

Bodies-in-process: intersubjective (inter)materialities

Jacqueline Taylor

So, this is my paper: a 32ft-long scroll of hand and machine-made Japanese kozuke paper. I have written the words on this paper, but my words have also been made: they have been hand-printed, drawn, embroidered. Words exceed themselves; letters seep, slide, tumble across the surface. At various moments, slippages occur and these words extend into painterly marks, an other visual and material language.

My paper could be said to deal with something *in-between* language. Or perhaps, something *other* or *elsewhere* to communicable language.

But, if I speak of this elsewhere or otherness, where is this where, from which 'I' am something 'else' from and 'other' to?

Signification

From a psychoanalytical perspective, Lacan's symbolic realm of signification and Other discourse governs the communicative function of language and thus fields of intersubjective interactions and authoritative power.

In Lacanian terms, for a 'normative' and stable speaking subject to emerge and function within ordered and rule-governed signification and representation, the pre-linguistic instinctual drives must be repressed, regulated, contained, ordered, fixed.

By implication, the 'feminine' or 'otherness' possesses a *non-representability*.

However, there remains a residue; something *other* that eludes enunciation in precise words, an excess that cannot be contained.

Indeed for Kristeva, the semiotic is never fully repressed or eliminated. Rather, the process of *signifiance* forms a state of disruption that continually transgresses and renews the subject and its representational structures.*

* FOOTNOTE: *Signifiance* is "the work performed in language (through the heterogeneous articulation of semiotic and symbolic dispositions) that enables a text to signify what representative and communicative speech does not say." Rather than representing the drives, the process of *signifiance* transgresses and renews the symbolic to create a new generativity in the subject-in-process.

Kristeva locates *signifiante* as related to the poetic dimension of language - and certain aesthetic practices such as 'art-making' and 'artistic experience' - as able to recover a former relation to the semiotic and mobilise the drive energies gathered in the *chora*.¹

Signifiante also resonates with abjection; that which is rejected/expelled by social order to conform with the self-image of the 'body proper', an alchemy that transforms the subject into a new generativity.

According to Kristeva, it is out of such ground that one draws *jouissance*.

The object is "that which disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, ambiguous, composite."² It is a foldable, heterogeneous space that exists toward "a place where meaning collapses",³ that escapes being inscribed into a symbolic system.

Some aesthetic practices are by their very nature *ungraspable*. One could say we try to grasp artistic practice, precisely by letting it slip through our fingers.⁴

Form, tone, line, pattern, space, composition, materiality, temporality, colour: these *things* collapse and exceed representation. The relationship between signifier and signified does not always cohere; meaning is uncertain, fluid, multiple.

Indeed, Kristeva speaks of colour as a space of *jouissance*; where the semiotic and symbolic interact most directly and like "rhythm in language thus involves a shattering of meaning and its subject into a scale of difference".⁵

I am also reminded of Bolt's 'heat of making'; the performative nature of art-making and the indefinable moment where an artwork takes on a life of its own and ceases to represent or illustrate subject matter but instead performs it.⁶ Some(thing)-in-process.

[INTERLUDE: Such poetic language, challenges the unrepresentability and suppression of difference, otherness, the 'feminine' and also for some – woman – within the Lacanian symbolic but *also* culture and visual language more broadly. Dominant discourses and power structures are deeply embedded in language but also art practice, in particular Western Art, which has

¹ Kristeva, J. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, (1982), trans. Roudiez S. L. New York: Columbia University Press, p17

² Kristeva, J. *Ibid*, 1982, p4

³ Kristeva, J. *Ibid*, 1982, p2

⁴ Lomax, Y. *Sounding the Event: Escapades in Dialogue and Matters of Art, Nature and Time*, (2005), London: I.B. Tauris & Co. p3.

⁵ Kristeva J. Giotto's Joy, 1979, in *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, (1992), Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, p216

⁶ Bolt B. Painting is not a Representational Practice, in Betterton R. *Unframed: Practices and Politics of Women's Contemporary Painting Practice*, (2004), London: I.B. Taurus, p42

been argued to be a monocentric hegemony rooted in phallogentric, patriarchal, masculinist and masculine power structures that marginalises the feminine and otherness.]

