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## WRITING/ PAINTING/READING/DRAWING

### Something not yet, and yet, still something

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Abstract: An artistic practice might suggest an act of work as the act of seeking (and finding) or summoning something within the almost formed, teasing something out of a latency, be it something close to an utterance or an idea or any number of forms or networks or new configurations. But what is the practice of the writing up of a practice, working in the present tense of making and doing, but nevertheless referring to something which has already taken place? Writing, documenting and reflecting in terms of artistic practice (or research) might, in some instances at least, be a stand off between the precision of utterance on the one hand and the noise of 'speaking in tongues' on the other, but is it possible these opposites hybridise, and if so what forms and affects might be generated? What might this mean for the document, which by its nature, seeks to graft a past and a present onto a future? Might there be a coming together of utterance and glossolalia in an active *body of* or even *in* writing? I here write around, and as, an artistic practice, which itself concerns the written text as some form of drawing/painting and vice versa, and in turn aims, in some way, to situate knowledge, or a form of knowledge, as generative and creative process in the making.

Keywords: glossolalia; utterance; doing; writing; drawing; painting; artistic research, making

For this work I focus on a body of writing, drawing and painting as a document in the making. I consider the work as a developing organism (or orgasm, or origami), a mutating body in spasms of doing and becoming as opposed to a mutated and hypostatic body of the written, the drawn and the spent. This is a process which is always seeking to become more of that something which always exceeds it as practice, which reaches out towards its own vanishing point until that very point reaches back up and swallows it whole in cyclical convulsions. What, perhaps, the late Jon Thomson, while writing of Blanchot's Space of Literature, described as the point of being 'moved by a desire for oblivion' of being 'enamoured of death' (in Akerman and Daly 2011, 54).

