REMODELLING *THE VITAL IMAGE*: NEGOTIATING BETWEEN HERBERT READ'S VITALIST AESTHETICS AND CONTEMPORARY SCULPTURE'S VITAL MATERIALISM

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REMODELLING *THE VITAL IMAGE*: NEGOTIATING BETWEEN HERBERT READ'S VITALIST AESTHETICS AND CONTEMPORARY SCULPTURE'S VITAL MATERIALISM

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Abstract

This practice-based enquiry negotiates intersections between modern sculpture's vitality (approached through Herbert Read's book chapter *The Vital Image* in *Modern Sculpture: a Concise History,* Thames and Hudson, 1964) and more recent theories of vitalism that are often called 'vital materialism'. Where Read's *Vital Image* is a survey of the way that sculptors penetrate the unconscious to retrieve plastic images or archetypes, vital materialist forces need to be revealed by other diverse mechanisms. This study is a sculptural investigation into some of these mechanisms.

This research reconsiders Herbert Read's *Vital Image* as a form of residual culture. As proposed by the critic Raymond Williams, this part of a culture is no longer expressed in the present, although it remains active within cultural processes. The research asks how *The Vital Image's* residual qualities might inform a new, vital materialist re-modelling of modern sculptural vitality? It investigates this question through a construct I call 'matter fiction'. The matter fiction draws on Simon O'Sullivan and David Burrows 2019 work *Fictioning,* whilst extending their theories further in the direction of material instantiation.

Supported by original insights into Read's work and case studies into the work of contemporary sculptors Rebecca Warren and Phyllida Barlow, sculptural vitalism is re-conceived as immanent to the histories, theories, materials and activities that help bring a sculpture to 'life'. This research explores ideas of 'life' in sculpture in relation to both an object's vital forces and a subject's vital images. It re-situates ideas of sculptural vitality to the specific activities and operations in studio practice that join artistic subjects and sculptural objects together in remodelling ideas of vital force and vital image.

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I would especially like to thank my family, in particular Katy, Aggie and Larkin for their immeasurable love, kindness, patience, support and understanding.

Declaration

I Declare that the work contained in this thesis has not been submitted for any other award and that it is all my own work. I also confirm that this work fully acknowledges opinions, ideas and contributions from the work of others.

An ethical clearance for the research presented in this thesis has been approved. Approval has been sought and granted by the Faculty Ethics Committee on 10/05/2017.

I declare that the word count of this thesis is **39,733**

Name: Nicholas Francis Evans

Signature:

Date:

Prologue

Dear Sculptors,

Although I am dead, I once again write to remind you of the unique way that the art of sculpture might approach the universal.

A uniquely sculptural emotion is not apparent to the eye alone, but is given in every direct or imaginable sensation. A sculpture proceeds almost blindly to a statement of universal values through a method I once called palpable. With the palpable sensation is key and sensation may not only be direct and tactile but may also be imagined. The sculptor advances beyond experience towards the imaginary through exploratory and intuitive means.

The true sculptor does not only seek, but finds.

You might still ask me, what is this thing that is already there, waiting for the sculptor to find? My answer remains to this day, nothing less than the universal - the true apprehension of the underlying forms of life.

Not just in its harmony or beauty alone, but in all of its expressive variety I demand from the sculptor an expression of truth, and judge their success by the subjective criterion of vitality! In my own work I have made unceasing and tireless efforts to uncover this subjective criteria that merged the geometric and the organic abstractions of my time into a more profound order that I called vitalistic art. My work showed that in great epochs of art we discern the artist's sensitivity to life within sculpture evolving alongside their sensitivity to all forms of life everywhere. Like the photosynthetic cells that absorb creative rays from cosmic rays, the artist is the sensitive organ of an evolving consciousness. My belief in the biological function of art remains.

Did I not once say that nature must be understood by sculptors not in some vague pantheistic way, but in terms of fundamental processes? The law of nature is a material law, and in response the human realm is transcribed as a mode of material behaviour. What I sought then, and what I encourage from you now, is the development of practical theories of interpenetration between art and nature. The function of the sculptor in these relationships is an evolutionary one, as the contribution of the artist to society is indivisible from their evolving consciousness of material process. In this way the sculptor will extend the capacity and quality of all human consciousness by the application of constant aesthetic principles to an ever-changing flux of events!

Take Henry Moore, some would characterise my affiliation with Moore as overly partial. They would misunderstand how he exemplifies creative access to and expression of archetypal experience, what Jung called the chthonic portion of the mind. This is the portion of the mind that is linked to nature, or in which at least mind's relatedness to the earth and the universe seems most comprehensible. Henry Moore prefigured the urgent task of your own time - to revision the idea that the human mind can be set apart from matter.

I am sure there are many sculptors among you who see my own philosophy as limited by its relationship to Jungian psychology. You will characterise it as trapped within the great horizon of the unconscious that surrounds the human species and can never be surpassed, receding just as a real horizon recedes on approach. But this criticism is itself characterised by a limited understanding of the vital principle that underpins my project. My project was in fact concerned with a challenge to the core of western subjectivity. The fact that it sought to locate this challenge as already existing at the heart of the aesthetic sensibility across historical periods should not undermine the radicalism of the challenge itself. The aesthetic

project, understood vitalistically, is to undermine the illusion of the interiorised self, not to reinforce it. The aesthetic is the living force of sensation within art. Sensation belongs to no single being, and its force lies beyond representation, yet it is the job of the individual artist to represent, is it not?

So when I speak of the palpable, what I mean to speak of is a body, not just metaphorically, but in actual fact. The sculpture is a body, yet it is also a representation. Therefore representation in a sculpture is made bodily. Bodily representations are real representations that seek their freedom through sensations from things that are already known. I will grant that Jung perhaps regulated this potential too much through his symbolic system of the archetype, but I would implore you to no longer hold Jung's regulatory tendencies against my own truly vitalistic aspirations.

Instead what I ask of you is this. Seek ways to liberate through practical exercises your sensation from your unconscious, understand both these things ecologically, turn them towards the greater goal of life itself. Make structure into process, incorporate the laws of matter into yourselves to encompass more than the organic individual, extend the individual towards all modes of material behaviour. Discover in these modes varieties of mutation that will lead your representations towards their true potential for ontological genesis.

Recover from me if you will the idea of an artistic future, but turn the patrician model that has been my unfortunate inheritance on its head.

Yours in good faith,

Sir Herbert Read.

Introduction

This enquiry uses studio practice to negotiate the intersections between modern sculpture's vitality, associated in my research with the modernist critic, theorist and writer Herbert Read (1893-1968) and more recent understandings of vital materialism - the forces latent or active within matter. My research investigates the transformative implications of these negotiations between modern and contemporary vitalism through sculptural process, which is expanded in my project through exhibition making, creative and academic writing.

Vitalism in sculpture is not an idea exclusive to Herbert Read. It has a widespread significance within histories of modern sculpture[1]. For Read however vitalism was an essential and fundamental component of his conception and theorisation of sculpture. In penetrating form Read proposes that a sculptor mines from the depths of sculptural matter and the artist's unconscious 'vital images'; symbolisations of a sculpture's own inner reality (Read, 1948, p.592). This brings to a sculpture its sense of vitality, which Read defines as feelings of autonomous life or intense animism. By the end of the 1950s Herbert Read felt confident enough to assert that his aesthetic theories of the vital image might be surveyed within post-war sculpture as a widespread general tendency. Published shortly before his death four years later he called this in his book *Modern Sculpture: a Concise History* (Thames and Hudson, 1964), a "new rubric…vitalism" (p. 162). In *Modern Sculpture* Read surveys the work of seventy-seven vitalist

[1] Wider histories of vitalism in modern sculpture are explored by Edward Juler in *Grown but Not Made: British Modernist Sculpture and the New Biology* (2015), Anne Wagner in *Mother Stone: The Vitality of Modern British Sculpture* (2005) and Olivar Botar and Isabelle Wunsche (eds) in *Modernism and Biocentrism* (2011).These works provide an updated context for earlier accounts, such as Jack Burnham's chapter *The Biotic sources of Modern Sculpture* in his book *Beyond Modern Sculpture* (1968).

artists working under this new rubric in a chapter called *The Vital Image* (pp. 163-288).

Herbert Read's combination of the word 'image' with the word 'vital' in his chapter title is significant. The word 'vital' in *The Vital Image* responds to the idea that, following the work of the influential philosopher Henri Bergson (1859-1941), matter and life can be understood as part of a single continuum. By means of their intuition an artist can penetrate matter, sympathetically engaging the living forces contained within the inorganic realms of material (Bergson, 1974, p.161). Such engagements with living matter explain the importance of direct carving to sculptors active prior to the Second World War - artists such as Henry Moore and Barbara Hepworth who feature in the initial part of Read's survey[2]. Following the Second World War a younger generation of sculptors began to turn away from direct carving towards modelling, either in plastic materials such as wax, clay and plaster or through the manipulation of more 'modern' idioms such as welded or forged iron. Such changes in formal idiom, featured in the latter part of Read's survey, reflect a closer engagement with emerging psychoanalytical theories, which in Read's own work follow his increasing involvement with the psychoanalyst Carl Jung (1875-1961)[3]. The new, often psychologically unsettled or traumatic post-war sculptural imagery which make up the larger part of Read's survey is variously called throughout *Modern Sculpture* plastic images, icons, symbols or archetypes of the unconscious. Modelling was commonly seen pejoratively by pre-war modernist theorists as a medium through which an artist could impose their own subjectivity upon a material, rather than engaging objectively with a

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[2] Carving, explains contemporary art historian Alex Potts, was to engage with the living qualities of a sculptors material, where the carving process is likened to the the "wooing" of material in order to "give birth" to form (Potts, 1996, p.47).

[3] Herbert Read's close involvement with the work of Carl Jung was such that he became one of the contributing editors to the first English edition of the collected works of Carl Jung, Volume I-XX, published after Read's death by Routledge in 1973.

material's own qualities[4]. Read extends and indeed counters such subjectivist interpretations in *The Vital Image* by implying (through the format of his sculptural survey and accompanying commentary) that it may be possible to catalogue the diverse ways in which sculptors use modelling to penetrate a new hidden reality; that of the unconscious. Read's proposition in *The Vital Image* is that the subjectivity of modelling might enable a sculptor to access a broad and universal repository of archetypal imagery. *The Vital Image* can therefore be understood as an attempt to bridge pre and post war vitalist concerns; it engages both the idea of living matter key to understanding pre-war idioms such as direct carving *and* ideas of an archetypal imagery or symbolism contemporary to the psychoanalytical preoccupations of the post-war period during which Read was compiling his survey.

Whilst Herbert Read provides a definition and many examples of vitalist sculpture in *The Vital Image* and elsewhere in his work, contemporary approaches to vitalism tend to be associated less with unconscious or archetypal *images* and more with ideas of heterogenous *forces* immanent to matter. They might therefore be best associated with the Bergsonian influence on the sculpture of the first half of the twentieth century, exemplified by ideas such as direct carving[5]. As such, contemporary theoretical understandings such as vital materialism - drawing on ideas such as a material's force or agency - continue these longer sculptural histories of vitalism. Broadly speaking, contemporary vital materialist theories tend to draw on ideas of vital materiality which emerge from the philosophies of Gilles Deleuze (1925-1995) and Felix Guattari

[4] See chapter four of this thesis, where I expand on this idea with reference to the work of the modernist art theorist Adrian Stokes.

[5] Bergson's key influence on the development of modern sculpture in the early part of the of the 20th century is explored by Mark Antliff in relation to the work of the sculptors Henri Gaudier Brzeska, Raymond Duchamp Villon and Umberto Boccioni in his essay *Shaping Duration: Bergson and Modern Sculpture* (Antliff, 2011).

(1930-1992)[6]. More specifically, in the field of contemporary art, the writing of a Deleuze-Guattarian theorist such as Stephen Zepke constructs his theory of ontology and aesthetics explicitly around Deleuze and Guattari's vital materialist engagements. In the introduction to his book *Art as Abstract Machine: Ontology and Aesthetics in Deleuze and Guattari* (2005) Stephen Zepke describes art's aesthetic potential as something "both vital and material". Art's vital materiality is an engagement with an idea he calls "matter-force". In engaging with the forces held within material formations Zepke says art might become an "expression of the living materiality of the world" (Zepke, 2005, pp.2-3). Theorist and artist Simon O'Sullivan likewise confirms that art can be understood as having a multiplicity of 'materialist meanings' that can be generated in terms he describes in his book *Art Encounters Deleuze and Guattari: Thought Beyond Representation* (2006), through 'encounters'. Here, myriad forces act "on one another in a reciprocal and transformative relationship" (O'Sullivan, 2006, pp.20-21).

Where Read's *Vital Image* is a survey of the way that sculptors can use modelling to penetrate the unconscious to retrieve what he calls plastic images or archetypes, contemporary art's vital materialism need not necessarily privilege the unconscious as a repository for vitalist imaginaries. Although Herbert Read's 'Bergsonian' material vitalism and O'Sullivan and Zepke's 'vital materialist' aesthetic theories share common understandings of vital forces distributed throughout matter at large, contemporary vital materialist aesthetics need not be manifest through images or symbols of the unconscious. Instead, they may need to be revealed using other diverse mechanisms. The focus of this study is on an extended exploration of some of these mechanisms. This is achieved via a sculptural investigation of the intersections between distributed vitalist

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[6] Jane Bennet, for example, in her influential book *Vibrant Matter* draws on long and varied vitalist traditions, but identifies as central Deleuze and Guattarri's "experiment with the idea of a 'material vitalism' ", calling it a "project" that "helped inspire mine" (Bennet, 2010, p.x-xi).

forces, as theorized within vital materialism, and the idea of a repository of vital images held by the unconscious, as theorised by Read. My sculptural investigation therefore draws on a diverse range of intellectual and aesthetic tools, concepts and strategies in order to simultaneously revision Read's work *and* ideas that arise when considering or, perhaps more relevantly, acting through practice upon sculptural engagements with material forces. These include making use of Deleuze and Guattari's concept of schizoanalysis and the assemblage of enunciation in order to revision the psychoanalytical influences underpinning post war sculptural imagery. I draw upon Steven Shaviro's speculative realist proposal of an alien vitality within tools and processes in his 2014 book *The Universe of Things* in order to revision ideas of agency within my studio. I further contextualise my own practice based research in relation to the work of other artists from the contemporary sculptural canon. I use the tactility of Rebecca Warren's (b.1965) vigorously modelled clay sculptures to reconsider a vitalist idea that Read called palpability. I identify how Read relates his theories of vitalist aesthetics to sculptural process and consider the way that these ideas are revisioned in the work of Phyllida Barlow (b. 1944).

My project aim is to draw out, revise and remodel relationships between Herbert Read's *Vital Image,* and ideas that arise out of O'Sullivan and Zepke's commitments to contemporary art's vital materialism. In order to guide my investigation my project borrows from an additional framework that O'Sullivan recently theorised with his colleague David Burrows. In chapter five of their book *Fictioning: The Myth Functions of Contemporary Art and Philosophy* (2019) Burrows and O'Sullivan discuss a framework that the Marxist critic Raymond Williams calls a "residual culture" (p.86). In chapter eight of his book *Marxism and Literature* (1977) Williams argues that "any culture includes available elements of its past" (Williams, 1977, p. 122). A residual element is a part of the culture that was "formed in the

past" but is still active within contemporary culture. It may not be directly "expressed or substantially verified" in the dominant culture, although it may still be lived or practiced as the residue of some previous formation (pp. 121-127). In my project, as a result of the crossovers between modern and more recent vitalist perspectives (crossovers which are outlined further in my first chapter's contextual framework) layerings between past or residual elements and their presence within my own contemporary practice are a little complicated. It is nevertheless possible to see in my project a relatively straightforward mapping of Williams' schema in terms of the relations between post-war vitalist aesthetics in *The Vital Image* and my sculptural process. Here, the residual qualities of modern sculptural vitalism are re-signified through me referencing *The Vital Image* via direct visual quotation (for example in adopting a form or motif) or in a more ambient appeal to modern sculpture's values (such as in adopting a process or material).

In *Fictioning* Burrows and O'Sullivan expand on the use of residual cultures within contemporary art practices more widely. They write that Williams theorisation of residual cultures helps to identify how "any present moment is always already made up of different times'" (Burrows/O'Sullivan, 2019, p. 86). They say residual cultures can be "mobilised in contemporary aesthetic productions" (p.85); used in the present to re-signify "past myths". In so doing it may be possible to produce a "rupture" in the "signifying regime" of the present (p.19). Burrow's and O'Sullivan's analysis helps to reveal the way that, in my practice, simple dialectics between past and present are complicated by other factors. These disrupt or augment the straightforward processes whereby residual qualities can be re-signified. Instead, residual qualities may be re-engaged whilst simultaneously being *transformed* through process and material. Here, transformation is understood as being driven by the forces present within and animating matter, especially within the interplay between my own artistic agencies, the historical agencies of

the residual qualities in question and the agencies of plastic materials such as clay and plaster in the studio.

An awareness of these transformative forces and agencies means that during this project I have negotiated sculptural activities in the studio with a sense of openness. I allow the indeterminacy of the way different forces combine in the studio - matter-forces such as physical or chemical reactions between or within materials; physiological forces or affects[7] within the body such as feeling and sensation; or residual forces such as modern vitalist imaginaries, memories or intuitions - to shape the progress of a work without clearly defined outcomes in mind. My studio processes are specifically designed to encourage these forces to influence the development of works in an open-ended way. However, I am not claiming that responding to indeterminate forces through open-ended sculptural process is a particularly original idea. In fact, this was a key ideology within modernist practice, especially within practices surveyed by Read[8]. Neither do I propose to naively exploit ideas of material agency in order to straightforwardly illustrate ideas that follow on from Deleuze and Guattari's vital materialist paradigms. As I detail further in my contextual framework, in *Fictioning* Burrows and O'Sullivan explicitly warn against unquestioning deployments of Deleuze-Guattarian paradigms or legacies. Instead I use contemporary sculpture as both a framing device and a methodology to *negotiate between* or re-signify *both* contemporary vital materialist *and*

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[7] "Affects", writes O'Sullivan, are "moments of *intensity*, a reaction in/on the body at the level of matter". Being related to bodily matter they "are not to do with knowledge, or meaning", as they occur on a "different, a-signifying register" (O'Sullivan, 2001, p. 126). Affects work to produce feelings and sensation, prior to language or signification.

[8] Artists surveyed by Read in *The Vital Image* tend to foreground ideas of indeterminacy through engagements with process, seeing the 'image' within their work as an end result of such processes rather than a starting point. For example sculptor Lynn Chadwick (1914-2003) wrote in 1955 "The actual technique acted as a guide, and gave its character to the work… I do not analyse my work intellectually." Reg Butler similarly commented that pre-conception is unhelpful as "the working artist's world is that of works yet unborn" (Nairn/Serota (eds), 1981, p. 132).

residual vitalist perspectives. In my research contemporary perspectives help me to reconsider the way that vital materialist qualities within contemporary sculpture might expand on Read's older vitalist schemas in particular ways, and vice-versa.