Stuff

I navigate this paper and utter its words, drips, painterly marks, *stuff*. I utter this stuff in a performative sense: it is shaped as it is spoken. It has also been uttered in its own making.

[*pause*]

Here in front of me sits a delicious thick gloopy blob of paint. There, bare, in all its sensuous materiality. It excites me. It evokes in me something very real, which I feel on a bodily and psychical level, but with which words cannot fully grasp. *

* FOOTNOTE: As I make my way to this footnote, my fingers traverse the surface of the paper. I feel its texture with my fingertips but also with my eyes. I displace this within, explode, overturn it, biting it with my teeth to get inside of it.⁷

I cannot say what cannot be said. Am I moving towards a place where meaning collapses?

I arrive: يقرأ و يورد لغة أخرى باللغة العربية

Stuff is also the materiality of the text where meaning emerges out of denotation(s) and connotations suggested by the material shape of a given word.⁸

BARTHES: “*Language is a skin: I rub my language against the other. It is as if I had words instead of fingers, or fingers at the tip of my words. My language trembles with desire.*”⁹

The pre-verbal space of the semiotic is mobile, fluid, in flux, heterogeneous, in becoming, never-ending, amorphous.

It manifests materially in poetic language as ‘absences’, ‘silences’, ‘contradictions’ and ‘collisions’ in a text where codes move and come into contact,¹⁰ rhythm, prosody, timbre, sound, that exceed the descriptive. An intertextual practice in which a place of enunciation is never complete as the transposition of different sign-systems within a text is exchanging, permutating, articulating a new representability.¹¹

⁷ Cixous, H. Sorties, (1975), in *The Newly Born Woman*, (1986), Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, p95; Cixous H. *The Laugh of the Medusa*, trans. Cohen K and Cohen P. in *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, (1976), 1:4 p887

⁸ Roudiez, L.S. Translators note in Kristeva, J. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, (1982), New York: Columbia University Press, pvii

⁹ Barthes, R. *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*, (2002), London: Vintage Books

¹⁰ Barthes R. *The Pleasure of the Text*, (1975), New York: Hill and Wang, p6

¹¹ Kristeva, J. Op cit., 1982, p112

Artworks are also imbued with the materiality of their making and matter.

If paint is pigment plus medium, what happens if this medium is salt, sugar, resin, vinyl, polyurethane, latex, wax, glass?

BOLT: “where materiality insists, the visual language begins to stutter, mumble and whisper.”¹²

ADAMS: It is the materiality of the image in which the otherness of the work becomes known: that which has remained outside the signifying chain, desired and only dimly seen by the artist and acceded to only with the help of ‘accidents’ or ‘chance’ effects.¹³

Cezanne’s ‘little sensations’ perhaps; or what Bois calls the ‘blob’ in Twombly’s paintings - a “turd-like handful of paint applied to the canvas and unexpectedly remaining there”;¹⁴ maybe Frances Bacon’s accidents - ‘anamorphic’ affects.¹⁵

Stuff - matter - the material - can also be considered in relation to the corporeal. Indeed, semiotic functions are constituted through biological drives in which the subject and language emerge from material processes.¹⁶

POLLOCK AND ROWLEY: A focus on the *process* of painting rather than the end artifact or art object is closely related to *signifiante*.¹⁷

Such material and performative utterances produced in the heat of making could be said to vacillate and cause the foundations of the reader to tremble¹⁸ to echo Barthes writerly text of *jouissance*; a rhythm evoked in the process of art-making that resonates with the body-in-process.

Convergence

The process and ‘heat’ of art-making sits at the intersection of corporeality/ matter/ bodies stuff/ materiality/ the linguistic/ signification/ the social/ biological processes/ energy charges/ psychical and creative strata bound up with *jouissance*.

The subject becomes and unbecomes through this convergence.

