Chapter 5
The Virtual, Alternate Spaces, and the Effects upon Artwork

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explores the philosophical notion of The Virtual in response to the writings of Gilles Deleuze and unfolds this thinking through its interdisciplinary and transformative effects upon contemporary fine art. The Virtual is discussed in relation to forms of contemporary painting, yet the chapter provides a model for thinking through interdisciplinarity within, and from, other media. The research investigates the perceived resistance of painting to explore external possibilities and introduces methodological strategies, which encounter externality as a means for establishing radical change. In this way, the Virtual acts as an instigator for change, which effectively destabilises the pre-formity attached to medium specific practices. It is for this reason that the Virtual forces external relationships and connections to come to the fore in order to radically alter and transform the physical and conceptual constructs of different disciplines. Alongside the discussion of the Virtual and its direct affects upon artistic practices, the chapter discusses literary models including hybridity and metamorphosis as potential key elements affecting transformative change.

INTRODUCTION

I was invited to take part in a video discussion on the notion of the Virtual, which was created for the ISEA conference, Istanbul in 2011. It was evident that the ideas that were being proposed from my perspective were very different from thinking around the virtual in relation to digital media and creative digital technologies. The notion of the Virtual I proposed linked into my own research on interdisciplinarity focusing upon the philosophical methodologies of Gilles Deleuze in order to inform and affect change and transformation to the discipline of Painting within contemporary artistic practice. Therefore, it is important to emphasise that this writing has directly evolved from my practice as a painter. Having trained in painting, concerns
relating to its contemporary condition led directly to my doctoral and post-doctoral research. This chapter examines the notion of the virtual from a philosophical perspective and so proposes an understanding of the virtual that is different from common parlance relating the virtual directly to, or embedded within, the digital.

This research outlines the relevance of the virtual as a philosophical idea that leads towards interdisciplinarity. It will be articulated in turn as a philosophical concept and subsequently its potential affects through the practice of painting, (whilst using reference to contemporary architectural theory as an exemplar for the practical application of the idea[s]). Allied to these propositions will be the citing of the cinematic through which a discussion surrounding the notion of time and space can critically open out the disciplinary strictures of painting as a contemporary practice.

Examples of my own practice will also be discussed in order to present how the notion of the virtual can potentially be actualised in form.

THE DISCIPLINE OF PAINTING

A Pure Resistance

Questions surrounding the condition of contemporary painting particularly its formal concerns, have led towards new thinking in relation to painting, specifically as an ‘expanded practice’ (Krauss, 2002). Formal methods effectively lead towards a ‘grounding’ within the questioning of the specific materiality of painting, in terms of how this affects its closure or completeness and the creation of its identity as a (specific) object - painting.

The contemporary condition of painting constitutes it as a vastly expanded form, which leads towards potential methods for rethinking the characteristics or traits of a, or the, medium employed within the work. The many questions regarding the limits and/or boundaries of painting drive the physical and structural problematics of its condition. These physical (or structural) questions have necessitated the examination, or testing, of the perceived boundaries of painting. The most prominent form, or type of painting practice, which typifies this method, is an internally structured critique of the medium. Where this may change the physical material dynamic of the work, it does not question that materiality, but rather examines the physical limitations of the materials thought to constitute painting. This consequently leads towards a structural or formal shift in the materiality of painting, yet, can be said to relate and conform to its particular identity as painting through the materials themselves. This form of rigorous internal questioning obviously leads towards difference in terms of the physical structure of ‘painting’ however, this difference is still determined through the constraints the medium itself presents. This research highlights alternative possibilities in order to challenge, transform and rethink the potential of painting as a contemporary practice.

In this context, the notion of change needs to be considered and defined in terms of its importance and how it can be forced into action. Change is not simply the reordering or internal deconstruction of prior arrangements in order to instigate difference within. It is also not the shift within a process that instigates a subtle altering of specific identity. In fact the idea that identity should have this internal focus is alien to the proposition that will be promoted. That is to say that the specifics of particular identity (in terms of painting – or other alternative media), needs to be re-established, for, this is not a search for truth or the essence of ‘being’ of a thing but rather a very different way of thinking. This involves investigating an opening of ‘systems’ across boundaries or alternatively where territorial or boundaried ‘schematics’ are not perceived as (or to be) static and internally specific. This opening of systems also presents a position and the potential for painting to be less reliant upon internal combinations (oppositions or contradictions) for change and the creation of the new.
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