I have set out to achieve these processes of re-signification mainly by means of activities in my studio and in exhibitions using the sculptures produced out of these activities. By way of responding to and enlarging upon these sculptural outputs I have also done so through pieces of creative writing contained within this thesis. Both of these encounters have been further expanded through more scholarly exposition in my thesis commentary. The methodology of this project therefore expands sculptural process and display to include written work, both academic and creative. In the first chapter of my commentary I discuss the way that these various approaches that work between sculptural process, object and text, can be enrolled within a construct I call a 'matter fiction'. The idea of my matter fiction is to allow me to step back and consider the various mechanisms through which I conduct this research as a particular kind of critical construct. This construct extends Burrows and O'Sullivan's project in *Fictioning* away from their more dominant performative and textual paradigms to further investigate ideas of material instantiation. The aim of my extended fictioning construct is to develop through practice based research new and original manifestations of sculptural vitalism that might work both ways. New vitalist sculptures in this project acknowledge the 'mind-independent' vital forces that transform matter at large, whilst using these transformative forces to remodel the 'mind-dependent' archetypal images and symbolic legacies associated with Herbert Read's vitalist aesthetics in general and the post-war sculptural legacies of *The Vital Image* in particular.

Thesis Structure

Section One, *Documentation of Artworks*, provides examples of my sculptural work through photographic documentation of three exhibitions that I presented during the second year of my research project in 2018.

Section Two, *Historical and Critical Commentary*, comprises of four chapters, each further subdivided into two parts:

Chapter One, *Methodological and Contextual Frameworks* is an introductory survey of the methodological and contextual background to my research.

- Part 1 outlines the materials and methods I have used in my practice-based research and expands on my concept of the matter fiction.
- Part 2 provides a brief survey of historical and contemporary vitalist positions relevant to my research, followed by a more extended discussion of the contexts I have drawn upon in revisioning these positions.

Chapter Two, *Situating The Vital Image,* works from a more detailed exploration of the historical positioning of *The Vital Image* within Herbert Read's vitalist aesthetic theories towards developing a context for my own response to his theories within my research practice.

- Part 1 explores how Herbert Read's vitalist aesthetics draw on the work of Henri Bergson (1859-1941), Alfred North Whitehead (1861-1947) and Carl Jung (1875-1961). It explores tensions within *The Vital Image* around archetypal imagery, which in

Read's theories can be either vitalist - vivified and expressive - or devitalised by conforming to predetermined clichés. By accessing vital images or vivified archetypes post-war critics proposed that artists could redeem wider social anxieties or traumas.

- Part 2 examines these redemptive possibilities in post-war sculpture in more detail, relating *The Vital Image* to art historian David Hulks' work on psychoanalytical interpretations of post-war sculpture, going on to discuss more recent contestations of psychoanalysis in Deleuze and Guattari's concept of schizoanalysis. I explore how attempts to control the so called 'pathological' representations of 'the geometry of fear' - nine sculptors selected by Herbert Read to represent Britain at the 1952 Venice Biennale - within quasi-clinical and supposedly neutral or objective representational structures such as the modern art gallery can be contrasted with Deleuze and Guattari's interest in freeing subjectivity from representational control. I consider how mechanisms within Deleuze and Guattari's work such as the assemblage of enunciation might help me to identify new approaches to post-war sculptural imaginaries in my own research.

Chapter Three, *Remodelling The Vital Image* is a more detailed reflection on the methodological and material aspects of my practice based research. In this section of my thesis I explore some of the practical, material and operational mechanisms through which I have engaged vitalist imaginaries, past and present, through my studio practice.

- Part 1 reflects upon ideas of agency within sculpture with specific reference to plaster's plasticity. I expand my discussion

by contrasting ideas of agency within modern and contemporary artists studios. I do so with reference to feminist scholar Mary Bergstein's 1995 critique *The Artist in His Studio, Photography, Art and the Masculine Mystique*. I contrast Bergstein's critique with ideas of an 'alien vitality' residing in materials and processes, explored in relation to passages in contemporary theorist Steven Shaviro's book *The Universe of Things* (2014).

- Part 2 comprises a non-academic text called *A Description of an Exercise.* This text explores the idea of the studio possessing an innate agency in the form of an alien consciousness. This chapter provides a fictional account of a studio exercise set for the candidate by the studio, whereby the studio is personified as having its own form of consciousness.

Chapter Four, *Contemporary Sculpture's Vital Materialism,* returns to Herbert Read's *Vital Image* in order to consider some ways in which modern sculpture's vitalism can be revised, readdressed and recontextualised within contemporary sculptural contexts. In this section I refer Read's vitalist aesthetics back to my own work documented in section one and the work of two sculptors from the contemporary canon, Rebecca Warren and Phyllida Barlow.

- Part 1 explores Herbert Read's idea of 'palpability', his tactile sculptural methodology. I reference an argument between Herbert Read and Clement Greenberg in the mid 1950s that opposes tactile and optical priorities for modern sculpture. I extend my discussion of this argument in two ways. Firstly I consider it in relation to my own exhibition *Sculpture Showroom* and secondly I consider more strategic

forms of tactility in the work of the contemporary artist Rebecca Warren.

- Part 2 contextualises ideas of sculptural process with particular reference to the thoughts of sculptor Phyllida Barlow. This part of the thesis compares my own sculptural work with an idea Barlow calls ‘invented form’. I consider the way that invented form repositions sculptural vitality as immanent to sculptural form, independent of the intentions or desires of the maker or viewer.

The conclusion establishes continuities of concern between modern sculpture’s vitalist aesthetics and contemporary vital materialism whilst also highlighting important differences in approach. It reflects upon my consideration of *The Vital Image* as a residual culture and offers a reflection on my idea of the matter fiction. It proposes that the matter fiction may be best approached as an alternative sculpturally situated mode of fictioning that can draw on sculptural vitalism within modern and contemporary sculpture alike in order to propose new kinds of vitalist engagements. I argue that doing so might offer resistance to dominant fictions around artistic intentionality and lead to a renewal of the idea of autonomous ‘life’ in sculpture.

Section One

Documentation of Artworks

Turning Arch & The Couple

The Modern Institute, Glasgow

2nd February - 17th March 2018.

Sculpture Showroom

Glasgow Sculpture Studios

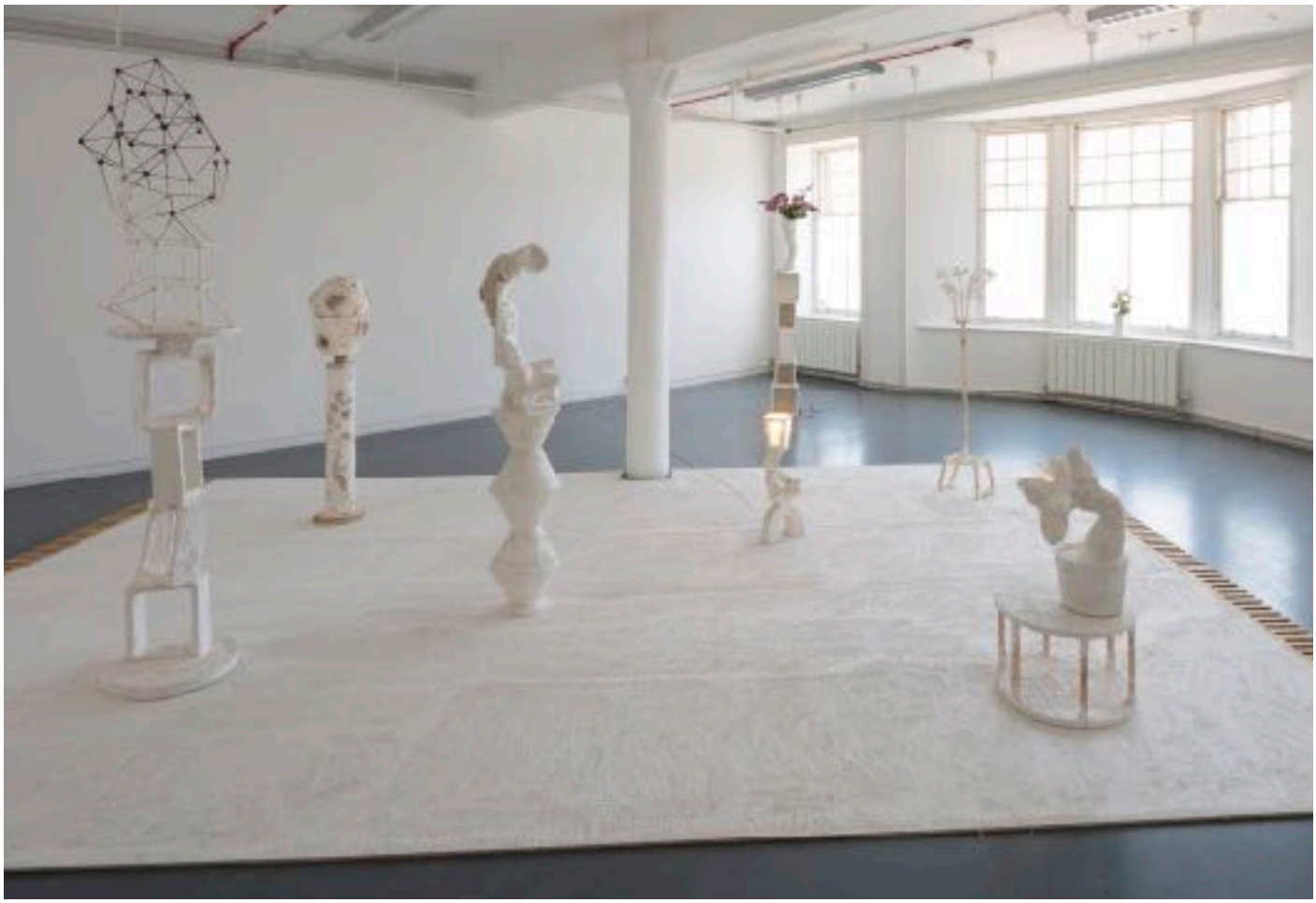
20th April - 7th May 2018


Nick Evans

The Language of Flowers

Glasgow Project Room

2nd - 9th June 2018



List of Works

Page 34
Turning Arch, 2018
Fibre reinforced plaster.
235 x 170 x 50 cm.
Photograph: Patrick Jamieson.

Page 35
The Couple, 2018
Fibre reinforced plaster, light fittings,
electrical cable.
230 x 100 x 80 cm.
Photograph: Patrick Jamieson.

Pages 37 - 44
Sculpture Showroom, 2018
Fibre reinforced plaster and jute scrim over steel,
expanding foam and wood, electrical light fittings,
electrical and steel cable.
Sculpture in 6 parts, dimensions variable.
Photography: Kate V. Robertson.

Pages 45 - 56
The Language of Flowers, 2018
Fibre reinforced plaster, orientated strand board, wood,
steel, garden flowers, electrical light fittings, electrical cable.
Sculpture in 9 parts, dimensions of plaster floor 400 x 600 cm.
Photography: Ruth Clark.

Section Two

Historical and Critical Commentary

Chapter One: Methodological and Contextual Frameworks

Chapter One of this thesis commentary provides the methodological and contextual background for my study. **Part One** is an overview of the sculptural methodologies used in my project such as sculptural assembly, modelling and casting. It further expands on the construct of the matter fiction. **Part Two** provides the contextual framework within which this study is positioned, touching on histories of vitalism and vital materialism within new materialism and expanding on ideas such as residual cultures and mythopoesis.

Part 1: Methodology

This thesis sets out to both argue and to demonstrate through its practice based research that the vital forces held within materials ('vital materialism') have an important methodological role to play in my project. Engaging with vital materialist matter-forces enable me to re-signify imaginaries belonging to *The Vital Image* in my sculpture according to an alternative set of priorities. These include de-centring ideas of artistic subjectivity - repositioning the myths around existential subjective expression, archetypal imagery and tactile embodiment that interested Herbert Read and post-war sculptors - within an expanded field of practice. The expanded field proposed by this methodology incorporates not only studio practice but art historical research, engagements with contemporary theoretical perspectives and original writing, both fictional and academic. These approaches contribute to a wider construct which I call a matter fiction, and which is explained in more detail later in this section.

Hybrid Assemblies

Generally speaking, the way my research has gone about engaging with layerings between past vitalist myths and present vitalist practices has tended towards the non-hierarchical and the combinatory. Through the course of my research I have experimented with using both sculptural and textual processes to juxtapose, splice or arrange sources relating to both modern and contemporary vitalism in an effort to generate new combined entities. These have resulted in outcomes I might describe as hybrid assemblies. A hybrid assembly can be likened more to a chain than a network. Its assembly is made up of a limited number of conjoined parts. For example, the prologue to this thesis is a letter from the ghost of Herbert Read that combines unattributed quotes from his own writing with textual influences from vital materialist theory. Read's ideas are presented at the start of the letter by borrowing from his work in a manner consistent with his own ideologies. By the end of the letter his thoughts are extended towards a more fictional position where his vitalist preoccupations have become inflected with contemporary vital materialist vocabularies. Similarly, in a piece of creative writing in chapter four called *A Description of an Exercise* studio techniques such as modelling, casting and assembling using materials, techniques and operations associated with modernist practices are described in a manner that borrows ideas, phrases and terminology from contemporary vital materialist sources. *A Description of An Exercise* dramatises the idea, central to this thesis, that modern sculptural technics might be repositioned away from the creative intentions of the artist towards other stranger and less personal agencies latent or active within material and studio processes and operations.

Within the studio practice itself I have engaged with material rather than textual strategies to negotiate between modern and contemporary vitalism. One strategy that enables me to negotiate between ideas of a unified singularity such as the 'vital image' in Read's work and ideas such as a hybrid assemblage is casting. Casting is a key methodological approach for

my project whereby a unique singular form is lost and replaced with something multiple. The artist's hand or gesture of origination is, at least in a manner of speaking, subtracted. In its place come multiple iterations of the lost original form. The nature of these multiple iterations is ambiguous. Marcel Duchamp was acutely aware of the ambiguity of objects derived from moulds. In 1937 he wrote of the minute differences between objects cast from the same mould, describing this difference as an "infra-thin separative amount" (Duchamp, quoted in Joselit, 2005, p.160). Even mass-produced objects derived from the same assembly line are different on account of this "infra-thin interval which separates two identicals" (p.160). So once again, I am not suggesting a simple dialectic whereby the single form is multiplied by identical reproduction through casting. Instead I am interested in more complex and circular processes of passaging between single and multiple, original and reproduction. Here, the singular engenders the multiple through casting, but the multiple re-engenders the singular by incorporating multiple parts into sculptural wholes. These sculptural wholes nevertheless remain determined by the multiple parts from which they are constituted. The governing dynamics of my sculptural works in this project tend to arise from ambiguities around such passaging circularities between part and whole, single and multiple.

Modelling materials and plasticity

In order to work with the cast parts of a sculpture, I must first originate their component parts. I use modelling techniques to do this. Partly this responds to particular qualities in the post-war sculpture surveyed by Read. The sculptor William Tucker (b.1935), who was associated with the later

‘New Generation’ sculptors of the 1960s[9], provides a useful if pejorative description of these qualities in his book *The Language of Sculpture* (1974). Tucker describes post-war sculpture as dominated by a “great wave of textured and expressive sculpture, both constructed and modelled, figurative and abstract”. He maintains that this was “…a dying tradition… when form was sacrificed to texture and autonomy of structure to a cheap and melodramatic imagery” (Tucker, 1974, p.83). I engage with modelling not only to refer back to the melodrama of this ‘dying tradition’ but also to re-signify it by engaging with the less stable meanings generated out of a modelling material’s particular *kinds* of materiality.

Modelling materials, like clay in its plastic state and plaster when hydrated, are typically unstable. They are soft and easily deformed. They have a metamorphic or mutational quality whereby an image can easily be imparted to the substance, yet can equally easily be changed from one resemblance to another. Plastic materials can be caught between states. They can be temporarily fixed, but even after plaster has crystallised into a solid its form can be relatively easily reworked by mechanical means such as cutting, sanding, scraping or the application of further layers of plaster. It is in fact quite possible to recycle used modelling plaster by heating it to 130 degrees centigrade to return it to its semi-hydrate state. Although I have never done this, I mention it in order to illustrate the way that plastic materials like plaster make visible the often less visible transformational forces in materials more generally.

The expressive capabilities of materials typified by malleable plasticity do not generally arise in isolation, but can be related to their interactions with

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[9] ‘New Generation’ sculptors such as Phillip King, David Annesley, Michael Bolus, Tim Scott, William Tucker and Isaac Witkin were taught by Anthony Caro at St Martins School of Art in London in the late 1950s and early 1960s and were interested in ridding sculpture of its plinth or base and using brightly coloured industrial materials like preformed steel, plastic or fibreglass (https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/n/new-generation-sculpture).

artistic intention. In my practice based research I explore the way that modelling materials possess particular qualities that transform relations between the artist's mind or hand and matter through plastic process. I do not necessarily consider meaning to be pre-existent to these transformations. My initial interest in modelling materials was because, unlike other industrially manufactured materials or found objects, I did not consider them to be marked with a particularly clear identity or history. I now realise it may be more accurate to say that the histories and identities of modelling materials are often bound up in their potential for plastic processes of transformation, deformation or reformation. In my project I respond to these mutable qualities; meaning is not necessarily predetermined or constrained by artistic intention, but is additionally developed out of the way that plastic materials transform artistic intentions. This might occur through encounters between material and artist, one material and another, or between materials and the forces that work upon them, such as gravity, chemical, mechanical or other forces[10].

A Matter Fiction

Choosing a sculptural method through which to engage with a complex intellectual history such as *The Vital Image* as well as complex contemporary vitalist ideas introduces unique and particular problems. Namely, how might my practice be developed as a structure capable of the containment and exploration of such ideas? Partly by way of responding to this question, my research is also a consideration of the *manner* in which

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[10] I have recently been reminded that these understandings can be traced back into Heidegger's analysis of arts relationship to 'technology'. For Heidegger the essence of technology is a combined artisanal and ethical project which can, in his terms, "bring forth" or "poiesis". According to Heidegger in his essay *The Question Concerning Technology,* an artist can bring an artwork into being through engaging with the "essence" of technology as a mode of "truth" or "revealing": "Technology is a mode of revealing. Technology comes to presence in the realm where revealing and un-concealment takes place, where *althea*, truth, happens." (Heidegger, 1977, p. 13).

my practice might respond creatively, freely, intuitively or affirmatively to a range of contemporary vitalist perspectives and modern vitalist legacies.

These considerations led me to the idea I call a matter fiction. A matter fiction is a construct through which this research arranges studio processes, materials, written texts (my own and others), ideas, histories, objects and their modes of display into a particular kinds of formations. These have taken three principle formats. Firstly, the matter fiction consists of the activities and processes in the studio involved in the production of new sculptural work. The outcome of these activities have resulted in three exhibitions during the second year of my research project. Secondly, I have expanded on the ideas or processes in these exhibitions in the form of three short fictional text works that are included in this thesis. These take the form of a fictional letter from Herbert Read to sculptors of the future in the prologue, an imaginary conversation between two sculptors in the postscript and a description of processes involved in casting plaster forms and assembling them into sculptures in chapter three (p.111). Thirdly, both these sculptural and textual outputs are reflected upon from a variety of positions through the more traditional academic exposition in the thesis commentary. The matter fiction is therefore not an entity in its own right. Rather it can be considered a construct or proposition which frames my work in order to help me to reflect critically upon it.