¹² Bolt, B. Op cit., 2004, p47

¹³ Adams, P. *The Emptiness of the Image*, (1996), London: Routledge, p113

¹⁴ Bois, Y. A Certain Infantile Thing, in: *Audible Silence; Cy Twombly at Daros*, (2002), Zürich: Daros Services, p72

¹⁵ Adams, P. Ibid, 1996, p111

¹⁶ Barrett, E. *Kristeva Reframed*, (2011), London: I.B Tauris & Co. Ltd, p8

¹⁷ Pollock, G and Rowley, A. Painting in a 'Hybrid Moment', in: Harris J. (Ed), *Critical Perspectives on Contemporary Painting: Hybridity, Hegemony, Historicism*, (2003), Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, p65

¹⁸ Barthes, R. Op cit., 1975, p25

[pause]

I have found an 'I'. It sits here on the paper in front of me; seemingly alone but amidst falling 's and >'s and [paint mark]'s. 'I' meander(s).

Directed against a threat, within abjection looms a violent and dark revolt of being; it provokes desire but cannot be seduced: neither subject/object, inside/outside, it summons and repulses - a fluid demarcation in an unstable space of meaning. 'I' am at the border of my self.

This leads me to think about *intersubjectivity*:

In this space I open up the space of my own making. At the same time the practicing of encounter takes place through multiple modalities.

I do not read this paper a linear fashion; footnotes and words overflow the physical edges of the paper, some hover amidst the space. An asterisk weaves omitted words/marks/stuff into the text; words I have misspelt remain, scored through.

This paper could be said to be an inter-text, or possess intertextuality in the Kristevan sense; containing its own internal form of signification based on the presence of the signifier and the absence of another through deferral.

It may also encompass what I call intermateriality: a relation of relations where at various indefinable moments slippages occur through the textual and painterly colliding visually, materially and conceptually.

Some words are unreadable as I cannot read any of the text in other languages, others are barely visible existing amidst writing, painting and drawing. As I speak, I mediate my encounter with these moments, enunciating them through their material and textual utterance: some other articulation happens.

This reminds me of what Barthes refers to as *writing aloud*: "pulsional incidents, the language lined with flesh ... a text where we can hear ... a whole carnal stereophony: the articulation of the body, of the tongue, not that of meaning, of language."¹⁹

¹⁹ Barthes, R. Op cit., 1975, p67

Reverberation(s)

Intervals of time weaved with space²⁰ allow a temporal thickness; an unfolded space in which difference and *jouissance* can be enfolded. Rather than attempts to represent difference, difference *becomes*; it is a matter of trying to *practice* the difference. *

* FOOTNOTE: Artists who engaged with Kristeva and Irigaray's thinking surrounding textuality and difference in abstract painting, historically have tended to translate the textual qualities of poetic language into the painterly, reducing the 'feminine' into a visual aesthetic characterised as plural, fluid, tactile, mobile, heterogeneous. These qualities have also been interpreted formally in which the tactile, fluid and overflowing properties of painterly materials have been used to signify the 'feminine' and abjection, as a challenge to the perceived 'masculine' conventions of Modernist abstraction. Inevitably, problems occur in attempts to represent the 'feminine' in visual terms such as maintaining oppositional thinking and risking essentialism and universalism.

Within this space I am also aware of a multiplicity of other bodies-in-process. Bodies that themselves negotiate encounter through practices of seeing, looking, feeling, reading - rooted in their own creativity and particularities of experience.

An ambiguous, heterogeneous, mobile, inchoate, spatiality: transgressing language and representation, an open-ended play of differences, never-ending chain of signifiers - materialities, colour, verbal/visual/material/bodily utterances, visual displacement.

This space could be said to exist towards a place where meaning collapses. But, it is not a space of non-meaning. Meaning-making becomes and unbecomes through interpretation, subject to alteration in relation to corporeal/biological. Meaning resides with affect, feeling, the visceral, sensuousness.

BARTHES: *Signifiance* is "meaning, *insofar as it is sensually produced*."²¹

Transference of experience amidst convergence forms its own signifying process; "a twisted braid of affects" beyond a definable object.²² The subject is placed at the limits of identity and subjectivity as the partial-drives that original in the semiotic are mobilised and reactivated through these practices of encounter. It reverberates.

So, this is my paper: it / 'I' / we open up a space – of convergence, stuff, disruption, signification, making, unmaking – an intersubjective site of mediation, enunciation, materiality, affect.

'I' un-become(s).

²⁰ Irigaray, L. *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, (1993), Ithica: Cornell University Press, p47

²¹ Barthes, R. Op cit., 1975, p61

²² Kristeva, J. Op cit., 1982, p1