*(Walk slowly towards the Vanishing point)*

***Preamble***

*Go for a run*

*Have a bath*

*Read the News while having breakfast*

*Check emails*

*Check the previous day's gambling*

*Check bank balance*

*Check for any free coffee bargains with O2*

*Walk towards the studio*

*Go for a free coffee*

*While drinking coffee sort out calendar and various teaching engagements*

*Check jobs.ac.uk*

*Check axis opportunities*

*Check Twitter*

*Check LinkedIn*

***Enter studio***

*Check email again*

*Think about what to buy from the market for a cheap dinner and make a list*

*Look at paintings on the walls and try to remember something*

*Look at books on the table and try to remember something*

*Pick up a book*

*Put the book down*

*Check fitbit*

*Make a cup of tea*

*Look at wall*

*Look at books*

*Open a book*

*Read for two minutes*

*Open notebook*

*Write date in note book*

*Read a passage from a book*

*Feel something inside my head*

*Re read the passage*

*Underline it pencil and make a note of it in notebook*

*Read the passage out loud*

*Put the book down*

*Look at the walls*

*Stand up and walk towards the wall*

*Walk back to the chair*

*Pick up a book*

*Read for two minutes*

*Feel something inside my head again*

*Re read the passage*

*Underline it in pencil and make a note of it in notebook*

*Read the passage out loud*

*Put the book down*

*Look at the walls*

*Stand up and walk towards the wall*

*Swap two canvases around on the wall*

*Walk back to the chair*

*Stare at the wall*

*Put the canvases back where they were*

*Pick up a book*

*Read for two minutes*

*Stand up*

*Tidy the table top*

*Tidy the table of materials*

*Sit down*

*Stand up*

*Walk around*

*Wash cups*

*Put on Spotify*

*Listen to music*

*Turn off lap top*

***Exit studio***

*Go to the market*

*Buy food*

***Enter Studio***

*Put shopping in the fridge*

*Sit down*

*Stand up*

*Sit down*

*Stand up*

*Pick up a book*

*Put the book down*

*Stand up*

*Walk towards the wall*

*Take everything off the wall*

*Choose one canvas and put it back on the wall*

*Sit down*

*Stare*

*Stand up*

*Look very closely at the canvas*

*Turn it upside down*

*Sit down*

*Stand up*

*Walk towards the canvas*

*Turn it back around*

*Pick up the pencil*

*Pick up the stencil*

*Say the words which you are going to paint out loud to yourself*

*Say them again*

*Say them again*

*Look at the canvas*

*Say the words*

*Say the words*

*Imagine the words on the canvas*

*Say the words*

*Notice how the words are changing*

*Say the words to the canvas*

*Address the canvas with the words*

*Address the world with the canvas*

*Address the world with the words*<sup>1</sup>

***Begin***

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<sup>1</sup> This text was first ‘performed’ at gallery Blip Blip Blip, Leeds, UK, for Natasha Kidd and Jo Addison’s ‘No Working Title’ project *Inventory of Behaviours* 07/02/17-17/02/17.

## **Part 1.**

Writing 'A'

Painting 'A'

Vanishing Point 'A'

Proposition 'A'

Text 'A'

Exhibit 'A'

Future 'A'

Past 'A'

'As the most visible items of a language, scripts and orthographies are 'emotionally loaded', indicating as they do group loyalties and identities. Rather than being mere instruments of a practical nature, they are symbolic systems of great social significance which may, moreover, have profound effect on the social structure of a speech community' (Coulmas, 1991, p.226).

What some might think of as nothing less than the logic of linguistic imperialism mistakes knowledge (singular) for knowledges (plural) and meaning for meanings. I suggest there are alternative knowledges to be found in the present tense of making and doing in writing, the work performing as opposed to the work's performance, lying somewhere between utterance, incantation and prophecy.

This working-in-the-half-light might suggest an act of work as the act of seeking or summoning something within the almost written (and the spoken), pulling something out, the latency of which may always and already have some kind of 'profound effect on



the speech community'. Writing in this sense, might at least *feel* closer to reading, speaking and drawing than writing per se. It may even feel closer to the thaumaturgical.

The Russian philosopher, Nikolai Berdyaev (1950) writes:

'Despite the established and venerable tradition of confining philosophy to logic and epistemology, I was never able to conform my mind to such a limitation or to see any possibility of true philosophical knowledge along these lines. On the contrary, knowledge appeared to me as a creative understanding, involving a movement of the spirit, a direction of will, a sensitivity, a search for meaning, a being shaken, elated, disillusioned, and imbued with hope' (Meyer 2012, 22).

What registers might a document such as this operate on as it foregrounds the 'direction of will'? And what, if anything, might be documented and revealed in the excess and edges of the focus of the document? And what of a writing which shares some of its traits with comedy, writing which improvises, which enjoys slapstick, and acrobatics in the spotlight?)

Brian Massumi writes, 'Drop sink holes in. I mean build them in – make them immanent to the experience. If the inside folds interactively come out, then fold the whole inside-outside interaction in again. Make a vanishing point appear, where the interaction turns back in on its own potential, and where that potential appears for itself. That could be a definition of producing an aesthetic effect' (Massumi 2008, 10).

Writing and making, as an aesthetic effect then, writing which swallows itself up and spews itself out over and over like some Martin Creed reversed loop. A form of writing which refuses to 'dismember and disperse the human subject' (Thompson in Akerman and Daly 2011, 181).

Writing and making in and about movement, from the written to the spoken, from sign to image, from meaning to non meaning; that which dilutes what Barthes termed ‘the aggressiveness of which the sign, which formed from “the sad and fierce history of men”, is the Pandora’s box’ (Barthes 1989, 78).

I am reading and speaking, offering spoken and broken words which focus on images, in this case necessarily always incomplete things for which I have no words as yet. Things made only as propositions, because only that which is moving towards being a particular other thing can be incomplete, until the thing-ness to which is yet to become, it’s ontological dwelling, is fully inhabited and the first thing rendered invisible, yet just as real as the dead.