The different methodological approaches within the matter fiction are also intended to help me to re-vivify *The Vital Image* and modern sculpture's vitality more generally in new ways. Approaches to re-vivifying historical paradigms have been described by Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker in their anthology *Metamodernism* (2018) as a kind of 'upcycling'. As distinct from a postmodern recycling a metamodern upcycling picks out "from the scrapheap of history those elements that allow [artists] to resignify the present and reimagine a future" (p.10). Using

metamodern upcycling in order to reimagine the future within the terms of a matter fiction is to engage with an idea that David Burrows and Simon O'Sullivan call a 'fiction' (Burrows/O'Sullivan 2019). In Burrows and O'Sullivan work, fiction is explored "as a verb", meaning to write, image, perform or materially instantiate worlds or social bodies "different to those engendered by the dominant organisations of life currently in existence" (p. 1). Fictions can evoke "potential realities to come", they can intervene or augment "existing reality", and take on a "critical power" when "set against, or foregrounded within a given reality" (p.2). The primary fictional construct within my matter fiction is a material instantiation called a 'sculpture'. I explore sculpture through this research as a very complex and quite particular form of object and address. A sculpture in my project can be considered a *matter* fiction quite simply because it is a instantiation of a world that privileges 'material reality' - understood simply as the way my own deployment of sculpture relies on its materials - opposing corporeal matter to words or concepts. However, a sculpture as a matter fiction cannot, in reality, exclude any of its less corporeal dimensions. So a matter fiction is also a term I use to to extend sculpture beyond material medium. It indicates potential realities to come that are inclusive of the wider productive relations brought into being by sculptural activity. Sculptural activity within the matter fiction is inclusive not only of its corporeal aspects, such as its forces and materials; but its incorporeal ones too, such as words, gestures and time, including social or historical constructs.

One strategy used by the matter fiction for revealing these productive relations is the idea of framing. Within the matter fiction, 'sculpture' itself can be considered a kind of master narrative, whose particular histories, traditions, conventions and canons frame the field in which this enquiry operates. I use framing in more specific ways when working with my own sculptural objects in exhibition contexts. As can be seen in the documentation of artworks in section one, I have used framing devices

such as floors, plinths or bases, and more expanded analogies such as a plaster lined room as compositional parameters to generate limited relationships (frames) that encompass sculptural wholes. A more in-depth discussion of these framing devices is explored in relation to the work of Phyllida Barlow in chapter four, but to briefly summarise: Instead of using such relationships to generate meanings I use them to generate 'worlds'. My interest in doing so is for this research to move towards a new appreciation of sculpture's special capabilities. I am curious about the way that sculptural worlds form irreducible sculptural realities, realities whose forceful presence may not be easily categorised by any means other than their own.

Part 2: Contextual Framework

The objective of this contextual framework is to two provide two contextual overviews. The first contextual overview provides a brief outline of the historical and contemporary contexts for the Readean vitalist histories within my research. I have found that vitalism is a large and diffuse field of study, with a very long history. Vitalist ideas can be related back to concepts such as hylozoism, the idea that there is a living spirit that animates matter, first recorded in ancient Greece. These ideas were resurgent within German *naturphilosophie* and 19th century Romanticism, partly in order to counter mechanistic theories of life that saw the organism as determined by physical laws; a type of animal-machine[11]. Rather than give a full account of these longer histories of vitalism, an ambitious undertaking not possible within the space of this study, I have limited my first survey to a sketch of the vitalist contexts specific to understanding my project's negotiation between Herbert Read's *Vital Image* and

[11] See Tristan Garcia's chapter *Living Things* in his book *Form and Object* for a concise survey of the evolutionary and biological science-histories pertinent to discussions of the mechanist/vitalist debate (Garcia, 2014, pp. 197-203)

contemporary vital materialism. Some of these contexts, in particular those surrounding Reads organic vitalism, will reappear in more depth in the next chapter. The second contextual overview provides the contexts for the processes of revisioning with which my research engages. This part of the survey references the work of Deleuze and Guattari, and Deleuze-Guattarian approaches to art practice within the work of contemporary art theorists Simon O'Sullivan and Stephen Zepke. This overview returns to examine in more depth Raymond Williams concept of the residual culture and its expansion in the work of David Burrows and Simon O'Sullivan in their book *Fictioning* (2019). Burrow's and O'Sullivan's work also provides a context for considering the specific ways that new form might emerge from my sculptural negotiations between *The Vital Image's* residual qualities and contemporary vitalist ideas.

Contextual Overview (1)

In the 1940s Herbert Read developed a paradigm that he called 'organic vitalism'. Organic vitalism was a synthesis of qualities Read called 'abstraction' and 'superrealism'. For Read, abstraction denotes a more conceptual tendency within artistic practice, whilst superrealism denotes a more expressionist approach. In a 1944 essay on the work of Henry Moore, published in *The Philosophy of Modern Art* in 1952, Read proposed a paradigm wherein superrealism, which Read says is informed by the science of psychology, expresses one pole of a continuum. The other pole is expressed by abstraction, which is informed by the science of physics. Organic vitalism was the term Read used for the ultimate achievement of a synthesis between these two poles (Read, 1952, p.207).

David Thistlewood, in his essay *Herbert Read's Organic Aesthetic: I (1918-1950),* explains the importance of the sculptor Henry Moore (1898 -

1986) to Read's paradigm. For Read, Henry Moore's work was exemplary of organic vitalism. Read felt that Moore was one of only a few artists truly capable of an idiomatic synthesis between abstraction and superrealism. Moore indicated the way that an artist could respect the reciprocal tensions between the various fractions along a broad creative front between abstraction and superrealism, whilst asserting their right to create independent new realities out of conventional forms along this front. This was a creative freedom Read likened in his 1952 essay *Realism and Abstraction in Contemporary Art* to a "psychic shuttle", that could not only advance art, but culture in general, therefore ultimately leading in Read's schema to human evolution:

> Somewhere in this psychic shuttle…freedom intervenes - the freedom to create a new reality. Only on that assumption can we explain any form of evolutionary development in human consciousness, and kind of spiritual growth. A novelty-creating freedom exists by virtue of the intensity generated by aesthetic awareness; and evolutionary advance emerges from the act of expression (Read, 1952, p.99).

For Read therefore, vitalism was not *in itself* the goal of sculptural interpenetrations between matter, process and psyche. The end goal of vitalism was to use art to advance, through the creation of new realities, the evolutionary capacities of human thought and expression. In theorising these new realities Read drew upon the work of the philosophers Henri Bergson and Alfred North Whitehead and the psychoanalyst Carl Jung. These intellectual lineages, explored in more detail in the next chapter, bring to Read's organic vitalist paradigm a number of important ideas. Bergson brings a sense that life and matter are allied tendencies, not separate entities but existing in conjunction and competition with one another. Whitehead brings a notion of organicism that is focussed on creative process. Jungian mechanisms such as the collective unconscious and the archetype allowed Read to theorise artistic creativity as

transcending the individual in order to contribute to new and advanced social collectives[12].

Modern and Contemporary Vitalism

I was struck when exploring Herbert Read's organic vitalist paradigm by certain continuities between modern sculptural vitalism and vitalist strands within contemporary critical theory. These continuities arise due to a shared intellectual inheritance between modern sculptural vitalism and contemporary vitalist theory. I will outline these shared inheritances below.

Read claimed in his 1951 lecture *Art and the Evolution of Man* to be an "unregenerate Bergsonian" (Read, 1951, p.34). For the philosopher Henri Bergson, life is a tendency towards activity and mobility, whilst matter is a leaning towards stable formation. Life and matter are not permanent conditions but "nascent changes of direction" (Bergson, 1974, p.188). This means that life and matter flow between and into one another as part of a mobile monistic continuum. Bergson's philosophies propose a consciousness within the inorganic realm that a sympathetic individual might intuit. Intuition is the "sympathy by which one is transported into the interior of an object in order to coincide with what…is unique [about it]" (p. 161). Bergson's vitalism continues to inform contemporary theoretical perspectives such as Jane Bennet's book *Vibrant Matter* (2010). Bergsonian vitalism helps Bennet propose that there are forms of lively agency situated throughout various forms of matter - agency is not the sole

[12] According to the Encylopedia Brittanica the collective unconscious is a "term introduced by psychiatrist Carl Jung to represent a form of the unconscious (that part of the mind containing memories and impulses of which the individual is not aware) common to mankind as a whole and originating in the inherited structure of the brain. It is distinct from the personal unconscious, which arises from the experience of the individual. According to Jung, the collective unconscious contains archetypes, or universal primordial images and ideas" (Editors of the Brittanica Encyclopaedia, https://www.britannica.com/science/collective-unconscious, last updated 2007, accessed November 8th 2019 at 12.02).

privilege of human thought or action. Bennet theorises the capacities of material formations as active or 'agental' configurations, calling these formations a "vital materialism" (Bennet, 2010, p.x). Material configurations, for Bennet, have a 'thing power'; which is the power of things to act, to "produce effects" or "alter" the "course of events" (Bennet, 2010, p.viii).

Alfred North Whitehead's organicism engages process ontologies relevant to understanding Read's conception of modern sculpture. Herbert Read, in a positive review of Whitehead's *Science and the Modern World*, saw in Whiteheads philosophy a "doctrine of the interconnectedness of everything" (Read, quoted in Juler, 2015, p.91). Edward Juler, in his book *Grown But Not Made* explains Whitehead's worldview as; "the idea of co-ordinated interactivity… a primary quality of life itself was integral to Whiteheads conception of 'organicism' and his vision of different grades of matter blending indissolubly into a single unity formed a convincing template over which organicists could map their own holistic philosophies" (p.95). It is possible to position Herbert Read's organic vitalist paradigm as one such form of this mapping. Read engages Bergsonian *vitalism* and Whiteheadian *organicism* into a holistic hybrid unity - *organic vitalism*.

Whitehead's process ontologies are also relevant within contemporary vitalist thought. In the introduction to their 2005 volume *Inventive Life: Approaches to the New Vitalism* editors Miriam Fraser, Sara Kember and Celia Lury consider what they call "vital processes" (Fraser, Kember, Lury, 2005, p.1). They explain how they draw on Whitehead in order to outline contemporary engagements with "radical relationality", where "objects, subjects, concepts are composed of nothing more or less than relations". Further, "co-ordinates of space and time" are not external to these relations: "Change…does not occur *in* time and space. Instead time and space change according to the specificity of the event". Their accent on process is a "privileging of an ontology of becoming over being - to a flux that cannot

be understood except in terms of process or passage" (Fraser, Kember, Lury, 2015, p.3-4).

New Materialism and Vital Materialism

Both these perspectives, a material vitalism emerging from Bergsonian thought, and process ontologies relating to Whitehead, can now be contextualised within a broader contemporary field of knowledge called *new materialism*. This is a contested field that nevertheless "emphasises the materiality of the world and everything - social and natural - within it" (Fox and Alldred, 2018, 1). New materialism departs from other theories such as post-structuralism in that it has a greater focus on "social production" than "social construction" through texts, systems of thought or discourses (p.1). New materialism's focus on material production involves de-centring the human in favour of more entangled material relations or agencies. As Alexander Wilson points out in a recent paper (Wilson, 2018), new materialism is not a singular field of knowledge. In its move away from anthropocentrism Wilson notes a key divergence within new materialism. On one side he identifies a rationalist approach to the materialist spectrum. Associated with a philosopher like Quentin Meillassoux this upholds ideas of the 'real' as being independent of, or a-priori to, the subject. Here, matter has an ontological priority over thought. Matter is a dead, inert or non-thinking primordial background. For Meillasoux it "designates contingent non-living and non-thinking beings" which precede "observation, consciousness, sentience or agency" (Meillasoux, quoted in Wilson, 2018, p.4). Wilson positions vital materialism on the *other side* of this divergence. Vitalist forms of materialism "defend the reality of non-human capacities, agencies and subjectivities of the material (and immaterial) world" (p.4). Vital forms of materialism do not recognise a firm distinction between "thought and thing, mind and matter", but allow for the "capacities, agencies

and subjective dimensions of seemingly dead materials" (p.4). It is these capacities that expand ideas of *agency* beyond the human that my research practice responds to. Simon O'Sullivan in his 2001 essay *The Aesthetics Of Affect: Thinking Art Beyond Representation* writes of this kind of materialist repositioning as an "*a*-personal thing", where the "matter in us" responds and resonates "with the matter around us". This kind of encounter he calls "*trans*-human", where art "opens us up to the non-human universe that we are part of" (O'Sullivan, 2001, p.128).

Contextual Overview (2)

The term "material vitalism" appears within Gilles Deleuze's and Felix Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus,* as a "life proper to matter, a vital state of matter as such, a material vitalism that doubtless exists everywhere" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, p.411). Deleuze and Guattari use material vitalism to describe ideas of transformative forces not limited to living organisms, but instead found present within non-organic matter more widely. Stephen Zepke, in his essay *The Animist Readymade: Towards a Vital Materialism of Contemporary Art*, (2017) explains how Deleuze and Guattari's material vitalism can be situated in terms of the hylozoism of earlier German *naturphilosophie* and Romantic movements, which suggests that matter is infused with a living spirit. Zepke explains that Deleuze and Guattari's work extends ideas of hylozoism to develop "…a perverse Nietzschean form of hylozoism in which living force goes beyond any organic teleology…" (p.237).

Vitalism beyond Organicism

I would like to draw on this observation in Zepke's account in order to examine the way that Deleuze and Guattari's surpassing of organic

teleologies contests Herbert Read's theory of organic vitalism. David Thistlewood in *Form and Formlessness* again refers to Read's review of Whitehead's *Science and the Modern World*. Read explains in this review that although for Whitehead organicism is a fundamental concept in nature, organisms individually are nevertheless quite ineffective. Thistlewood points out that Read understood how for Whitehead "the gains of societies of co-operating organisms are immensely greater than the sums of individual contributions" (Thistlewood, 1984, p.58). Read's theorisations of artistic creativity follow on from Whitehead's organicism in typifying creativity as an "uneven progression" whose significance is "in its total organisation" rather than in "the detail of its parts" (p.58). The result of such an understanding is that Read's aesthetic theories are not just concerned with isolated events, individual people, or single artworks. Instead they theorise inter-relations between the individual part (be it an artwork, action or person) and the whole (an ouvre, an event or a society). Read's organicist theories of creativity are therefore open to new ideas of multiplicity emerging from Whitehead's scientific philosophy. Nevertheless Reads theory of organic vitalism situates the purpose of such multiplicities within a hierarchical model of human evolution. "Evolutionary development in human consciousness" is understood by Read as a kind of "spiritual growth" (Read, 1952, p.99). In short, the artist's role is to negotiate and imagine a multiplicity of relations in order to grow the human spirit.

Where Whitehead opened up ideas of multiplicity for Read in the relations between the part and the whole, in *A Thousand Plateaus* Deleuze and Guattari call this kind of multiplicity which returns to ideas of a unitary subject (such as the advanced creative human in Read's schema) a "pseudomultiplicity" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, p.8). Instead their own position counters Read's hierarchical interpretation of Whitehead's organicism with a different kind of organic metaphor. Deleuze and Guattari re-position ideas of evolutionary processes within the non-hierarchical

structure of the rhizome, a “subterranean stem”, a “multiple, lateral or circular system of ramification” (p.5). The rhizome consists *only* of multiplicities, and returns to no unified subject. Deleuze and Guattari say that: “Multiplicities are rhizomatic, and expose arborescent pseudomultiplicities for what they are” (p.8). Within a rhizomatic multiplicity there is “no unity” (p.8). Here “evolutionary schemas would no longer follow models of arborescent descent” (p.10) (or conversely, in the case of a Readean teleology of advancement, ascent). Instead, rhizomatic evolutionary schemas are heterogeneous, operating by “jumping” from “one differentiated line to another” (p.10). These discontinuities lead to alternative lines of descent typified by “transversal communications” that serve to “scramble genealogical trees” (p.11). Instead of “points, positions..” there are, in these alternative genealogies, “only lines” (p.8). These preclude any concept of any overall stabilising unity (although I acknowledge that stability in parts is not precluded by Deleuze and Guattari’s model). Instead there is a constant relay, “lines of flight” (p.9) territorialise and de-territorialise.

Meta-modelisation (between *The Vital Image* and vital materialism)

In Read’s schema the task of the artist is to access the unknown hidden depths of matter and psyche and to find within their chaotic formations an archetypal image of unity – this is what he means by a ‘vital image’. For Read the unity of the subject ultimately triumphs through the vitalist artwork. How does my project negotiate between this triumphant unification of matter, process, and mind through a ‘vital image’ in Read’s aesthetic theories and ideas of a multiplicity within Deleuze and Guattari’s work that returns to no single image, but contain instead a multiplicity of heterogenous images, forces and relations?

The work of Deleuze-Guattarian art theorists like Simon O'Sullivan and Stephen Zepke often engage with art's specific aesthetic capabilities within Deleuze and Guattari's thought (Zepke 2005 and O'Sullivan 2006). They understand these aesthetic capabilities as negotiating with ideas of the multiplicity: A "constellation of forces", rather than response to or manipulation of images, representations or texts (O'Sullivan, 2006, p.58). In fact, this focus on forces and multiplicities can open up a new language, often based in non-linguistic 'affect' that is "beyond representation" (O'Sullivan, 2001 and 2006). However, in his most recent work with David Burrows, *Fictioning* (2019), Simon O'Sullivan indicates a danger in uncritically adopting such affect-driven Deleuzian concepts in the presumption that these concepts might automatically propose some kind of alternative to a dominant culture. He defines the dominant culture under capitalism in his earlier work *Art Encounters Deleuze and Guattari* as being one of "spectatorship and consumption" (O'Sullivan, 2006, p.49). Burrows and O'Sullivan say that not only has the "once radical Deleuze" increasingly become "orthodoxy within the Academy", but that Deleuze's ideas have now become characteristic of certain contemporary control mechanisms within capitalism which extend spectatorship and consumption through Deleuzean mechanisms such as "affect" and "discontinuity" (Burrows/ O'Sullivan, 2019, p.46). Instead of uncritically adopting Deleuzean models O'Sullivan and Burrows propose that Deleuzean concepts should be "metamodelised" by using other conceptual resources (p.46). Burrows and O'Sullivan qualify their use of the term "metamodelisation" as "a method which, following Felix Guattari… *performs* its own fictioning" (p.8, my emphasis). The relevance of such an idea to my research lies in the way that models of thought associated with Herbert Read's vitalist aesthetic, such as *The Vital Image,* might be 'metamodelised' (or performed) by what Burrows and O'Sullivan call "forcing… encounters" or "fostering… couplings" (p.8) with Deleuze-Guattarian models of thought such as

material vitalism, and vice versa. In so doing, I propose to develop this research as a speculative hybrid – a forced coupling between the archetypal unity of a vital image and the heterogeneity of forces, images and effects brought on, or performed, by my engagement with the vital materiality of sculptural process, material and operation.

