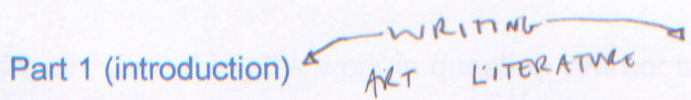


Title: Writing Beyond Art

- ① — Extra-disciplinary def of Writing
- ② — WRITING AS PHASE: HIATUS - DARK HOLE  
VOID = RESOURCE
- ③ — RESOURCE/ENIGMA - (COMMON SENSE VS ADEQUATE SENSE)
- ④ — PROBLEM/ISSUE FRAMED AS MATTER OF DISCIPLINARY BOUNDARIES

Introduction to the Introduction

While one might enjoy Patrick Brill's particular way of using activist and aesthetics, there is a counter-productive element in the work in his affirmations of 'art' in abstract terms. Such persistent affirmations diminish the potential for radical transformations of practice, for futures of art that might emerge in the present. I start by highlighting this issue because it's prevalent in discussions of art and writing, where both of these terms are often implemented in too general a way. I want to try, at least, to do something different, to propose something quite specific where writing is concerned. The argument will be that writing can be used to name a specific phase or passage in a very diverse range of cultural practices. That phase is a problematic one insofar as it appears a part of work and yet a part in which no work seems to be happening. Using the term 'writing' to name this phase of work within work has a number of consequences. It allows a constituency of practitioners to come into community, if momentarily, around their commitment to a radically uncertain future for cultural work—a future in which, perhaps, it will no longer make sense to speak of art and/or writing in the disciplinary sense.



① This paper proposes that in any generative, critical cultural practice there is something that can be called 'writing', that those who might in other respects <sup>BE</sup> find themselves on opposite sides of the conventional image/text or art/writing divides can find themselves with a joint project in this sense. Writing here has to do with a certain kind of hiatus, a pause in working process. It has to do with an event of that hiatus. The hiatus, the moment of not-working within working, is commonly assumed as a dark hole of some sort. In fact, there is an important sense in which it can be revealed to be anything but a void. The argument will be that more attention needs to be paid to the phase in working process in which the resource of the void becomes apparent.

③ The term 'resource' is the enigma here. We have a common way of thinking about it as an archive existing in actual terms. The point here will rest on a different more complex understanding of what's meant by 'resource' in generative-critical practice.

④ It's common for questions of the relations of art and writing to be framed as a matter of disciplinary boundaries. In fact our own event today is pitched that way in some respects, as a

Problem framed as matter of disciplinary boundaries 1

Practitioners  
ART Literature

bridging of the gap between written form and object-oriented art practice, a breaking down of the barriers between writing on the one hand and art-making on the other. That's both a usefully concise starting point and a problem if it conditions the discussion against radical transformations of cultural practice in which, for instance, the terms of art and writing might no longer apply. There's a danger that we forbid the paradoxical but important question of unimaginable futures. As an exercise, acknowledging the frequency with which I <sup>HAVE ALLOWED</sup> allow that same opposition to condition my thinking, I want to try at least to avoid the common framing of the discussion of art and writing as a boundary dispute, beginning instead by invoking a constituency of practitioners who have no 'proper' place, or who occupy a place that's radically difficult to determine.

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In a recent piece in *Art Monthly*, <sup>similarly</sup>, Marina Warner writes on a kind of cultural work that seems determined to conserve its homelessness, or to continually undermine its own position. Her focus is on the historical evolution of criticism in art and more broadly. "Meaning" in the work in question, she says, "is produced through webs of connectedness rather than separation. The criticality of the work is not projected by a subject onto an object, but produced through the relations and complex temporalities that come to rest for a moment in the here and now." There is a "changed ontology of art," she says, such that art is no longer a matter of "delimitation but of interrelation with other kinds of objects and images".

Again, describing the work in question Warner says "a critical delimitation has become immanent to the work itself." From this I understand that the criticality in question has no clearly determined object in advance of its emergence but comes into being in response to a kind of power not accumulated in a stable way in one or other identity but distributed and fluid in its movement. This is [quote] an "embodied criticality" and [quote] "a means of inhabiting the problem of an extended practice equal to the complexities of our world". [end quote] The mode of work in question is a predicament. As the practitioner refuse to conserve the domain established through her/his work, so the work becomes a kind of attack perpetrated on the very ground on which the practitioner stands. But if the mode of work in question is a predicament, it's also a certain kind of achievement: that's the point Warner is making in her article. (And in a different way, I want to argue something similar.)

## Part 2

Some time ago I had the idea of writing a book that would take as its starting point the pieces of useful advice I remember receiving when studying painting as an undergraduate. These lessons

seem not to have been particularly numerous, to say the least. My first idea was that to collect them might be a way of identifying an essence of art education. Of course, the idea is flawed. As I've begun to write, the few instances that come to mind most easily (when they're considered with the tools of writing) begin to expose many other conversations, discussions, instances with tutors or with other students, which I had forgotten. Maybe what's interesting or compelling about the reanimating of the past is the vividness with which memories appear in the present, the puzzle of how so much can have remained so tightly folded up and unavailable until the thinking and writing process draws it out. And this is to invoke again the need for a more sophisticated thinking around the idea of 'resource'.

