of work that is called art. For me to do this, as well as researching the practice, I had to investigate myself, and have done so using various techniques and teachings, from Zen Buddhism, to Shamanic healing.

...we felt that by freeing ourselves from self-conscious thinking one could liberate sub-conscious ideas, much in the same way the Surrealists did.

Alan Davie

By the time I collaborated in this quartet, I was already embarked on research for this doctorate. During my first year as a research student, I was involved in a multi-praxis-based set of modalities. These included; drawing and painting; taking part in weekly sonic improvisation sessions (on guitar and keyboards); some work as a visual performer (in which my own bodily presence formed an integral part of the installation); ‘readings’ widely dispersed through histories of other artists, philosophy, cultural theory and listening to a great variety and kinds of music.

During the third year of my research, I decided to go to Thailand. I went to a monastery in the south of the country, and stayed there for two weeks. This was to be a period of guided meditation and contemplation under the direction of various monks

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12 Tate Gallery exhibit 2004. St Ives, U.K.
and nuns in the monastery. It was a period of controlled silence interspersed with special ‘talks’ which involved listening to teachings and guidance in pathways leading to a heightened and engaged mindful state of being. At times ‘out’ from these silent meditations, I worked a great deal with ink on paper (black and white). The ink used, would take on blue and grey qualities when wet and running, and I exploited these tonal ranges. By spreading the liquid ink and water and smearing the liquid across the paper, using my fingers or the edge of a pencil, the ink diffused into the various colours that make up the inherent ‘black’ of the ink.

Plates 6 to 13 are pages from a notebook, used in Thailand, the swirl and smearing of ink on the paper, created a ‘water droplet’ image. It is the simplicity of the mark, and the process of making these works, that thrilled me. My mind had to be still and relaxed, so I would literally ‘go with the flow’ of the liquid on the paper.

Plate 6
Plate 7

Clearly, my state of mind became more and more relaxed. The marks made - even the writings, became calmer; more tranquil and contemplative. This was a place and condition in which ‘histories’ (mine especially) diminished in significance. Perhaps (it seems to me now), I discovered a delight in painting that had hitherto been framed too much by a personal history and personal education.
In spite of a multi-disciplinary form of research already completed, this Thailand experience took me to a relatively singular form of self-expression, mark-making. As a result of this experience, I came to see a clearer division (even conflict in my case), between figurative representations and abstract mark making.

Here is a study from the same note book of ink marks, produced in Thailand, again showing the use of ink on the page, and a free flowing movement created by my hand being loose and relaxed; gently holding a pencil, horizontally, and using the side edge to manipulate the liquid. After the liquid ink and saliva had been dropped onto the page, a swift movement of my hand swept the liquid around the page.
Within this gesture, if I had hesitated or doubted the movement, the line and smooth curl of ink would have been disrupted. Before making these pieces, whilst living in a monastery my mind was in a clear and calm state, which I believe allowed these delicate and ‘meditative’ paintings to be produced.

I had made many earlier pieces that were of a figurative nature. The purging of ‘ego’ that accrues from an experience like this, led me towards a greater understanding of my desire to paint from and with feeling but without (or beyond) representing my own body and form.
Plate 14 is a full-sized self-portrait, c.1989, depicting a rather tormented persona; a struggling soul, a portrait of a self in a state of anxiety and vulnerability. Its almost cruciform shape suggests crucifixion and exposure. The naked body is perhaps sexually expressive, and invites desire. In my younger days, much emphasis was put upon my appearance, so much so that my understanding of another person’s desire for me was on the basis of body and not mind. Abstraction offered me an opportunity to ‘mask’ the explicit and physical and to replace anatomy with an inner architecture of emotion and sensuality; less overt perhaps, but deeply personal and authentic all the same.

Art belongs to the unconscious! One must express oneself! Express oneself directly— not one’s taste or one’s upbringing or one’s intelligence, knowledge or skill. Not all these acquired characteristics, but that which is inborn, instinctive.\(^{13}\)

This is perhaps another way of saying that I now ‘knew’ myself better. I was developing a new way of working, that related back to the Sacker ‘action’ work’, and that allowed an assimilation and visualisation of the work, not as separate or apart from me, but a work that integrates and unifies the maker with what is made.

\(^{13}\) Ibid. Schoenberg/Kandinsky Letters, p.23.
painting is a state of being...self discovery;
Every good artist paints what he is...

Jackson Pollock

To put it bluntly, I had imagined (and theorised) that a truly spontaneous engagement with my practice would ensure an authentic realisation of feeling. I was dubious, if not sceptical, about the value of organisation and pre-planning in the execution of work and wanted to believe that I could make a work by means of a kind of sensual improvisation that appeared on a moment-to-moment basis.

'composition is selective improvisation'.

Stravinsky;
Poetics of Music – 1974
Alan Davie exhibit. Tate Gallery, St Ives.

After the Thailand trip, I took a studio that offered a good space and light in which to work. The whole purpose of taking such a space was that it enabled me to work on a large-scale. Earlier works on paper, for example, were less than Imperial size, most being little bigger than A4 format.

I called the space, Studio Basho, a Japanese word translating into field or land. This was after a performance at Dartington, where I had written words calling for my own field, and land – or home. Plate 15 is a still frame from the performance, with my own body and presence performing an action of smashing a heavy lump hammer onto a log of wood. Black pigment, water and sand were being smashed into the wood. As the log was hit, the log bounced into the air, and fell back onto the canvas, the paint and sand falling and splashing marks onto the canvas. The lighting in the studio space, where the performance took place, was low with one spotlight behind me, casting large shadows of my moving arms upon the wall in front of me. The overall effect was that of a disturbed place created by the noise, the movement, and the exhaustive manner in which I hit the log of wood with the hammer. After nearly forty minutes of this action, the tension in the space had been built, and the exhaustion I was
experiencing reflected the emotional exhaustion after my own losses. These losses were mainly to do with the experience of losing my own home, one in which I had lived with a loved ‘other’ and which had just come to an end itself. Thus, the ‘action’ of the piece/performance was a breaking and smashing of an old life, and the building and creating of the new. But it was also the drive and need to make and create a work that was communicating or representing my world. The overall experience of the action was cathartic, and akin to a Shamanic cleansing ceremony.

A kind of transition had begun in which I made many smaller ink drawings, (at home) and worked on large-scale works in the studio. Many of these small works (about A4 size), were figurative. They were drawings in ink on paper, illustrating emotional and physical challenges and changes. However, these simple drawings, though reflecting intense emotional experiences, became less significant as I realised that the use of abstract mark-making was saying more. The abstract mark allowed me to liberate the sub-conscious far more than the illustrative drawings.
The above plates, 16 and 17, are more like cartoons; illustrations— even caricatures— being an emotionally-charged self portrayal, and are almost like scenes from a play, or moments in a life. Looking back at work like this, I recognise my own naïveté and actually an inability to be truthful to what feelings and perceptions I was trying to communicate. Indeed, these more figurative works were a means of hiding behind work. Even though they may appear to be more revealing, they were in fact less exposing than the later abstract works. It remains a strange paradox then, that my treatment of what might have seemed as the figuratively explicit, was in fact far from direct. My representations of myself were themselves ‘masked’ and opaque from an emotional standpoint. However, there was a definite and deliberate movement towards making new work that refined and defined a technique of mark-making that was cast in the model of a non-historical and non-self-referential practice. All the work prior to this had been work in black on white, but at this point, as I approached the possibility of making large-scale pieces, I began to make works that introduced colour.
Plate 18

Plate 18 is an early work from the ‘Basho’ period, where the abstract mark began to develop, with a strength of line(s) juxtaposed against shape/mass/plane. This work is not about emotional chaos, but has a relatively controlled freedom and vitality within the bold statements made by each mark. Already, the earlier chaotic emotional figurative pieces began to fade from this kind of work as the developing abstract mark making-grew with a new intensity and formal integrity.

Much of the earlier work (in black and white), had references to writing (calligraphy). As work progressed, the idea of writing and the development of a ‘language’ within actions of mark-making, became more significant. At this stage, however, I was largely unaware of the inherent relevance of scripts; writings and calligraphy in the
interplay between ‘message’ and form emerging in the newer and more large-scale pieces.

Plate 19

Picasso and Matisse showed the influence of Chinese calligraphy on their works.

…it is Chinese painting that enters into me in depth converts me. I devote myself once and for all to the world of signs and lines.¹⁵

Traces of calligraphy-strokes are well recognized in the paintings of Henri Matisse. Gazing at Jackson Pollock's action paintings, one may feel the impact of Cao Shu

(swift/grass style) by Huai Su. Brice Marden and Mark Tobey are two other contemporary artists who have actually studied Chinese calligraphy and used its techniques in their paintings.

This work (Plate 19), was also connected to a desire to 'see' things in 'black and white', i.e. unambiguously. The clarity of black on white, allows me to see the depth within a mark. I had to feel comfortable with basic structures and compositions before colour could be added. Each individual mark carried such significance, that just adding colour would have distracted (and detracted) from the 'weight' of every mark.

Plate 20

Franz Kline’s work ‘Meryon’ was given a written commentary (next to the work on display) which stated:

...His sense of space and insistence on flatness were particularly influenced by Japanese art and many of his works have a calligraphic feel...despite the spontaneous feel, Kline often made small preparatory sketches before executing the larger paintings

Tate Modern Gallery, London.
Kline’s use of black and white seems literally ‘momentous’, or at least a rapid configuration of ‘moments’ that congress to form a homogeneous action or set of actions. This is the kind of work that inspires me. But here, Kline is using paint on canvas. I wanted to utilise a medium that was at once strong but also flexible and perhaps to some extent unpredictable. This is why I began to work in charcoal with a new determination and confidence.

I had used charcoal as a foundation-tool for the work on Plate 19, which precedes the Kline, is a work that involved the application of paint over charcoal. The charcoal formed a kind of ‘ground’ upon which and with which, the paint would interact.

Charcoal is not a material that yields to total control. The charcoal sticks are often irregular and brittle in form and can create marks of an unexpected kind. However these often-hidden properties of the mark-making tool can lead to fortunate and/or appropriate ‘accidents’, some of them capable of reproduction and iteration, this having a controlling influence on the evolution and completion of a work. It has its own indelible properties (though it is easier to erase or dilute than watercolour or inks). This medium is quick to offer depth and varying degrees of opacity. More than any other medium that I have tried, charcoal has a way of governing or at least enhancing my responses and actions.
With a large space, and a greater scale to work on, the marks became more translucent- fading charcoal lines hovering in vast white planes of canvas. I found particular pleasure (during this period of work), with these wide-open configurations of white and empty planes, with just a suggestion of interference between a few striking charcoal swirls and lines, (see Plate 21). The preparation of the canvas; the making of the stretchers; priming and sealing the canvas, and fixing the charcoal- took a long time; a lot longer than the actual making of the marks themselves. The preparation of the canvas became very important to me. The white area had to be smooth and clean, made potent and almost skin-like, by using layers and layers of white emulsion.

After completing the application of many layers of white paint on canvas, this form of priming all-but removed the semi-opaque texture of the original canvas. This ‘heavy’ application of white, added a depth and solidity to the surface of the canvas; one in which the primed surface began to take-on the appearance of marble and not cloth. With the primed and prepared surface, the charcoal marks had to ‘match’ the love and care and integrity with which I had prepared the canvas. The moment of adding charcoal to the surface would cause a lot of hesitation, and a need to be very clear and calm within my self. I had purposefully prepared the surface, with such care, so that the application of the charcoal had to compliment this quality.

Priming my canvasses was more than just a mechanical act of preparation for work. It was in fact a form of highly controlled treatment of a surface waiting to be marked. I have always been aware of the kinds of physical movements associated with such activity as this. The application of numerous layers of white paint is executed in repetitive iterative movements, as a conductor might conduct several empty bars of music before the musicians play. It is a highly ritualised act of readying. These works then, often linked ritual and repetition as a ‘prelude’ to more intuitive and instantaneous forms of visual activity. I am, however, stressing the significance of the two activities in terms of being both complementary and interactive. The white paint (once fluid and watery) dries to a hard skin. The charcoal has never been ‘wet’ in the same way. It was fired to be brittle and to have the property of an instrument ‘charged’ with grain or dust.
Before adding the charcoal mark(s) to the white surface, (that became as significant as a mark upon ones’ body, like a tattoo or a tribal scarification), I would sit quietly and still; preparing mentally. My aim was to clear my mind, so that the marks made would be fresh and fluid. The actual mark-making would take maybe forty-five seconds. Several marks were made in quick succession; in a dance of rhythmical gestures across the canvas.

Plate 22

*Isadora called for a closer link between art and life ... to find some organic connection between music and dance*¹⁶

*All my life I have struggled to make one authentic gesture.*

Isadora Duncan¹⁷

Here are words from the dancer/choreographer, Isadora Duncan, whose life-work was concerned with the exploration of human movement of a highly personalised and

idiosyncratic kind. In particular, her quest for the 'authentic movement', forms of dance derived from internal states of consciousness, rather than narratives usually employed by choreographers, inspired me. Duncan revolutionised dance as an expressive medium. In a sense, she also released women from the tyranny of female representation and replaced the décorative and often paternalistic 'vision' of the female dancer with something far more potent, even androgynous. The few pieces of film that I have seen of her working, created a sense of a body 'drawing' in time and space. Thus, the plate above represents a kind of 'dance' with the mark-making tool. In one way, it can be seen as relatively minimal in structure, but I saw work like this as representative of high states of physical energy and feeling.

The vertical configurations on the left of the work are balanced by a surge to the right. A kind of 'buttress' and arch is presented in a single 'arabesque' of movement. Works like this taught me a great deal about the value of both marked and unmarked spaces. For example, the right side of this work is largely empty of marks, save for the 'slip' of the horizontal lines into the space. The two arched lines fall away from an energetic and convoluted loop that reflects and balances the loop to the left. This right-hand loop ends at pretty well the centre of the piece, and acts as a kind of fulcrum for the overall balance of the work. But given that the right side of the work is almost empty, the energy and dynamics of the markings, concentrated in the left of the picture, are 'shadowed' by the emptiness of the 'field' in the right.

The writings above are a brief description of the inspirational sources for a few of the Basho works. Duncan (together with Motherwell and others) was an important influence on the techniques, forms and structures of these experimental and transitional pieces. These influences represent the what comes before an action. Having completed a series of works, however, it is possible to offer an analysis of the outcome, and that is what I have just done. However, at this stage of the research, much of the actual process-of-making remained intuitive. I cannot say (remember) that I was 'aware' of the influences of others in a self-conscious way. Neither was I conscious of making a concrete and deterministic decision about structure and formal content. It seems, from my 'readings' of the work of Duncan, that much of her 'dancing' was similarly intuitive; involving actions relatively free of planned forms and outcomes.
Only *subsequently* have I been able to apply an analytical mode of reflection and evaluation. As I will discuss later, analysis and pre-ordered sets of structures and techniques were something that would accrue from the ongoing practice. The more I worked, the more I 'learned', and the more I learned, the easier it became to 'manage' the works themselves. *Play*, in terms of art-making, is a complex expression. Usually one might think of play as a form of activity of a thoughtless and non-reflective type. It may even suggest flippancy. However, if indeed I was playing with ideas, I cannot deny the possibility of influence and reflection. A quick look at a coupling of Plates 21 and 22 seems to connect these works with the *Spirograph* pieces from my childhood.

But a Spirograph is a 'tool' with quite specific limitations. During the making of the Basho pieces, I had no such mechanical device to limit my work. If there is something 'confining' (or confined) about these pieces, it is the size and form of my own body together with my state of mind during the action of making. Bit by bit (or rather, piece by piece), I was in fact creating a 'body of knowledge' about the practice of mark-making. Each new piece informed the next one. A kind of experiential and evolutionary intellectual practice was now in motion and I was compelled to react to each new experiment with care and attention. To put this simply, I was becoming progressively more analytical; more conscious of the process of making works.

*A line comes into being. It goes out for a walk, so to speak, aimlessly for the sake of the walk.*

Paul Klee

The making of marks in general, lines in particular, has formed the basis of a very particular state of attention in me as a visual artist. Judging by the analytical commentaries of Kandinsky and Klee, 'points' are described as units of great potential but often in an entropic state. The line is dynamic on a scale beyond the point. It leads and is lead. The line is an extension of a point or points. Significantly, (even within the context of works by Kandinsky and Klee), points are seldom relatable to notions

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of top or bottom; even side - to - side. Only an arrangement of points in a specific order can indicate a spatial and gravitational relationship to and with the dimensions of a given work.

Vertical lines have an ascendant and descendant quality, whilst those placed horizontally or diagonally (see Plate 23), dispose of notions of horizons or layers that belie the presence of forces of a dynamic kind that are different from those ‘contained’ within points alone. In Klee’s work in particular, the point is often used as a point of grammatical punctuation, sometimes being enlarged to form an entire punctuation mark in its own right. But line is lingual, more like a narrative in textual terms. This is why Klee referred to taking a line for a walk.

In Kandinskys’ Point and Line to Plane\textsuperscript{19}, he moves from points, through lines, to the materials of planes. In his own works, he often creates planar materials by means of continuous overlapping of lines and/or by clustering many points on a surface. Notions of texture as a formal determinant in my works were late to develop.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{Plate23.png}
\caption{Plate 23}
\end{figure}

The other developing aspect of my work was texture and plane. Early on, materials were at first accidentally dropped onto the surface of the drying paint. Working in

\textsuperscript{19} Kandinsky Wassily; Point and Line to Plane
Dover publications; New York, 1979
Studio Basho during the summer time, the space also housed dozens of visiting swallows. Although I had erected sheets of tarpaulin that worked as a roof over the studio space, the odd feather; droppings; pieces of twig, and bark would fall through the covering, falling onto work being made. A feather, landing on a painted area, would gently stick itself to the surface, finding a natural (n)resting place. The quality of these small touches and beautiful accidents added to the work, and were at first left alone. But these accidents were later embraced and added to the work in a more purposeful manner. Feathers, soil, leaves and other materials were added to pigments, then applied to the surface of the work, developing a textured surface. In retrospect, textured surfaces have always embodied a seemingly innate sense of the planar, and were explored and demonstrated in the school exams, taken years previously (i.e. The Garden Wall ' A' level piece, see page 19).

Plate 24, was one of the first works where a textural quality was added to the work. Soil, sand and other materials were mixed in with the paints before being applied to the paper, or after, feathers and pieces of bark were added, using the paint as a form of 'glue'.
Watching the swallows and falling feathers, I wanted to capture a sense of flight and fluidity within the work. A swiftness of movement was captured with grace and ease, and attempts were made to evoke the colours and the noise and sounds of chattering swallows. These sounds and visual-effects surrounded me daily whilst working in Studio Basho, and although the work is not a direct representation of these elements, the influence of the environment is present within the work. If there was ever a time when work stumbled, and a day passed with little reward or result, time would be given to sitting in fields or watching the swallows and the effects of nature. Time spent in this manner would always lead to the next piece of work.