Residual Cultures and Mythopoesis

One way that Burrows and O'Sullivan propose that a metamodelisation might be achieved is by the artist "self-positioning - as an actor - in a larger field of interaction" (p.47). Whilst Burrow's and O'Sullivan's notion of an actor is an expanded one, incorporating multiplicities both "human and non-human" (p.47), my own understanding of myself as an 'actor' is less concerned with literal performance than the kind of private enactments that take place in the confines of the studio[13]. My self-positioning includes in its field of interaction temporal aspects such as summonings of the past; for example invoking certain qualities, materials or approaches associated with the sculptural work surveyed by Read in *The Vital Image*. As I have already mentioned in my introduction, my research explicitly engages with this aspect of Burrow's and O'Sullivan's work by asking whether *The Vital Image* can be considered a residual culture? It may therefore be worth considering in more detail what is meant by a residual culture, and how residual cultures might be useful to developing my project.

Raymond Williams, in *Marxism and Literature* writes:

[13] O'Sullivan and Burrows acknowledge the complexities of involving "many kinds of agents" within an art practice. Principally their concern in the passage I quote is to theorise alternatives to an artistic retreat into hermetic ideas of autonomy. In this thesis, rather than considering the studio as a site apart, what O'Sullivan and Burrows call a "vacuole of non-communication", I attempt to follow an alternative path they propose – this is to explore and fiction the studio as a "human-machine conjunction"(p.47). See in particular my text *A Description of an Exercise* in chapter 3 of this thesis.

> The residual, by definition, has been effectively formed in the past, but it is still active in the cultural process, not only and often not at all as an element of the past, but as an effective element of the present. Thus certain experiences, meanings, and values which cannot be expressed or substantially verified in terms of the dominant culture, are nevertheless lived and practiced on the basis of the residue - cultural as well as social - of some previous social and cultural institution or formation. It is crucial to distinguish this aspect of the residual which may have an alternative or even oppositional relation to the dominant culture, from that active manifestation of the residual….which has been wholly or largely incorporated into the dominant culture (Williams, 1977 p.122).

My research responds to Williams proposition that there are “experiences, meanings, and values which cannot be expressed or substantially verified in terms of the dominant culture”, asking whether such an idea might be true of certain kinds of vitalism within sculpture? My research investigates whether modern sculpture’s vitalism might still operate as an effective element within the sculpture of the present, even though it may not be directly expressed or verified as such. It suggests a number of ways in which this hypothesis might indeed be the case, most specifically through ‘case studies’ into the work of Rebecca Warren and Phyllida Barlow in chapter four. Ideas of the residual can be further contextualised in relation to my own practice through Simon O’ Sullivan and David Burrows work in a chapter in their book *Fictioning* (2019) called *Residual Culture and the Magical Mode of Existence* (pages 85-102). For Burrows and O’Sullivan, residual cultures attend to the way the past “might be utilised… against… the present” (p. 85). The past is “a repository of materials that might well provide alternative points of subjectification today, especially when mobilised in contemporary aesthetic productions” (p.85). Burrows and O’Sullivan say that according to Raymond Williams, residual cultures are the ‘left overs’ from previous hegemonies within contemporary hegemonic culture. These ‘left overs’ might offer alternatives or might even “challenge… the dominant culture” (p.86).

This challenge occurs through something that Burrows and O’Sullivan call *mythopoesis*. Burrows and O’Sullivan propose that layerings between past

and present reposition the self within a wider field of interaction, thereby disrupting the “dominant fiction of the self”: speaking instead to the “multiplicity that would deterritorialise our usual identifications… whilst addressing us as part for wider collectivity” (p.16). In Burrows and O’Sullivan’s theory of mythopoesis artworks are engendered through “images, sounds, writing or events… by other artists, writers or musicians” in order to fiction “other ways of thinking speaking, enjoying, relating and existing” (p.17). Mythopoesis does not promise another world but sets up new conditions for “the production of a different mode of being” from within “already existing ones” (p.18). Mythopoesis, they say, involves a “unmaking and making of sense” through the “performance of a rupture in a given signifying regime” (p.19).

In my own research I draw upon Burrows and O’Sullivan’s mythopoetic analysis to position my ‘self’ as a particular kind of actor: A ‘sculptor’ who ‘metamodelises' Deleuze-Guattarian ideas like material vitalism and past imaginaries, such as the sculptural practices and objects surveyed within *The Vital Image.* This self-performing results in a field of activity that is as much a fiction as it is a fact. The ‘myth’ of a modern artistic subjectivity as proposed by *The Vital Image* is not so much refuted in my project as remodelled. Therefore in my research project the possibility that modern sculpture’s residual qualities might provide alternatives to dominant realities are explored as reaching out in two directions simultaneously. Firstly, in remodelling *The Vital Image* the artistic unconscious in modernity - its archetypal imagery and capture of traumatic subjective expression - is explored in terms of ideas of matter-force that extend away from organic singularity towards heterogeneous vital forces. Secondly, the notion of creativity as a force beyond representation within O’Sullivan and Zepke’s engagements with Deleuze and Guattari’s work is not denied but leant a specific *kind* of imaginary valence - metamodelised through my project’s response to *The Vital Image’s* vitalist imaginaries. Speaking more generally,

my project could be said to explore *sculpture itself,* as a construct and an activity that enables meta-modelisation to occur. My project explores the ways that sculptural processes and operations can re-signify the relations and contexts that I have been outlining through *negotiating between,* or re-enacting in a new or different way both modern *and* contemporary vitalist ideas.

Chapter Two: Situating The Vital Image

Chapter two of this thesis commentary contextualises Herbert Read's *Vital Image* in relation to Read's work and wider post-war contexts. In **part 1** I will explore how *The Vital Image* is situated within Herbert Read's vitalist aesthetic theories. In **part 2** I will explore post-war sculpture's wider unconscious archetypal symbolism in more detail. By the end of the chapter I will have worked towards outlining in more detail a historical context for formulating my own response to Read's theories within my research practice.

Part 1: Herbert Read and *The Vital Image*

In this chapter I will explain some of the ways that *The Vital Image* fits into Herbert Read's wider post-war aesthetic philosophies. At the risk of a reducing the scope of Read's thinking, which resists easy summary, Read's aesthetic position in the post-war period can be explained by his allegiance to three thinkers: Henri Bergson, Carl Jung and Alfred North Whitehead. I have already briefly outlined in my contextual framework the importance of Henri Bergson and Alfred North Whitehead's philosophies to Read's sculptural ideologies. I propose to enlarge on these relationships in this chapter, additionally expanding on Read's relationship with the work of Carl Jung. David Thistlewood's introduction to Herbert Read's aesthetics, *Form and Formlessness* (1984), provides some useful co-ordinates for understanding Read's post-war thinking. I will draw on Thistlewood's work in order to outline the influence of each of these key thinkers on Read in turn before situating *The Vital Image* in relation to Read's commitment to the wider social functions of his aesthetic theories.

Herbert Read's Vitalist Aesthetics

According to Jack Burnham in *Beyond Modern Sculpture* (1968), Herbert Read was one of the few modernist theorists to develop a “gradual awareness of the central position of vitalism as a ruling principle of modern sculpture” (Burnham, 1968, p.71). Edward Juler in *Grown But Not Made* maintains that Herbert Read, “spoke for many sympathetic to neo-vitalist dogma when he professed that Bergson had ‘offered an interpretation of the universe that was neither mechanistic nor finalist [and which] provided a way out of a closed system of predestined fact’ ” (Juler, 2015, p.27). In *Modern Sculpture, a Concise History* (1964) Herbert Read was to place these Bergsonian principles close to the centre of his interpretation and communication of modern sculptural process and ideology. Read devotes a chapter of *Modern Sculpture* to what he calls a “new rubric, that of vitalism” (Read, 1964, p.162)[14].

In formulating his new rubric David Thistlewood demonstrates how Bergson provides Read with a way of thinking about the “broad current of consciousness” that appeared to “have penetrated matter” (Thistlewood, 1984, p.137). For Read, Bergson illuminates the way that there exists a “dormant” consciousness in the “inorganic realm”, which the human organism is “capable of reflecting intensively upon”, without being essentially different from. This means that the human consciousness adapts the “latent geometries” of his or her own organism to an understanding of the geometry of others: “intellect and matter” therefore assume “comparable form” (p.137). Read theorised this “unitary principle of pattern formation” (p.137) in collaboration with the physicist Lancelot Law

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[14] Read’s “new rubric” is perhaps a little belated, considering the influence of Bergson’s vitalism on the development of modern sculpture over the course of the preceding half century. This influence is explored by the historian Mark Antliff, whose essay *Shaping Duration: Bergson and Modern Sculpture,* shows just how important Bergson’s ideas were to European avant-garde sculptors such as Henri Gaudier Brzeska, Raymond Duchamp-Villon and Umberto Boccioni, who were active at the same time as the publication of Bergson’s major works prior to the first world war (Antliff, 2011).

Whyte. As well as their discussion of Bergson, Whyte and Read also shared in a “thoroughgoing knowledge” (p.133), of the scientific philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead:

> Nature for Whitehead consisted in moving patterns of growth and development, the movement of which was essential to their being. These patterns could be analysed into *events* - stages of development consisting, at any moment, of the interaction of organic growth, the mentality of those observing, and all other impinging phenomena (Thistlewood, 1984, p.133).

Thistlewood observes how, for Whitehead, reality is a “structure of evolving structures”, a particular instance of which may be apprehended as a subdivision - the event. The event is not isolated, “but the fusion of aspects of a temporal activity” (Thistlewood, 1984, p.134). An event has a present manifest through “contemporaries" - simultaneous events “mirrored within itself”. It has a past - “as memories fused into its own content” and it has a future - permeated by aspects “the future throws back onto the present” (p. 134). Following Whitehead, Thistlewood claims that Read and Whyte saw development in a work of art that was “at least analogous to” and probably “identical to”, development in nature. That is, Thistlewood points out, “the essence of art is in its processes rather than its products…such artistic events as are thrown up are significant… in that they reflect past, present and future aspects of the dominant process” (p.134).

Although agreeing on the fundamentally process-led nature of artistic creation, Read’s debate with Whyte revolved around the role played by human creativity in relation to the artwork as ‘pattern forming event’. Herbert Read disagreed with Whyte that understanding the artwork as a pattern forming event was a comprehensive theory, as Read argued that such a theory neglected the counterparts to intellection. These Thistlewood identified as “intuition, consciousness-reflecting-inwards or non-discursive apprehension” (p.138). Thistlewood explains how Read regarded these qualities as the spark and sustaining energies of human creativity, whilst

Whyte maintained that they were only analogies of more fundamental physical processes. This disagreement is at the nub of Read's organic vitalism, for as Read describes, "the whole point of my hypothesis, is that the work of art is not an analogy - it is the essential act of transformation; not merely the pattern of mental evolution, but the vital process itself" (Read, 1951, p.38/9). Read's conviction was that the significance of pattern forming is inherent to the "physical structure or functioning of the nervous system" (Read, 1951a, p.v-vi), and a realisation of the ontological significance of these pattern forming tendencies proceeds by way of aesthetics. For Read, 'vitalist aesthetics' places human creativity and natural science on a single plane of enquiry, there could be no fundamental differentiation between aesthetic enquiry and scientific enquiry: "Aesthetics is no longer an isolated science of beauty; science can no longer neglect aesthetic factors" (Read, 1951a, p.v-vi).

For Read therefore, art and aesthetics do not exist in a separate symbolic or analogous realm, but are intrinsically tied up in the evolution of the human consciousness. In *The Vital Image* Read is interested in communicating the vitality of "unsettled psychological experience" (Thistlewood, 1984, p.141). Ideas of unsettled experience are important to Read as they enable the artist to get beneath the surface of appearances, foregrounding the relations between mental and physical process and psychological experience. The vitality of human creativity resides in it's capacity - its biological necessity even - to harness these unsettled relations. They find form through the "challenging potency" of the aesthetic - it's "active, sensually satisfying, even shocking symbolism" (p. 118). The aesthetic becomes vital when it delves down to the depths of the unconscious in order to recover there archetypal images of universal and challenging importance. Herbert Read's conviction was that the challenging qualities of the 'vital images' recovered by artists extend to vitalistic art and artists within his schema a specifically social remit.

The Vital Image and Carl Jung

Carl Jung's influence on Herbert Read is central to understanding the social function of the vitalist aesthetic in Read's later aesthetic philosophies such as *The Vital Image*. Jungian theory provided Read with some answers to the apparently irresolvable dilemmas that seemed to underlie his earlier thought. These included the question of how to position the artist as a free individual whose creative individualism could nevertheless influence the evolution of society as a whole. Read's response to this dilemma was to theorise that the individual artist, through Jungian mechanisms such as the collective unconscious and the archetype might, if the artist was sufficiently committed, transcend the personal and connect directly to the collective.

In his final essay on Henry Moore a year before his own death, Read wrote that Moore's form appears to have (and here Read quotes from Jung):

> '…emerged from the abyss of the pre-human ages, or from a superhuman world of contrasting light and darkness' He [Moore] had 'plunged into the healing and redeeming depths of the collective psyche where man is not lost in the isolation of his own consciousness and its errors and sufferings, but where all men are caught in a common rhythm which allows the individual to communicate his feelings and strivings to mankind as a whole' (Read, 1967, p.124).

Read associates the imaginaries of the individual sculptures and sculptural practices surveyed in *The Vital Image* with such 'impersonal' visions of the pre-human abyss - the contrasts of light and darkness underlying the collective psyche connect the individual and the collective. Light and darkness can here be understood as figurations of what Read calls in *Modern Sculpture* a "deeper level of the unconscious - the Shadow as Jung called it" (Read, 1964, p. 204). Read points out that the Shadow is a quality "distinctive of the work of many sculptors of the vitalist tradition - of Alberto

Figure 1: *The Vital Image*, pages 202-203.

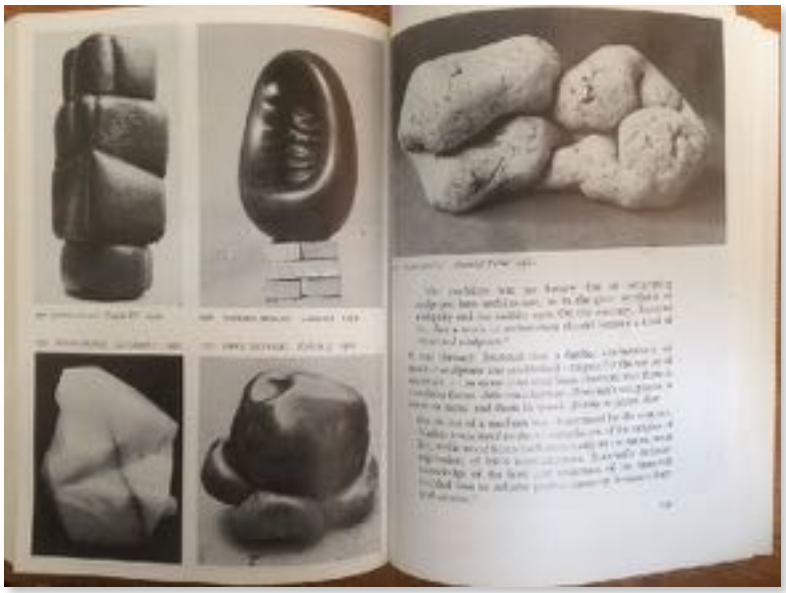

Figure 2: *The Vital Image*, pages 190-191.

Figure 3: *The Vital Image*, pages 251-252.

Giacometti, Germaine Richier, Theodore Roszak, Luciano Minguzzi, Reg Butler, Lynn Chadwick" (p.204). These last two sculptors named were included in *New Aspects of British Sculpture,* an exhibition Read curated for the British Pavilion at the 1952 Venice Biennale. Now associated with a phrase taken from Read's catalogue essay written to accompany the exhibition, "the geometry of fear" (Read, 1952), these and the 7 other sculptors included represent particular vital qualities associated with Jung's 'Shadow'.

I enlarge further on the artists associated with the 'geometry of fear' in part 2 of this chapter. But here I would like to note that behind their 'Shadow' imaginaries there exists a fundamental tension. According to Ben Cranfield's Tate Gallery research publication on Read's aesthetics and politics (Cranfield, 2015), archetypes that are not transformed through creative vitality are de-vitalised and pre-determined, whereas archetypes that are transformed by creative vitality are free, that is, full of potentiality, "always updating and developing" (Cranfield, 2015). I would argue that this tension is illustrated in the pages of *The Vital Image* itself, both in the imagery and the accompanying narrative. Read is concerned to explore the way that artists express within their individual creative commitments a healthy and vivified archetypal unity, arising out of their sculptural processes. Conversely and paradoxically, I suggest there exists within the pages of *The Vital Image* a pathological loss of unity - a negative inscription of the archetype as a de-vitalised and pre-determined cliché. This arises in part out of the repetitious archetypal symbolism of the works surveyed in *The Vital Image*.

By repetitious I mean the way the illustrative plates in Read's survey are arranged, which group together works by formal affinity. In grouping works in this way I would argue that Read intends to reveal the underlying archetypal principle behind the works illustrated. For example, striking

pages include a double spread of sculptures depicting upright standing figures or columns, including works by Louise Bourgeois and Fritz Wotruba (fig. 1). Another double page shows formless lumps that seem to depict primordial sculptural matter (fig. 2), a third juxtaposes images of distorted expressionist animal sculptures by Elizabeth Frink, Germaine Richier and Robert Clatworthy (fig. 3) and so on. The possibly unintended consequence of these groupings by archetypal symbol (enhanced by the survey format overall), is to foreground the idea of the archetype as a *generalised likeness*, and to subsume the differences in intention, handling, presence or other factors between individual creative projects in favour of these general principles.

Read's late theories of the archetype actually have a way of incorporating the unintended consequences of these kinds of de-vitalised clichés or generalisations. Read theorises these in response to Picasso's *Guernica.* Thistlewood explains how Read claimed, in *The Forms of Things Unknown* (1960), that Guernica was "impressive in spite of its burden of outmoded symbolism" (Thistlewood, 1984 p.153). According to Thistlewood, Read claimed that Picasso had deployed in this work "formerly vital symbols which had become clichés" (p.153). These clichés could only be incorporated "with the greatest difficulty in an authentic work of art". What redeemed Guernica was that "every line, every form, every colour had been dominated by the artist's secondary-aesthetic sensibility expressed as 'handling', 'facture', or 'handwriting' " (p.153). In other words, in his late theories, Read had moved from a theory of vital aesthetics as pattern formation to a theory of vital aesthetics as style, saying; "There is always in a work of art this intangible, indefinable element to which it owes its vitality, it's magical power to enhance life, and an artist's possession of this transforming power is his style" (Read, 1965, p.176). I shall explore through the course of this thesis how ideas of style in my own work might revision Read's formation of the artist as possessor of style's transforming power. In

my own project powers of transformation are not always located in the zoomorphic self through ideas of handling or facture, but will be shown to be extended out into wider material agencies and configurations.