Not coincidentally, the particular piece of advice I'm thinking about today is one that concerns the 'resource' and the status it has in generative-critical practice. The protagonist in my book is struggling with the whole business of <sup>BEING A PAINTER</sup> ~~developing a painting practice~~. She wants to be prolific. That aspiration — to make work and to make a lot of work — continues to elude her. She is held up. She cannot get on because she cannot stop herself from asking fundamental questions about 'art', what its function might be at this particular historical moment, how it's to be valued and so on. These questions hold up the working process in a way that's all the more ~~difficult to~~ <sup>EFFECTIVELY</sup> deal with because her intuition tells her that they are essential questions and have to be dealt with before the prolific work can begin.

She's right in one sense. There are periods of not working that appear within working. That's to say, a certain kind of pause in work is both inimical to work and essential to work. My protagonist's mistake is to assume the hiatus as empty, and something simply to be got over so that the 'creative productivity' can begin again. In actual fact, despite how it might feel, the hiatus is anything but a void.

Over a number of years I've been collecting literary and philosophical quotes on the theme of darkness. I began doing so when I thought I was going to write a PhD on the subject. In fact, my research went in a different direction but I've kept collecting the quotes. Now that collection is becoming an interesting record of my reading because there is hardly a book in print, it seems, in which a metaphorical darkness is not used in some way. I include a few of the quotes here, particularly those that concern an experience of looking at darkness, where that is first a matter of privation and then an apprehension of something emerging, a texture of darkness.

The question of art in general for those who embrace a particular art practice is a persistent theme in philosophical aesthetics. It's been said for instance that when one affirms painting one

cannot question art, at least so when the latter is a subcategory of the former. And that is the problem I'm posing for my character, perhaps as a way of dramatising the origins of what is referred to now as the post-medium condition. In an attempt to help her with the problem of her apparent unproductivity, one of her well-meaning tutors observes that Fern (that's her name) would be able to make more work if she could find a resource of imagery that would allow her to do so. The tutor points to the work of a number of contemporary painters, remarking that in each case, they have managed to "tap into" an apparently infinite source of images and part-images. Having done so, they can then arrange and rearrange these elements, adding new motifs and subtracting others, so producing numerous works, while never lapsing into a non-productive hiatus of the kind that she, Fern, seems to be dogged by in her work.

'Resource' as it's recommended to Fern here is nothing but a set of interchangeable items, things that can be viewed in their entirety, or individually; chosen or left where they are.

'the new', whatever that it, will not be brought into being simply by shuffling and reshuffling of extant elements in relation to one another.

I was struck recently listening to Tania Kovats giving a talk about her work at Falmouth University. She described a kind of practice very different from that of my story. Kovats' account of her working life provides good evidence of the post-medium idea, (although as far as I can remember she didn't invoke Rosalind Krauss' term) Now, as I'm thinking back after having heard the artist speak, I'm imagining how a fictionalised account of the lecture might be recast as a future for my character. Perhaps it is Fern, who, having overcome her early fixation on the medium and methods of painting, gives a lecture about her work in a relaxed and interesting way to a crowded hall full of undergraduate art students, about an art practice that, by her account, progresses in an unpredictable way. <sup>→ AT LEAST, WHERE MEDIUM + METHOD ARE CONCERNED</sup> This artist who speaks now from the position of one with an established career testifies to the way that new ideas and new proposals for work appear, as if of their own accord. After one project is finished, another begins; after that's completed, without any pause, without any hint of a problem, another commission is taken up, and so on. At the end of her talk, when the invitation goes out for questions that audience members might like to address to the speaker, one after the other, those present want to press her on the same point. They would like to know the secret. How does one develop this kind of practice in which ideas for work flow so easily ~~one after the other~~. The speaker begins to reply but very quickly it's apparent that she doesn't have an answer. She cannot explain, admits as much and laughs at the trap she's made for herself.

But let's cut back to the earlier moment. In the fiction of Fern's early life I'm making my young protagonist more or less obsessed with the work of Giorgio Morandi. It is a way of revealing her good intuition, that her slow and difficult relationship with art-making is unavoidable. Fern recognises that Morandi is an artist who qualifies in terms of her tutor's dictum. Morandi has 'tapped into an apparently infinite source of imagery'. She would not yet be able to articulate it that way but she understands all the same that Morandi's work somehow builds ontological or fundamental questioning into the process of the production of work. || It may not be possible exactly to claim that every one of his small, quiet paintings of a few brown or grey bottles against a similarly coloured backdrop is performing a radical reshuffling of art's deck, but Fern's apprehension of his work and his practice as a whole at this particular moment in the story is such that she sees both his potential to be prolific and the foundational question being asked.