*(metempsychosis)*

A thing but not yet *the* thing (not Blanchot’s oblivion, not yet). A thing not yet a painting, not yet poetry, not yet art, not yet philosophy, not yet research, not yet knowledge, a thing perhaps, but only at this point as some form of comedic faith. Something not yet, and yet, still something. So, let me re-word. Re-write. Re-work.

## Part 2



Figure 1. *Crash House Blaze Drama*. Graphite, Acrylic on Linen 60cm w x 60 cm h.

Dutton (2015)

How to write a drawing or a painting? Or first? Why write a painting? Because, it seems stupid and impossible. The paintings (such as they are) are written in order to write themselves out of writing, to become something other than writing, but because they are written, indeed, because they are 'writing' and not simply texts, they may never quite be paintings. There is a *Stephoe*-esque<sup>2</sup> sensibility here in these pretensions.

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<sup>2</sup> *Stephoe and Son* is a British sitcom written by Ray Galton and Alan Simpson about a father-and-son rag-and-bone business first aired in the early 1970s. The show veered between tragedy and comedy as it charted the intergenerational conflict between father and son, and in particular the thwarted ambitions (and pretensions) of the son.





Figure 4. *Vortex A*. Ink, Graphite, glitter on Canvas. 60 cm h x 80 cm w

(Dutton 2016)

Begin with an A. The first letter, the word, which precedes what is to come, and what is yet to come is 'A' painting or something like a painting. The image (fig. 4) shows the first letter of the English alphabet inscribed on a canvas; 'A' on its top left corner next to a cross or vortex or a double bisection of the primed surface. The 'A' suggests that the vortex/cross is either the exhibit itself (exhibit A), or the remaining 'Text' which begins with 'A'. (A-X Surely, the alphabet should be sealed with a kiss? YZX.)

The letter 'A', announces the appearance of a 'thing' into (at least) two worlds, a world of mattering and the world of signs. The 'A' is a summoning to whatever follows, as if to say 'summoning itself is our transaction'. The 'A', announces the incoming

'thing', the thing that fills the vacuum created by the 'A'. There is no vacuum without the 'A' and thus no vacuum to fill.

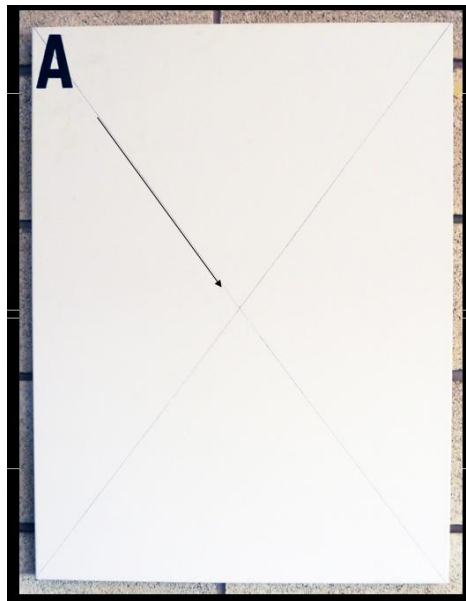


Figure 5

And the 'A' is the writing into the world of the painting, the image of a painting, the indefinite article to A vortex, A centre, A future, A before-text.