Herbert Read's Anarchist Aesthetics

It might be becoming clear that for Read 'vitalism' did not have a single stable definition, but was a mutable concept that changed its delineations with his own developing aesthetic theories. A further complication for understanding Herbert Read's vitalism is related to the way that his aesthetic theories also incorporate a commitment to anarchist politics.

Central to Read's anarchist politics was a view of the natural world as a place of "order, structure and harmony" that could be "uncovered through scientific and artistic methods of enquiry" (Cranfield, 2015). Read's anarchism reflected his view that society could be likened to a natural organism, that would "develop under its own principles of growth and form if left free from governmental control" (Cranfield, 2015). Read's path to anarchism was particularly influenced by the time he spent as a young man at the Leeds Art Club, and subsequently it had a "particular aesthetic dimension" (Cranfield 2015). At the centre of Read's "aesthetic politics was the figure of the artist" who Read understood as a model of the "individual in his or her fullest realisation" (Cranfied, 2015). For Read, "the artist was an ideal individual" because in striving "for a freedom in his/her work, the artist became the ideal member of the community… in a higher sense 'man'… the collective man, the shaper of the unconsciously active soul of mankind" (Cranfield, 2015). What this means is that Read's advocacy for anarchism involved a paradox that relied on a certain kind of elitism. This was a creative elitism that sought above all to preserve the imaginative freedom of the individual. The reason for Reads paradoxical commitment to simultaneous qualities of emancipation *and* elitism is that *both* qualities are

essential for the safeguarding of creative vitality. Vitality is first and foremost an individual matter - but it's lucid growth in individuals requires a free society. This problem has something of a 'chicken and egg' dimension; in order to achieve a free society the diffusion of an individual's creative vitality throughout society is a pre-requisite, but an individual's full creative development first requires a free society.

Herbert Read's post-war anarchist aesthetics therefore extend anarcho-individualism towards what he saw as the artist's unique potential to contribute to wider processes of social emancipation through Jungian constructs such as the collective unconscious and the archetype. Herbert Read proposed one specifically sculptural methodology by which the modern artist might achieve this. He called this the 'palpable' - a unique form of sculptural tactility that proposed to access the inner dynamic of a sculptural form as if it were a kind of body. The palpable was a method through which the individual might sensitively extend their engagement with lived reality into more expansive realms, privileging a specifically tactile understanding of sculpture that was not uncontested at the time[15]. Artistic practice could uniquely combine the palpable with social-individualism and Jungian psychology by engaging the unconscious through feeling and archetype - providing for Read a powerful, pluralistic and holistic model. The advancement of individuated members of society would engage with creative forms of anarcho-syndicalism that might develop into idealised co-operative commonwealths to come[16].

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[15] I expand on these contestations in chapter 4, relating them to competing theories around opticality and tactility between Read and Clement Greenberg in the second half of the 1950s.

[16] Herbert Read's novel written in 1934, *The Green Child,* could perhaps be read as an allegory of one such commonwealth. In Read's only published novel Read idealises a subterranean 'Green People', inhabitants of a quasi-artistic commonwealth. The 'Green People' are a society who strive towards achieving a literal oneness with the material universe by petrifying the bodies of their dead and whose 'workers' carve perfect crystals for the contemplation of the 'Green Worlds's' sages. See H. Read, *The Green Child,* Heineman 1935.

The Social Role of the Artist

Parts of *The Vital Image,* and Read's book *Modern Sculpture* more generally, come close to a statement of Read's ideal for the wider social role and function of the modern artist. From the perspective of the present Read's conception of the social role of the artist can be slightly difficult to understand as such. Read's ideal incorporated no conception of the artist as politically or socially engaged in the manner to which we have now become accustomed; for example working in a place specific manner with defined social groupings. On the contrary, the way an artist best contributes to society in Read's schema is to work in a relatively separate way. The Hampstead artistic community with which Read, Moore and Hepworth associated before the second world war is a typical model. Only by working in such quasi co-operative communities could modern artists achieve the required levels of individuation needed by Read's vitalist schemas to contribute in a meaningful way to Read's concept of 'wider society'. I am not suggesting that this model is without its problems. Not least of which is the assumption that a wider post-war social psyche - its collective unconscious - might be sufficiently homogenous to be affected in a meaningful way by the advanced aesthetic sensibilities of communities of like minded and individuated creative practitioners and artists.

Nevertheless, rooted both in the Jungian concept of the collective unconscious and in his anarchist politics, increasingly in his later work from the 1950s onwards, Herbert Read felt that both the modern artists' social function, and the mechanisms through which the artwork itself were derived, were directly related to the artists unique freedom to use their special abilities in tapping the collective unconscious (Cranfield, 2015). In a letter to Herbert Read dated 2nd September 1960 Jung supported this idea, writing that the modern artist was able to:

> …dream the future by attending to the images and forms from the unconscious, accepting responsibility to reveal them without modification, avoiding temptation to make them conform to the familiar. The creative act was to be regarded as an event *visited upon* the artist by virtue of an ability to tap the creative unconscious (Jung, quoted in Thistlewood, 1998, p.247)

This idea of the artist as a *medium* therefore became a mainstay of Read's definition of the modern artist. Read demonstrates how a confluence of vitalist philosophy with the archetypal imagery of Jung's collective unconscious leads to the 'concretisation' of the "rubric of vitalism" into hieratic forms: "icons…plastic symbols of the artists inners sense of luminosity or mystery, or perhaps the unknown dimensions of feeling and sensation". The role of the artist is to connect through intuition or imagination with a vital essence in order to "materialise the mirage" (Read, 1964, p.212).

In a 1957 essay on Jung, Read explained that the human unconscious possesses an "innate bias" for forming symbols with some kind of communal significance: "symbolic images or moulds of thought by which the hopes and aspirations of mankind can be expressed and shaped" (Read, 1957, 205). These hopes and aspirations emerge from an unconscious continuum "which by chance we interrupt" (Read, 1957 p.205). Interrupting the unconscious continuum relates to the concept of the archetype - a predilection for certain types of imagery. The archetype however is "not a ready-made image. It is merely an inherited predisposition or tendency to fabricate definite types of imagery" (Read, 1957, p.206). The source of this archetypal imagery for Read, resides in a particular kind of organic vitalism. Organic vitalism does not represent organic forms through academic practices of mimesis or representation. Instead Read's conception of the archetype within his organic vitalist paradigm is, quoting Henry Moore's own words in a 1967 essay, *The Reconciling Archetype*, a "penetration into reality…and expression of the significance of life, a stimulation to a greater effort of living" (Moore, quoted

in Read, 1967, p.127). This ‘stimulation to a greater effort of living’ hints at the ethical, even political, dimension to the archetype when realised through organic vitalism. As Ben Cranfield points out, organic vitalism was “illustrative for an anarchist society, not because of its organic unity, but because it made manifest the compromise between underlying structures and individual volition” (Cranfield, 2015). Thus when Read quotes Jung in formulating the archetype as an “inherited tendency of the human mind to form representations of mythological motifs”, a tendency which is involuntary, “instinctive, like the specific impulse of nest-building, migration etc, in birds” (Jung, quoted in Read, 1967, p.135), Read is only formulating part of the picture. The other part of the archetypal construct in Read’s organic vitalist theories relates to the artist’s transformation of the archetype into vivified, original and ‘free’ symbolic representations. This transformation relies on the artist’s *own* creative energies, a vital force that enables the artist to concretely manifest, in the manner of Bergsonian durée, his or her “engagement with all history and experience as it was present in a particular moment” (Cranfield, 2015). History and experience are actualised through the artist’s imagination. In this way artists operating within Read’s organic vitalist paradigm are uniquely placed. Their advanced aesthetic sensibilities are able to exemplify a certain kind of freedom that recovers from memory and experience its uniquely redemptive potentials (Cranfield, 2015). I will discuss this aspect of *The Vital Image* in more detail in part 2 below.

Part 2: Renegotiating *The Vital Image*

Part 2 of this chapter engages in a closer analysis of the material coding and historical context around the unconscious archetypal symbolism of

British post-war sculpture[17]. It considers in more depth the idea that post-war sculpture's archetypal symbolism might redeem wider societal or individual trauma or anxiety. I examine psychoanalytical interpretations of these material codings and redemptive claims through the work of the historian David Hulks. I then contrast Hulks' psychoanalytical interpretations of post-war sculpture to alternative schizoanalytical perspectives drawn from Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. In the latter part of the chapter I outline the way my own response to *The Vital Image* relocates ideas of the unconscious within some basic schizoanalytical functions, such as the assemblage of enunciation. This helps me begin to formulate my own contemporary sculptural response to what David Hulks calls post-war sculpture's 'pathological imagery' and suggest a speculative context within which *The Vital Image's* material coding and other qualities might be renegotiated through my own practice based research.

The New Iron Age

Many artists in the 1950s were working in a milieu of hardship and trauma, with shortages and rationing set against the backdrop of tension and fear as the horrors of the second world war, the ongoing war in Korea and the Holocaust became more apparent. All the while the Cold War and an associated escalation in new weapons of mass destruction such as those associated with nuclear and biological warfare were becoming established as part of the popular lexicon of post-war culture. Reflecting its pop-culture counterparts in science fiction novels such as John Wyndhams *Day of the Triffids* (1951), and films such as Howard Hawk's *The Thing from Another World* (1951) or Warner Brothers' *Them!* (1954) in which mutant human and plant or insect hybrids threaten life on earth, the "drama of the possible

[17] My use of the term 'British post-war sculpture' infers a bias in my text towards sculptors that were active in a British context. For the rest of this chapter I will use the term post-war sculpture without specifying it as British. The British bias of my analysis should nevertheless be taken as read.

Figure 4: Reg Butler, *Woman,* 1949

extinction of the human species is very much in evidence in the sculpture of the late forties and fifties" (Phillips, 1984, p.24, quoted in Taylor 2018). Like many monsters of science fictions films, "new sculptural images were based on imaginative cross-breedings of dinosaurs, predatory plants, pods, and blobs – nature gone berserk, grotesque mutations that represent an attempt to exorcise unbearable terrors by invoking and subduing them" (Phillips, 1984, p.24).

Critic Lawrence Alloway at the time famously called the sculpture of the postwar generation a "new iron age". He noted that "plaster, iron and wax are the mediums in which the tension and fugitiveness of the twentieth century can be appropriately expressed" (Alloway, 1953, p.4). Margaret Garlake has since noted that it is "forged and welded metal sculpture that is collectively understood to exemplify Herbert Read's Geometry of Fear" (Garlake 2008, p.51). 'Geometry of Fear' was a term used by Herbert Read in his catalogue essay for the Venice Biennale British Pavilion exhibition of 1952, *New Aspects of British Sculpture*. This exhibition included many of the artists later surveyed by Read in *The Vital Image,* including, Robert Adams, Bernard Meadows, Lynn Chadwick (fig 5), Eduardo Paolozzi, Reg Butler (fig 4), Henry Moore, Kenneth Armitage, William Turnbull, and Geoffrey Clarke.

Garlake observes that poverty was often a factor in determining these artist's choice of materials given post-war scarcities. However she notes as significant the enrolment of many artists on welding courses given by British Oxygen, with the aim of equipping the post-war workforce with new skills. It is unclear whether the turn to industrial materials on the part of the post-war sculptors associated with the 'geometry of fear' initially had an ideological bent. Garlake speculates that artists may have been interested in notions of rupture; adopting base materials such as iron and concrete, abandoning the human form in favour of hybrid imagery and rejecting

Figure 5: Lynn Chadwick, *Winged Figures*, 1955

Figure 6: Theodore Roszak, *Invocation I*, 1947

Henry Moore's precedent, which was based on a volumetric approach to the human figure (Garlake, 2008, p.54).

Sculptors Reg Butler, Lynn Chadwick and Leslie Thornton all attended British Oxygen welding courses in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Butler had previously worked during the war as a blacksmith, and he described his own sculptural approach as "steel knitting" (Garlake, 2008, p.59). Lynn Chadwick built up frames from juxtaposed welding rods which he then backfilled with 'stolit', a plaster and iron powder composite that oxidised to a rusted finish. Leslie Thornton, although not included in the 1952 Venice Biennale exhibition, was associated with the 'new iron age' through his use of welding rods visually modified by globules and runs of molten metal. Although it would be incorrect to identify the British artists of the 'geometry of fear' or the 'new iron age' as an avant-garde movement per-se,[18] it is interesting to observe the interest shared by these artists with international colleagues in a new type of atavistic sculptural imagery. This exploits the high degree of plasticity associated with materials such as metal, plaster and wax in order to use modelling techniques, sometimes using industrial materials, to generate primitive, primeval and totemic imagery. Alex Taylor, in his research publication for the Tate Gallery on the American artist Theodor Roszak (fig. 6), notes that the "scorched, and coarsely pitted" surfaces of the welded iron work of numerous post war artists "suggest destruction, as close to the burned flesh of Hiroshima as certain marble carvings were to the philosophy of Greece" (Kuh, 1965, p.127, quoted in Taylor, 2008). Post-apocalyptic aesthetics expressed the belief that primitive and modern terror were equivalent, and introduced a multi-directional temporality into the work of Roszak and his contemporaries. This imagined a world that not only plunges the human race into a new stone

[18] Margaret Garlake proposes that rather than an avant-garde grouping it might be better to consider the sculptors associated with the 'geometry of fear' more loosely as a 'local modernism', after the work of John Picton in the context of 19th century West African art, where international forms have been taken up, assimilated and transformed into distinctive local styles (Garlake, 2008, p. 60).

age, but that mutates the human; melding animal, vegetal and human forms, coding their resultant metamorphic animism “into their material handling and metamorphic imagery” (Taylor, 2008).

Pathological Objects

By the time of the Venice Biennale ‘geometry of fear’ exhibition; *New Aspects of British Sculpture* in 1952, the powerful coding surrounding the metamorphic animism of post-war sculpture had become widespread. It was to reach new levels of social significance and visibility as the 1950s progressed that would extend beyond Read’s own aesthetic theories. The atavistic and highly subjectivised imagery of the post-war sculptural object was also seen as having an important social function. Post-war sculpture, it was speculated by critics at the time, might help to channel and heal wider societal trauma and anxiety arising from the second world war and the Cold War. These functions are discussed by David Hulks in his essay *The Dark Chaos of Subjectivism:* S*plitting and the Geometry of Fear* (Hulks, 2006). *Splitting and the Geometry of Fear* points out the therapeutic possibilities inferred by positioning the artist in the role of the psychic hero. Here, Hulks quotes the Jungian art critic Erich Neumann, writing on Henry Moore in 1959:

> It was nothing less than the artist’s duty…to face society with its darkest imaginings… the socially responsible artist was forced “not only to represent the highest values of his culture, but also to give shape to the compensatory values and contents of which it is unconscious” (Hulks, 2006, p.96).

David Hulks’ point was that artists were not necessarily supposed to exhibit symptoms of their *own* psychosis. Instead they were seen as psychic specialists tasked with converting wider symptoms of social psychosis or trauma in the form of psychological conditions such as anxiety or schizophrenia into the “civilising substance of art” (p.96). Artists engaged

with this role by experimenting with ideas they encountered in psychoanalytical literature such as “schizoid linguistics” (p.96). Schizoid linguistics identified the way that psychologically ‘abnormal’ individuals might produce strangely complex and sometimes devious verbal logics. According to Hulks this suggested to certain artists the possibility of “emulating or exploiting somehow a transgressive oppositional language for the purposes of advancing artistic modes of expression” (p.96). Hulks provides further detail on the relationships between the ‘geometry of fear’ and post-war developments in psychoanalytical theory in his essay *Despair, Or Defiance: The Double Inflection in Herbert Read’s Geometry of Fear* (2007). In this essay Hulks explores the deeper relationships between new theories around schizoid personality disorders in the post-war period and modern artistic expression, saying that “…the schizoid personality, as it was understood in British psychoanalytic thought, became increasingly compared to the attitudes and psychological make up of modern artists, and the fragmentary nature of the modern artistic and literary forms they were producing” (Hulks, 2007 p.146). The work of the psychoanalyst Melanie Klein was particularly influential. Klein published *Notes on some Schizoid Mechanisms* in 1946, and delivered numerous talks and essays on schizophrenia between 1948 and 1951 (p.146). Klein developed both Sigmund Freud and her colleague the Scottish analyst W.R.D Fairbairn’s view that a schizoid splitting of the ego was central to the early formation of the personality. This “so-called paranoid schizoid stage” (p.147) was the individual’s “primary defence” against what Klein called “fear of annihilation” (p.147). In Read’s mind, Hulks maintains, such a fear had “obvious Cold War connotations” (p.147). Read draws out these connotations in his catalogue essay for the *New Aspects of British Sculpture* exhibition and relates them to wider post-war anxieties within art and philosophy around ideas of existential oblivion. He calls the works in the exhibition “images of flight” (Read, ex cat, 1952). Here, Read is referring to the possibility that the works in the exhibition display “psychic dispersal, the self destructive

splitting of the ego" (Hulks, 2007, p.147). This, Hulks says, was for both Klein and Fairbairn "paradoxically absolutely essential for subsequent [psychic] integration" (p.147). Hulks explains how for Read:

> The 'geometry of fear', then, takes us back somehow, to a very fearful, pre-rational schizoid existence…The artist, according to Read, is exceptional at navigating these unintelligent, essentially instinctual waters. Through the act of creation, the artist strips away intellectual, conscious processes, so as to produce a deep and fascinatingly undifferentiated vision, a very primitive but wonderful visual engagement… There is at this level, not only 'fear of annihilation' and 'psychic dispersal', but also what Klein describes as innate 'capacity for love'…an integrative expression of the instinct for life (Hulks, 2007 p.147).

Hulks additionally points out that these processes of dispersal and consequent re-integration would be "the scenario under ideal conditions" (p. 147). Read was conscious that post-war conditions were far from ideal, Hulks says that Read feared that; "…with the modern, already-fragmentary, disintegrated and dysfunctional personality that he found in British post-war society there was insufficient 'capacity for love' for creative processes to proceed" (pp.147-148). In short, for Read, post-war society was itself in "… a 'schizoid situation'; 'envy and greed' had got the upper hand, 'love' and 'community feeling' had become degraded" (p.148).