However, even this new influence; one in which ‘accident’ formed an integral influence on practice, did not prevent a sense of an ordered development for the work. For example, Plate 24 above, is clearly an antecedent of the earlier ‘calligraphic’ pieces. But its very density also reflects a more complex formal activity. There is now virtually no ‘clear’ and unmarked space to be seen. This work is ‘worked-on’ in almost every area of the surface. Clearly, it connects with earlier works in terms of its overt linear energy and its ‘(inter)play’ of/juxtapositions of the vertical, diagonal and horizontal. Early – on in the making of works like this, I began to ponder on whether or not ‘additions’ of rendering (in textural and planar terms especially), was having a detrimental effect on the outcome itself.

Was it possible that this more complex modality of work was diluting or obscuring the overt dynamism of the simpler linear works in black and white? Was the addition of colour a basis for addition or subtraction to/from the intended clarity of the pieces? This was a question that had to be answered, and my research began to reflect on the question and to interrogate past work as a means of guidance for further experimentation.

*As an artist who found answers by looking at nature, by thinking about and comprehending the phenomenon itself, he arrived straight away at the right answers.*

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20 Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, 1817. (writing about Leonardo).

Once I had returned from Thailand, I had a clearer sense of the influence of the forces of nature on my art-making. I returned more imbued with a sense of the inspirational repertoire that could be employed, via a process of observation and study of natural forms and phenomena. Goethe and da Vinci were ideal models of thinkers who had gained deep insights into formal processes through the study of nature on the basis of ‘field-work’ as well as acts of study away from the phenomena themselves. I began to realise that a purely intuitive approach to art-making was fraught with danger if not a denial of the way in which the human brain actually works. On the one hand, I had sought to work free of analytical constraints, but on the other hand I needed a disciplined approach to my work that would settle issues of control in each new act of making.

*To recognise fear and pride, in order to have a freedom of mind, is a long process.*

Agnes Martin

Curiously (and on reflection), I believe that my figurative work was less controlled than the abstract work. But perhaps I might have had similar degrees of certainty had I chosen to use few marks in making a representation of something (usually representations of my own physical form). In retrospect (a condition or state where analysis becomes somewhat easier to manage and articulate), I can look at a work like Plate 24 above, and see that many of the ‘figurations’ employed in the abstract works that followed, are also present in this figurative work. The early paintings of Kandinsky are figurative yet disposed of many forms of decoration that suggest the passage of his work towards pure abstraction. The same can be said of the evolution towards abstraction in the earlier works of Rothko and Pollock. Consequently, I believe that I achieved an early control of the abstract works because I had already ‘tested’ symbolic and decorative procedures during the earlier figurative works.

I must also stress that my work as an installation-artist; actor and musician had provided me with documentation(s) that offered a body of evidence for formal and

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procedural patterns of work that could and would be applied to works during and after the ‘Basho’ period.

Canvas was still being used at this stage, but the formal outcomes of the work itself were moving me to work more on paper, that was placed flat on the floor. Placed flat on the floor, the paint and added textures could flow and dry in situ, that is without dripping down the flat surface (although the use of dripping paint became an important development in the work at a later date). During this period, another ‘accident’ occurred. When reaching across a painting to pick up a piece of charcoal, I lost my balance, and fell into the work. Staggering to my feet, I realised that the patterns on the soles of my shoes had left ‘prints’ on the surface of the work. I had literally trodden-on a new potential for textural and formal treatments of the works.

Experiments began with different soles, and textured treads. I began deliberate ‘walks’ across the work on the floor, often taking different forms of footwear in order to make different markings on the surface.

![Plate 25](image)

The horizontal and vertical marks, in this work, were made by sliding the toe of my shoe across the work’s surface. Here, (I now realise), I was working as much as a dancer as I was a visual artist. I’m tempted to believe that the ‘heaviness’ of these lines could not have been made by hand alone. In a poem about a winter-skater,
skimming across the surface of a frozen pond in Kent, Edmund Blunden closes the poem, *Midnight Skaters*, with these lines:

\[Court \text{ him, elude him, reel and pass,}
\]
\[And let him hate you through the glass.\]  

Once the paper or canvas was placed on the ground; once my relationship to the work was one of ‘walker’ (dancer), I was able to impose a ‘gravity’ on the markings that hitherto had been less dynamic, perhaps. But this simply means that the hand is designed for precise activities like mark-making, whilst the foot is designed for support of the torso and for acts of walking. The hands are relatively free of gravity, but whilst standing, the feet are not. There is a difference in the control and ‘weight’ of the markings, but both the hands and the feet (as it turned-out), are powerful tools for mark-making. I have mentioned earlier how much I enjoyed being close the surface of a mark (especially lines). Using the hands, one can place the eye close to the mark-making tool, but with the feet there is the whole distance of my body between me and the work. Had I chosen to use a brush of great size, length and weight, perhaps I would have encountered the same degree of ‘loss of control’ and/predictability. Physical distance, from the marks being made, offered new challenges and techniques and this was an exciting and invigorating extension to my working-methods.

As a visual performer (or action/actor performer), I had been used to the use of the ‘whole body’ in my practice. A single charcoal stick is a highly focussed tool, and one that challenges me in terms of rationalising or representing a whole-body-effect. This, more than any other technical consideration, led to a series of experiments that could have been presented (and documented) as a form of visual performance. The process and completion of the work below, (Plate 26) would have made an interesting and revealing visual performance, but it was not so-recorded. Encoded, however, within the production of a work like this was a struggle to adapt and control a whole-body engagement with a visual practice, albeit by means of making the marks with particularly focussed and precise mark-making tools and techniques.

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None of my works have titles. I don’t want to influence the responses of the viewer in terms of a personal narrative or explanation. Perhaps for the same reason, Kandinsky left many of his works with titles like *composition*. In Part 1, I quoted from Stravinsky (page 35), who wrote of composition as *selective improvisation*. Stravinsky is not renowned for verbal exactitude and this statement is somewhat paradoxical. Not only is musical composition a process of *putting in order*, it is also a process concerned with *the strategic disturbance of silence by means of the generation of sonic events*.  

Perhaps what he really means is that the musical composer is a kind of cipher or transmitter that relocates random possibilities in ‘sonic events’ and responds to these events in a ‘selective’ way. Judging by the diversity of modalities of musical improvisation (including *extemporisation*), it is difficult to imagine musical composition in any other way than that described by Stravinsky.

From the Basho period onwards, my visual practice became more and more ‘composed’. If there were aspects of the work that were beyond my control, I was aware of those moments and began for the first time to ‘control’ moments of randomness. Here again, I find the relevance of Agnes Martin’s observation to lose

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24 Where a composer/musician ‘improvises’ in a specific and recognisable style or based on a known popular theme...
control as a discipline. She is speculating of course on the idea of working without thought, without formal determinism. Whilst working with my arms and hands, I knew that the ‘eye-hand’ syndrome would be powerful and to some extent deterministic. But the more I used my whole-body, the more I hovered on the edge of absolute control and predictability.

The untitled work above (Plate 26), was executed with both my hands and my feet. Charcoal lines were done with my hands then scuffed with movements of my feet. The last mark made was the straight black line to the middle and right of the piece. Unlike a number of the other works from this period, this piece is a right-to-left composition. The vertical black line reinforces the spatial gravity of the right side of the work. Almost totemic in power, it echoes the ‘softer’ triple-lines of verticals on the extreme right. Thus, the three feint triple verticals are compressed into the thickness of the last vertical line drawn. Though this is in fact a kind of 3+1 of verticals, the conjunction between this group of verticals and the two pairs of 4-lines in the horizontal, balance each other. Thus the work treats on the idea of 4+4+(3+1). It is almost musical (in the pulse-sense) in content and form.

At the time of execution, I had no such numerical and proportional consciousness. Subsequent analysis reveals the ‘unity’ of the piece. It seems that the work was (in Stravinsky’s terms) a selective improvisation. All the more fascinating then that I used three groups of four lines to underpin the form and tie the work together.

During this period of work, a total transition from canvas to paper occurred. The paper more readily absorbed and moved the charcoal and paints, and the breakable surface of the paper added to the textured and planar outcome(s). The wet paper ‘held’ the charcoal dust more efficiently, and when dried, worked as a fixative, the charcoal drying into the paper’s surface. Realising this, and noticing the use of fixative, this affected my breathing, and I developed a method of ‘fixing’ with water. When the paper was wet, the charcoal moved with the wetness in the form of granulated paint. Once dry, it was the water that ‘fixed’ the charcoal.
The water is poured on to a sheet of paper with the dimensions of five foot by four foot, a heavy watercolour paper with the weight of 400 Gsm, and left for an hour, allowing the water to be absorbed into the surface of the paper. Charcoal used on wet and damp paper has a different quality. It is like a pigment and can be smeared like paint.

Applying the charcoal; smudging the marks with my fingers then rubbing the dust into the paper, allows the work to develop with a different quality and at a slower speed than that of charcoal used on a dry surface. Dry paper facilitates an immediate and fixed mark from the charcoal. The viscosity of water (wetness on paper) creates a subsequent dispersal of the charcoal that is less immediate. The visual effect of lines and marks created in this way is one where the viewer can sense a longer duration in terms of the interaction(s) of the medium with the surface. Work on a dry surface could be considered as ‘quick’, those on wet paper as ‘slow’ or slower.
Using my fingers to work the charcoal and paper together, the tactile relationship between me and the work made the work more ‘a part of me’. Not holding and using a brush or pen, there was nothing physically between me and the mark. The marks are coming from the tips of my fingers, directly onto the paper and causing a greater bond and engagement with the work. With this method, and feeling the texture of paper and charcoal, the dust is being used as a pigment, thus allowing paint and charcoal to ‘bleed’ into the surface of the paper. A new relationship with the work emerged. I began to value the work more.

Moving within the tributaries of water, I would gently sway the charcoal and paint, mixing water and colour, allowing the colour to find its own place and to settle upon the paper. Charcoal was used as a foundation, and paint added to increase the weight and depth of the work.

Plate 28
Working in this way, I recalled a book that I read as an eight year old, *The Phantom Tollbooth*\(^\text{25}\). In the story, the boy Milo watches Chroma the Great conduct the orchestra of colours to perform the setting of the sun. The next morning, Milo mischievously tries conducting and playing his own version of the rising of the sun;

\[
\ldots \text{Milo stood on tiptoes, raised his arms slowly in front of him, and made the slightest movement possible with the index finger of his right hand.} \\
\text{It was now 5. 23 A.M.} \\
\text{As if understanding his signal perfectly, a single piccolo played a single note and off in the east a solitary shaft of cool lemon light flicked across the sky. Milo smiled happily and then cautiously crooked his finger again. This time two more piccolos and a flute joined in and three more rays of light danced lightly into view.} \\
The \text{Phantom Tollbooth}\(^\text{26}\).
\]

![Plate 29](image)

Colour was being slowly introduced into the paintings. I wanted to rekindle my confidence in my own abilities in drawing and mark-making. The skills I had learned, during earlier college days, had not been practiced or maintained whilst I was venturing into other areas, exploring other means of expression and developing new skills.


\(26\) ibid page 128
A careful pursuit, and an orderly manner of introducing colour came from the teaching and guidance I received during the year at foundation art college, with John Baum. Instruction within drawing and still life was given, using only graphite before a slow introduction of colour began, to expand the vocabulary and variety of techniques. At College, I had used colour without restraint or inhibition. Having conducted the series of tonal works (mainly black and white), the appearance of planar works reinforced the issue of colour in my work.

Edward Cowie had shown me some watercolour paintings (in his own collection of this artist’s work) by Willy Tirr (Plate 30). Tirr had used colour on wet and heavy hand-made paper, often washing-in planar masses of colour, then making fine markings in black on the coloured ‘ground’. The sight of these works (together with Cowie’s recollections of Tirr’s working methods), inspired me and confirmed that I was ready to interrogate colour within a new series of works, works that were to end my Basho period.

Plate 30

The Tirr can clearly be seen in terms of its influence on the work illustrated in Plate 30 above it, though I hasten to add that the modalities of both line and plane had been
developed fully by me before I saw any of his work. But here is an example of a specific set of techniques having an influence on the outcomes of a series of works in colour. Perhaps the most striking visual ‘effect’ of Plate 29 above is the way in which its linear content is balanced more evenly with planar materials. Though still calligraphic in some respect, the use of colour has given the work more of a three-dimensional property.\textsuperscript{27}

\begin{center}
\textbf{Plate 31}
\end{center}

\textit{Colour possesses me. I don’t have to pursue it. It will possess me always. I know it.}

\textit{Colour and I are one.}

Klee\textsuperscript{28}

A few of the earlier works had employed colour (see Plates 29 and 31). I have already indicated that I denied colour in most of the ‘calligraphic’ pieces, simply because I really did want to see things in the extreme dichotomies of black and white (see page 40 above). The combination of three research experiences led me to accept colour into my working methods.

\textsuperscript{27} Indeed, I had observed a sculptural quality to the Tirr watercolours and was not at all surprised to learn that he was also a sculptor in the sense of making large-scale shaped-canvasses.

\textsuperscript{28} From catalogue, Hayward gallery exhibition 2002 – The Nature of Creation
The first of these was no doubt the impact of my visit to the Klee exhibition at the Hayward Gallery. Not only did his works demonstrate a vivid interplay between symbol and design, but they also radiated rich tapestries of colour-juxtapositions, harmonies and chromatic conflict. In particular, the ‘magic square’ paintings were most impressive.

![Plate 32](image)

Readings from Klee’s writings allowed me to discover how much he was influenced by timbre in music, together with the rhythmic and motivic configurations of note against note in music. In Kandinsky’s terms (those relating to point, line and plane), *Ancient Voices* appears to be a work consisting of a series of regular ‘points’, this time represented by rectilinear units within a single frame. But of course, each unit of colour is linked to its near-relations, and where the eye detects repetition of a colour-bloc, the eye traverses the gaps between and begins to make linear associations too. From a few meters away, the piece appears as a single planar form as well. Thus, Klee has combined all three formal paradigms (sited by Kandinsky) within the same work. This piece, together with other Klee colour-works in the Hayward exhibition were to linger in my mind’s eye for many months.

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29 Klee *Ancient Voices*, 1925.
The second major colour-influence of the Tirr paintings (see page 58 above), and the third influence was a matter of timing in my research and practice. During the preparatory period of painting that involved more representational than abstract work, the first colours used were reds, and yellows, worked in with the black and/or white of the paper. Working as an abstract artist, I was less constrained by colour than I had been as a figurative artist. Nevertheless, Plate 31, above actually disposes of only one colour (red) with its varying derivatives within the black paint and charcoal used. I used my hands and even other pieces of paper with which to ‘smear’ the work, especially during the process of completion (ending). This smearing was done whilst the paint was still wet on the paper. Where and how often I attacked the painting with the smearing tools was certainly reflective and analytical as well as intuitive. Intuition arose from the visual impact of the work, the analysis arose as a result of structural domains such as line, point, plane and possibly the innate ‘geometry’ of the piece.

Red is encased in two regions of black (or diluted/smeared to form black/red/grey). In actual spatial terms, the amount of surface devoted to black and red are equal. The greatest formal weight of the work is in the left of the work. The left-hand region of black and red is more overtly linear and clear. The area of blackness to the right is more planar than linear. This is (probably) why the large (and smaller) ‘Xs’ are placed in the left-hand side of the work. In a work where only two tonal properties are treated, the constraints and rigorous juxtaposition of the two tones is obvious. In a sense, this work marks the transition towards colour. It is perhaps a black and white work, treated with ‘redness’.

Though not trained as a musician, I have practised as one; mainly as a guitarist and vocalist. But music has played an abiding and continuous influence on my thinking about treatments of ideas in general, formal ones in particular. Thus the onset of coloured works seem to be analogous with the treatments of timbre by musicians; composers especially. There is something more ‘symphonic’ about the use of colour. Black and white or monochromatic works are the ‘chamber music’ of the visual arts.

The duality of working (by now) with hands and feet also offered me a greater range of visual dynamics. Somehow, the marks made by my feet seem ‘noisier’ than those
made with the hands alone. The fact that both practices involved my physical and tactile self is also important. Surely one of the most 'symphonic' of painters was Jackson Pollock, though he often used the lip of a tube of paint with which to mark the surfaces of his canvasses. From virtually the earliest pieces completed in my research, I sought to represent 'body (mine) with as much of my body as possible.

During a piece of visual performance filmed outside a ruined castle in Dumfrishire, Scotland, I was working again with Chris Sacker, and Pete McPhail (who I had worked with previously), provided an intense and screaming alto saxophone, as an accompaniment to the disturbing visual image. (See CD 2). It was a forbiddingly cold day, yet I chose to strip naked for my performance, which was filmed by a camera placed in a fixed position some several yards from me. I took a large piece of dead branch from a tree nearby and used it as a spear, or weapon. There is an unrelenting notion of 'raving' about the performance. The whole-body was used, and what was more significant perhaps, the whole voice as well. I shouted, and screamed, creating vocals that would sound like a language, with a defiant sloganism. At the same time as my own action, Chris Sacker was working on a piece of his own some distance away and invisible (again) to myself. His action was to move his body, very slowly and silently, climbing the outside of the castle walls, whereas I was inside, with frenzied action and noise. The two separate actions were projected as films, side by side, in Cologne, in Gallery 68 Elf (see page 81).
In an earlier performance-piece, I was semi-naked and invited people around me to use my whole body as a kind of canvas.\textsuperscript{30}

Plate 35

The above plate is an image from a thirty-minute performance; my skin was eventually covered with marks, 'scored' by the participating audience.

During the writing of the Abstract and Introduction to this written thesis, I made mention of the interdisciplinary nature of my practice. In the several pieces of performance work that I made during the course of my research, there was never a moment where a single mode of creative practice was employed without reference to other modes. During the earliest stages of my research, I considered assessment by means of these visual performances alone. But given my question (and series of overlapping questions) about the nature of my body as a 'performer', ultimately the

\textsuperscript{30} Given that the end result was a series of writings and marks on my skin, I guess it is more accurate to describe the body-used as a kind of parchment though the physical solidity of my whole form was influential (I presume) in respect of the location and kinds of marks made.
body of works on paper and canvas seem to have best embraced all the disciplines that have impacted on my quest for formal revelation.

Plate 35 above, is an example of whole-body-practice. By this time (about midway through my research), I had completed several-score medium and large-scale works; mainly work on paper. At this point, my supervisor and I commenced a series of ‘reviews’ and criticisms of the works completed. Professor Cowie was quick to observe the part played in the completion of these works with what he called an innate geometry, or, as he put it, a subliminal and implicit sense of ratio and proportion. Frankly until he made this observation, I was scarcely aware of this facet at all.

Subsequently and with very little need of retrospection, I realised that this was indeed the case. This form of evaluation of my work, (by a critical ‘other’), was highly influential on the works that followed the Basho series. Suffice it to say that work was now proceeding in a tighter and more rigorously controlled way. I asked Edward Cowie if there was a relationship between degrees of rigour and the numerical forces involved in the process of musical composition. I was curious to know if working with large-scale (large numbers of instruments that offered greater degrees of timbral richness) ensembles, imposed greater restriction on formal precision and tightness. His reply was surprising and worth quoting in full.

'I'm not sure that the number of instruments involved in the production of a piece of music is likely to influence me much in formal terms. But there's no doubt that some of the greatest and 'far-out' formal inventions took place in large-scale symphonic works. This is not just a music that stretched structural boundaries such as sonata form or baroque forms like the minuet and trio. Beethoven pushed all dimensions of musical form forward in his symphonic pieces and so did Berlioz and Mahler.