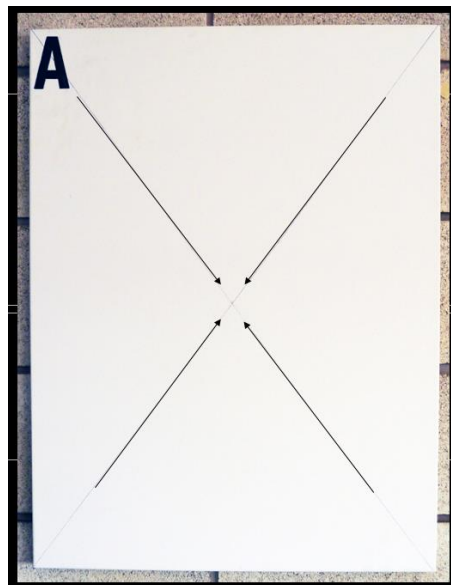


Figure 6

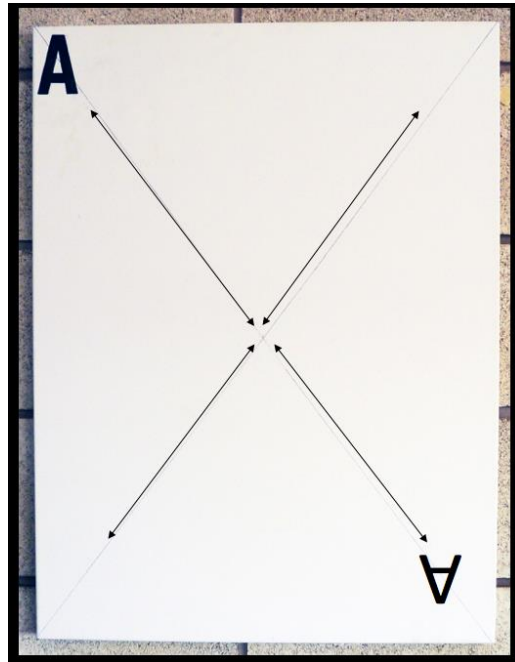


Figure 7

The 'A' positions us to witness a perspective, from the outside to the inside of the vanishing point and back again, back to front and front to back, the near to the far, but also from the written to the not-written. From A to B for Blank. A so-called 'writing-drawing' enters into two worlds, the worlds of retinal and physical mattering and impact and the worlds of signs. The contradiction between the two are reminders of the violence to the mind done by words alone in an impossible alliance.