To Read, and his colleagues such as the critic Adrian Stokes (1902 - 1972), who was engaged both professionally with psychoanalytical thought and personally exposed to psychiatric medical settings[19], this meant that the role of post-war sculpture within society had become something entirely new - unprecedentedly "volatile" and even "potentially harmful" (Hulks, 2006, p.97). The art gallery in its clean white neutrality would now have to, according to Stokes, become a "self supporting mise-en-scene" (p.97). Stokes theorised the modern art gallery as a 'container' for the contemplation of complex and troubled objects - objects Stokes referred to

[19] Stokes brother Geoffrey was hospitalised with 'shellshock', and his daughter Ariadne was initially diagnosed with schizophrenia (Sayers, 2000, p.69-90 quoted in Hulks, 2006, p.113).

as the “dented meteorites of our time” (p.97). For Stokes it was important that the gallery was separate from the wider social environment, as according to Hulks it was therefore, “a place for the safe containment of pathological objects, where the ‘dark imaginings of the soul’ were put on display for the purposes of clinical as well as aesthetic scrutiny” (p. 97). Post-war sculpture’s challenging imaginaries needed to be isolated within the safe spaces of the modern art gallery because their regressive tendencies were intended to “explore via creative processes near-psychotic levels of consciousness” (Hulks, 2007 p.150). The desirable outcome of such explorations was for Read a better integrated ego, which would in turn allow a more enlightened culture to emerge. The danger with regression was, of course, that further fragmentation could occur. Either way, Hulks maintains that Read believed artists of the time were impelled to produce works “articulating instability and the precariousness of modern existence” (p.150). Such engagements would represent “a… double character” that seems “characteristic of the geometry of fear ‘school’ as a whole” (p.150). In spite of the fears of critics such as Stokes, these were the characteristics that led to the resounding critical success of the *New Aspects* exhibition in Venice in 1952. Critics saw in it an acknowledgement of psychic fragmentation under Cold War conditions, but equally saw it moving overall in an affirmative direction. The sculpture of the ‘geometry of fear’; “showed disintegrating symptoms, yet at the same time was an art articulating signs of recovery and renewal” (p.151).

From Schizoid Linguistics to Schizoanalysis

For Felix Guattari, in his last book *Chaosmosis: an ethico-aesthetic paradigm* (1995), the unconscious within the psychoanalytic tradition had become institutionalised. For contemporary Western cultures at the end of the 20th century, at the hands of what Guattari called the old testament of

Figure 7: *New Aspects of British Sculpture,* British Pavilion, XXVIth Venice Biennale, 1952

Freud and the new testament of Lacan, the unconscious had lost its "seething richness" and "disquieting atheism", becoming re-centred on the "analysis of the self, its adaptation to society and its conformity to a signifying order" (Guattari, 1995, p.10). Previously, in *A Thousand Plateaus,* Deleuze and Guattari had proposed that the unconscious, through psychoanalysis, is "crystallised into codified complexes". Psychoanalysis describes the unconscious in terms of a "de facto state" that is "ready-made" rather than productive (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, p.12). They specifically criticise Meanie Klein in this regard (p.13). Here, I would like to investigate the way that Deleuze and Guattari's alternative concept of *schizoanalysis* might provide a different perspective onto modern sculpture's schizoid linguistics. Might schizoanalysis help reveal within post-war sculpture a residual challenge to the psychoanalytical parameters of schizoid linguistics? Could schizoanalysis help me to contest the control and containment of *The Vital Image* within standardising and quasi-clinical formats such as the modern art gallery?

The display of ‘pathological objects’ in exhibitions such as *New Aspects of British Sculpture* in Venice in 1952 was David Hulks points out, “highly stage managed, clinically ordered and well administrated” (Hulks, 2006, p. 98) (fig. 7). Nevertheless Hulks speculates on the paradox raised by such a clinical ordering. Artists “may have realised that an almost medical containment of what was commonly regarded as aggressive and psychotic sculptural works was more likely to *increase* any perceived pathological imprint than it was to erase it” (p.98, my emphasis). By the middle of the 1950s this tendency towards the clinical containment of anguished and tortuous sculptural form in several major international exhibitions - from *16 Young Sculptors* at the ICA in London 1952 via *New Aspects* at the Venice Biennale the same year to the *Unknown Political Prisoner* competition exhibition at the Tate in London in 1953 had become a mainstream cliché.

In a critical review of the exhibition for the *Unknown Political Prisoner* competition at the Tate Gallery in 1953, the artist Patrick Heron dismisses what he calls the “zeitgeist” around post-war sculpture’s anxious imagery as fashionable, clichéd and ineffectual:

> …weak frenzy, the tortuous, unreal complexities of a new expressionism, dark and thorny with fashionable doubts and fears, giving birth to bleak, anaemic or turgid forms which spring as much from formal inaptitudes as from any genuine, compelling Angst… it seemed to me that the repetitive spikiness of all those iron thorns and cacti (preferably iron already showing signs of rust: our northern romanticist bias welcomes this element of archaicism) were a thin cliché by now. (Heron, 1955, p.228)

Do these responses to post-war sculpture’s pathological imagery at the time - which highlight their containment in the clinical and well administered spaces of the modern art gallery, or reduce them to mainstream caricatures and thin artistic clichés - mean that post-war sculptor’s efforts to enrol the unconscious through strategies like schizoid linguistics in transgressive modes of signification ultimately failed?

Strange Arrivals

Whilst I think that David Hulks more recent contextualisations and Patrick Heron's contemporary responses to post-war sculpture might seem to answer this question affirmatively, I would like to approach post-war sculpture's problematic from a different point of view. This uses my work to re-address post-war sculpture's pathological imageries, revisioning them for the present time. I seek to enrol in a more productive light the pathological imprint clinical ordering paradoxically heightened in post-war sculpture. I want to find ways to reconsider and perhaps even reincorporate into my work post-war sculpture's problematic qualities - such as its "bleakness", "formal inaptitude" or "fashionable" bad taste. My underlying proposition is that post-war sculpture's contribution could now be based as much in *imaginative speculation* as in historical fact. Could more speculative readings remove post-war sculpture from the limitations of temporal context and open up new possibilities around a liberation of their ideas and qualities? I propose that a degree of temporal disconnection could entail new readings of Adrian Stokes 'dented meteorites' as speculative objects, even reversing their temporality in order to revision them as 'strange arrivals' - visitors from an unknown future. Such readings might actually build upon the "fearful, pre-rational schizoid existence" I previously referred to, where the artist "strips away intellectual, conscious processes" (Hulks, 2007 p.147) to expose a deeper reality. However in speculatively enrolling the *Vital Image's* 'reality' into my work it may no longer be necessary to refer it back to an artistic unconscious in the form of a "deep and fascinatingly undifferentiated vision" (p.147). Instead of the 'real' residing in the unity of the artist's unconscious, with the sculpture providing a 'vital image' of an artistic or societal archetypal reality, might I now propose that a new 'real' resides in the sculptures themselves?

This is to propose that a post-war sculptural object's reality might no longer be found in the fact that it symbolises access to an undifferentiated psychic realm, but that *it is itself* a strange realm. Instead of seeing in a post-war sculpture facts - vital evidence of an underlying psychic real - I propose to see it as a fiction. This translates post-war sculptural alterity into the realm of a strange, autonomous, a-temporal imaginary being, that might freely live its *own* 'schizoid existence', independent of it's historical connection to an individual artistic or wider collective unconscious. I will enlarge on what I mean by this suggestion in relation to two formative encounters of my own with post-war sculptural objects, one from some time ago and the other more recent.

At the *Palais-de-Danse*

In 2006 I was artist in residence in the Porthmeor Studios in St Ives. My residency was in studio number five, previously occupied by Ben Nicholson and Patrick Heron. As a former painter's studio the door was quite narrow and I needed an alternative space to work on some large sculptures. The head technician of the Tate Gallery in St Ives offered me a space in the yard of Barbara Hepworth's studio annex, at the *Palais-de-Danse,* a former dance hall across the road from Hepworth's house and main studio. Hepworth used the *Palais* to fabricate larger sculptures in the late 1950s and early 1960s, such as *Winged Figure* (1963) installed on the outside of the John Lewis building on Oxford Street in London. The main use for the *Palais* in 2006 was for the storage of Hepworth's original plaster models and some wood carvings. Whilst working in the yard space I could also occasionally go alone into the former dance hall and look at the works stored there. In my memory I recall a large number of plaster works crowded onto a wooden dance floor. I remember these works as a giant set dance, a stately quadrille revolving slowly as I made my way around the

Figure 8: Interior of the *Palais-de-Danse*, St Ives, Cornwall

Figure 9: Reg Butler, *Archaic Head II,* 1952

floor, freezing mid-sequence whenever I stopped moving. When, during course of this research project, I have looked again at documentation of the space in photos and video online (fig. 8), I realise how my memory of these works on the dance floor of the *Palais* is utterly distorted. There were actually far fewer works than I remember and hardly any plaster works at all. Hepworth's work in the *Palais* has achieved a totemic mnemonic status in my mind. But what they help me remember is not the original details of the arrangement - the number and type of sculptures - but a more vital sensation of presence. What I remember is a dense arrangement of vivid, animate and immediate beings. A world on which I could intrude and help to animate, but that nevertheless remained remote, stilled into silence every time I stopped circling to look more closely.

I had another experience more recently with a small work by Reg Butler in the store of the *Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art* (SNGMA) in Edinburgh. This work, *Archaic Head II,* 1952, (fig. 9) is one of the strangest objects I have held in my hands. It is made from lead bronze, an alloy that improves flow and plasticity within the cast, but makes for an extremely heavy object. As the sculpture is quite small, around 25cm long, it is possibly cast solid, or if not then it is certainly very substantial. Either way, it is small enough to handle, but too heavy to do so easily. Its unease of handling is enhanced by Butler's inclusion of a number of bronze nails embedded in the upper side of the sculpture which are, according to the SNGMA, "inspired by nail-studded Nkisi figures from the Congo"[20]. On the end of the sculpture, not particularly noticeable at first, is inscribed a small schematic face. In order to view the face you have to either stoop down very low to peer at the almost hidden end of the sculpture, or lift the sculpture up, grasping it by its longer, smoother handle-like shaft to bring the elongated object almost upright. The object is rough, handling it in this

[20] Quotation taken from the artwork pages of the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art website (https://www.nationalgalleries.org/art-and-artists/90565/archaic-head-ii). Accessed November 7th 2019, 10.30.

way is like grasping a small club or cudgel. Because of the fear of dropping the remarkably heavy object and damaging the quite fragile protruding nails, this kind of handling feels very intimate and quite delicate. This delicacy combined with the shape of the object itself gives the sculpture's physical weight a disturbing psychosexual charge. The phallic form is partly comically repugnant, partly fearful.

Although quite different, these two experiences describe similar phenomena that often seem to me related in post-war sculpture. These are simultaneous phenomena of intimate presence and distant remoteness. I would like to propose these as special qualities of modern sculpture's otherness. I respond positively to these qualities of post-war sculpture's strange alterity. Certain encounters such as these I have been describing in relation to works by Butler or Hepworth indicate how these qualities can arise from a sculptural object's particular kind of enunciation. Partly, these bring together more conscious impressions with less conscious feelings or bodily driven somatic expressions, for example physically circling a group of works or negotiating an awkwardly heavy fragile object. The fact that these objects are sculptures as opposed to more everyday objects, and that the context of the encounters were private ones in sculpture stores, lent the encounters I have been describing a particularly heightened charge. Deleuze and Guattari would argue that the enunciations arising from these combined and contextual encounters are called assemblages. They argue that instead of formulating our unconscious response to such encounters linguistically, we might instead understand them in expanded terms as "assemblages of enunciation" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, 7 - 14). Deleuzean art theorist Stephen Zepke explains that understanding the unconscious in this expanded way goes "beyond the frame of the individual subject and its modes of expression" focussing instead on "a-signifying mutations" that produce a subject (Zepke, 2018, p.5). Guattari maintains that the schizoanalytical subject calls upon these mutational expressive

possibilities as a form of “deterritorialised enunciation” (Guattari, 2013, p. 20). This relies not only on interior mental processes but also on “non-human procedures and memories to deal with semiotic complexes that for the most part escape from direct control” (p.20). For Guattari therefore, schizoanalysis produces a subject in ways that are not only ‘sensible’, that is in accordance with representational structures such as language, but also through ‘non-sense’; other processes that mutate languages or signs and re-position the interiority of the subject as just one part of a wider, metamorphic assemblage of enunciation[21].

Non-Sense: Towards new kinds of process

I would like to conclude these observations by returning briefly to Herbert Read’s *Vital Image.* I have discussed the way that *The Vital Image’s* qualities rely on imaginaries associated with representations of psychic ‘pathologies’ through ideas such as schizoid linguistics. Associations such as these suggest a close, perhaps says David Hulks, a “dangerously close” connection between “artistic achievement and schizophrenic suffering” (Hulks, 2007 p.149). Hulks is cautious about the manner in which this connection can “rake[s] up the old romantic argument about the artist-genius and his or her closeness to madness” (p.149). Associations with such stereotypical imaginaries may be one of the aspects of Read’s thought that has left him, in the words of Ben Cranfield, “on the wrong side of the modernist fence for future generations of artists and writers” (Cranfield, 2015). But this, as both Hulks and Cranfield point out, would be to disregard the detail of Read’s position. Read’s proposal was not that there was an equivalence between artistic creativity and conditions

[21] For Guattari enunciations of the unconscious are everyday, not necessarily specialised as in psychiatry, or even in an art object. He says “I would see the unconscious… as something we drag around with ourselves both in our gestures and daily objects, as well as on TV, that is part of the zeitgeist, and even, and perhaps especially, in our day-to-day problems” (Guattari, 2011, p.10).

such as schizophrenia, but an important a-symmetry. The creative process can be related to schizophrenic patterns, but advances in psychoanalytical theory in the 1940s and 50s meant that dis-integration followed by re-integration within creative processes could be clearly distinguished from the inability on the part of a schizophrenic to re-integrate. Read and others understood that the dis-integrated and the creative personality of the schizophrenic and the artist were by no means equivalent phenomenon.

As I have discussed, this does not mean that through the creative enrolment of ideas such as schizoid linguistics modern sculptures were able to escape processes of social normalisation. My task in the latter part of this chapter has been to review what remains within post-war sculpture *after* these processes of normalisation. I have tried to de-couple ideas of the ‘real’ in post-war sculpture from ideas of a ‘vital image’ mined from the depths of an artist's unconscious. In this de-coupling I have explored post-war sculpture’s real in my project as a kind of fictional being - a form of radical alterity intrinsic to post-war sculptures themselves. The way I propose to address this alterity is in an expanded sense, as an assemblage of enunciation. Such an assemblage relies on somatic as well as semantic factors, and finds in the strange alterity of *The Vital Image* a non-sense. This non-sense indicates the way that post-war sculpture’s otherness might activate new kinds of processes that help to mutate signs, languages and the known. In the next part of this thesis I consider some of the practical ways that I engage these ideas of otherness as an ‘alien vitality’ - strange assemblages of enunciation in my own studio that can be activated through particular kinds of materials, histories and sculptural operations.

Chapter Three: Remodelling The Vital Image

Chapter three of my thesis commentary is a reflection on the materials and methods I have used in this research project to remodel aspects of *The Vital Image*. In **part 1** I explore some of the practical, material and operational mechanisms through which I have engaged with *The Vital Image's* imaginaries in my studio as a kind of 'alien vitality'. In **part 2** I dramatise these operations in a piece of creative writing which casts the studio in the role of a conscious being who sets a task for the candidate to fulfil.

Part 1: The Studio

In this chapter I discuss some of the qualities and associations of the principle material I have used in this research project, plaster. I discuss the way that plaster forms one aspect of an expanded range of material agencies in my studio. These expanded agencies revision modernist conceptions of the studio as passive container for the will and intention of the artist. I explain how I draw on the expanded agencies of the studio in terms of their alien vitality, an idea borrowed from the theorist Steven Shaviro, in order to develop imaginative reconfigurations of the studio as a form of agental consciousness in its own right.

Plasticity

Hanging on the wall of the *Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum* not far from my studio in Glasgow is a large slab of Carrerra marble. On the slab appears the following inscription:

CLAY THE LIFE

PLASTER THE DEATH

The incised marble slab is a sculpture by the artist Ian Hamilton Finlay (1925 - 2006). The inscription is an alternative rendering of a well known aphorism, variously attributed to neoclassical sculptors Antonio Canova (1757 - 1822) and Berthold Thorvaldson (1770 - 1844), which originally read: clay the life, plaster the death, bronze the resurrection (Wade, 2018, p.75). Both versions of the aphorism brilliantly encapsulate in short form a wide spectrum of the material associations that follow on from traditional sculptural media. Rather than allowing these associations to extend into a potentially unmanageable series of relations, the language of the aphorism ties them to something that the artist Christine Borland (b.1965) describes in an interview (in a comment arising in connection to this work by Hamilton Finlay) as a material “shorthand” (Ramm/Borland, 2018). In my studio I engage with aspects of Borland’s material shorthand through a return within my practice to processes associated with clay and plaster - two of the traditional sculptural media invoked by Canova/Hamilton Finlay/ Thorvaldson’s aphorism.

Ideas of a return to traditional materials within my work originally arose from a frustration with constantly seeking the right material from the wide selection I might use to realise any given project. It seemed as if the myriad material possibilities by means of which any project could be realised were both slightly arbitrary in relation to my goals and were over-determining my working process. I felt that this was at the expense of a more fluid relationally between myself and a sculpture’s development. Now, on reflection, I would characterise the qualities that I was seeking less in terms of a return to tradition - which implies quite a stratified set of cultural relations - and more in terms of a search for greater plasticity within my working and decision making processes.

Figure 10: Umberto Boccioni, *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space,* 1913 (cast 1972)

The plasticity of modelling media is, to me, an association between the mutability of a material formation and the mutability of the mental and bodily processes that interact with it. Plasticity is a process of deformation and transformation that spills over and blurs the boundaries between the subject and the object and never knows, or never *seems* to know, when to stop. But stop it must. At least, for me, stopping is a key part of the sculptural dynamic of plasticity. This, as the philosopher Catherine Malabou confirms, is the difference between plasticity and flexibility. Malabou, in *What Should We Do With Our Brain* (2008), says that plasticity is often mistaken for flexibility (Malabou, 2008, p.12). Malabou explains that plasticity differs from flexibility. Its mechanical definition clarifies a plastic material as one that "cannot return to its original form after undergoing a transformation" (p.12). I'm interested in the sculptural dynamics that arise out of plasticity which, when frozen, arrest transformation in this way, sometimes in mid-flow. A sculpture's dynamic formation, like Umberto Boccioni's famous *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space* (1913) (fig. 10), might, in this freeze framing, allow for both an imaginative and physical negotiation of a vital fluid motion. I love this paradoxical foundational quality that a sculpture like Boccioni's can have - in motionless or inertia there exists the potential for great animism. This animism is transposed by imaginative tracings of possibility. This means that an imaginative viewer might extend the continuity of the object outwards and onwards, projecting its potential animism into space.

Malabou parallels the plasticity of matter in the world with the plasticity of brains. She imparts neural plasticity, especially in its essential difference to flexibility, an important quality. This is a quality of resistance. "Plasticity denotes solidity as much as suppleness" says Malbou (p.15). This allows not only for a brain to change, but to learn. Change is important, but if change always returns to its previous form development is not possible. The timescale for neural plasticity and sculptural plasticity are different. I'm

not suggesting any direct correlations between plastic development in a sculpture and plastic development in a brain. But I am suggesting that they are analogous. Particularly in foetuses, babies and childhood, but continuing to a lesser extent throughout adult life, cell death is “a tool allowing the embryo to work out its form in its becoming, by an eliminative procedure that allies it with sculpture” (Ameisen, quoted in Malabou, 2008, p.19). There is no master plan to either sculptural or neural plasticity, but both entail in their becoming a working out of form through plastic processes of material development.