The reason why I am doubtful about numerical strength of players and a commensurate complexity of form is that in chamber music, for example, the exposure of form is greater with smaller numbers of players. You see, if I may paraphrase from Henry Moore... 'scale is not a matter of size or dimension but rather a matter of the number of marks made on any given surface'. In other words, salient timbral qualities, even the hierarchies of pitch, rhythm and motif are more exposed when there is less colour (and sheer physical noise) available.' 31

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31 Conversation with the composer, Edward Cowie, during a tutorial in May, 2002.
Though I have referred to a ‘symphonic’ treatment of colour in these late Basho works, the actual ‘instrumentation’ is based on the hybrid between chamber music and symphonic music. Works like this are closer to the sound-world of the chamber orchestra. Perhaps as an indicator of the verity of this assertion, it so happens that I was often listening to Bartok’s chamber orchestral pieces during this period, especially the *Music for Percussion, Celesta and Strings*. The angularity of his music (especially in rhythmic incisiveness) belies a sense of geometry in Bartok as well. This, coupled with frequent listening to the music of J. S. Bach, only served to reinforce the vitality of the observation (by Cowie) of my works of this period as being innately ‘geometric’.

The marks in Plate 36, below, began with semi circles, executed quickly in black in the left-hand corner of the sheet of paper. One semi-circular shape grew and moved into a long horse-shoe,\(^{32}\) pointing down into the centre of the paper. From within the horse-shoe, comes the corner of the irregular square. As a kind of ‘inner frame’, the interlocking of these two geometric shapes help to lock the form within the dimensions of the paper, and gather the corners of the work towards the centre of the piece. And slightly off-centre, to the left, a triangle is placed. There are many marks, smudges, scrapings. The surface of the wet paper breaks up easily, and rubs into pieces under my fingers. Among the many marks, the geometric shapes are clear, and the focus of the piece is the triangle slightly to the left of centre, but also the black bold marks; the large irregular square at the bottom of the paper, where colour is added.

Here, this is pink within the black of the charcoal, and more horse-shoe shapes. And yet, the colours shapes and movement in the piece could not detract from the triangle that holds the central focus. An illusion of depth and perspective is given by

\(^{32}\) I seem to have a particular penchant for ‘crescent’ forms!
lightening the blues, which disappear behind the triangle and square, and move into the horizon.

The triangle was still, and did not move, and would not be part of the chaotic marks and colour-washes. It stood still, and kept its powerful position, and held the focus. The triangle, in this work, is also like an eye. There is a shape in the overall piece that is seen as a head, and face; the eye being the one eye of some 'all-seeing wisdom'. A painting by Alan Davie in the Tate Modern Gallery (London), *Image of the Fish God*, seems to represent something similar, albeit a collection of symbols of a more figurative order than my own work, above.

33 Using the Leonardo da Vinci technique; that of the 'disappearing distance', behind the Madonna, in *Virgin of the Rocks*, Leonardo da Vinci's essay on the reason why distant mountains and objects appear blue...

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe
In Davie's work, the two interlocking 'L' shapes (reminiscent of the interlocking loops of the Yin Yang form), of black and white, with a black 'head' representation, join with a central yellow shape, thus framing the central diamond form like brow and cheek of a single eye. Within the geometric shapes, the focus is the diamond, or the eye. My own piece (Plate 36), has a similar if more complex form of geometrical harmony and stability. Though executed in red and black, like Plate 31 above it, this is a far more assertive and confident work than the former and shows that I was beginning to control large-scale form with greater surety and technique.
On looking (later) at more examples of Davie’s works, I was aware of an affinity between his treatments of geometry and those within my own work. Having (subjectively I admit) given the description of ‘brow, cheek and eye’ to the Davie work (Plate 37), I am also aware that part of the new directions in my research were taking a more narrative and anthropomorphic dimension. The circles, squares and triangles of these new pieces were ‘players’ in a narrative. They had some form of ‘story’ to tell.

Given the shapes, or the ‘players’ within the work, ones that possessed their own ‘personas’, short ‘scenes’ were created, and the geometric forms began to be imbued with characteristics of players in a drama of some kind. It was even possible to think of collectives of these forms as though they were ‘family groups’. Certainly forms likes these had generic properties that were easy to construe in terms of filial relationships. Again, there is a recall to childhood drawings, with patterns and the creation of ‘families’ of shapes, and developing these into communities and systems.

Work by work, experiment by experiment, I was developing a practice that also embodied a collective of theories. What had begun as an essay on the intuitive was
fast becoming a primer for theoretical discourse and investigation. Perhaps the most seminal moment in my research was the moment when I decided to discontinue visual performance as the core of my practice. Once I had produced more than 50 works on paper or canvas, I had a ‘body of knowledge’ from which to formulate ongoing theoretical questions and formal propositions.

*His genius was so wonderfully inspired by the grace of God .. fed by a willing memory and intellect .. his arguments and reasoning confounded the most formidable critic.*  
Giorgio Vasari, 1568

It is not, in my case, any notion of ‘genius’ that forms a part of the ways in which I interrogate form, though the *loci* for this expression intrigues me greatly. But that with which I can most easily agree (now), is an exhortation to employ the senses to the full. This multi-sensuality was born in a monastery in Thailand, then relocated to my Basho Studio here in Devon.

During the time of working in Studio Basho, I began the first of a series of works that made an enquiry into the ‘three pillars’ (of wisdom); Plates 39 and 40 a sequence of works that grew into a definite structure of three vertical lines, and one horizontal line.

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The first piece of work that embraced the development of these lines was created during the summer of 2002, whilst working in Studio Basho. Layered with other marks and more chaotic lines and colours, the charcoal and paint structures that developed became a powerful collective and collision of symbols to be used in different formats, and in many future pieces. It became a significant structural determinant, and at a later date, part of what I now think of in terms of a *symbolic alphabet*. The three lines did indeed become an emblem for that period of time,

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35 All alphabets are of course symbolic. My use of this expression is particular, however, to the use of symbols as visual replacements for sounds and not as elements as a series of signs designed to facilitate a sounded response and a 'reading'. Thus, the images submitted (plates 183 to 207) are the first stages of a series of symbolic forms that may form a kind of 'alphabet' that is not aligned to any particular language; even, perhaps, to notions of being sounded at all. Each symbol is a representation of an idea, and not a fraction or part of a word or phrase.
representing a progression in the work, and also as a symbolic metaphysical gateway that I stepped through, into a new episode of life and work.

Plate 40

The days and months working with drawing and mark making, was a practice to reveal the process of expressing the unconscious thought (see Schoenberg). Meditation-techniques, (that had been learned in the monastery in Thailand), were at times employed; enabling a calm mind to mark the paper without worldly restraints and diversions corrupting the clarity of the enquiry. Formal and symbolic differences and similitude were being clearly observed within each work, and between my own personal condition at the time of making work, and the quality of the work and the marks made. It was at this point that I became more aware than ever of the state of mind I was in during the making of the piece. Even the time of day and the condition of light and weather became influential factors.
My art-making had moved beyond the textual, and yet into a new form of visual narrative. Works like Plate 40 above, were affected by a greater sense of empowerment derived from a greater degree of formal pre-meditation. The ‘three pillars’ works, with their obvious associations with gate-ways or portals, were visual metaphors for a fresh set of openings in my practice.

To treat ‘the self’ as a research object raises questions about the role of ego within any kind of creative practice. But I must emphasise the difference that I perceive in a research that is facilitated by a set of body actions as opposed to one that is framed by an intellectual stance that is insulated from other ‘bodies of knowledge’. My research has vacillated, at times, between a form of insulation and a widely discursive reading of the ideas and practices of ‘others’. Towards the end of my period of work in the Basho Studio, I realised that my practice (in my visual work especially), had already passed through two phases and was rapidly entering a third and new one.

Plate 41 above, is a work that stands on the cusp between stages two and three of my practice. All of my visual practice is identifiable with textual matters in general, acts of writing in particular (calligraphy). It is also connected with the movement of the body as both actor and mark-maker. Music (and sometimes just sonic events) has also
played a significant part in arranging a set of motifs, gestures, signs, signals and symbols that seem to permeate most if not all of the work completed to this point.

Bodily gestures, when mark making, had become increasingly significant. Works like this one are no longer ‘taking a line for a walk’. In order to make such a piece, I was in fact performing a kind of dance with brush, fingers, hands and sometimes, the whole body. I had in fact begun to conceptualise the works in terms of an expression of inner states of consciousness by means of whole-body actions and interactions.

The development of defining a ‘language’ of gesture and mark, within the work, was underway, although at the time of execution I was unaware of this being an intention behind the work, not realising, however, that these early stages of research were formulating the foundation and basis for the future work that would grow into the symbolic alphabet (See Plate 42).

...the study of gesturality and writing as a search for the origin of language, or rather of a preverbal symbolicity, seemed at the time to constitute a zone that rebelled against Cartesian teaching on the equivalence of the subject and its verb, and thus to introduce a subversive element, pre-meaning, into verbal reason. Wasn’t the problematic of the production, change, and transformation of meaning thus infiltrating, through the gesture, the rationalism of the materialists?

Julia Kristeva

Plate 42

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Newman, Avis; The Stage of Drawing: Gesture and the Act. Selected from the Tate collection. (talking about 18\textsuperscript{th} century thinkers) P.274
The leaving of Studio Basho, as winter approached, and the change from a summer accommodation and living in a barn conversion, to living and working in a house near the sea, effected the approach to working, and the methods pursued. As already mentioned, sound and music were strongly influencing the making of work, as a source of inspiration, as was the location, and typography of the natural landscapes including the experience of isolation and living in a small village. The winter of 2002/3 proved to be the most prolific time for output of work and performances. Though often hesitant, the flow of the work was now incessant and purposeful. The closure of the Basho period found me more confident about my practice and with many key questions about the interplay between intellect and intuition at least tried and tested if not fully answered.

Having completed the period of rental of the Basho studio, I moved back to working in my own house in Bantham, Devon. The large canvasses were scrolled-up and stored, and once again I returned to working on paper alone. During a criticism period with my first supervisor, there were several works reviewed that benefited from being moved from the vertical to the horizontal, even inverted in some cases. Whilst the work had seemed to me to have been completed, these actions of change sometimes revealed a formal strength that had been missing when viewed from the angle in which I had painted the piece. I guess this is not dissimilar from the actions of some Cubists, who often turned their paintings around before settling on a final presentation of a ‘completed’ work.

The year before this, I had been to Hayward Gallery in London, to look at the Paul Klee exhibition. The impact of this visit was enormous. In particular, I was most impressed by the scale and size of the actual works. Many of them were scarcely larger than illustrations of them in books published on his work. A work of his called Secret Letters – Geheime Schriftzeichen - was especially potent. But since this work in particular was not to influence my actual practice until a little later, I will return to this work during the close of Part 3 of my written thesis.

The ‘Klee experience’ encouraged me to work on the small-scale again. Work on larger pieces continued, but a series of works on either wood or MDF captured my imagination during this transitional stage between Basho and my home studio.
The piece of wood on which this work has been painted is almost 2cms thick. Even before being treated for painting, it was already an 'object' with a property of its own. I prepared the surface of the board with layers of white emulsion. This was not 'planned' within the context of a series of specific experiments, certainly I didn't have the placement of sequencing that had characterised the Basho series. At this moment, the work on wood was a form of play with an object (the piece of wood). I had no idea how or where working in this way would take me.

In addition to a relatively 'flat' ground/plane, the piece consists of two strong linear motives, one straight and the other gently curved. Not only does this interplay between straight and curved represent the configuration of the Arabic alphabet:

Pdf.
for example, but it also reflects the curvature and ‘straightness’ of pretty-well all alphabets, including Greek and Hebrew texts. Naturally, the possibility of the written alphabet arising from natural forms is not new or strange to me. The Greeks believed that their own shaped alphabet arose from looking at Cranes in flight. Chinese and Japanese letters are obviously pictographic too, and were derived from natural forms in many cases.

Alphabets, it seems, are representations of archetypal forms including that of the human form. With due hindsight, a work like Plate 42 above is connected to a whole series of specific and iterative visual motifs that permeate a great deal of my work at all stages of practice. Certainly more than half of the works so far illustrated are concerned with the interplay between the straight and the curved. I would like the reader to return for a moment to Plate 15, (the still from the Basho performance). The vertical, and relatively fixed an immobile part of me, is the seated torso. The arms, however, are moveable and indeed in that Basho performance, I configured a sequence of rapid arch-like movements with my arms and hands.

What if this small work in plate 15 above is implicitly ‘figurative’?

Considered in a figurative context, this piece has ‘removed’ the actual representation of a figure (mine actually) and distilled the image into a form that shows not what the figure looks like, but what the figure does. The straight and vertical form is a symbolic ‘spine’; the curved form the movement of the arms from the spine. Turn the work to the right and the curve becomes an arched ‘form’ above a brilliant blue horizon. But this is neither the position in which I made the work nor the way it is presented now, as a complete(d) expression. If the Eureka moment did not in fact emerge as I completed this piece, it certainly has since!

All the works on MDF are small-scale (compared to many of the large works on paper and canvass). Along with the ‘flowering’ of colour, in retrospect, I can see the influence of Klee writ large.
The works above (see Plates 44 and 45), once again uses curved and straight lines as structural devices. But it is obviously a more heavily worked piece and with a more complex set of ‘coded’ symbols within it. The two black discs were added at the end of the work on the piece. The rich and earthy red had purposefully been mixed to give the surface of the piece an aged appearance. The black markings were made with the tip of a brush and then, using the handle of the brush, I employed *scraffitti*-techniques to reveal some of the cream ground underneath; sometimes digging so deeply that it reached to the white of the board.

Where more than a half dozen symbols are used, more complex inter-relationships occur. Perhaps for this reason, I ‘locked’ the forms together by means of the imposition of the two black discs. The largest (in the lower right) has been imposed on the descendent curve from the short vertical. In a sense, it both arrests and partially obliterates the curved line and can be seen as an object designed to ‘lay over’ the form underneath. The smaller disc, in the upper left of the piece, however, rests against the thickest curve to the left. It doesn’t interfere with the continuity of the twin-curves, but acts only to prevent the eye from following the curves to the left and out of the frame.

The next two plates (46 and 47) are works envisaged as a pair. I enjoyed working into the red on the MDF and the completion of the first of the two below led me to complete a companion-piece to it. This time, the red ground is not taken to the limits
of the board. I wanted a rawness and roughness to the edge of the piece, perhaps reinforcing the idea of the work being contained by the form of the block of wood and not covering it.

Given that this piece has the appearance of ‘early’ musical notations, I naturally speculate on the reason why the discs in this one are almost all unfilled with black. Neither are there any obvious curved lines to work against the vertical and horizontal straight lines. What curves there are, in the second in particular, are very slight. In some respects, these two works are the closest to landscapes of the pieces so far, though there is as much possibility of these discs and lines being ‘stick-people’ as they might also be trees or posts with signs on them.

How interesting (to me at least), that the lack of curves makes these two pieces far less ‘calm’ in form. The use of the dark red (similar to the red used on the roofs of Shintu Temples that I had seen on a visit to Japan), is a colour that warns. But this is also a colour that is enobling (like the Imperial colours worn by the Caesars), in any event, a red that has an ancient feel to it.
The second piece (with even less of the MDF surface covered with red), seems to have less motivic and formal conflict that the first of the pair, especially the way in which the figure (8) rests so easily on the two strong lines emerging from the lower right to left. This is balanced by the configuration on the left, a series of interlocking lines capped by the gently falling arch in the top left. These two pieces are restricted to one colour and two tones; red, black and the undercoat of creamy white. There is no room for subtle interplay between different colours, thus I see the red as another motivic element of the pair.
In this fourth work in the series, I have returned to a square format. Formally it integrates workings in the previous three pieces. The ‘quartet’ begin to take on the appearance of a theme and variations. 37 Though I didn’t paint this group as a ‘set’, they nevertheless integrate as a set of five studies in line, point and plane and connect directly with works in the black and white Basho series, analysed above.

Clearly, at this stage, I still had a propensity for working in sharply contrasting pairs of colours or tones. I guess the passage towards abstraction (albeit via calligraphy), had revealed the potency of unambiguous codes and symbols. To have used too much colour-variation at this point would (it seemed to me) have blurred the clarity with which I wanted to represent body-movement and the place of my own form in making a piece of art-work. There is nothing to hide behind but the stark configuration of mark(s) and tone.

After two years of active research and art-making, I had produced a large body of work that challenged me to assess the degree of homogeneity within the whole body of pieces. The motifs in the paintings are limited (to perhaps only three or four-straight-line; curved-line; circle, and solid disc), but these symbols are closely aligned to natural forms in both the organic and inorganic world. My own physical form is disposed of this quartet of shapes.

This body of work interrogates (again) notions of stillness and movement. Some of my visual performances did the same. From time to time, and during the course of this research, I have moved from the fixity of my studio and home to another ‘place’; often another country. The poly-modality with which I worked in earlier years was often connected to travelling and travel. Shortly after the move from the Basho studio, I was invited to travel to Germany. I began a series of works that would travel with me, and a new episode in my practice began.

37 Edward Cowie played and took me through some of Beethoven’s Diabelli Variations, showing me how Beethoven deconstructed the Diabelli theme into brief motivic elements, too elemental to be described as tunes. These fragments of a ‘musical sentence’ enabled Beethoven to invent much larger-scale musical forms. The Diabelli Variations take more than an hour to perform with repeats.
PART TWO

We must be still and still moving

Into another intensity

In the early part of 2003, I was invited to go to Cologne in Germany. The English artist, Steve Miller, had invited Chris Sacker to exhibit in 68 Elf Gallery. Steve was the curator of the show, and Chris asked me if I’d like to participate. Before going, I had completed a series of ten large-scale works on paper, using charcoal, inks and paint. The set chosen featured more of the interplay between line and plane.

Plate 49

This was originally a work of 5x4 feet, but failed in that format. I salvaged this work by cutting the ‘fatter’ piece. To test a work, I had begun to use blank sheets which were overlaid and shifted into various positions on the finished piece. Sometimes,

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nothing of value was revealed but in this case, I sensed a vertical piece that had sufficient power, to save.

The first marks made were with charcoal, mainly vertical heavy lines or vertical lines tilting slightly away or to one side from straight lines in the vertical. When paint was applied, I allowed it to drip across the surface, by lifting the edges in a way that would control the direction(s) of the paint-flow. I wish I could confirm that this (and many other works), was completed in a state of total sensual abandon. So far as I can remember, I had no specific formal design for the piece during the commencement of work on it. I wanted to ‘play’ with line and mass in an uninhibited fashion. Like the opening of Sibelius’ 7th symphony, this was a work in search of a theme.

But looking (now and backwards in time) at the collection of ten works taken to Germany, and looking at the art-work done on the walls of the gallery, in situ, I can see that my ‘themes’ in fact travelled with me. Here again, is a piece that deals with straight and curved motifs. No matter what scale of surface I have work on, I seldom if ever draw discontinuous lines. Each line drawn is a complete movement. Of course, this work is a fraction of a larger piece, one that included a considerable area of flowing lines created by wet paint moving across tilted paper. In its current form, it is not difficult to see that the work has been cut-down from a larger piece.