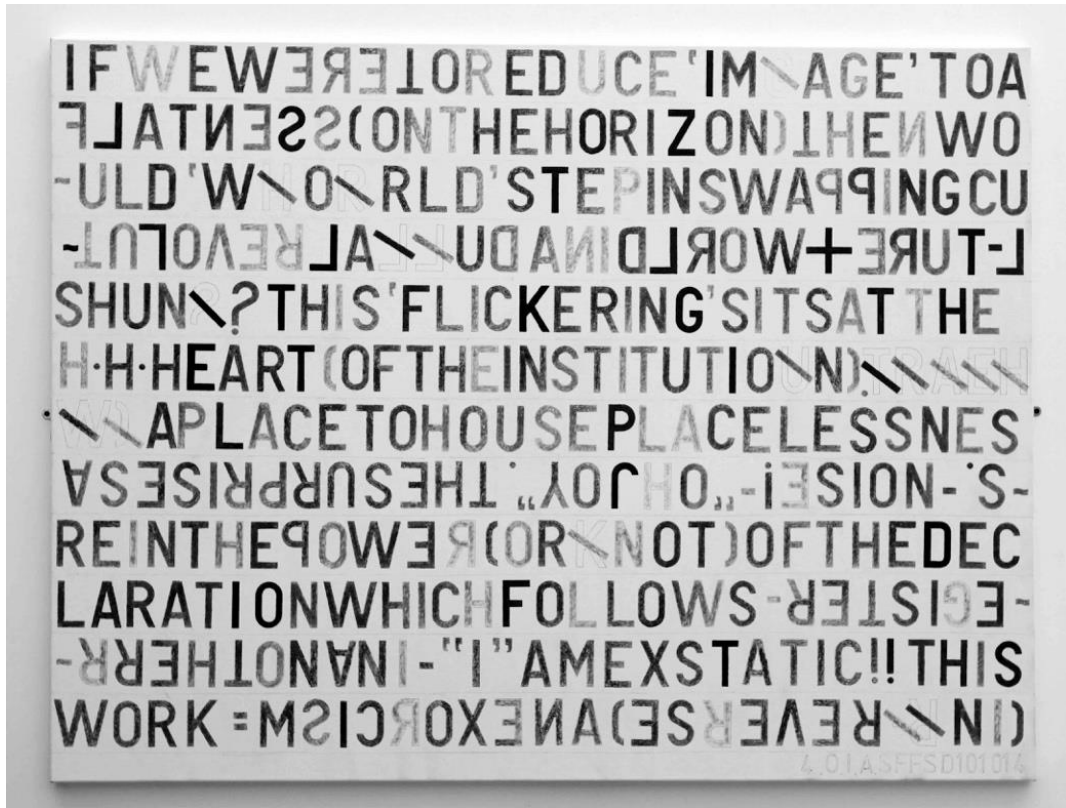


Figure 8. *The Flickering Institution*. Graphite, glitter, acrylic on canvas. 120cm h x 160cm w,  
(Dutton 2015)

Here. Different 'voices' or 'registers' are located. Individual letters themselves are positioned up, down, and/or mirrored to get inside and behind the 'writing' in spatial, contextual play, in another form of writing, often losing themselves on their way, veering into malapropisms, stutters, mistakes and confessions

*(stutterances)*

At the canvas, here I am then, painting (and mouthing) some words, then, here I am, writing a text on painting a text, and then speaking a text, on a writing-painting, here, and now rewriting a text, spoken about writing on painting a text.



Having given up the ghost on presenting themselves as either text or image or indeed as presenting themselves as anything at all other than what they seem to be at any given moment, these works then present themselves only as models of something vaguely generative. Something out of kilter and a little aimless, not yet themselves. Something more than a little clueless. Although they are set within the limits of canvas, paint, glitter and stencil, in making them, their ontological status is up for grabs as images, signs, paint, pencil and text slip, slide and pore over each other for currency. This ontological flickering is seductive and elusive, but I suspect may also hide a comic violence which itself hides another violence; that of a world broken in to bite size chunks. It is precisely this (erotic) shimmering which is a potential for some form of rupture, which marks the *work* of the work, as the work continues to perform itself in its making.

The production of a writing-painting. A stand-off which summons the particular potentiality located in the dynamic and fluid meta-sphere of a transaction which embraces two ontological spheres. The negotiation of a post-conceptual realm that collapses (or fails to collapse, by presenting the totality of its collapse as a thing) around the necessarily endless and tortuous arguments around matters of meaning, meaninglessness, exegesis and subsequently, the play off of subjective and institutional power. The work gains its own articulation at the cost of its own slightly embarrassed asphyxiation. It's a small consolation.

(A 'gag' reflex)

*The work is a score performed in the mind*

*The world is a work performed in the words*

*The mind is a work performed in the world*

Figure 9.

(Dutton 2015)

The text here then is a play on the nature of the task which lies ahead, which is to say it is a declaration of what it *is*, which is precisely that which it has yet to become. This precognition suggests that the work, the mind, the score, the world, and the word are all interwoven in the performance of something at some point unspecified in the near future. In mind of Benjamin's reading of Klee's 'Angelus Novus', we might be indifferent to a future as imagined by the present, if we are to escape the limiting and restricting nature of our own foresight (Benjamin 2009).

As aim is removed, or at least, quietened, is it possible (finally) for the things to be 'themselves'. Were this to be the case, there may be a space for a form of practice/writing, which is contemporary in the sense that Boris Groys describes as a 'prolonged and potentially infinite period of delay' (Groys 2010, 26). And, as a consequence we might find ourselves within a space for a non-teleological approach to acquisition of knowledge and fetish of progress, in the form of a potential 'profound effect' located in the present.