Plaster Technics and Semiotics

Sculptural plasticity for me mainly relates to a range of processes associated with plaster. Plaster is made from mineral called gypsum. In its unmodified form this ‘stone’ is also known by its common name alabaster. Gypsum alabaster is a soft evaporite mineral with a structure comprised mainly of large crystals of calcium sulfate dihydrate[22]. Alabaster has a long history of human use in its unmodified form; alabaster artefacts have been found that date back to early bronze age Mesopotamia (3500 - 1500BC). In order to convert gypsum crystals or dihydrate into plaster the crystals must be pulverised and water must be driven off by heating to around 130 degrees centigrade to form hemihydrate. The structures of dihydrate and hemihydrate allow for an easy conversion between the two forms. The addition of heat in order to drive off water converts dihydrate into hemihydrate. The addition of water converts hemihydrate into dihydrate. When the latter conversion occurs the hemihydrate powder reacts with the

[22] U.S national library of medicine explains what this name denotes in more technical detail. Calcium is a common earth metal also found in animal bones, teeth and shells. Sulfate means a salt of sulphuric acid. Calcium sulphate is formed when sulphuric acid forms a salt with calcium. Dihydrate means a solid containing two molecules of water of crystallization per molecule (https://pubchem.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/compound/Calcium-sulfate-dihydrate). Accessed 28th October 2019 at 14.18.

water to re-crystallise back into its original dihydrate form - a soft stone like substance.

In its unmodified form dihydrate gypsum alabaster is only suitable for carving. When pulverised and modified by heat into hemihydrate it has a far greater range of uses and applications. For example, the format taken by plaster in the workshop consists of a variety of states; from industrially manufactured dry powder, liquified through the addition of water, crystallising through various viscosities on its way to setting as a durable soft stone, and then back to a dry desiccated powder as it is mechanically broken down by cutting, carving, sanding etc. Plaster's main working attributes include the different types of plaster itself (fast and hard or soft and slow), different binders or solvents (such as water or acrylic resin), the multiple stages of plaster, from powder to liquid to solid, the ability of plaster to bind to itself in layers, to be moulded, sledged (that is formed under a profile), cut or carved. Reinforcements such as jute scrim or wood or steel armatures can be used, or plaster can be combined with mould making materials like silicone rubber, or built up in multiple parts using liquid clay slip or plastic film as a mould release. Plaster can be worked quickly and provisionally to make large forms or crafted with slow care for detail. Plaster is in fact a generic term for a wide range of composite materials, processes and approaches, which can be used in a variety of combinations to a multiplicity of ends.

Plaster has a complex and sometimes pejorative symbolism which is reflected in its 'deathly' attribution in the aphorisms cited earlier. Its range of plastic attributes lends it to modelling and reproduction through casting - both ways of producing copies or multiples of an original. It is associated with academicism due to its accuracy in rendering copies of classical statuary, or sculpture of other periods and locations. This is why plaster casts and copies can be found in great quantities in the 'cast collections' of

museums and art academies throughout Europe and America. It is often used as an in-between stage in the production of sculptural models - between the fragile malleability of clay and a more finished material such as marble or bronze. This often leads to the in-between plaster artefact being destroyed - seen as worthless in its own right or perhaps even worse, leaving the sculpture open to the risk of further unauthorised duplication. Plaster's other associations writer Rebecca Wade describes, in relation to the studio of the London based Italian sculptor Domenico Brucciani (1815 - 1880), who supplied the great London cast collections such as the *Kensington Museum* (now the *Victoria and Albert Museum*), as "death masks and dance halls" (Wade, 2018 p.75). This is because plaster also had ignoble associations with the spectacle and the sideshow. Its ornamental qualities, especially when gilded, lent themselves to the lavish decoration of 19th century urban recreational spaces such as theatres and dance halls, where a cheap material like plaster could masquerade as a more expensive one. Plaster effigies - death masks, or casts of other body parts such as hands - were also often commissioned from plaster casting workshops such as Brucciani's for use by both ends of the social spectrum. The families of the noble or the famous would commission death artefacts for posterity. Death artefacts from criminals would be commissioned by showmen for public display in travelling exhibitions and sideshows. Plaster death masks also had an uncomfortable association with the pseudo-science of phrenology. Phrenologists collected criminal death masks in order to hypothesise (incorrectly) that variations in the shape of human skull might have some bearing on intellect and personality, with a special emphasis on 'predicting' criminality or other undesirable traits through skull 'abnormalities'[23].

[23] University College London holds a collection of 37 plaster death masks once in the possession of 19th century German phrenologist Robert Noel (https://blogs.ucl.ac.uk/museums/2016/01/15/the-robert-noel-collection-of-life-and-death-masks-what-we-know-now/). Accessed 18th July 2019 at 14.19.

Plaster's Agency

Whereas historically a studio's materials and processes tend to be designated as a passive foil or setting for artistic creativity, in this chapter I am interested in imaginative possibilities around revisioning studio activities within different ideas of agency. Here a material like plaster has a role to play in a wider agental ensemble.

I am interested in reframing ideas of agency in the studio in order to re-imagine the studio as possessing certain innate abilities residing within the studio and its materials, tools and processes themselves. Might these ideas of innate ability reclaim the studio from problematic ideas lingering around artistic creativity, for example ideas such as artistic genius or will? This distinction can be expanded in relation to modernist histories of the artist's studio. Mary Bergstein, in her essay *The Artist in His Studio: Photography, Art and the Masculine Mystique* (Bergstein, 2012, p.29) explores the trope of the masculine genius through the American Magnum photographer Alexander Liberman's book *The Artist in His Studio* (1960). As a form of "high modernist reportage" (p.29) Liberman both documents *and* promotes the mystique of the (male) artist's atelier. Here, the more that masculinity is identified as a generative force in artistic creation "the more necessary it seemed for women to assume the foil of alterity - to be cast as natural passive beings…" (p.29). The interesting thing about the passive role ascribed to the female in these modernist histories is the way that the feminine is conflated with the studio environs overall. In Liberman's sequence of photographs documenting the sculptor Alberto Giacometti's (1901 - 1966) studio (fig. 11), Bergstein notes the way that Giacometti's wife Annette is represented as a "distant vignette… her face and mind… as

Figure 11: Alexander Liberman *The Artist in His Studio,* plate 130, 'Giacometti'

absent to the degree the those of the artist are emphatically present" (p.31 - 32). In the captions and in the photographs there is no real distinction between Annette and the wider studio environs. I would argue that this indistinction is actually extended to Diego, Giacometti's brother and studio assistant, perhaps complicating Bernstein's clear gender demarcation of male activity and female passivity. But either way, I would certainly agree that the studio itself and its non-creative denizens, whether Annette or Diego, are facilitators. They passively answer to or assist the driving force that is the creative will of the artist.

In this chapter I have included, by point of comparison with Liberman's photographs, a photograph of my own studio (fig. 12). This photograph was taken by a friend and colleague of mine, the artist Lorna Macintyre. I invited Macintyre to come and document aspects my studio in 2015 as part of a project we were putting together based around the work of the sculptor Nicholas Pope (b.1949). I felt that Pope's work had been a subliminal influence on my own since I first saw it as a teenager before attending art school in the mid 1990s. I asked Macintyre to go to Pope's studio in rural Herefordshire and document aspects of his studio, in order to include the photographs in an exhibition of Macintyre and my work, in conjunction with Pope's, at the *Northern Gallery for Contemporary Art* in Sunderland in 2016. The photograph I include here was taken in my own studio as a counterpart to that project, although ultimately we did not use it. The thing that interests me about Macintyre's photo, and the reason I include it here, is what I would characterise as her focus on ideas of latency. The photograph shows a block of bright sunlight shining through the window onto my studio floor, casting strong shadows of a sculptural form. These areas of bright sunlight and shadow are shining onto the bench where I mix up my plaster. Macintyre said she was interested in the way the areas of light look a bit like some of the shapes in my sculptures - only natural I suppose, given that they are created by the silhouettes of the sculptures

Figure 12: Lorna Macintyre, Nick Evans' studio at Grey Wolf Studios, Glasgow

themselves. I might additionally be tempted to offer an interpretation of the image whereby the shadows appear to me to manifest a sculptural form that is *already inscribed* within the space. I might interpret the photograph's shadows appearing as if they are a ghostly presence - they appear to summon sculptural form from out of the air, where none existed before. This summoning is enhanced by virtue of the fact that the ghost-like appearance of shadowy form is juxtaposed with the raw materials of form-creation in the shape of the as yet unmixed plaster. Of course, this interpretation is too poetic. In fact, it might be more accurate to discuss the implications of the image in relation to the realities of photographic process. A silver gelatin photographic process, basically described, involves exposing light sensitive chemicals to varying degrees of light in order to generate an impression. This photograph of Macintyre's is therefore remarkably self-reflexive in this regard. As much as it is an image of a condition of light, it is also an image of the process of light's own capture. It's subject is its own mechanism of production. It is as if Macintyre herself, once she has observed this phenomenon, has stepped back from the frame and allowed the capture of light and shadow through chemical process to make visible its own agency.

Alien Vitality

Part 2 of this chapter consists of a piece of creative writing called *A Description of an Exercise.* The description started out as a way of trying to write directly about the kinds of studio activities involved in my working processes. It describes quite closely a typical working sequence in my studio that involves modelling clay components, taking plaster moulds, casting the components in plaster and assembling the cast sections into sculptures. The large works *Turning Arch* (2018) and *The Couple* (2018) (pages 32-36), which were exhibited at *The Modern Institute* in Glasgow in January and February 2018 were made in precisely this way, as were several other works included in my submission. In developing my text I was

interested in describing my working processes as a set of methodological instructions. I was interested in the idea that in doing so there might be less room for interpretative mediation. As in Macintyre's photograph the instructional format might provide an 'objective' record of the mechanics involved in realising these works.

The reader will notice that the account of the exercise quickly lapses into alternative language. For example steel armatures are called 'skeletons', clay models for casting are called 'avatars', moulds are called 'cosmic eggs', and the casts are called 'replicants'. Nothing in *A Description of an Exercise* actually departs from the 'real life' operations of my studio. However when I started writing my objective record I quickly I felt that a linguistic re-framing of my activities was important. The reason I started to use this alternative terminology was in order to engage imaginatively with a different kind of agency, something Steven Shaviro, in his book *The Universe of Things* (2014), describes as an "alien vitality"(p.48). Steven Shaviro points out the *risks* of expanded agencies, saying the "…magic of a fully animate world" has the potential to become "a Cthulhu-esque nightmare. We are threatened by the vibrancy of matter, we need to escape the excessive proximity of things. We cannot bear the thought of objects having an autonomous life, even this life is ultimately attributable to us" (Shaviro, 2014, p.48). In reality the exercise I describe involves the tools and procedures needed to undertake a simple mould making and casting operation. But in my description the tools and processes have taken on another kind of agency - they have become 'other' to their simple engagement through studio process. They have become 'Cthulhu-esque', in Shaviro's terms. Shaviro borrows the name 'Cthulhu' from the horror writer H.P Lovecraft (1890 - 1937). Cthulhu-esque refers to humankind's subordination in Lovecraft's work to a strange extraterrestrial species whose immense lifespan reveals the transience of the human species and the earth itself. Lovecraft's Cthulhu trivialises both human concerns and

earth history by juxtaposing them with the “awesome grandeur” of the Cthulhu’s own “cosmic cycle” (Lovecraft, 2014, p.381). Human history is portrayed by Lovecraft as a a mere cheerful facade covering this nightmarish truth. Alien vitality is likened by Shaviro to the Cthulhu’s hidden cosmic truth - behind the innocuous facade of the everyday lie alien lifelike, yet entirely impersonal, animating forces.

In *A Description of an Exercise* I draw on this idea of alien vitality to ask; what if the will of the artist is less clearly facilitated by the studio? What if the studio or its processes were to be considered as having their own active will? What if the studio possessed an active alternative consciousness that does not reside so much with the artist, but could be ascribed to factors already present within the environment, or latent within process or material?

The description concerns a consciousness that I might call a studio mentality devising an exercise for the artist/candidate to fulfil. As with the scientist Victor Frankenstein in Mary Shelly’s novel *Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus* (1818), it is clearly the case that I, the artist (also at present the candidate), am the one responsible for bringing the studio in the form of a ‘monstrous consciousness’ into being in the first place. After all, it was me that arranged the location, the materials and the equipment and it is me that pays the rent and the upkeep. However, as with Victor Frankenstein, all this investment may not mean that I am necessarily in charge of what transpires. In fact, in a very literal sense, having set all this infrastructure up, the artist’s true role may be best reflected in the fulfilment of their obligations to their money, materials and equipment - in other words the consuming monstrosity that is the studio mentality.

A Description of an Exercise is therefore a deceptively simple manoeuvre that sets out to translate resources - materials and their related processes

in an artist's studio - into actors and agents. One intention of this manoeuvre is to make room for surprise and irony. Underlying this manoeuvre is a proposition; that the world of the studio might not only have its own agency but also its own independent sense of humour. Allowing the studio a 'witty' agency is to propose that knowledge production in the studio may be less the result of mastery by the artist and more the result of encounters with various protean, unexpected or surprising imaginative embodiments. I think that learning to encounter the unexpected through process is a good goal for my project. I am interested in engaging in the tricky encounters raised by problematic historical formations such as the modern artist as imaginatively as possible. I hope that imaginative engagements with problematic formations can shift the tone of the discussion a little and provide opportunities for irony and self-consciousness. The perspectives provided by my text *A Description of an Exercise* onto alternate forms of agency may be serious in intention, but they are not entirely serious in tone. My hope is that this slight difference between intention and tone - and the ensuing self-reflexivity this difference allows - might open up new fissures; small spaces out of which different kinds of embodiments might emerge.

Part 2: A Description of an Exercise

Aim of this Exercise

To manufacture and combine a number of part objects to make a group of whole objects (or sculptures as they might eventually be called) similar overall although differing in their particular arrangements.

The exercise falls into four parts.

1) The first part consists of modelling a variety of part objects.

2) The second part consists in taking moulds from these part objects.
3) The third part consists of casting multiple replicant parts from the moulds.
4) The fourth part consists of the arrangement of replicant parts into whole objects.

This exercise is devised by the Studio who does not undertake the exercise itself, but employs a candidate to do it for them.

The First Part - Modelling

First take a long piece of steel rod and cut it into lengths. The steel may be further subdivided as required. Bend the steel rod into shapes in order to make armatures of various designs. These shapes may describe volumes, planes, angles or may consist of linear, bulbous or organic forms derived from life or imagination as the candidate desires. The size and number of forms described is also left to the discretion of the candidate, but the candidate should bear two factors in mind during this part of the exercise:

1) The parts when combined together will increase the overall size of the whole object achieved at the end of the exercise. It is wise not to start with too large a part unless a correspondingly large whole object is required.
2) Whilst it is possible to arrange a single part in a number of different combinations a greater variety of whole objects may be achieved with a larger number of original parts. Therefore a minimum of three original parts is suggested.

The steel armatures are skeletons. This means that they represent the remains of once living forms. The aim is to reanimate these skeletal remains with living flesh. By modelling over the skeletal remains with clay the aim is towards a gesture of origination. This gesture produces avatars that are alive, but only momentarily. This is because it will be necessary to kill the living avatars in order for them to be reborn as replicants.

The Second Part - Taking Moulds

In order for the living clay avatars to become arranged into whole objects it is necessary for them to be reborn as replicants. In this way they can be converted into plaster and multiplied in number. In order to do this moulds must first be taken of the avatars.

The mould may also be called a cosmic egg. It is not enough that everything begins, everything must begin again and again. A technology of second origins is therefore needed. Where the avatar merely converts a moment into form the mould converts the avatar into repetition or series and opens the way to combinations and re-combinations.The surface of the avatar must be subdivided into parts by inscribing on the clay with a stylus. These lines describe the limber lines, or the boundaries between the parts of the egg that will crack open when the replicant is hatched out. Care must be taken when inscribing these limber lines that the parts of the egg are sufficient in number and format to allow for the replicant to be removed from each part without getting stuck. Areas of the avatars' form that overhang and might lock the parts of the mould together, or lock the avatar to the parts of the mould themselves are called undercuts and must be avoided. Otherwise the cosmic egg will become damaged and the series threatened.

The Third Part - Casting

If care has been taken with the limber lines whilst constructing the cosmic egg what follows will be straightforward. Firstly the parts of the mould must be removed from the avatar. This may involve the dissolution of the avatar as parts of its flesh pull away from the skeleton, or become de-laminated from one another. The death and dismemberment of the avatar is an inevitable and necessary sacrifice in order for the replicant to be reborn. It may be tempting to the candidate to save parts of the avatar, such as the steel skeleton. This is quite possible. It is also advisable for the candidate to maintain the clay from the body of the avatar in workable condition by using plastic wrapping, buckets and water from a spray bottle. In this way the dismembered parts of the avatars body are not wasted but may be put to use during future gestures of origination.

Once the parts of the mould have been removed they must be reassembled as the cosmic egg. The cosmic egg describes the form of the avatar in negative. The space at the heart of the egg is the space the avatar once inhabited. This is the space that will be reoccupied serially, time after time, by the replicant. The replicant will be the avatar reborn in plaster. Because of this the rebirth also appears as a kind of death. The whiteness of the plaster describes a calcification or ghosting of the avatar's body. The plaster is a crystallisation. Where the living clay enabled the surface of the avatar to be modelled and remodelled numerous times as the molecular platelets slid over one another with a malleable plasticity, the plaster instead converts liquidity into hard crystal. It fixes the surface of the replicant as a durable impress.

The candidate must now fill the void inside the cosmic egg with plaster. If the cosmic egg is large they may do so by covering only the inner surface of the egg with plaster - reinforcing the plaster surface with a fibrous substances such as jute, glass fibre, canvas, bedsheets, old sacks, straw

or whatever comes to hand. If the cosmic egg is small it may be filled with plaster only, in a liquid state, pouring it into the void until completely filled up.

The Fourth Part - Arranging

The cosmic egg must be cracked open once again. Force will be required, combined with extreme care. This is called coercion. With the removal of the parts of the egg from the avatars body the removal involved some dissolution of the molecular platelets comprising the plastic surface of the avatar's clay body. This enabled the process to proceed with greater speed and less need for coercion. With the removal of the parts of the egg from the body of the replicant no dissolution of the replicant is possible. Remember that the plaster has crystallised, fixing and hardening it.

Coercion involves the use of decorators filling knives, small blocks and hammers, wedges, warm water spray laced with detergent to lubricate. Coercion should involve the parts of the egg eventually falling away intact to reveal the replicants' body. It is wise to re-assemble the parts of the cosmic egg straightaway to preserve the parts in a good condition, ready for the repetition of the third part.

This third part should be repeated until a sufficient number of replicants have been reborn from the cosmic egg. This overall number depends on the candidate's wishes and relates to the total number of whole objects that the candidate wants to achieve. Once a sufficient number of replicants have been removed and the egg reassembled for the last time the egg must be put to one side.

Finally take all of the replicant parts reborn out of all of the cosmic eggs.