I arrived at the gallery in Cologne and found an L-shaped space available on two walls of the gallery. These blank white walls frightened me. After placing the ten works on the wall, they diminished in scale and visual potency, and that disturbed me too. I had bought a number of nails with which to fasten the works to the wall. I wanted the ‘hung’ (nailed) pieces to look raw and perhaps even menacing. These were long nails in tarnished steel. Once pierced, the paper could travel-up the nail and buckle into relief in free-space.

None could have been framed. These were more like enormous pages from a book. Very quickly, I sensed that these nailed works needed a conjunction of more than the intervening white spaces in which they were hung. I made a first charcoal mark on the wall and ran a black line between two works, allowing the line to scrape across the painting onto the whiteness- ultimately connecting with the next painting on the wall.

82
Now, what had been a ‘suite’ (procession) of ten pieces became one single large-scale form. This work was done, always facing the wall. This was actually a performance-piece, though nobody was present to witness it but myself.

These acts of linkage were part of the ‘hanging process’. Ultimately, even the ceiling was attacked and interrogated! What had begun as bridging-lines, began to convolute into symbols and signs. This was the moment when I began to apply paint into and over the charcoal marks. Some of the paint was applied on the ten paintings. On reflection, this is the single largest totality of a work on which I ever worked to this time.

People that wandered in and out of the gallery began to interact with the work. Some commented that the work was beginning to look like an enormous ‘text’, even a text of a mystical or religious kind.
As I have written above, the paintings were hung on white walls in the gallery; with nails hammered into the walls, defiantly and absolutely marking the place and space and presence of the paintings. Large nails, almost like sacrificial nails, held the paper, like artefacts, or relics from a sacrifice, clumsily and purposefully arranged in a crude way.

Plate 53

Plate 54

Plate 55
The entire space\textsuperscript{39} was marked, sometimes in a state of near frenzy, and at others during moments of steady and slow calm. But the plate above also records moments when I stood in one spot and drew within the confines of my ‘rooted’ position. This is why some of the markings are intensified within a vertical column of about the same width as my standing form. Other markings represent the movement of the hands and arms away from the body, arching across a horizontal space beyond the polarisation of the vertical configurations.

Plate 56

Above, some of the markings are the familiar rod-and-point of earlier works; sometimes exercising the interplay between straight-line and curve. But here too are markings allowed to drip freely downwards (with an entirely different effect from the floor-based meanders done in the earlier Basho pieces). If on the one hand the ascending or traversing materials indicate a freedom from gravity, the falling wet paint does not. I was, it turned-out, ‘charging’ (and charged) the paper with a powerful set of emotional elements. Whilst at all stages prior to this I worked alone, contained within my own emotional habitat, the marks that now issued were done in public and for the public.

\textsuperscript{39} http://www.galerie68elf.com/2003/april/mitte.htm
I can only speculate on the effect of the presence of the viewing public on these markings. Was it some subliminal aspect of the ‘German question’ (partition, WW2, Nazism, etc.) that led to the writing of real words, words that are fired with political and social contexts? Was it also that this work was presented in a city once demolished by bombing in a furious act of retribution for Coventry? I’m tempted to feel that in some respects, the Cologne piece (and performance) was my own Guernica.

Plate 57

Certainly there is an obvious fury, even anger in a work like this. Yet I was also mindful of the movement from abstract markings to text. Indeed, I always felt that the association between abstract markings (including symbols), and writing, was a close one. Though I did not realise it at the time, work was beginning on the development of a symbolic alphabet which, as it turned-out, formed the basis for the final series of experiments completed during the duration of my research for my doctorate.

Approximately a year after this exhibition, I watched a biographical film, portraying the life of Jean-Michel Basquiat, the graffiti artist, who lived and worked with Andy Warhol. The following (Plate 58) shows a painting by Basquiat, where he has incorporated his language and art of graffiti, into his artwork, indeed his graffiti is his art.
The use of language, or symbols representing a language has been a consistent theme within my work. Comparing the wall in Cologne, and the following Basquiat piece, I was surprised at the similar use of colours, and ‘spacing’, between marks. Basquiats’ work also uses language and lettering to create a kind of scripture.

Having completed the ‘hanging’ and subsequent series of linked markings (between the works – all along the wall and even on the ceiling of the gallery), the process had been planned as a completion, but it wasn’t.

There was a formal opening-night for the exhibition and I decided to make a performance-piece as a kind of *coda* to the works now pinned to the walls and together with the markings I made after the nailing was over. Why was this? I had also decorated two columns on either side of a wall that was still blank and unmarked. It was a huge area of ‘visual silence’. The previous 48 hours had been spent in hanging the ten works, together with the markings made when they were hung. I have already suggested that these acts were themselves an unwitnessed performance-piece. Now I wished to extend that performance into the public and shared domain. I wanted to place ‘on record’ the kinds of acts and actions that had been employed in the completion of the works on show, and I wanted this to be a work ‘of and in the moment’.

40 The Man from Naples, Jean-Michele Basquiat; 1982, Bilbao, Guggenheim Museum
Here, we see me working (with an audience present) very close to the wall, and with my eyes averted from the movement of my hands and charcoal. I wanted to emphasise the way in which unseen marks could be made. This was visual work made without seeing. In some respects, this is akin to the work I had done earlier as a collaborative visual performer, with Sacker et al in particular, where some of the work done entailed one or all of us not being able to see what the other was doing.

But if this new performance work seemed (to the onlooker) to be improvised because I could not see the markings being made and because I was making the marks in the moment of the performance, nevertheless, I was obviously carrying the memory of the images of the works already done and on show. The piece of paper attached to the spare wall was a very large sheet, much higher than my standing form and wider than my hands could reach with arms extended from the static standing position. Consequently, I had a visual space that enabled me to engage in whole-body work.

*Drawing is all,* (Giacometti),...and he was still drawing ‘*with just his eyes*, *his brother tells us, only a few hours before his death.*'\(^41\)

No longer able to work with his hands, the artist Giacometti, as he was dying, was watched over by his brother, who made the above remarkable observation. Centuries

earlier, Leonardo had written (in one of his many sketch pages) that the sketch is all,\textsuperscript{42} by which he reinforced other observations on the potency of sketching. Leonardo hardly ever completed a painting, leaving works like his depiction of John the Baptist incomplete at the time of his death; a work he had started more than 12 years before.

The first marks made on the huge sheet of paper, were direct ‘shadows’ or ‘ghosts’ of the kinds of marking already completed. Perhaps this was due to the shift from the already-completed works (and responses to the nailed pieces), and a desire to connect directly in the form of a visual-bridge between the former and the new work being made in public.

But as time passed, a mood-change set in where a much greater diversity of marks was explored, ultimately leading to the writing of texts (many of them having the appearance of slogans or graffiti), at the point when I finally turned towards the paper and looked at the marks I had made.

A three metre by two-metre sheet of white paper was hung using large nails, hammered into a blank wall. Once the audience appeared, the performance began. I pulled the paper off its’ nails, ripping and tugging at it, bringing it down to the floor, with as much aural disturbance as possible. This was a kind of audible curtain raiser, one in which the turbulence of rustling paper would create focus and attention from the onlookers. As the paper laid flat on the floor, I used a large piece of charcoal and made bold marks, long lines down the sheet and across, dividing the whiteness into bisected planes.

Using my shoes and foot movements, I scraped the charcoal across the paper, smudging and pulling the lines further to the edges. Standing at one end of the paper, I pulled it up to my shoulders, turned my back to it, and held it as though a ‘burden’, one to be dragged and carried, then walked slowly towards the wall, the paper dragging behind me, (an obvious metaphor of Christ carrying his cross). Reaching the wall, the paper was re-hung, with nails hammered into it and through to the wall, using the same large, ‘sacrificial nails’, again using the sound of hammering the nails

into the paper and white wall, as part of the performance (action). The loud banging sound of the hammering, echoed around the gallery space, forcing silence from the audience, and pulled attention towards the performance area.

Since arriving in the gallery space, I had been in a state of continuous action and reaction. But why did I make this performance open in the way it did? Why the ferocity and dynamic entracte? Why in fact did I not execute this work on the same way that I would have done in earlier pieces, including the ten pieces now fastened to the walls?

I think perhaps that the presence of ‘witnesses’ once again raised the issue of the interplay between act (or) and action. In directly relating this visual performance to an audience. I was perhaps less within myself than when working alone. The key question, in a context like this, is the degree to which the relationship to the work is altered by the presence of others. Certainly I felt that I was building something (again), but here I was also building a relationship with an audience as well as one with the work itself.

Set apart from an audience, as a visual artist, I can perhaps encase notions of self and ‘others’ in a more speculative domain. But with these ‘watchers’, I realised that I was being watched as earnestly as I myself was watching. Working with and for others, is confrontational, something that challenges the dichotomy between social acts and isolation. If I am an introvert when working alone, a person deeply involved with the externalisation of the ‘interior’ in the quietude of my own studio, when I work with an audience, I ‘work the audience’ with all the enthusiasm of the actor-extravert.

The aggression, perhaps stimulated (too) by the slogans and graffiti now in the walls, was natural and deliberately ‘dramatic’. The tension between solitary thought and social thought was enormous. At times (it seems now), I worked as much as a destroyer as a builder.

There is so much destruction in my work... but it's how the Universe operates, constantly being destroyed and recreated.

Alan Davie43

43 Interview with Alan Davie, Tate Gallery, St Ives. (Jingling Space, Tate Trustees catalogue, 2003)
Earthly elements have both constructive and destructive properties. Volcanoes destroy in an act of building. Even the tremendous force of earthquakes and tidal waves can be seen in terms of removal and replacement. The creative artist may (and often does) use the same flux of building and destroying as the forces of nature.

Facing the wall then, and unseen by the audience, I used plasters to cover my eyes, and still facing the wall and the paper, began to make marks. I drew with charcoal onto the paper. Blind as I now was, I emphasised the blindness further by turning my face away from the action of my hands and fingers. At this point (with my back still turned towards the audience), they were unaware of my actual blindness. The moment when I turned towards them, (the audience), was intended to be a shocking one.

Plate 60

Working with both hands, sometimes I made marks that mirrored one another. At other times, the two hands worked independently, but at all times, I had to ‘feel’ as well as inwardly ‘see’ (visualise) the placement of the marks on the paper. In some respects, this was like a game of chess being played by a blind - person, a situation where the entire layout of the piece had to be memorised. A kind of ‘unsighted vision’ was in play. Though unable to see, my body and my mind’s eye was able to remember what had taken place at any moment during the performance.
I say that one must be a seer, one must make oneself a seer\textsuperscript{44}

Everything I had done prior to this moment had been of a ritualistic kind. Now, in the performance itself, I was continuing a ‘rite’, albeit a ritual of a somewhat shamanistic kind.

At one point (facing the audience), I pressed my back against the wall and began to draw large arcs, my torso acting as a kind of fulcrum for the swing of the arms, rather like the motion of two pendulums in a clock. There was an absolute silence in the gallery, a tangible attentiveness towards a set of actions by someone who could not see what was being seen. In this state, the entire space, audience, art, maker and the work became an absolute whole.

Plate 61

The ‘point’ or message of this work had not been clear to me, during the making of it. I believed this work was still defining itself and refining its own theoretical and encoded paradigms.

The analogy with the crucifixion is clear. Unable to see my audience (perhaps encased in a private world un-seeable by others), I nevertheless exposed an image of the vulnerable and 'suffering' feminine.

Framed within the arc of forms drawn with both hands, arms outstretched, I moved into a pose of absolute stillness. Whether Leonardo's representation of the outstretched arms of a male figure, representing, man and cosmos, or the iconic figures of a Madonna or Saint, this closing form is archetypal in its symbolic significance.
The act(s) of performance had led me in unexpected and unplanned-for direction. Yet that final pose seemed an appropriate closure to the exhibition in Cologne.

But as one thing closes another opens. I returned to England to work on more large scale works on paper. Work also began (again) on sonic collaborations with musicians. The theatricality of Cologne had confronted me with the inherent and implicit love I have for performance. Evidently, my practice was in a state of ebb, one where the poly-modal approach to experimentation reappeared alongside the visual practice alone.
Plate 65
(Finished Cologne performance space)
PART 3

There are many reasons, difficult to put into words, for this new procedure for composing sounds; one may be that in the experience of hitherto unknown and unadumbrated procedures of sound composition, composer and listener have a new sort of experience of themselves and of their world, and for a moment become-ideally-speechless. 45

I lived with a professional rock musician for many years. 46 I had also been in a band myself (as guitarist and vocalist). Music was and still is an enduring source of inspiration to me. Though my tastes in music are broad, during the last decade at least, I have had a particular fascination for contemporary music. I also like performing; had missed doing this for some time, and wanted to return to it. I was now looking for a way to combine my practice as a visual artist with the practice of sonic realisation.

Within this new period of work, more performances began to take place within a sonic framework that incorporated sound, body and vision. The first performances were a series of solo works using my voice, and including a pre-recorded soundtrack of vocal sounds mixed with other 'concrete' sounds such as the clang of bells and gongs produced on Asian instruments. I also used an acoustic guitar with which to accompany this fusion of vocal and concrete taped sounds. Though I had some pre-recorded materials with which to work, the actual performances were improvisatory.

Although I had previously ‘listened’ to the recorded sounds on tape, I deliberately chose to make the moment of live interaction with these sounds one in which I had no preconceived notions of form, technique and structure. 47 Damaged Dorothy became a work of 7 minutes duration. This is the ‘Dorothy’ of The Wizard of Oz. But this woman was in her early 50s, stuck in a trailer park in the Southern States of America, rather a lost soul, being sustained with large doses of Valium to keep herself ‘together.’ I had written a text for the performance, but never actually performed with

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47 In much the same way, in fact, as I had worked as an ‘actor’ in the Sacker performances described earlier (see page27).
it. I pre-recorded a reading of this text and then added vocals and guitar to the live performance.

The text has a woman talking about 'seeing colours' from unrelieved greys to all the colours of the rainbow. The colours influenced the mood-swings of Dorothy. Considering the large-scale works exhibited in Cologne (and the big Basho pieces), this performance-piece is quite 'small-scale'. Having just come across the John Cage '4’33" I was intrigued by notions of duration. The prepared tape of this work was 7 minutes long, so the performance was to be confined by the length of the tape. The performance (in a back room of The Kingsbridge Pub in Totnes, Devon), was without specific lighting, set, costume and movement other than the act of singing, playing the guitar and occasionally changing the controls on the tape machine.

Subsequent to this performance, I confess to a kind of aversion to the result! Many musicians present for the performance were impressed enough to suggest collaborative projects with me in the future. So why my own diffidence about the piece? It had a kind of naivety to it that seems (now) to be childish and oversimplistic. In any event, this particular form and idea was not pursued further. If I was in fact looking for an acceptable place within the domains of sonic performance, this didn't quite seem to fit inevitable notions of a performance 'off the peg'.

However, a colleague at Dartington, Tim Sayer, watched and heard this performance and we talked immediately about a collaboration. Tim was working on a computer-programme that would create a sequenced pattern of sounds in a random order. The computer programme, written by Tim, had been programmed with sixty sounds, such as my own voice reading text, Tim playing trumpet and a varying medley of sonic effects. Alongside this sonic event, the computer had on its desktop, a grid of colours. When any one of the sixty sounds was played by the programme, a colour within the grid would appear, also randomly. The desktop image of the coloured grid was projected onto a wall behind my performance space. This was a performance where I literally improvised with a computer, where again in the performance, I was using guitar and voice.
This started a new area of work, and a collection of new performances, with other artists and musicians working in this field of 'improvisation'. Not knowing what each artist would bring into the performance and without a known structure or form, the piece began to 'find' its own structure and moments of tension, leading to an ‘agreed’ ending, with a crisp silence. The ending confirmed the absolute complicity between the group that came together for this work (the group being Tony Moore, Jeff Cloke, Mike Mcinerney and myself). To have worked the entire form out beforehand would have been to deny spontaneous and shifting generations of responses, techniques and forms.

*If you have to think about it, you’re already too late*

Comment by Tony Moore

In fact, my own working-methods during these sonic/textual collaborations, was remarkably similar to that employed in earlier visual works. I worked to allow the action of making sound dictate its own passage and transformations. I was certainly aware of the possibility of visualising sound, though I cannot say that the visual motifs used in my paintings and drawings were in my mind at the time of performance.

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48 Improvisation, in the sense of a piece of work devised 'in the moment', usually without a score or text.
Even though I had worked as an actor and performance artist, this new series of performances did stretch and strengthen my performance abilities. I grew in confidence. I performed at several ‘gigs’, each time feeling more comfortable with my own ability to interact with musicians surrounding me. These were, after all, purely sonic works, but enabled a sense of form and idea that was to reflux into my visual work a little later.

With the other three collaborators, we developed an ensemble called ‘Work’, and performed maybe fifteen times, several recording sessions, and gallery gigs. I used my voice, guitar and bass guitar. Moving between various techniques and sound manipulations, at some gigs, I used CDs as samples, pre-recorded sounds and work from other music projects I had been involved in. The overall effect was that of a layers of colours - or sounds, manipulated and blended, sometimes disturbing and harsh, or soft and gentle, but always maintaining the interactive - complicite between the four players.

_When he (Kandinsky) realised that the musicians’ incorporeal freedom from earthly inspiration for his art was also the privilege of the painter, he became one of the most violently attacked pioneers._

It is doubtful, even now, that I can depart from inter-modal methods of art-making. Music and sound mean too much to me to abandon them in favour of a Fine Art practice alone. Here again, perhaps, there is a link between my work and the ideas of intersection expressed by Klee and Kandinsky. There is something about sonic art (music in particular) that suggests further innovation in terms of visual relocations of sound to image.

_The Preston ‘Set’…_

Working with sonic artists, Tony Moore and Jeff Cloke, led us to agree to a series of studio recordings, in I.C. Studios, Preston, (Lancashire). We had a general agreement that I would bring to the studio a visual idea for the recording, (some kind of visual

49. Kandinsky, Wassily, _Point and Line to Plane_, preface Hilla Rebay, Dover publications; New York, 1979, page 8
sonic ‘map’ or score). These visual notations would have to be ‘free’ enough to permit the maximum of freedom to those sonically responding to them. The visual ‘scores’ were made with and without reference to musical notation. ‘Without’ in the sense of never giving directions for specific pitches, melodies and dynamics, but ‘with’ in the sense of representing the musical domain of line, duration and rhythm (perhaps even *timbre*).

I could not write a conventional score (not having been trained as a musical composer), but I did know how to paint a tension or release. I decided to create a ‘score’, that was open to translation and interpretation, and as a painted image, more like a mapping of space and time and tension that would give a free hand to the interpreter.