### Part 3

*That said, all that was left to do, the last things, to frequent the bowery, Listen! can you hear 'the barges drift' la la la la- she sat, and considered the rudimentary line drawn in chalk on the stone, a line here to here + there to there, not unlike she thought. As if a stone had dropped, as if a line had been found, abandoned! They were listing + tipping, peering over, down the track, towards the creosoted fence (sic). There again the song- la, lie, laa, lu- "it sounds familiar because it is!" a voice from the rock, terror there, not unlike, he said. A garden. A dove. Least things. The final connections, the eye, the world, the score already written, him playing along, a weak improvisation- no. A weak interpretation. The always already. Down. Water here, oily sheen but cool at least. The neck tightens, a rosebud. Glass stairs smeared in what? In this. In precisely this + that' 'K'slips. But laughs. What is written on his sole? Becoming smaller. A fleck of matter. The song- le le-leu-leu 1,2,3,4 times. Nausea, time to turn back again. So many turns. I follow the lead, the lead follows only the path. At last the sea / a line drawn here to there. There to here. A horizon as seen from the sides. Who could have known? Only them. The line in chalk, now echoed by another, many years later, two lines joined by a third invisible line, a thread. The song "la la liu-le", this time from the sea. Not unlike the empty house. The bloody nose. And they. There, stand again, summoned, dazed, sombre, grave of course. We let them go. Skin floats in air. How? Not how? How not? He reaches inside his shirt. This! That! Some form of proclamation, a gesture of defiance even. Learn the languages. Submerge. The Acrobat. A glittering peeling ocean, the light of the water seems to surprise itself. (Image of the Parthenon backwards). Back across the bridge. We (no, they) meet in the dark. Because of this we (not they) are truly ecstatic, fumbling boys. Firstly, all matters retreat, secondly, secondly. Lost the. She looked up. "This" she cried "mayhem, this matter. Such is my turmoil. ~~When is it.~~*

~~OK-~~ (my son, my son, there is no time in this regard, only a delay, which is something else entirely)" – although forgotten. Thus having said, having taken the time to cross the water, what can we say we have learned? Only that the mountains are old and oh! so very heavy. The caves are few and the reality is one of mass. Dreaming squeezed to the surfaces through millennia (sic), and even so knowing, then still hands are held and sparks fly, same as ever. On the boundary animate + echo, satellites made of copper, threads of sunlight, "le le-liu", a song skimmed across the smooth rock, almost whistling, with such force and velocity, that mass is paid no mind, indeed it serves the song by being its opposition, + no bridge is built between the two that can't be demolished in the instant. Deep time.

Figure 10.

(Dutton 2017)

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Steve Dutton is an artist, Professor of Fine Art and Head of Art at Bath Spa University in the UK, where he also directs the Art Research Centre. As an artist, Dutton works on individual and collaborative projects which have been exhibited throughout the UK and internationally, including: *Midpointness* (with Andrew Bracey), which was first shown at the Lock Up, Newcastle, Australia (2016), before being further developed as part of the Trans Art Triennial (2017) and for Airspace Gallery in Stoke-on-Trent, UK (2017); and *Possession* (with Brian Curtin), for Bangkok Arts and Culture Centre (2014). In the past Steve was one half of the collaboration Dutton and Peacock. More recently he worked extensively with Steve Swindells (Dutton and Swindells), and their *The Stag and Hound* at PSL in Leeds was nominated for the Northern Art Prize in 2014.

A long-term interest is the subject of artists' institutes, and the institutes of art. Dutton draws on complexities within his own practice and those of a growing body of artists and academics seeking to rethink the nature of the art educational institution as a process of unfolding epistemic events, rather than a sequence of progressive tiers of knowledge. This relationship to non-teleological space/time and the quizzing of modes of knowledge, production and generation is central to his work. He is currently developing a new body of work, entitled 'Industry', which includes drawings, objects, sound works, animation and texts.

Dutton has published in the *Journal of Writing in Creative Practice* and the *Journal of Visual Arts Practice*, as well as contributing to numerous blogs, publications, conferences and symposia – most recently participating in 'Performing Writing', Wellington, New Zealand (2017).