No doubt her idea of Giorgio Morandi is false, a romantic misrepresentation. But the reader will sympathise with her in her fantasy of the one she'd like to emulate, whose work attracts her attention and seems to provide an inspiring blueprint for art-making. In fact, that way of speaking is instructive. When we look at work, historical or current, and feel inspired to redouble our own efforts, a 'blueprint' is precisely what we don't have; only another case of the unexplained, the unexplainable, the miraculous—a great boost to the desire for prolific production, let's say, and precisely no clue about how that's to be achieved.

Perhaps in her later years my protagonist learns the secret of the infinite resource, enabling the continuous generation of new work and new ideas for work. Perhaps she discovers, finally, the resource that allows her to be prolific. If so, it's not the resource as first recommended, one the elements of which sit in plain view on the shelf, like bottles, to be chosen and arranged in infinitely varied combinations. The cases abound of artists who grasp too quickly at this insufficient idea, which leads them into unthinking production and results in nothing so much as a storage problem. If it's to work, the idea of the resource has to be thought differently. Just as it's not a set of determined objects—just as that kind of resource will soon halt the process it presumes to enable—neither is the question of the resource hopelessly mysterious and beyond articulation. The failure evident in my character's practice, which is a result of her compulsion to think about art in the abstract, is not simply an example of work having ground to a halt. The hiatus, which the institutions of art and culture hate so much (precisely because they are premised on stability and predictability or continuity of work as production — and progression) is not a black hole forbidding the escape of light. The hiatus can be seen in all its peculiarity and so

it can be interrogated and negotiated with. If it is a resource, it is not a resource *for art*. And that's the crucial qualification.

The question for the maker, then, is how to understand the apparent terminal failure of process as a resource without assuming it a resource *for art*. My protagonist intuits her mistake but cannot quite articulate what's wrong. And I'd venture that it's the mistake made too by the more experienced artist who testifies to the way her work seems able to generate its own future in the present, but cannot get beyond the representation of that experience as puzzling and unexplainable. The better-formed idea of 'resource' requires learning a composure with the void of work within work, so that it no longer appears simply as the unexplainable but begins to reveal its texture. As I indicated at the beginning, I want to give that particular skill a name and call it artists' writing, where writing is precisely the name for a kind of work within work that never stops bringing the resource for work's future into being.

Tuesday, 29 November 2016

## Agenda for conference: Words of Art

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Note for speakers

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Wimbledon College of Arts Lecture Theatre: 2 - 5:40 pm

- 2:00 pm: Zoë Mendelson: introduction and welcome:
- 2:10 pm: Neil Chapman
- 2:40 pm: Sharon Kivland
- 3:10 pm: Rachel Cattle
- 3:30 pm: Zoë Mendelson
- 4:00 pm: Stella Capes
- Break
- 4:40 pm: Dean Kenning
- 5:10 pm: Ted Targett
- 5:15 pm: Ami Clarke
- 5:35 pm: Indi Farrell
- Close

“Such a blackness. Nor jus over us and all  
roun it wer coming up inside me as wel. Not  
jus wood and paint I smelt the blood and  
boan the redness in the black.”

Russell Hoban, *Riddley Walker*, London: Picador, 1982, p. 58

“Unlike critique, which in its Frankfurt school derivations  
sought to expose the latent meanings and ideologies  
behind works of art, meaning in criticality is produced  
through webs of connectedness rather than separation. It  
is not projected by a subject onto an object, but  
produced through the relations and complex  
temporalities that come to rest for a moment in the here  
and now.”

Marina Warner, 'Critique Fatigue', *Art Monthly*, October 2016, p. 13 - 16

“a critical delimitation has become immanent to the work  
itself..”

Marina Warner, 'Critique Fatigue', *Art Monthly*, October 2016, p. 13 - 16

“a means of inhabiting the problem of an  
extended practice equal to the complexities of our  
world ”

Marina Warner, 'Critique Fatigue', *Art Monthly*, October 2016, p. 13 - 16

“In the heart of matter there grows an  
obscure vegetation; in the night of matter  
black flowers blossom.”

Gaston Bachelard, *On Poetic Imagination And Reverie*, Connecticut: Spring  
Publications, Inc. (third edition), 1998, p. 10-11

“If I continue to write, it's because I have  
nothing more to accomplish in this world  
except to wait for death. Searching for the  
word in darkness.”

Clarice Lispector, *The Hour of the Star*, Giovanni Ponteiro (trans.), Manchester:  
Carcanet Press., p. 70

“At Last! I am allowed to relax  
in a bath of darkness!”

Charles Baudelaire, *Paris Spleen*, Louise Varèse (trans.) New York: New  
Directions Books, 1970, p. 15

“Now the dark was coming up  
through the rocks.”

Doris Lessing, *Mara and Dann*, London: Flamingo, 1999, p. 89





The better-formed idea of 'resource' requires learning a composure with the void of work within work, so that it no longer appears simply as the unexplainable but begins to reveal its texture.