The composition or score was written prior to the recording. Using time-durations (spaces between markings or length of continuous lines), levels of tension (depending on the thickness of markings and/or the complexity of a configuration of different figures) and release (‘space-between’ or visual ‘silences’) for each track- the score gave the artists the shape and feel of the work and the overall ambience of the piece. The composition was arranged in nine parts, each part with its own set of directions for a specific duration. Each column in the plate (67) below, represents a specific period of sonic activity, ranging between one and nine minutes in duration.
The first score version consisted as much of text as abstract markings. In this format, I am close to representing something that does look and read like a musical manuscript. Some of the words used (for example) might be the name of a song learned and performed in my past. They are ‘prompts’ for me as the vocalist/cantor in the piece. This, in the end was the version that I worked from during the performance and recording. The wedge-like form, rising in height and complexity from left to right (as many musical scores do), was to be mirrored in the performance itself. Because I was directing the performance and the recording, I needed a textual ‘script’ far more than (as it turned out) was needed by the other performers.

Plate 68

The Plate (68) above is another version of the priming score I used for my own performance. In making a different version of the ‘original’ score, I wanted to create other versions of it that would offer a diversity of responses to my collaborators. There is no actual text in the score, above. It is in fact a drawing of an imaginary soundscape and has many allusions to landscape. Nevertheless, it is still a version that follows exactly the form and structural dynamics of Plate 67.

I had not given any instructions as to melody or tonal ranges, nor the duration of the notes. Indeed this whole area of music and sound had been left totally open to the individual artists’ powers of interpretation. Though the performers would sometimes (and did) perform within specific tonal domains (even keys), they often didn’t, and
worked in free tonalities as well. I am acutely aware of the importance of rhythm in my work as a visual artist and sonic performer. It is impossible to make any mark on paper without sensing and manifesting a rhythmic configuration of one kind or another.

Some composers have claimed that rhythm is the prime motive-force for and behind music and that pitch and harmony are less important. But these would be composers (or composers’ works) that deliberately suppress elements of pitch and melody in favour of pulse and meter. A classic example of such music would be the final Dance Sacrale from Stravinsky’s Le Sacre du Printemps. Rhythm also forms the structural basis for much of the music of Vivaldi.

Rhythmic music is often associated with the Dyonisian in music, a music of and for the body. Melodic music is generally associated with the Apollonian, that which connects to thought and emotion expressed in intellectual terms. Considering the amount of my visual work that appears to ‘dance’ (especially in the physical way in which I actually work), my own performances (visual or sonic) are governed more by rhythm than any other property of the acoustic arts.

_Music is ... pure rhythm; rhythm and nothing else, for the variation of pitch is the variation in rhythms of the individual notes (i.e. the frequency of vibrations), and harmony the blending of these varied rhythms._

Ezra Pound

Margaret Fisher goes on to say rhythm will be Pounds’ equivalent of ‘pure colour’ in painting. Pound actually used the phrase ‘absolute rhythm’, and also goes on to say;

_Rhythm is the hardest quality of a man to counterfeit_

The rhythm in all my works, marks and paintings, is a representation of my own rhythm, or spatiality. And maybe the unique quality of any art is a reference to, and portrayal of, the artist’s unique sense of events in time and space. Rhythm is Pound’s

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51 Ibid page 21
equivalent to ‘pure colour’ in painting. Comparing this to my own act of working, the colour is not as important to me as the rhythm, and the use of black in many works, and of bold single colours, is the most succinct and clear way to define the rhythm of the piece.

The painted works employ a limited use of colour. Of greater importance within the paintings/drawings are the levels of ‘build and release’, or ebb and flow. A deliberate restriction (or absence) of colour is intended to highlight or accentuate tensions between lines, points and planes whilst at the same time enabling me to represent a form of build/destroy within the working process.

*I think the destructive element is too much neglected in art.*

Plate 69

I cannot say that the Plate (69) above is, *per se*, representative of a graphic score. Yet all works such as these are obviously prone to interpretation in terms of 'events' happening in time and space. Further, the juxtaposition of lines and points, suggests acoustic realisation in terms of pitches and musical 'lines' (themes or melodies). Even

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52 I hasten to add that my own supervisor, who happens to be both composer and painter, has advised me that Pound’s views on music are both flawed and naïve. Nevertheless, what Pound has to say about rhythm and colour is of interest and connects to things I shall write about colour a little later on.

the arrangement of the work into discrete areas of rhythmic marks suggests elements of pulse, meter and beat. A musician would (and did) see this work as something that begins tentatively but which, through time, increases in intensity and dynamic strength to a climactic episode towards the end (the extreme right) of the 'score'.

Plate 70

Plate 70 above, is a different version of the same basic organisation of the piece, perhaps even a form of visual template for the visual notations that succeeded it. This offered the musicians several options in interpretation on the basis of different treatments of the original textual idea (schema). But the basic form of the work is retained, no matter how many permutations were presented in the other works in the series.

I was in fact working on architects’ paper which enabled me to see the progression of each treatment in the form of an overlay on and above the earlier ones. Consequently, by the time I had completed six versions, I could still see the original ‘ghost’ of the textual template, seven layers down. The engineer had a version of the original including the specific time-slots for each collection of visual (acoustic events). The other two musicians chose one version each from the set of six graphic variants and performed from that version.

This provided for a treatment of the idea in terms of each musician playing a version which was originally overlaid by another. In realising the ‘scores’ within the
moment(s) of performance, this layering-effect (transformational and additive drawing) may have been lost, but I doubt it.

**Tribute to Kurt Schwitters...**

The musician, Sam Richards, invited me to collaborate within a gig by his band. My involvement was purely as a video producer, filming and recording the gig, but I also used a stick of charcoal on paper to make marks with my free hand that reflected and perhaps interrogated the sonic events in the concert. After taking the video home, I decided to make an altered version of the gig. I wanted to make something visually and sonically more inventive. I had at that time been researching the work of Kurt Schwitters, and had recently acquired a recording of his phonetic alphabet. The sound of his voice used in this recording, the rhythm and metering would, I realised, combine with the video images I had. His rhythmic utterances, coupled with the ageing-effect of the sepia tones on film, coupled to create an atmosphere of 'the old'. Further, I added another track of my own vocalisations and mixed this with the sounds on the Schwitters CD.

The end-product then was a multi-layered fusion between the Preston recordings, the Schwitters and my own visual treatments and drawings carried out with the Richards' group playing, and adding the visual musical aspect.

54 Recordings of his phonetic alphabet (Schwitters, Kurt; Ursonate 1922-1932: Wergo, 6304-2 286304-2)
Perhaps more than any other project completed during the course of my research, this work employed several modes of self-expression, all reflective of my interdisciplinary past. At this time, I was, however, also continuing work on large-scale pieces that were to form the basis of my next major show in the Gallery at Dartington.

Dartington Gallery; exhibition and performance, April 2003.
Having booked the space in the Dartington Gallery, I was once again (as in Cologne), faced with a large area of blank white walls. I had no planned idea for, or directions for how the works might be hung, other than that I had the materials and equipment that would allow me to include the hanging of work from the ceiling as well as on the walls and placed on the floor. I had fishing-wire, large bulldog clips, and a staple gun, and an idea that paper should be light enough to hang from the ceiling by means of fishing-wire.

I had completed 15 pieces prior to moving into the gallery. I laid the pieces on the floor of the gallery to test ideas of placement. Curiously, each piece seemed to dictate its own filial relationship with another(s). Four of the works were hung from the ceiling in the gallery. This gave the quartet a floating appearance, hanging, still and in a quiet place; quite another feeling and presence from the works that I now fastened to the walls of the gallery. The works were hung, with raw edges, and unframed, purposefully following the rawness of the charcoal marks, and the slightly abrasive and rough application of other materials on the paper.

Unlike earlier shows, where the final exhibition had seemed like a form of completion (even the Cologne show), this show seemed as much a primer for further action and activity as it did a form of closure. I already knew much more of what the collaboration with three musicians would be like during the live performance than in any previous collaboration. Having worked with these musicians before (two in Preston and all three in previous ‘sonic gigs’), I had ‘rehearsed modes of practice and interaction that could easily be re-invoked in this performance.
I began the performance by making a piece of work, following the same modalities as those used in Cologne. The foundation marks were made with charcoal on the floor, then paint in layers, was added once the paper was hanging, thus allowing the wet paint to drip down the paper. The paint came from a plastic bottle that had a small nozzle opening. This allowed me to drag the full bottle of paint across the wall, and the paint to leave its trail, and enough moisture, so that it would drip down the wall. The interaction(s) between charcoal marks (dry) and the dripping paint (wet) created a highly complex interplay between horizontal fixity and vertical fluidity.

55 Once again, laying papers on the floor, and using heavy nails with which to fasten preliminary work on the walls.
The other three artists began the sonic work by reacting directly to chosen works on show. My own responses, however, were within and beyond the context of both the exhibited works and the sonic improvisations now taking place.

No specific instructions for sonic realisation had been offered beyond suggesting (asking) the musicians to look at the images and to respond to them within the frame of their own instrument(s) and techniques.

One of the musicians, Mike McInerney, played a Shakuhatsu, an ancient Japanese flute used by Samurai warriors, as a disguised weapon. Sitting in front of a blue paper work, his sounds threaded through the gallery, like the trails of black lines through the blue ink. The texture of the piece is rough, with soil mixed within the media. The earthiness and richness of soil and blue pigment adds to a feeling of landscape and of a 'clean air'.
Another, Jeff Cloke, used his sound-altering equipment to capture the sounds of the room, and sat in front of a paper work with a large calligraphic symbol; (see Plate 19) black paint and with a ghostly charcoal figuration behind the black shape. Now resonant with clashing sounds, the space became a fearful challenge to walk into. The work in front of him, a strong, bold piece with heavy calligraphic lines, was a daunting gateway and was the first work the gallery visitor would see, upon entering the space.

Tony Moore, playing cello, placed himself in front of a pink and black work; one with a sense of the heaviest ‘weight’ at the bottom of the piece, filtering through and up to a lighter space of visual relief at the top of the work. The tones and vibrancy of cello notes rang around the piece, the melted inks and paints, and were reflected in the smothering cello sounds.
Simultaneously, I worked upon the wall, as the sonic piece began. What is Plate 82 all about? Is it a musical score? A musical score is a collection of signs and symbols used to enable a musician to apply various techniques with which to realise the signs and symbols as acoustic events. Here I was, responding (visually) to a series of sonic events generated by a group of musicians. Thus the markings being made were transcriptions of the frequency, pulse, meter and rhythm of some or all of these sonic events. In a sense, I may have been behaving like a sonograph, a scientific instrument designed to record sound and to translate the entire spectrum of sound into a visual read-out.

Of course, the accuracy of my transcription is open to question (unlike the marks made by a sonograph, which are precise in both time and frequency). Nevertheless, my responses were affected and shaped by the sonic environs of the performance. Consequently, the verticals can be ‘read’ as acoustic events in time and space, and the horizontal marks as being governed (or at least influenced) by the sequence and succession of events, also in time and space.

The shapes made by my body, (the performed gestures), were defined but not pre-ordered. The form(s) of my responses) was/were created by means of an immediate and intuitive action, and not some form of premeditated formal design. In other words, the design of this kind of work was a direct response to the ‘design’ of the sounds being made at any one moment or sequential series of moments.
I have always been concerned about a potential negative impact of the ego on art-making. Ideally, I would have liked to imagine the possibility of (in this case particularly), making an art work in an unselfconscious manner, where thought is not influenced by conscious activities that might intervene in a process of direct realisation of formal and dynamic events taking place in time and space.

Thus, I hoped that the process of doing the work would be one where the work makes itself. I should surely know what will happen; the structure of the piece and where marks might be placed. There is not some magical, mystical way for the work to appear; it happens- just happens, and with little or no intervention by my conscious mind. Making work with no thought but allowing instinctive, intuitive responses and an immediacy of action, can take over ‘the slower process’ of thinking and conscious decision-making. The conscious mind is one prone to pattern and order, many being previously ‘received’ and/or taught. In any event, there is a perceptual delay between thinking and action at a conscious level. Ideally, I hoped to close the gap between thought and action and make the two occur simultaneously. This was the state of art-making to which I aspired, but I cannot of course prove that such a state was ever achieved.

After the visual action, I picked up the bass, and stood in front of one of the four paper works hanging from the ceiling, one with a map-like structure on it, (see Plate 83).
I was now in a position (literally) of being able to respond to the marks on this work together with the surrounding sounds being generated by the other musicians.

Spectators to the performance said as they walked in to the gallery, the sound, the images, the overall effect was disturbing and challenging. The sound levels were loud (most being amplified). Even an un-amplified cello, in such a space, becomes a throbbing tortuous timbre and sonic device. A friend said he was ‘knocked backwards’ as he walked into the presence of the performance. The space and its energy of sounds and works, took a few minutes of readjusting and re-balancing to regain a composure and understanding of what was actually happening within the gallery itself.
As I played the bass, I was aware (with peripheral vision), of spectators standing close and watching me. This was a new experience, that of being watched from either side. As I looked ahead at the paper work, within a confined space, the hanging work created the effect of a small corridor. The viewers, either side, exaggerated this sense of being inside a corridor; one that challenged my focus towards sound and image, and not one that enforced a natural sense of wishing to connect with other viewers and listeners.

I wanted to engage with, and respond to, the other sounds, feeling the presence of the other artists, feeling instinctively where to place the bass notes and sounds and silences; and of course, what to play. But what to play is not considered, it is played; it is done. To consider and think is to cause a hindrance to the immediacy of the reactions and responses to the external stimuli. If anything, the external stimuli and the feeling of the other artists overrides my own internal world of expression, although this world is what the work is all about.

In the context of a performance like this, I am aware of the dichotomy that exists between performer and audience. More, I am also aware of the interplay between sonic and visual forms of performance. Given the presence of 'finished work' and the constant generation of improvised sound, a further schism could develop between performance (in the moment), and plan. Some things have been done (completed), and some things are being done.
The overall performance lasted for about 25 minutes, commencing with the sounds of my hammering nails into the walls of the gallery, then flowing into the production of improvised sounds from the group. This was the first time that I had performed a piece (together with a group of musicians) in a situation where visual and acoustic materials were invented at the same time. This was a kind of conflation of the various modes of working that had formed the progressive and investigative aspects of my practice, to date.

**Gables Yard Gallery**

During the course of my research, I was sometimes asked to collaborate with musicians seeking a visual interaction between my work and their sonic practice. In the case of the Gables Yard Gallery, the cellist/composer, Tony Moore, invited me to ‘accompany’ him with a set of live visual responses. As already discussed earlier in this thesis, the interaction between sound and visual symbol has a history of at least 100 years. Indeed, musicians and visual artist seem to have had an enduring curiosity for the interplay between sound and image for centuries.

But whilst this curiosity was pervasive and even sometimes overt (in the case of visual artists being directly inspired by pieces of music, and composers working in the reverse direction)\(^{56}\), it was not until the artists Paul Klee and Wassily Kandinsky addressed this form of ‘fusion’ in the early 20\(^{th}\) century, that a canon of writing came into being about such forms of interaction. Composers, Arnold Schoenberg (also a painter), and Olivier Messiaen, were also interested in the sonic/colour paradigms and wrote about such relationships now published in treatises.

Gables Yard is a smallish gallery close to the city of Norwich in Norfolk. Tony Moore had been approached by the gallery owner, Robert Henderson, who had ‘seen’ (and heard) Moore’s work in Scotland, some time earlier. I moved-in to the space one day before the performance. A performance-space was available as one of three exhibition spaces, and it was in this performance space that I worked ‘live’ with the cellist.

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\(^{56}\) An example being Mussorgsky’s *Pictures at an Exhibition*...
Because we had done a number of gigs together, before this event, there was no need to discuss a *schema* for the performance. We knew that we could simply allow the collaboration to happen.

I prepared the space by using a heavy weight paper, (the dimensions being five by four foot), together with an underlying lighter Fabriano paper, which was attached to the wall, using gaffa (Duck) tape, and a staple gun (the gallery disallowed the use of nails into the walls). Paper was also placed onto the floor of the performance space, creating a ‘stage’ and working area in which the action would take place. All other walls in the gallery space were a stark white. Tony Moore’s chair was placed at the edge of the paper, in front of me, where he would play cello. The work I made would happen behind him.

![Plate 85](image.jpg)

With strips of gaffa tape, the above form of the three pillars was added to the ‘stage’ left side of the paper. This ‘emblem’ had become something akin to a form of signature, since versions of it had appeared in several earlier pieces of mine. Appearing like some kind of ‘dolmen’, or mathematical symbol (*π* for example), I nevertheless wonder why it has become a familiar symbol in my output. In any event, it suggests architecture and calligraphy; also a symbol representing stability and ‘rest’.
In a situation where one is working in the instant, there is little or no time for self-consciousness. This is a situation in which the self is submerged in momentary action.

To reach that state of condensation of sensation (where the picture could later be recognised as) a work of (the) mind.\textsuperscript{57}

In addition to the white paper, I also used charcoal, paints in black and yellow (the latter being a powder pigment). Previously, I had worked with both sonic and visual material, but in this case, I chose to work visually only, and with no pre-existent material(s) to guide me in my actions and reactions. Why did I do this? I suppose I wanted to find what progress I had made in the development of visual techniques without ‘diluting’ the action in a poly-modal performance. I had earlier been on a journey of making works in a studio space, actions and performances, visual works and sonic works, and had come to a place where I wanted to know how my discipline had evolved.

I was testing and interrogating progress made as a visual performer. I already felt confident about using the materials chosen, but this was an event where I had to work with visual forms before an audience. I knew how difficult it was to relocate the privacy and intimacy of my solo (alone) practice in my studio at home. Now I sought to be able to perform that kind of work in the presence of others.

\textsuperscript{57} Op Cit. Motherwell page 73.
The first action, as the performance started, was to mix the yellow powder paint, with water, in a small dish. The audience was drifting into the performance space. Their noise did not effect the slow deliberate movements used to mix my ‘face-paint’. I had intended to mix the paint, and to apply this to the wall, with my hands. However, as the slow stirring of the yellow paint mixed in with my hands and my own flesh-colour, the obvious next act, was to apply this mixture to my face.

Plate 87

Applying paint to my face, an un-planned action not used before, worked to translate my form. I suppose I was still finding a method of hiding, as I had done in the past, behind scripts, texts, covering my eyes, or using a musical instrument. There has always been a method where I ‘trick’ my self into not being there, and applying a mask of sorts to work from.

It seems then, that the application of the face-paint was yet another form of neutralising mask, one that allowed me to ‘retreat’ into a kind of anonymity, a person less known to an audience. It was of course, also a form of display; an overt action of covering in order to recover. What I sought to recover was a personal space in a public arena; one in which I could work as though alone though of course connected to the gradations of sound being created by the solo cello.

Using large sticks of scenery charcoal, I held a piece in each hand, and began marking the paper on the wall. Picking up the rhythms of the cello, sometime making complimentary jittery marks as the charcoal scratched the surface of the paper; the
sounds in fact being remarkably similar to those being shaped and performed by the musician.

Working with two pieces of charcoal, it was almost as if I conducted the work. Indeed, it did feel as though I was standing in front of a composition, and ‘conducting’ it into existence. As it happened, just when the cello began, and I started to move my body, a terrific thunderstorm broke. Incredible thunderclaps were heard, the very hot weather that had continued through August (2003) broke with this amazing clamorous cacophony of sounds. The noise from the out-doors had a profound effect on the performance inside.
As the work developed, my familiarity working the charcoal on paper continued and I relaxed into the work. The techniques I had developed were tools that enabled me to work fluidly and easily. I guess the same familiarity and ease was utilised by the cellist, who had also worked a series of practices (earlier) that enabled him to improvise effectively in the moment and without a ‘programme’.
After completing a charcoal rendering on the wall, I wetted the surface of the paper and began to work in paint (though there were now traces of yellow paint on the paper, from my stained hands). Again I used black. Why? I suspect that I seek an absolute form of incisiveness with marks. Black (the colour of many writing inks and the tone used by this computer in basic writing mode), is incisive and bold. But perhaps there is an underlying (unconscious) concern, too, with mourning and death. The abstract marks made in Paleolithic caves in Europe are black marks. Only the representations of animals and natural forms are coloured. Do we think in black and white? Is the unconscious saturated in these two tones? But how do we ever know what another person perceives, is anything similar to ones' own view of the world?

...the biological basis for the fact that colour and luminance can play distinct roles in the perception of art or real life is that colour and luminance are analysed by different parts of the visual system, each of which is responsible for different aspects of visual perception the areas of our brain that process information about colour are located several inches away from the area that analyses luminance - they are anatomically distinct as vision is from hearing...parts of the brain that process colour information are present only in primates. The luminance system, which is evolutionary older, is common to all mammals...most primitive or necessary visual information about a scene is found in luminance variations.  

And so, is the use of black and white reflecting my instinctual desire to see a special kind of luminance in my work? Perhaps colour (in some contexts), can obscure or deflect specific properties of light in (and on) form.

Colours are only symbols; reality is to be found in lightness alone.  

Picasso

Where my work is dominated by symbols, the use of colour would, it seems to me, dilute the clarity of the forms. If I use(d) colour, the palette is restricted. I want to make my (visual) points with the maximum of sharpness and incisiveness. That is perhaps why some of the work in black and white is so readily 'readable' to a musician-someone used to reading from scores in black and white.

59 Ibid. Introductory page
I am concerned with the creation of various depths of field. I seek to illuminate my works by means of sharp contrasts between mark and texture- between line and plane. Charcoal has a dry quality that invites (by it’s very dustiness) both hard-edged-line and treatments that blur and indicate ‘depth’ (distance).

![Image of charcoal drawing]

Plate 92

Hans Hartung; (Untitled. Indian ink and grease chalk on velum.1948)

Hartung is celebrated as an often ‘hard-edge’ visual artist. Plate 92 above leaves the viewer in little doubt as to the order in which marks and textures have been applied. Underneath the ‘black-on-white’, is a rectangle of soft ochre and a soft orb of lines stained yellow from the tonal derivatives of the ochre. The two crosses indicate a form of visual cancellation, perhaps. In any event, the crosses are added to link the overriding dominance of the rhythmic forms with those of the planes with which they interact. The luminance of the work is created in the interplay between line(s) and planes.

This is also a work that deals with ‘before’ (in front) and ‘after’ (behind). A piece of mine (Plate 93) (using only black and white), illustrates my own concern with these temporal dimensions of art-making and the influence of light (and its absence) on an overall form.
Peoples' neural pathways are different. Every individual perceives colour in his/her own way. It may be that my interest in black and white is pathological and kind of visual biological imperative.

The information I receive through my eyes might affect a different area of brain other than the visual cortex alone. Maybe I am referring back to some ‘ancient self’, and the primal, instinctual and intuitive responses in which I am most comfortable. Chris Sackers' name for this idea was 'genetic memory', believing that the work we make is an evolutionary continuum of ideas, passed through genes. Jerzy Grotowski had a similar theory (The Grotowski Source Book, 1997), and working within his theatre methods, he searched for the performer's soul, and for 'who's son are you?'. The rhythm of dance, song and performance may have been genetically imprinted, and perhaps we can re-learn and re-discover these ancient rituals through work.

I am suggesting, too, that sensory perception is lateral and collaborative. In any event, the human brain is now well understood as working in the form of a series of neural lattices, where different sensory inputs are allowed to coalesce and combine.
Scientists have determined that the prevalence of different kinds of synaesthesias reflects the closeness of the 'cross-wired' areas in the brain. For example, one common kind of synesthesia is seeing colours associated with numbers, and the part of the brain that codes for colours is very close to the part that perceives numbers...even in non-synesthetic people, the degree of cross-communication between different modalities varies from one person to the next, accounting for differences in the tendency to make associations, like metaphors or poetry.\textsuperscript{60}

Though never tested for synesthesia, I may possess that faculty. Certainly I have always used several modes of self-expression with which to make art-work. The connection(s) between sound and image (and the reverse), have always been important to me.

On reflection (something that writing a thesis allows), I am a blend of scientist and creative artist. The scientist in me seeks 'fact' supported by theory, whilst my creative 'self' often denies reason and logic. The intuitive (making art in the moment) seems to offer a non-linear approach to creation- one that requires no specific theory and no pre-designated plan. But there is no doubt that there is a bi-polarity between reason and intuition; between the known and the unknown.

*Something exists as the presence at the two extremities of the same register, two different poles; that of instinct and that of consciousness....we are neither fully animal nor fully human, one is moved confusedly between the two... in the true 'performing arts', one holds these two extreme poles at the same time... to 'be in the beginning'... of your original nature... with all of its original aspects; divine or animal, instinctual passionate... It is this tension between the two poles which gives a contradictory and mysterious plenitude*\textsuperscript{61}.

The above statement, by Grotowski, is probably the most succinct way of describing my own working processes, the wavering between instinct, (primal and animal), and the rationality of the conscious and intellectual. If I am an 'animal' when I work, what follows seems all-too-often to be a modification of the 'beastly' into the 'all human', when a natural propensity to analyse and reflect sets in.

\textsuperscript{60} Op Cit page 198
Of all the works thus made, whilst in performance or action, I would say this piece (Plate 94), without doubt, is the first where my engagement with the work was ‘total’. By this, I mean, the ‘head-space’ from where I worked, did not disperse, at all, into anything other than a focused connection between me, and the work that was being made. In fact, I would say the work was happening with me, not as a separate something a-part from me.

I have had this total engagement with work before, but for shorter periods of time, and not while making marks and in front of a large audience (although this sensation had occurred, albeit briefly, in the Cologne gallery performance). To emphasise the engagement I had with the work, there is on the video piece (see CD no.2) a moment where I accidentally kicked over the tin of yellow powder paint. For a split second, I did step out of the engagement to look at what had happened to the yellow paint that was now dusting the floor, and immediately stepped back into the focus of the work. Jeff Cloke, who watched to work, made the comment, about this split second slip, that due to kicking the tin pot, he then realised how totally absorbed I had been in the
work, to be surprised and slightly 'caught out' by anything other than the work itself; anything else was an interference.

With this incredible engagement with the work, the qualitative value of each mark and gesture, increased in significance; the importance of each mark was more under my direct control.

The Russian artist, Filonov, coined a phrase 'analytical paintings', and worked with this premise, that is; work made with the maximum tension of analytical madeness (sdelannost - from the Russian sdelat, to make or to do, denoting a completion of an action). My understanding of this theory is that the artist uses every aspect of the intellect, the passion or totality of focus from the artist upon the work, one that effects the finished quality and 'madeness' of the work. The more conscious and forceful the artist works at an intellectual engagement with the work, the stronger the effect is upon the finished work, and, therefore, upon the spectator. Every contact with the paper is a recording in the material of the inner psychical process taking place in the artist, and the whole work is the entire recording of the intellect of the person who made it.

Filonovs' work can be related to Paul Klee ... with the same interest in children's art and in the art of the insane; in both artists' work ... the various events within the frame, like a story on a journey, one gradually discovers the pattern and meaning in pictures which have no immediate formal unity.62

If I am fully aware and engaged with the work, and no other sources of the room are interfering and distracting (i.e noise from spectators, of camera flash etc), at this point, or place, I am working in an almost meditative space. There is a 'place' one reaches, when the work is engaged in unhindered action. This is close to being in a state which Eliot called, the empowerment of the moment.

Sometimes, while working, there is a sense of the work 'coming from some other place then into and through me'. During the execution of this performance, I would like to believe that I was the instrument through which (the rite) passed.

The collision of cello and mark...

The visual doesn’t actually correspond with the music and sound; they can be as two separate entities, the cello sound and the marks being made; there is actually nothing to relate the two other than that they are both in the same place and working together. (Although is it not true I may actually, sub consciously respond to sounds from the cello? But actually what is the result, that is, what cello sound or phrase causes what mark?). It is not a translation of the sound, but a reaction towards it, causing a point of collision between two forms of work that creates a juxtaposition.

The ‘edgy’ sounds of the cello, the vibrations and violent sounds of the thunderstorm, and my reactions to these external stimuli caused me to make the marks, but I cannot say if I was following the flow of the sounds. There are times where the rhythmic patterns of the cello sounds are being picked – up and made use of in my methods for making the marks.

If there is a relationship between the sound and the visual work being made, I would suggest it is where the two meet within the same rhythmic pattern.
In a time of challenge appears the rhythmization of human impulses. Ritual is a time of great intensity; provoked intensity; life then becomes rhythm... Performer knows to link body impulses to the song... the witnesses (audience) then enter into states of intensity because, so to say, they feel the presence. And this is thanks to the Performer who is a bridge between the witness and this something. In this sense, the Performer is pontifex, maker of bridges.

Jerzy Grotowski

I had thought it was an energy that attracted people to the work, but unable to find explanation for this, I now consider it to be rhythm. Is it some primal rhythm that we had but have forgotten, and, somehow, within work and performance, this rhythm, for me, is used again. And so I search for the opportunity to make work, and to perform, as it is in this place – a place of work and performance – I re-engage with, or am more fully aware of, my natural rhythm and then my instinctual self;

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63 Op Cit page 305
And the Rhythm of life is a powerful beat,
Puts a tingle in your fingers and a tingle in your feet... 64

There's a metronome inside your head that helps you keep track of time, The beat, is central to our existence. We use it not only to make music, but to coordinate our brains and bodies, keep track of time, and filter the stream of events that assail us in this unpredictable world. The physical tempo corresponds to an internal pulse that regulates our attentions.

One reason is the phenomenon of "absolute tempo." Some conductors can beat 60 to the minute, or any other tempo you ask for, with astonishing accuracy. Daniel Levitin of McGill University in Montreal thinks we all have this ability. He asks people to sing a well-known song that they have only heard in one version, and finds that they get the tempo just right. Hard to explain if we don't have some precise internal metronome to guide us.

But apart from making music, what is the timekeeper for? There must be cultural advantages in being able to join in a knees-up or a hoedown, but it goes a lot deeper than that, Gura reports. Reiss Jones and Drake believe that we perceive the world in pulses, rather than as a stream of consciousness, and that our internal metronome sets the pace. Senses, such as sight and hearing rely on the idea of contrast, because

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64 Lyrics by Dorothy Fields; sung by Sammy Davis jnr. Ensemble, in the film Sweet Charity, 1969.
it's more efficient to confine your attention to places where things change - the edge of an object, for example. 65

And it is at this place where I work. The moment of contrast and a clashing of change, where the sea hits the rocks, when the soft meets the hard. The moment of collision, change, explosion and combustion. It is the meeting of two forces, the power of two energies colliding, the second of explosion, then the recovery, as the two parts or elements recover themselves and return within the rhythmic patterns and maintain a balance. Another reason to reset the metronome (as the New Scientist article suggests) is to join in with a group,

*From an evolutionary perspective, coordinating rhythms with other animals can have real benefits. There is a primal need to know where the other members of the group are, primates in the jungle.* 66

This is the ‘complicite’ – the tuning and feeling the rhythm of the other actors on the stage, knowing how and when they breathe, and where I aim for when working within a collaborative piece, whether it be sound or visual work. In the Gablesyard performance, the rhythmic sounds of the cello, the vibrations of the thunderclaps outside, effected the movements and gestures made in the performance, and I effected them. As all things are connected, my movements disturbed the air that travelled outside, as the lightning electricity excited the air, and those of us who felt it.

Using a similar pose, as seen earlier in Cologne, I worked, at times, with my back towards the wall. Using a large brush, loaded with black paint, I circled and spiralled across the work.

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66 Ibid. New Scientist
In any form of collaborative improvisation, it has always interested me as to how and when a work is ‘completed’. Neither could actually see each other, in fact, neither could see at all. After the second of two climactic and frenetic improvisations by the cellist and me, the process of attenuation and dispersal took a natural course towards a kind of closure. We simply ‘knew’ when the work was ‘done’. I had covered my eyes, in a pre-made mask. Using black polythene, I shredded the plastic into ribbons, and tied a group of ribbons together with another length of plastic; allowing some pieces of the plastic to hang down. The overall effect was that of a tribal mask. This was also to emphasise my inability to see the last few marks being made on the work, as it was coming to completion (see CD 2).

When I look at the sum of a set of actions, I am always tempted to ponder on the nature of the experience(s) that have shaped those actions. If there is a child-like quality, for example, to the symbols and marks made, what does this say about the state of my mind during the execution of a work like this? Interestingly, a musician is sometimes described as playing the instrument. We all know that play is a fundamental form of learning and experimentation in small children. ‘Free-play’ tends to extinguish itself as a person matures. So perhaps I intend a form of recollection of earlier states of play, when structure and time are less important in making things (happen).

*The development of the sensibility, the response to beauty
In early childhood, when the mind is untroubled, is when Inspiration is most possible* 67

Agnes Martin

The quotation from Martin belies a potential for subliminal and unconscious symbolism. Time and time again, my practice has been ‘ghosted’ by echoes from my childhood. I am tempted to believe that the process of making work has changed very little from the time (as a child) when I worked with a Spirograph. In Part Four, I will return to the notion of archetypal images again, especially within the context of there

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being a repertoire of 'shared' images, signs, signals and symbols that are common to all members of our species.
PART FOUR

Essence interests me because nothing in it is sociological. It is what you did not receive from others, what did not come from outside, what is not learned... conscience is something which belongs to essence; it is different from the moral code which belongs to society. If you break the moral code you feel guilty, and it is society which speaks in you. But if you do an act against conscience, you feel remorse - this is between you and yourself; ...essence seems to be a little thing, but it is ours.68

As I approached what I knew would be my final year of research, I was very much aware of the nature of the ‘journey’ that my work had taken me through. Always, it seems, there was a potential for dichotomy between one form of self-expression and another. And yet, my poly-modal methods of working have always been integrated within a linked and parallel practice that has involved a considerable amount of theoretical research. However, in spite of finding many points of contact between my own practice and that of others, I am sharply aware of the distinctiveness that has arisen in the fusion between, visual material and theatre; between site and context, and above all, between sound and symbol.

Perhaps for the first time in the course of my research, I ended the Gablesyard project with the ability to take a collective overview of what had been tried and tested. On the one hand, my practice had a form of social context to it, but on the other, it was a practice that was hermetically sealed within my own chosen creative domain. On reflection, I have always been suspicious of social orders that may dictate or affect style and idea.

This is why the above quotation, from Grotowski, is so apposite and beguiling. If there is a converse to introspection (extrospection?), my work as a collaborative artist may have touched on the latter, but it is has always been my desire to explore my own inner ‘essence’ as an art-maker. This essence ought to be authentic and something that verifies the conscious and unconscious repertoire(s) of art-making, albeit (in my case) a form of art-making that is largely two-dimensional and of an abstract nature.

To be aware of the presence of ‘others’ (collaborative partnerships, and audiences) is going to produce an interactive outcome, one that is shared between and across those

‘others’. The abiding and prevailing theme for my practice has been the continuous observation of nature. Whilst site (the venues in which I have performed and/or exhibited) has had an integral and conditioning potency for my practice, I seem to have carried a personal perspective on the nature of art-making and the art-making qualities of nature. Marina Abromovic speaks of the dangers of removing creativity from the influence(s) of nature, when she says:—

...this kind of presence that makes the difference in a space.
I think that in the situation of art today, there are very few artists who have that ability to create such presence. Most of them lost it because we completely lost our connection with nature.69

At the conclusion of this written thesis, I shall write about the directions that my work has moved towards during the past few months. There has never been a hiatus in my practice. Nothing that I have made represents a fracture from a kind of formal and dynamic continuity based firmly on my quest to make pieces that are natural and of nature. The objective/subjective elements of a practice are always problematic. In particular, I have hovered between allowing the influence (and inflections) of others to affect my methods and forms, and a quest for realization of forms that come from within my own sense of art-making. This has been a form of dualism, something between objectivisation and subjectivity of a personal kind.

Having completed the The Gables Yard project, there followed a two-month gap during which I continued to make work in my studio in Devon. A new project had been talked about that would take me to Italy. I had met the artist Pietro Fortuna, the owner of Opera Paese in July of 2003. After seeing some of my work, he invited me to go to Rome to make some work in his gallery/space. It was agreed that three of us (myself with Tony Moore and Jeff Cloke) would be given the space in which to work for a whole week in November, 2003. The Opera Paese space is built from what used to be a large industrial unit; high ceilings and concrete, a very harsh environment. There is a long corridor, with an 'L'-shape with four alcoves. The sound from four industrial heaters constantly rumble with an insistent ambient hum.

The schema for the performance was to make work, in situ, using the methods and processes that had produced the sonic works in the ‘Work’ gigs, and action mark-making in Gablesyard gallery. It had been discussed, with the other artists involved, that I would not take work with me to the gallery, but would make new work only, live and during the performance. Walking into the space of the Opera Paese; a 3,000 square meter area, (white walls, concrete floors and with an atmosphere reminiscent of heavy industry), my first reaction was, ‘how will I fill this?’ For the first hour, it was daunting to walk around the area. The sheer scale of the place was overwhelming and intimidating. But I was used to sensing places and to finding ways to make a ‘fit’ between myself, my work, and the inherent properties of ‘site’.

Perhaps it was the sheer scale of the place that influenced a decision I made to make a series of pieces that would entail working continuously for 24 hours. Most of my visual work has been on the large-scale though I am mindful of Henry Moore’s definition of scale as being *not a matter of size, but of the nature of the marks made on a surface.* I am aware that my works have explored both the prolix and the simple. But the number of marks on a surface has not been a factor in scale. It is the actual energy and structure of the marks that has best served my sense of ‘size’ in a work. Opera Paese was, as it turned out, an ‘empty space’. Its vastness invited large-scale solutions. In any event, my initial ‘walk-through’ in the space was one in which I interrogated that kind emptiness in an attempt to conjure with responses that would fill it.

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Plate (101), by Banksy, seems to exemplify this notion of space-filling perfectly although the added white text creates a further narrative. The following words are from Banksy, the artist, explaining his process.

*Obtain a fucking sharp knife. Blunt knives result in fluffy pictures and make the whole process long and boring. Snap off blades of British steel are best.*

*Draw your artwork on paper, glue onto some card then cut straight through the both. Acetate is apparently quite good but any sort of free cardboard is okay. Stiff 1mm to 1.5mm board is ideal.*

*Get a small roll of gaffa tape, pre-tear small strips and stick them on your shirt inside your coat...*

*...Spray the paint sparingly onto the stencil from a distance of 8 inches.*

*If you’re in a place with lots of security cameras wear a hood, move around the city quickly and act like a sad old drunk if you attract attention.*

*Remember crime against property is not real crime. People look at an oil painting and admire the use of brushstrokes to convey meaning. People look at a graffiti painting and admire the use of a drainpipe to gain access.*
The time of getting fame for your name on its own is over. Artwork that is only about wanting to be famous will never make you famous. Any fame is a by-product of making something that means something. You don’t go to a restaurant and order a meal because you want to have a shit.

Banksy
(Process; a section). 71

In describing some of the conditional parameters for art-making, Bansky manifests a deep sensitivity to context and site. But there is something evasive and illusory about his method(s), perhaps. Certainly, I seldom feel any sense of the ‘message’ when working ‘live’, neither do I work with some form of script or propagandized ‘storyboard’. The space surrounds me; I am in the space, and my work is made from within to without- seldom from without to within.

Preparing the space...
I bought rolls of yellow paper from a local art shop in Rome. Hanging the paper gave me some sense of the familiar, as the placing of paper on the wall allowed me to relate back to Cologne or Gables yard. By accident, however, a long sheet of paper (ten metres) fell from its nails (as in Cologne, nails and hammer were used to hang the paper, and also gaffa tape). The central nail remained in place, and the paper fell in on itself, and folded like the wings of a bird or a bat. The effect was stunning. If had had enough paper, I would have mounted ten sheets in the same manner, the paper looking statuesque, like a sentinel or guard.

71 http://www.banksy.co.uk/menu.html
Arranging the paper around the space, some sheets were left flat against the wall or on the floor, and others left with the draped ‘sentinel’ effect. A long stretch of paper was laid out on the floor, some twenty-five metres in length, then held down with gaffa tape. Around the edges, I used a cling-film plastic. The plastic was added by Pietro Fortuna and Maurizio Morrione, the curators, as they were concerned for the floor being messed up with paint, and had been warned about my use of paint and pigment by Chris Sacker, who had been with me in Cologne!

Whilst I was hanging paper, and setting the scene for the twenty-four hour performance that would take place on the Friday, Tony Moore was making use of the
four alcoves, mounting his own visual pieces upon the wall, and Jeff Cloke was organising his sound-manipulation equipment, the same equipment used in the ‘Work’ gigs, and in Dartington Gallery. This consisted of a recording unit, designed for sampling the sounds of the room, and being processed by Jeff Cloke, by adding reverb and various effects. We had decided all of the twenty-four hours would be recorded, on mini disc and digital video camera. (see displayed C.D. set in exhibition and/or coda images).

The Performance; action - interaction.
The performance began at 7pm. on the Friday night. We began making work, and people drifted into the gallery space. My first work, and action, was painting marks on paper, (for reference I called this the Poster piece). I began this piece, at an early stage of the performance, but kept returning to it, throughout the 24 hours.
(The Poster piece is given a more detailed appraisal on page 149).

Plate 105

I intended this performance to follow the same processes as in earlier ‘Work’ gigs. After about three hours of working, there was most definitely a divide between the
three of us working in the space. The 'complicité', or the 'tuning-in', or the working and performing together, was failing. Perhaps due to the shape of the space, each of the three performers began to work in a fashion that was independent of the others. But this was also due to the degree of concentration that emerged. In what might ultimately become a three-way collaboration, the process of ignition and initialisation was a personal one, not something that could be shared in an interactive way.

My first markings were not in the least tentative. Working with charcoal on the floor of the gallery, I began to trace-out 'figures' that represented a kind of formal ground from which to develop more complex marks and symbols.

As in Cologne, Dartington, and other paper works, charcoal marks have been made, as a foundation for a piece, an inner structure is built, to work from. The charcoal marks may be totally painted out, or just a faint (feint) trace is seen of them, but they are still there, creating a 'scaffold' for the work. Once again, I made marks that echoed a kind of primacy for the horizontal and vertical axes. Much of my work seems to have a 'secret geometry' though it is a geometry that does not measure a ground but forms a kind of rhythmic and spatial underpinning to treatments that I know will follow later.
I then moved to some of the papers on the walls, all the time being aware of the flux between the three performers and the continuously changing stream of visitors to the gallery.

![Plate 107](image)

The difference between working on open flat paper and those partially folded ones on the wall was remarkable. Each new mark had to be made within a confined if elastic space. One of the first marks made (seen in the plate above), was the cruciform at the top of the ‘triangle’. But having anchored the top of the form, subsequent marks were far more melismatic and loose. My body-position can clearly be seen for what it is— that of an intruder into a limited space, quite different from the whole-body surface offered by the large sheets on the floor.

The use of newspapers ...

Finishing the yellow paper I had been using, I looked for alternatives to make work with, and found a pile of newspapers. Using gaffa tape to stick the sheets of newsprint together, I mounted them on the wall, and began the application of paint and charcoal. Though not limited by an elastic form such as the triangular forms (above), I quickly realised that the iterative rectangles of news-print were also formal limiters of their own kind. The combination(s) of text and image were a challenge of a different kind.
In a way, these were already completed forms. But the use of gaffa tape offered me an opportunity to impose another form of counter-geometry and rhythm to the formulation. These were completed before I began to make any marks on this new and third kind of surface.

Plate 108

What followed was a series of quick arabesques with coloured as well as black paints. The news-print had been affixed in any kind of vertical and horizontal alignment, so I was free to work with symbols that did not conform to the usual top/bottom, left/right configuration.
I was very much aware that the work could be viewed from any angle. Consequently, the marks made were worked in a kind of space that was free of any specific spatial gravity. Retrospectively, I am struck by the interplay between 'heavy' and light markings. Thick lines seem to me to be more 'noisy' than thin ones. The thicker lines are a kind of *cantus firmus* for the counterpoint of thinner lines and marks. In fact, the
effect of the newsprint was one of a kind of visual polyphony. My responses to this form of polyphony was (it seems to me) almost Baroque in nature, where decorative motives are used to articulate the underlying solidity of the spatial geometry of a form that has much in common with bar-lines in a musical manuscript.

Plate 112

Plate 113

I am aware, of course, of other visual artists who have used newsprint in their works, (see Plates 112-3, Miro at work with newsprint). In the case of Miro and Picasso, print was used selectively in order to respond to specific ‘headings’ or words from newspapers. Many of the Cubists painted simulations of newsprint in order to imbue the works with a sense of a kind of propagandised ‘illuminated’ manuscript. Indeed, given the final treatments that I made of the sheets of newsprint, these too have something of the illuminated manuscript about them, albeit, manuscripts where the text is overlaid and often obscured and not decorated alongside the text.

Though I cannot say why, the figures employed in Plate 114 (below), have a kind of totemic form, the two on the right side being engaged ‘mirrors’ of each other and the one on the left being an incomplete form of the figures on the right. There is also a sense in which this work fulfils some of the dictates of Kandinsky’s points, line and planes. In particular, (and given the linear dominance in much of my work(s), Kandinsky’s definitions of combined lines, seem apposite to much of what this piece contains.

The third, and last basic type of line is the result of the combination of the first two kinds. Consequently, it must be called the combined line. The nature of its individual segments determines its particular character:

1. It is a geometric combined line, if the parts brought together are exclusively geometric,
2. it is a mixed combined line, if the free parts are associated with the geometric, and
3. it is a free combined line, if it is composed entirely of free lines.

Indeed, Kandinsky’s essay on ‘line’ seems to me to underlie much of the formal parameters of my work. I was especially impressed by Kandinsky’s writings on time. The close association of my work with sonic events (music especially) has often been reflected in the ways in which I treat linear forms in particular. Again, Kandinsky’s words on line and time are fitting in the context of much of what I completed in Rome.

Thus, the possibilities of using line as a time element are manifold. The application of time has a different inner colouration in horizontal and vertical lines, even if of equal lengths, and perhaps it is in reality a matter of different lengths.

which, at any rate, would be psychologically explainable. The time element in a purely linear composition must not, therefore, be overlooked and in the theory of composition it must be subjected to an exact examination.\textsuperscript{74}

Again, though not aware of it at the time, newspapers are \textit{a priori}, 'time-pieces'. They are a chronicle of events that take place from time to time. Plate 114, is a kind of time-piece and indeed has the look of a series of clock-faces or chronometers including the dynamic swing of pendulums and/or the mechanical gyrations of cogs and wheels. I am also tempted to wonder if the old joke \textit{what is black and white and read (red) all over?} is also a subliminal part of the treatment of the piece!

Plate 114

At the conclusion of this written thesis, I shall indicate briefly the course that my ongoing practice has taken. But during the work on newspapers, I became aware of the symbolic potency of individual letters in text. For example, the two enclosed ‘o’s’ on the right, are counterbalanced by an opened ‘o’ which forms the letter ‘c’. Open that ‘c’ further, and it can be placed as an arch between the left and right of the piece. Open it still further and it becomes an ‘i’ or an ‘I’. This mutative property of basic

\textsuperscript{74} Op Cit. p 98
linear forms has intrigued me sufficiently to begin work on a kind of symbolic alphabet of my own. I will make brief mention of this at the close of the thesis.

Plate 115

Here is Motherwell, working by making very free painterly responses to a page of a printed and published music manuscript. It is a curious yet apposite example of the tension that can be created between something of a textual or notational nature in conjunction with the imposition of free-flowing gestures, marks or symbols. In any event, it stands as an example of something rather close to the kind of work in which I engaged with newsprint.

The 'Poster piece'.
At the conclusion of the 24-hour project, Jeff Cloke asked for a photograph to be taken of the three of us in front of one of my pieces, which he chose to name as 'that poster'. Whilst not all of us could agree with this title for the piece, I can see why it could be described as a poster of some kind. Cloke's terminology must surely have arisen partly from the sheer size of the piece. It is a very large piece of paper, and like

many posters, it seems to represent a slogansque kind of message. In keeping with many posters that ‘advertise’ (or propagandise), it has considerable graphic power, especially in terms of an overt form of bilateral symmetry.
It is a work with a ‘narrative’ and a ‘message’. It remains one of the most complete forms of self-expression that I have completed so far.

Paint was applied to the paper, first in the form of blue squares and cubes, then adding various reds, and plenty of water to encourage the paints to drip down the paper. During the night, the piece was returned to again and again. It was not completed in one series of actions, but added to over the twenty-four hour period. Once again, the work is ‘rounded’ with an enormous circle.

The circle, one of the most complete and completing forms, is nevertheless easily translated into a vortex. The enclosure of the circle can be a kind of crucible or vessel in which the turbulence of nature can be represented. Both Leonardo and J.M.W Turner painted works that were vortexes towards the end of their lives. In both cases, these vortexes were connected with deluge, a form of psychic inundation. I am not at all sure if the generous use of water did not play an integral part in the formal treatment of this piece.

The ‘Poster Piece’ is one of the most complex pieces I have ever made. A work consisting of several collections of figurations, (the largest being the enclosing curves
of an incomplete circle), it is clearly dominated by aspects of bilateral symmetry. This symmetry was dictated by my own placement in the vertical centre of the piece, working with left and right hands from my own vertical axis. Most of the detailed work, however, was done at a later stage with my right hand alone. The top of the paper is high enough to be at the extremes of my reach.

The central vertical axis is the least-marked of the entire surface, with the exception of the cruciform black markings at the apex of what is a kind of triangulation within the arc of the greater circle. The original blue squares have been all but obliterated. This central space is a kind of ‘doorway’ or ‘window’, which acts to invite the eye into a central visual pathway. Two rectangular forms are placed on the lower right and left of this central ‘window’. The one on the right has another complex rectangular area that was achieved by working over an area masked by tape.

The red line at the base of the piece is in fact a mass of red powder-paint that settled as I worked. It forms an intense ‘ground-line’ for the complete work and offers a kind of ‘colour-key’ for the use of red throughout the rest of the piece. The apex of the circle (the cruciform black in the top centre), is like the configuration of the head of an insect, the remainder of the form being similar to the thorax of a beetle. Is it possible that the configuration at the top is literally, the ‘head’ of the piece? It is, after all, the area closest to where my head was when standing and working on the piece.

An ascendant small figure, a dark line connecting to a red point, is a major device in driving the eye upwards towards another figure (in blue) that arrests this upward movement in the form of a kind of downward chevron. I see these two small configurations as essential in completing the work. But these markings were not the ones that ended the work. I took some white chalk and began a series of ‘writings’, mainly done with the right hand. None of the ‘writings’ are a specific language, though they have the look of Arabic scriptural writings, for certain.

During this stage of the piece, I had a sense of writing in a secret language (Leonardo again?). The writings were always done from right to left. The only piece of actual text are the words TELL ME written in mirror-writing in the lower right of the piece. Beneath the upward curve of the arc at the top of the piece, there are two more large
rectangles. Geometry (mostly my own), forms the underlying (and overlying) matrix for the piece. (see my visual analysis of the piece, in Plate 168, page 169).

There had not been an intention to make a work that I would later compare to Islamic art, or other calligraphic forms. However, calligraphy is most definitely an influence, not just within the writing on paper, but the shape of marks and symbols that appear in the work. I have included a number of details (below) from the piece in order to highlight the fact that large-scale works often involve the completion of several (or many) small-scale pieces that work to articulate a larger complete form.
Paper and Gaffa strips.

From time to time, I worked away from the sets of pieces that have been described above. Some of the walls invited a response simultaneous to the engaged work in other places. Taking a role of gaffa tape, I made a simple form on one of the walls. This figure is simple a kind of bridge with three supports, or a kind of three-legged stool. It is also close to being the sign for $\pi$ and has the look of Japanese or Chinese script too. I left some of these forms without any further treatment. They seemed very much to be a sharp visual contrast to the complex pieces being worked elsewhere. A double cruciform device was also made.
I then worked with charcoal on each of the two pieces of paper. Frankly, there were times during this performance where my mind wandered into a kind of oh fuck-it mode. I was often tired and in need of some form of relaxation and relief. I wonder if these little ‘studies’ (etudes) are a form of disengagement from the large-scale. Certainly they are restrained in formal terms, and seldom if ever constitute more than a few interlocking gestures.

But these short ‘interludes’ with gesture and symbol, also led to a series of works in the large-scale again. I suspect that these larger works (the fourth of a series of responses with ‘big’ formats), were also ‘studies’, though in a sense all my work on paper has been concerned with acts of ‘studying’. However, the work at Opera Paese was of a type where the relatively speedy production of a number of works is bound to lead to interaction and cross-fertilisation. In fact, what ultimately accrued from the 24 hours of work was a series.

The ‘etude’ enlarged.

All the indeterminacy of the mind, like the whole empty space to be covered, is attacked, invaded, possessed by a necessity that grows more and more precise and insistent.

The soul of the mind requires marvellously little stimulus to make it produce all that it envisages, and employ all its reserve forces in order to be itself, which it clearly knows it is not until it is very different from its ordinary condition. It does not want to submit to being what it most frequently is. A few drops of ink, a sheet of paper as material for the accumulation and co-ordination of moments and acts, are all that is required... ⁷⁶

⁷⁶ Paul Valery, Degas Manet Morisot; The Stage of Drawing: Gesture and Act, edited by Catherine de Zegher, selected from the Tate collection, Tate publishing, New York, 2003.
Never before had I worked for a continual 24 hours, and never before reached a stage where the feeling of 'attack' and a desire to totally overcome the emptiness of the space formed a kind of obsessive drive to fill and complete. I want to emphasise that the work in the space(s) available was inevitably phased (the impossibility of completing all pieces at the same time) and continuous/discontinuous. But it has often been my practice to prepare a new work by means of making a series of marks that become the underlying (usually invisible ultimately) formal framework for later stages that lead to completion.

The adrenalin required to make this amount of work was great. Ultimately, I found any sheets of paper lying around in order to complete the process of filling and covering the walls with marked works. The three works that follow were completed in sequence (almost). These three works are hung in line with each other. Looking from my left to right, I worked on the three pieces in a way that relates to notions of 'series' perhaps much in the same way as the 'series paintings' of Monet. I had worked on these three pieces consecutively. I intend to establish, that in addition to a set of governing (familiar) symbols that permeate many of my pieces, these three works are a series that play with structural (and technical) devices in the form of bilateral symmetry.

The symmetry, of course, is a reflection of my own symmetry.

In addition to the relentless rumble of the heaters in the gallery, the sounds issuing from Cloke and Moore were often abrasive, even at times aggressive and overwhelming, albeit in amplitude alone. The frequent ferocity and sheer noisiness of their work was far-removed from the accustomed peace and quiet of my studio in England. To what degree does this kind of sonic/visual interaction create tensions between noise and mark? Certainly I am inspired by sound. I often listen with a sense of 'shaped sound'. The different energy-states of my marks (heavy/light- thick/thin) were reflective of the fluxes in energy of the sound itself. But there were (and are) times when I must free myself of such influences. Such moments of release from sound arose during my contemplation of the series that follows. Having completed one, it became a kind of source for others that would follow. Sound, however was
almost continuous, so it was difficult to avoid a kind of choreographic practice where the dynamics of the music affected the dynamics of my mark-making.

* I have always wanted my work to be inspirational and reasonable on the humanistic level. *The implied purpose of that kind of contribution would have been to somehow elucidate, specify and enrich humanity's life experience.* Hence followed my involvement with a search for a visual form to parallel music.*

Zapkus

Although I approached each piece of paper with an indeterminate attitude, the works did become a series of pieces. Approaching the work, without any premeditated formalism, maintained a continuous stream of new visual possibilities. The paper works were each made as separate pieces, and had not been considered as a series, whilst being executed, but they are most definitely all part of a visual continuum. This form of continuity is reflected in the parallelism of gesture and symbol that ultimately links one response with another, responses to the works being made and the sound-scape that continually ‘informed’ them.

Throughout this series of works, there are repeated circular structures, underpinning the layers of marks and textures made with the various materials, paints, charcoal and graphite. However, the circle is treated in the first of three as an explicit figure, but in the remaining two, as implicit. The ‘whole’ that encompasses the inner core of the work carries semelances to facial structures (as a reflection of ‘self’?). I began to view the circular shape as a structure or scaffold from which other marks and gestures would arise and accrue.

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During the early stages of the above piece; the charcoal marks were intensely applied to the paper, with my eyes covered, and charcoal sticks held in both hands. Tony Moore made sounds on the cello. This action occurred late on the Friday night, with a small audience watching. The heavy horizontal lines cutting through the circle were added at a later stage of the performance, on the Saturday afternoon.

Hidden within the textual marks, are again two words from Leonardo *tell me* (written backwards) This appears as a form of textual 'ghost' from the earlier use of the words in the piece (Plate 131 and 132) above.\(^78\)

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\(^78\) Op Cit. Complete works of Leonardo, p. 305.
Tell me signifies a question from me to the work itself. What does the work know (do) that tells me something? The answer to the ‘question’ of course lies in the work itself so the question tell me is in fact rhetorical.

Plate 134

I want to suggest that the completed work above may act as an illustration of marks made ‘in the moment’ (where reaction-time may be in micro-seconds), and marks made as a result of more deliberate and time-lengthened formal activity and analysis. The first stage in this work consisted of the large orb/circle being drawn. This is perhaps formulaic since I regard the circle (especially ones described by the arc of my arms outstretched) as tried and tested. In making such a form, I am immediately saturating the piece in a fundamental geometry. I am the ‘plan’ for the marks being made. My own form is a pre - determinant of the initial response.

But having set this form (done behind my back, facing away from the wall), I then addressed (faced) this form and began to work along, around and within it. If there is a possibility of seeing the way in which a work like this was made (apart from seeing
me make it on film), it must be connected with the inherent properties of the marks themselves. As it happens, the swirling and turbulent marks, made within the falling arcs of the circle, were made in the moment and often as a direct reflection of sounds being generated by the other two performers. In fact, they look like improvised marks, which is exactly what they are.

It so happens that the sonic material made by the other collaborators is often free of clear and regular pulse (meter). Pulse in music is close to being a form of sonic geometry. It even looks like geometry on a page of musical score.

Plate 13579

Plate 13680

79 Lutoslawski. Witold, Jeux Venitiens pour Orchestre, Score Edition 5012, Moeck Verlag, Celle
80 Cowie. Edward, Birdsong Bagatelles for String Quartet, part 3
At a later stage, however, I returned to this interplay between fixed and free mark-making, and commenced a process of deliberate rendering of some of the salient and most powerful symbols in the piece, beginning with the circle. I added paint to the charcoal markings to make the arcs more ‘noisy’. I then added the ‘bars’ in an act of completion. In all but one case, these bars are marked with equal weight and stress in bilateral relationship with each other.

The last two marks were the two ripples in the lower right corner of the piece. In a way, they are signing the work out, something akin to the fixing of a signature. The more I examine my works, in retrospect, the more I realise that numbers are important to the formal treatments of the pieces. The interplay between groups of two and threes is a ‘counting motif’ similar perhaps to duple and triple time in music. My work is a combination of making sense of forms and the forms that my senses take within concepts of site and situation.

...all knowledge comes from the senses and results from an abstraction based on sensorial data. 81

The exterior of the work, the newspaper side panels, had been placed in order to maintain a white wall around the work, but as the marks continued out beyond the paper, these side ‘wings’ became a necessary device that leads the ‘arms’ to the ‘outside’ of the work, to a new area. The framing of the initial marks then, are not to be used as guidelines since there is no pressure from the frame that forces the work to stay within it. The boundary, created by the paper, is broken as work spills out and across the edges. The effect of a treatment like this is to enlarge the single piece to that of a triptych. At the very least, it continues bilateral symmetry beyond the ‘frame’ of the paper itself.

Although this piece is filled with intense and often complex marks, there is a great deal of empty space, a kind of ‘breathing space’ where the intensity can flood from the continuum of the intense markings to a calmer space beyond. In this manner of working, the ability to leave the empty space reflects back again to the calligraphic art of China, where simple characters are set in gentle scenic landscapes, and the white

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spaces lighten the work whilst at the same time highlighting the markings on the paper.

I allowed a considerable amount of paint to drip to the floor since this provided a form of linear tracery that worked a kind of visual counterpoint to the swinging arcs and vortex-swirls of the improvised gestures within. The subsequent overlay of dark bars was done in order to lock the forms together, rather as hinges serve to stabilise a door swinging in free space.

Plate 137
Plate 138
(details)

I am certainly aware that most of my purely improvised gestures are childlike in quality. From a very early age (often within the first year from birth), a human child will begin to make marks. These marks are invariably abstract in nature, mainly (and often) consisting of vertical and horizontal lines; leading to cross-hatching and circular forms by the age of about three years. This process can be related to the acquisition of language (Morris. Desmond, The Biology of Art. UOP. 1967), and is generally done in an improvisatory and playful manner. The childlike quality to which I refer, above, is not a quality of mark-making of a representational kind; rather, it is a quality of mark-making that is playful and unpremeditated leading to a form of visual
notation that I feel connects with some of the kinds of symbols and signs to be found in my work.\textsuperscript{82}

If not childlike alone, they also have the appearance of doodles, in which an adult plays with loose configurations in an unconscious manner and where the kinds of markings made are also often naive or childlike in form. Some of Twombly’s drawings seem to indicate a similar playful notion of free-drawing. Apart from a few geometric forms (especially the ‘window’ in the top mid right of the piece, Twombly’s \textit{Leda and the Swan}, see below), has the look of an improvised work of a childlike nature. He has also drawn three hearts in the same top mid right region of the work. These too imbue the work with a kind of innocence, an innocence of the kind that sells Valentine cards in fact!

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{Plate_139}
\caption{Cy Twombly; \textit{Leda and the Swans}}
\end{figure}

Throughout the 24 hour performance, I was aware of the marks being made reflecting the \textit{state} I was in. The first large paper works contained rigorous and vigorous marks,

\textsuperscript{82}Welish, M; \textit{Signifying Art; essays after 1960}; Cambridge University Press, 1999.
overlaid as always, on charcoal foundation-forms. As tiredness gained on me, the marks became more determined, and quite aggressive. Early on the Saturday morning, as a kind of *aubade*, I made a second piece, following directly from the work just described, above. I used a red pigment, mixed with water. The charcoal foundation was again first applied, in a ‘T’ shape, the red liquid being painted on top of this, using a heavy, large brush.

But this piece was initially worked on the floor of the gallery. No doubt there is quite a difference between preparing a work on the floor as opposed to one hanging on a wall. One is looking down in a somewhat predatory manner, as a hovering falcon does over a prey far beneath. It is far easier to ‘fly’ or hover in a freer space with work on the floor.
At a certain point, I lifted and tilted the paper in order to encourage the wet paint to stream away from me. I then lifted the work, as one would a counterpane to put on a bed, and fastened it to the wall of the gallery. Curiously however, I decided to fasten the work upside down from the direction in which most of it had been drawn and painted. The result was an upside-down or inverted cruciform that gave the work the appearance of a falling bird. I cannot be sure, but I think this decision was made as the paint ran away from me when I tilted the paper. In any event, the work is hung in the opposite direction of the flowing streaks of red, and reverses the actual flow of the lines towards the floor. In this sense, though falling, the form also defies gravity and seems almost absurd.
After working more or less continuously for some 18 hours, I approached the sheet of paper that was hanging like a sentinel on the gallery wall, something akin perhaps to a bat hanging with wings folded. Easing the paper open, I inserted several washes with red paint and allowed it to run freely within the folds drooping from the top.

Significantly, I made the first marks in paint, without any charcoal underpinning, so often employed in the making of other large-scale pieces. I was of course fatigued and strained by this time. Nevertheless, those first marks (stains) were therapeutic and quickly led to my opening the work fully and pinning the corners into a flat format to
continue work. I am mindful of the fact that this is an analysis and critique, subsequent to the act of making that took place in Rome, but I am intrigued to notice that even the sentinel piece was already formed within the confines of bilateral symmetry. If I stand with my arms folded, I have traversed that symmetry and made a ‘cross’ of its centre. Open that cross, and the symmetry remains, albeit without the confines of the inner cross. In a way, the folded form is something of an ‘X’, but when opened, it becomes prone (in my case) to a form of ‘T’, and the cruciform reappears, unifying the triad of pieces in a chronological order.

Thus, I repeated the cruciform motif, in black overlaid on red, this time however, painting four radiating ‘bars’ from the central vertical axis. My first red stain-marks were quickly obliterated, though of course the red bled into the black and altered its intensity. Motivically, the vertical centre of the piece is a mirror of my own torso, the out-reaching bars, being my outstretched arms and digits. Though having the appearance of a fluttering winged form, at this point, the piece seemed rather fixed and angular and I sought a means to energise and liberate this fixity in a new way.

Taking several rolled balls of paint-soaked paper, I hurled these at the surface of the paper, noting their impact upon the piece. These missiles of paint-soaked paper marked the work in several places, often radiating splashes from the impact, both outwards and downwards. At times, one of the projectiles would stick to the paper for a short while, then slide slowly downwards leaving a snail-trail of paint as it descended to the floor.
These acts of throwing were of course rhythmical in character. Indeed, they imposed a kind of ‘notation’ on the work that linked visual mark with some form of sonic notation. In other words, these actions made the work noisier and relieved the tightness of the cruciform with a counterpoint of marks of a less formal nature. Here it seems, was a treatment that moved from lines to points, albeit a set of points with complex, even planar consequences. It goes beyond the final treatments of ‘points’ suggested by Kandinsky when he writes:

*When the piling-up of points is necessary, the three cases just cited (he is referring to three earlier stages of point-usage, from simple to more complex treatments) will become still further complicated by the manner of producing this accumulation of points—whether this accumulation be created directly by hand or by more or less mechanical means (all sorts of spray techniques)*\(^{83}\)

\(^{83}\) Kandinsky. W, Op Cit. p52
Though I initially had no sense of what impact these missiles would have on the work, the more I threw, the more control I could exert on where to have them impact on the form(s).

By this stage, I knew that I wanted the piece to flow even more and began to spit mouthfuls of soft-drink (Coke actually) in some areas of the work. These ‘attacks’ were also projectiles, and with similar unexpected consequences for the appearance of the final form.

Tony Moore, when viewing the piece, immediately told me to refer to a Catalan artist, he had previously worked with, Josep Vallribera.
Certainly, when looking at the ‘stain piece’ (right above) and the work of Vallribera (on the left), the relationship becomes obvious and one can see why Moore was stricken too by the similarity between these two treatments of the cruciform.

The triad of paper wall works, and the ‘Poster Piece’, shown graphically.

I left this triad of works with a new sense of energy, and moved back to work on a huge area of paper laid on the floor of the gallery, a fitting large-scale concept waiting

http://www.trigcoart.co.uk/
to be addressed. Throughout the performance, I had gingerly, and from time to time, worked tentatively on the floor piece, but not until the closing stages of the 24 hours, did I return to it to find a solution to a problem that had started much earlier.

Floor-paper...

Plate 172

This one huge sheet of paper was something close in length and width to half a cricket pitch! At the stage where I worked to complete the floor piece, all other spaces on the walls were now filled. I always intended that one major floor-piece would remain in the form of a work to be viewed from above, one that could be circumnavigated in a walk. I have/had a memory of a walk around a highly stylised and formal flower-garden in Barcelona, one I visited as a small child. Even at this early stage, the work had close connections to other personal memories of Roman Mosaics and exotic oriental carpets.

The pigments for this piece were mixed in two large vessels. I used black acrylic paint and red powdered pigment. I took this initial mix outside and added some soils to the
liquid to enhance the texture and thicken the medium. A great number of heavy ‘bars’ were marked from end to end, always applied with a large brush. Though I had started at one end, I soon moved to other regions of the surface, tracing a series of linked striations. However, in the main, the work was executed from a determined right-to-left. In a sense, even without calligraphic notations at this point, I was already ‘reading’ the work like a series of open pages in a book.

A page of text, even a page of musical notation (the latter especially), has an implicit relationship to and with the passage of time. The plate below (Plate 173) looks from what was my own right to my own left. The configuration of bars are more prolific on the right (at the front as the plate is viewed), and disperse to fewer and fewer towards the left (the most distant). But the whole work also seems to have fallen into a series of three ‘movements’. Indeed, Tony Moore suggested, at some point, that the floor piece had the appearance of a kind of three-movement work, like a modified sonata form used during the early 19th century by composers like Beethoven, Schubert, and later, Brahms.

These three movements move from relatively tight forms to far looser treatments on the left (at the far end). Of the three movements, the transition between movements one and two is the most abrupt and dense. It forms a kind of visual barrier between one set of visual events and another. As the 24 hour period moved towards its end, longer periods of stasis and near-silence from the two sonic musicians began to occur. Only the relentless throb of the heaters remained, filtered and looped into Cloke’s acoustic configurations. In such a state of ambient attenuation, the visual work also began to ‘quieten’.

Always, there was a flux between my ability to attend to sound and my need to be free of it. But when one is surrounded by a continuum of sonic events, these will impact upon the nature of the marks being made at any time. It is not difficult to ‘see’ sound, and to translate and relocate sounds to visual images. However, in the case of sonic materials generated by artists like Cloke and Moore, the sounds are often complex, poly-rhythmic and highly variegated in terms of frequencies of pitches and dynamic changes.
The cello in particular relies on the 'drawing' of a bow across strings, or the use of fingers with which to agitate, strike or rub the strings. The bow is a kind of drawing-instrument and so are the fingers of the left hand of the player. Having set out (and down) the rhythmic divisions of the bars (pulse is not always something easily heard in a piece of music), the energy of the sonic surroundings created a habitat in which I chose to make further marks that articulated or responded to the bars on the surface of my own work, and not the sonic material that was taking place at the same time.

Nevertheless, my movement towards calligraphy and symbols (again) was no doubt infected by the kinds of acoustic invention prevailing during this closing-stage of the performance. Clusters and constellations of symbols began to appear, and I was sharply aware of the need to create a large number of different kinds of forms within the entire length of the paper.

![Image](Plate 173)

I have commented before on the realisation I have that the kinds of base-marks I make during sonic/visual collaborations, are more hard-edged than those made without or outside the influence of sound. At this point, therefore, I began to use coloured paints
and powdered pigments, primarily using yellow, red and white tonalities. Here, the washes and dustings of colours softened and illuminated the linear continuum. The coolness and hardness of black was relieved by the warmth of reds and yellow.

Finally, I worked with white chalks and again made markings mainly over and in areas of blackness. At last, I took many pieces of spare white A4 paper, and scattered these across the central area of the piece (the area in fact which forms the second movement of the piece). My activity was open and relaxed. I threw paint and water with considerable abandon. These white sheets became micro-pages on the macro pages of the entire large-scale form.

Plate 174  Plate 175  Plate 176

Plate 177

The plate below (Plate 178) shows some of the floor piece against one of the big wall-pieces. The wall-pieces are physically more comfortable to work with, but the floor-piece offered considerably more space in which to work. The configuration of the floor-piece is far more spacious and less 'busy'. A work of this length is liberated (at least partially) from the constraints of the rectangle or square. It appears to be less
worked-upon because of the length of space used though of course, it probably contains at least as many markings, albeit of far greater variety than in any of the wall-pieces.

Plate 178
Conclusion.

I belong to a generation that was preoccupied with the human figure and I studied it. It was with the utmost reluctance that I found that it did not meet my needs. Whoever used it mutilated it. No one could paint the figure as it was and feel that he could produce something that could express the world. I refused to mutilate and had to find another way of expression.85

My research for this submission has been practice-led. However, from the outset, my practice has been interdisciplinary and poly-modal. The collective of modalities was (before the commencement of this research) diverse but always focussed principally on mark-making. Whilst the earlier paintings and drawings were more or less figurative in form, I commenced my research with a sense of wishing to find another way of expression. I knew from the outset that I wished to work ‘inside the figure’ and not to simply represent it.

I wanted to show that man is not a privileged being, but a part of the universe, that his nature is the same as the stars, or a piece of paper or a leaf86.

In representing a body of practice such as this, I have had to steer between the paradox (if not dichotomy) of subjective/objective commentary and representation. An artist at work is likely to be dominated by subjectivity though I hasten to add that on the completion of any one work or series of works, it was possible to engage in objective analysis and criticism and analysis. Activities like these, though often in various states of flux, were always a means by which to contextualise the progress of my work from one stage to another.

Because my research has been practice-led, the process of art-making has been as important as the end-product(s), in almost every case. A substantial part of this written thesis seeks to articulate and embody the nature of this ongoing form of process-driven research. Some artists work across discipline-boundaries; in my case strong associations with (and a study of) the acoustic arts and some forms of art-theatre. Since few visual artists have worked across such interpenetrating domains, it is difficult to contextualise my form of practice with an historical model of commentary.

Perhaps since Leonardo, via Goethe and Klee/Kandinsky, there have been examples of visual artists directly 'feeding' on disciplines outside or beyond that of a purely visual practice. But whilst my body of writing reflects on these influences, and whilst my critical readings have been rigorously eclectic, even to arts practices of our own time, I have always sought to represent and manifest a personal practice; based on my own skills in more than one form of self-expression. The contextualisation of my practice has required an approach to the means by which much of what I have made does not rather than does fit into contemporary practices by other visual artists in our time.

It is, in any event, difficult to be sure of such an idiosyncratic form of practice without engaging in substantial research into the world-scene connected to and arising from visual practices. I became more and more sure, however, of those artists who did and do influence my practice, and these I have referred to in the written thesis itself.

Central to my practice is a form of observation of my surroundings and the effect these surroundings have on my inner responses. More often than not, it was not possible to pre-configure an outcome simply because I worked in an improvisatory and spontaneous manner; a condition in which my emotional and sensual responses were relatively free of factors like art-history or cultural theory. The more I made, the more I realised, however, that my readings and studies in contemporary practices were a constant underlying judgemental and analytical frame within which I worked.

The outcomes for the research have been a very large body of works on paper, canvas and MDF. Some has been documented in digital format, where I have worked more as a performer than a visual artist alone. Whilst I seldom worked a series of sketches into a large-scale and finished work, many of my sketchbooks contain experiments that were usable as primers for action in my studio and at performances venues in this country and overseas.
We cannot create ourselves, by looking inward into our seemingly given selves, by indulging or imagining. Only by action, by changing the world, can the self be created. 

Not all of the work is designed for exhibition, at least, not in the sense of being re-hung in a space different from the one in which the original was made. This is especially true of the largest pieces, more often than not made during extended periods of collaboration (with musicians especially) and improvisation. This written thesis also attempts to articulate what was being sought and the manner in which the journey of art-making was conducted. I am very aware that the concluding sections of this thesis are sharper and more focussed than the opening sections. This being so, the most recent art-pieces are also sharper; more purposeful; and focussed than pieces made three to four years ago.

I conclude the written thesis with visual images, partly because acts of visualisation were the means by which I approached the initial and continuing research question(s). These closing images represent both a form of ‘closure’ and a new beginning. At all times, the research and practice was indeed partly self-ish. But it was also a form of thinking that involved a continuous process of making connections. Working under the supervision of composer/painter/natural scientist, Edward Cowie, was bound to confront me with the potential that fusion-thinking can have in assisting the framing of an interdisciplinary practice like mine.

Cowie’s relentless search for an ecological basis for his music and his visual notations has itself produced a body of work that seeks to relocate the natural world into a natural form of art-making. The images that close this thesis are an indication of the ‘way forward’ I can now take as a result of five years of research and practice. Like Cowie, I believe that all things connect formally and dynamically, and that the forces of nature (my own nature included) are highly potent and fertile issues for art-making that I shall continue to explore, relocate and express.

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Plate 180

Plates 181-182

Plate 183 (the symbolic alphabet notebook)
(and on further towards 3-dimensional possibilities...)
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Appendix A

CD1 – Plates (principal works)

Large-scale paperworks 150 cm x 120 cm
Small-scale paperworks 75 cm x 56 cm
Large-scale canvas 210 cm x 150 cm
Small-scale canvas 80 cm x 60 cm

CD2 – Video (filming and editing by Pauline Amos)

Head3
Tribute to Schwitters
Gablesyard Gallery
Castle
Cologne Gallery
Work
Dartington gallery
Work
Opera Paese – actions
Opera Paese – stain
Opera Paese - interactions

CD3 – Sound

Gableyard gallery
Head3
Opera Paese 1
Preston set – Precious
Work – March- 2003
Opera Paese – 3
Preston set- my time
Dartington Gallery – 2003
Opera Paese – 4
Preston set – onandon
Opera Paese
Preston set-onand on hurt
Opera Paese – 11
Preston set- yearafteryear-year
Prestonset-satelliteover-head
Prestonset –feelit.
Appendix B

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