In this exercise imagine we had modelled three avatars, resulting in three cosmic eggs. Out of each cosmic egg imagine we cast a series of three replicant parts. The candidate would therefore have a total of 9 replicant parts to work with. The candidate must arrange these parts using their sensitivity, intuition and the intrinsic physical or aesthetic properties of the replicants by way of guidance. The Studio cannot instruct as to the procedures necessary or desirable by way of these arrangements. However, in the past an improvisatory attitude has been found to have been beneficial. Also a willingness to work and rework the forms numerously. Remember there is no limit to the number of combinations and recombinations possible.

The whole object (perhaps it might eventually be called a sculpture) in final appearance may be some way removed from the part objects used to originate it, or it may not. This is the candidate's discretion.

Postscript - The Candidate's Lie

The point at which the candidate's discretion is exercised is the point at which the candidate opens themselves up to the problem of interpretation. The first interpretation occurs in the first action, namely in the selecting, forming and assembling of the steel skeleton. From thenceforward interpretation is multiplied and cannot be reversed; only amended or re-iterated. The candidate does not realise that in their act of interpretation they perform a lie that is necessary to the secret heart of the exercise: The candidate imagines they are acting according to their own discretion, and their discretion is the singular and inevitable result of interpretations of situations based upon their self; an encased entity that uses its body as a matrix designed to convert thoughts, feelings, histories and experiences into forms within a closed zoo-centric loop.

How the Exercise Actually Functions

The Studio craftily uses the candidate's lie to convert feelings into objects. The feeling The Studio converts is the candidate's sense of their body as a natural entity that houses their unconscious thoughts and proclivities as the arbiter of their discretion. The Studio uses the exercise to convert the candidate's feelings into objects using the following three secret qualities:

1) artificiality
2) omnisexuality
3) polyphenomenality

Quality One: Artificiality

Rather than seeing nature as surety - the assurance of a transhistorical criteria of value against which to judge human accomplishment - the exercise positions human accomplishments in terms of the plastic manipulation of the natural at its centre. The exercise does not build in homeostasis, but instead the elementary logic of replication and combination. The candidate is not asked to imagine anything at any point, but instead to respond imaginatively to thematic variation. The candidate must unknowingly accept the possibilities of manipulation as proof of living process - rather than seeing living process as a purely naturalistic, auto-regulationary regime. Living process does not exist separate to the artificiality of the candidate's plastic manipulations within the constraints of the exercise.

Quality Two: Omnisexuality

Rather than seeing reproduction as a process naturally occurring within a codified regime of binary combinants the exercise considers its reproductive dynamic to be a range of different iterations occurring within a field of difference. The reproductive model assumed by the exercise is like that of a bacterial parasite. Once the replicant has fucked the avatar, destroying the host in the process of generating the cosmic egg, the replicant is free to replicate infinitely. Once infinite replication has been assumed the combinations and recombinations of the replicants are not limited. Instead they arise from the interference patterns generated by series upon series of replicant forms combined and recombined in potentially unlimited number.

Quality Three: Polyphenomenality

The experiential matrix of the candidate is not irrelevant to the exercise. It is simply that The Studio does not allow the candidate's experiential matrix to be influenced by ideas that might be brought to the exercise prior to its immediate requirements. The key here is that the autonomous decisions taken by the candidate are governed by the field of resources granted to them by the exercise. The candidate's creativity is governed by the breakdowns, the way that the one thing leads to another. In the exercise the way that one thing is converted into another, or combined with another, manifests a living cognition that is not the candidates alone. Instead it occurs within the space of the exercise through heterogenous voices, actions and iterations; all developed out of the replicant's potential for difference, not prefigured by final cause or latent perfection.

Chapter Four: Contemporary Sculpture's Vital Materialism

Chapter four of my thesis commentary returns to Herbert Read's *Vital Image* to consider the ways in which modern sculptural vitalism can be readdressed within contemporary sculptural contexts. In **part 1** I refer Read's vitalist aesthetics back to both my own work and the work of the contemporary sculptor Rebecca Warren in order to revise Read's concept of palpability. In **part 2** I revision ideas around sculptural process with reference to the work of the contemporary sculptor Phyllida Barlow.

Part 1: Touch

In part 1 of this chapter I will revisit Herbert Read's concept of palpability, a methodological approach to sculpture he championed based on its tactile materiality. I contextualise Read's concept of the palpable within a disagreement between Read and the American critic Clement Greenberg, who in the 1950s opposed Read's palpable ideals with his own commitment to sculpture's optical qualities. This disagreement is expressive of a wider dichotomy between opticality and tactility within modernist art histories. I trace this dichotomy by means of Rosalind Krauss' book *The Optical Unconscious,* a revisionist history of Greenberg's hegemonic opticality that draws on an alternative modernist legacy emerging from dada and surrealism. Although Krauss does not write about Herbert Read's palpable methodologies specifically, Read's ideas can be productively explored in relation to this alternative tradition.

I explain the way I investigated ideas arising in relation to this tradition through my own practice based research in my exhibition *Sculpture Showroom* (pages 37-44). The idea of my exhibition was to explore a version of opticality that was shaped by material entanglements. *Sculpture*

Showroom proposed an investigative framework where plaster's material particularities help break down modernist dualisms. However, my exploration of a material breakdown of the historical dichotomies between opticality and tactility in *Sculpture Showroom* ultimately proves inconclusive. Therefore in the second part of this chapter I extend my investigation with reference to the work of the contemporary artist Rebecca Warren (b.1965). I consider the way that Warren uses vigorous modelling to re-situate tactility as a key strategic device within her work, activated both in relation to gendered modernist art histories and more recent gender symbolics. One suggested outcome of Warren's strategic reclamation of tactility through gendered imaginaries is that her work also re-contextualises sculptural vitality. I propose that within Warren's work sculpture's vitality can be reconsidered as a force that is activated less in relation to palpable penetrations into archetypal reality, and more in relation to social and historical constructs.

Herbert Read's Organic Vitalism and Sculptural Palpability

The relationship of an idea like palpability to Read's wider ideas cannot be separated from other constructs in his work such as organic vitalism. I would therefore like to recap this construct before I move on. Organic vitalism, as I set out in chapter one, arises out of a schema which expresses a continuum between abstraction on the one hand and superrealism on the other. Superrealism represents more irrational or unconscious creative tendencies. Abstraction represents more conscious analytical processes. Organic vitalism creates new realities by synthesising positions along a front between these two poles. The palpable can be understood as a *methodology* through which the artist goes about synthesising these positions. Read's commitment to palpable methodology lies not only with its tactility, but in its situation within non-idealised engagements with materials. Palpability avoids what Read saw as the more

exclusive forms of expression at each end of the spectrum - idealised ‘abstract’ forms like ideas or concepts on the one hand, or chaotically ‘subjective’ structures like emotional expressionism on the other. For Read, an artist who successfully synthesises through palpable approaches different positions along a creative front between abstraction and superrealism would produce work that is vital - infused with feelings of an autonomous life or animism arising out of the intensity of an advanced aesthetic awareness.

A further distinction that needs to be made before I progress concerns the relationships between ideas of tactility and ideas of palpability within Read’s schema. Whilst tactility describes physical sensations of touch, palpability has a wider role in Read’s schemas. This function is to open the artist, through tactile engagements with sculptural form, onto what the writer Ben Cranfield calls the “multi-sensory nature of experience” (Cranfield, 2015). This literal “reaching out and touching” Cranfield suggests is important in Read’s project as a means of overcoming modern industrial alienation. Sculpture’s palpable presence was a promise to “put people back in touch with each other and the world” (Cranfield, 2015). This connectivity between “people” and the “world” was informed by Read’s interest in sculptural process as an ongoing creative activity, whose truth was to be found in movement: “movement toward [truth] is the only form in which truth can achieve completion in existence here and now” (Read, 1960, pp.191-2). Palpability should therefore be understood as a quest to reposition “truth” - the vital forces underwriting creative activity - away from the visual, not only in terms of its appeal to a sensation like touch, but also in terms of its repositioning of the artist and the sculpture within wider sets of relations.

Read and Greenberg: Tactility or Opticality

David Getsy's essay *Tactility or Opticality, Henry Moore or David Smith: Herbert Read and Clement Greenberg on the Art of Sculpture 1956* (2007), explains how Read's ideas of sculptural palpability were publicly attacked by the American critic Clement Greenberg in his *New York Times* book review of Herbert Read's *Art of Sculpture* in November 1956. This attack formed one part of an ongoing argument between Read and Greenberg concerning the nature and status of the sculptural object within late modernity. Read's position in this argument was to advocate for a sculptural aesthetics based upon the medium's physicality. Getsy explains how Read felt that sculpture was not just to be looked at but "*felt,* with and through ones own experience of embodiment" (Getsy, 2007 p.153). Getsy bases this assertion on Read's claim in *The Art of Sculpture* (1956) that sculpture's physical traits were expressed by "a three-dimensional mass occupying space and only to be apprehended by senses that are alive to its volume and ponderability, as well as its visual experience" (Read, 1956, p.ix). In *The Art of Sculpture* Read counterpoises Western and non-Western examples of art from pre-historic, archaic, pre-columbian, medieval and modern sculpture. All of his examples were chosen to manifest his primary criteria - that sculpture should be considered an "art of *palpation* - an art that gives satisfaction in the touching and handling of objects" (Read, 1956, p.49).

For Greenberg, by contrast, "visuality…was the most compelling issue for contemporary art" (Getsy, 2007, p.154). In the case of sculpture, this involved articulations rather than displacements of space. Greenberg wrote that "space is there to be shaped, divided, enclosed but not to be filled or sealed in" (Greenberg, 1958, p.58). Sculpture's fundamental characteristics were best apprehended not in relation to tactility, but in the purity of the objective gaze of the viewer. The way a sculpture achieved its maximum

Figure 13: Henry Moore, *King and Queen,* 1952, Bronze, 164 x 139 x 91cm

Figure 14: David Smith, *Agricola,* 1952, Steel, 92 x 142 x 50 cm

optical effect was for Greenberg achieved in constructed, linear form. Welded metal forms such as those by David Smith allowed constructed sculpture to occupy space whilst simultaneously fragmenting it into linear or planar articulations that could be better perceived by sight than by touch.

Read's retort to Greenberg's attack a few years later in his introduction to *Modern Sculpture* (1964) was consistent with his palpable ideology. Read insisted that "touch has the sensational priority" and if the spectator does not "normally apprehend sculpture by this means, it is the spectators loss" (Read, 1964, p.15-16). As Getsy points out, what was at stake between Read and Greenberg was not only a personal power struggle using proxy artists (Moore and Smith - figs. 13 and 14) between the elder critic and old-world European (Read), and his younger new-world challenger (Greenberg), but differing visions and legacies relating to the purpose and definition of the modernist project itself. This thesis does not have the scope to extensively detail these wider arguments. However, what eventually emerged by the mid 1960s tends typically to grant historical favour to Greenberg[24]. Late modernism is typically associated with a Greenbergian realm in which ideas of opticality - associated with abstract painting, in particular colour field painting and abstract constructed sculpture like David Smith's and Anthony Caro's - take precedence over the tactility of the modelled forms associated with artists like Henry Moore and the other post-war sculptors surveyed within *The Vital Image*.

[24]Michael Paraxos argues in his essay *The Curse of King Bomba, Or How Marxism Stole Modernism* that Read's "pluralistic, subjective and radical anarcho-modernism…has been replaced by Greenberg's monolithic, objective and reactionary materialism". Paraxos identifies a systematic exclusion of Read's thought and work from the academy, a legacy he identifies as part of the wider exclusion from modernist histories by Marxist academics of alternative left wing currents such as anarchism.

Sculpture Showroom

The question remains as to why I feel it necessary to rehearse again these quite well rehearsed arguments? After all, complications of hegemonic modernist ideals around abstract opticality have now been thoroughly investigated by Rosalind Krauss and others[25]. Krauss' book the *Optical Unconscious* (1993) is now an influential and well known critique of the hegemony of both Greenberg and modernist opticality.

I will attempt to answer this question in my own terms with reference to an exhibition I produced in 2018. I drew on Krauss' critique of modernist opticality in developing my exhibition at the Glasgow Sculpture Studios called *Sculpture Showroom* (pages 37-44). *Sculpture Showroom* was an exhibition that was intended to invoke particular qualities of sensation associated with my studio space. These are the sensations I get sometimes where everything is so saturated in plaster dust that the distinct edges - the boundaries of objects - seem to get blurred. I wanted my exhibition to communicate this sense of indistinction between objects and their environment, and to approximate my own perceptual response to the studio as sensory environment. I set out to achieve this by using the same materials - the plaster dust - that blurs sensation in the studio, but I staged these materials to invoke this blurry sensation deliberately, rather than as an accidental byproduct of studio process. All the objects in the exhibition were made from plaster whilst the room itself was covered with a plaster and scrim coating on the walls and floor. The objects were not indistinguishable from their environment, but they did appear to hover slightly in a visual limbo. It was by no means impossible to delineate sculptural form, but form was nevertheless rendered *slightly* indistinct. The

[25] Krauss' critique has recently been extended and used to construct a survey of an alternative post-war modern sculptural canon based on the bodily, the made and the erotic in the exhibition *Part Object Part Sculpture* at the Wexner Centre for the Arts in 2005/2006.

idea of the exhibition was to negotiate a porous boundary between clear delineation and a hazy blurring of form.

In my exhibition I was not only interested in presenting matter as something that was shaped by form, but also something to be experienced directly, as matter itself. I wanted to generate a tension between indistinct matter and matter's formation into identifiable objects (sculptures). I was interested in activating a very thin slice of perception, a momentary indistinction between the identity of a form and the non-identity of the dust from which the form is made. Of course, it is not quite true to say that dust has a non-identity. So perhaps it might be more accurate to say that I was interested in a blurring of the line between dust's materiality; a materiality that can be everywhere and dispersed, and a sculpture's materiality; that can be massed together and delineated. I wanted to activate this blurred line as a self-conscious slippage, whereby the knowledge or memory of a sculptural form might be different to the experience of perceiving it; or the same form might be perceived differently at different times or in different ways. For example, it might be quite possible to see one of the sculptures making up the exhibition quite clearly, by isolating it within ones field of vision. However, if one allowed ones field of vision to extend to the whole installation, perception of the individual elements within it became less distinct - more blurry against the plaster background or in relation to each other's white dusty forms. The exhibition's operative was therefore what Krauss calls in *The Optical Unconscious* a type of *informé.* It displaced opposed notions of material identity and material non-identity, form and formlessness, in favour of a possible blurring or indistinction between such terms. As Krauss points out:

> It is too easy to think of *informé* as the opposite of form. To think of form versus matter. Because this "versus" always performs the duties of form, of creating binaries, of separating the world into neat pairs of oppositions…" (Krauss, 1993 p.166)

Krauss says that instead of this we should “think of *informé* as what form itself creates, as logic acting logically to act against itself within itself, form producing a heterologic” (Krauss, 1993 p.167). The heterologic of the exhibition *Sculpture Showroom* was primarily located in its un-settling of clearly demarcated relations between matter and form. In thinking about my exhibition, one question for me is whether a blurring of the distinctions between matter and form could or should be mapped onto the distinctions between opticality and tactility that I have just been discussing. Can opticality still be equated with form (and perhaps Greenbergian notions like objective cognition or understanding) and tactility with material (and perhaps Readean ideas around pre-cognitive feeling and sensation)?

In response to this question, and perhaps by way of sidestepping it, I would argue that instead of returning to such oppositions between opticality and tactility, Greenberg versus Read, my exhibition was more of an exploration of the way that vision itself is physical, *tactile* even. *Sculpture Showroom* particularises the tactile physicality of vision. In my exhibition I propose opticality not as a general or abstract principle that could be mapped onto ideas such as ‘form’, and opposed to ideas such as touch, that in turn might map onto ‘matter’. Instead vision is proposed as being entangled in its own kind of materiality - a complex quality of sensation arising in relation to plaster’s dusty materiality. Such an idea of vision as materially entangled shifts the term ‘optical’ within the argument in order to make the optical more tactile, and the tactile more optical. This is in line with Krauss’ heterologic in *The Optical Unconscious*.

Nevertheless, it could still be argued that the main way that the un-settling of relations between matter and form, opticality and tactility in *Sculpture Showroom* occurred remained primarily optical. That is, the heterologic the exhibition created was in the visual realm of perception. Tactility had little bearing on the function of this particular heteorologic - there was no

complication of the wider role of the optical with regard to touch (or indeed other sensations like taste, hearing, etc). The exhibition only proposed a displacement of the optical with regard its own particular capabilities. Greenberg's interest in sculpture as an optical phenomenon was concerned with the way that it "shaped, divided, enclosed" space (Greenberg, 1958 p. 58). Similarly, the way my own exhibition operated relied on the visual relations between sculptural parts to each other and to the space of the exhibition. *Sculpture Showroom* could therefore perhaps be characterised best as a kind of limbo. It remained caught up in the indistinctions it proposed between Greenberg's optical ideal and material contaminations of this ideal.

Although this limbo is not imaginatively unproductive I would like to move the argument along by proposing an alternative pathway. Perhaps a materialist breakdown of dichotomies between opticality and tactility could be helped by approaching them in a different way? What if this idea of a material breakdown were approached not from the starting point of the visual at all, but from a more Readean position - that is from the starting point of the tactile? Might the tactile be reactivated as a contemporary challenge to modernist dichotomies between opticality and tactility, without reestablishing the dichotomy itself? Might Herbert Read's palpability have any residual relevance for contemporary sculpture?

Strategic Tactility

I will consider these questions from the perspective of a contemporary artist who seems to be overtly concerned with tactile priorities. For the artist Rebecca Warren, could ideas of touching and handling perhaps be specifically opposed to ideas of opticality? After all, as the writer Bice Curiger says in an essay in Rebecca Warren's 2012 monograph *Every*

Aspect of Bitch Magic: “To say that Rebecca Warren’s sculptures are always extremely tactile seems like an understatement” (Curiger, 2012 p. 13). It would at first seem quite obvious that, following Curiger’s observation, Warren’s use of energetically and anarchically modelled forms in air-drying clay align her oeuvre with a Readean notion of palpability. But in actual fact, this would be to privilege only the *clay* parts of Warren’s sculptures, which also often comprise of painted plinths or wheeled dollies. In fact, Erica Cooke, in a review of Warren’s 2010 exhibition at *The Renaissance Society* at the University of Chicago (fig 15), points out that: “Warren believes all details to be integral: the classical geometric forms of her white plinths, for example, tame the ‘madness’ of her clay explosions” (Cooke, 2011). What is more, the dimensions of Warren’s plinths reflect the dimensions of the turntables that Warren uses when working on the sculptures in her studio, and being “presented at human height, the viewer can comfortably look at [the sculpture] at eye-level” (Cooke, 2011). So a simple privileging of the tactile over the optical may not stand up to close scrutiny in a consideration of Warren’s work. Instead Warren’s aims seem more critical and strategic. Her strategy becomes more apparent when her *whole* oeuvre is taken into account. This includes not only modelled clay sculptures but constructed metal sculptures, which seem as though they may allude to the kinds of linear metal sculptures that articulate space in a manner preferred by Greenberg. Meanwhile Warren’s vitrine works seem to propose a dada-like assemblage of chance components arranged as if to describe a miniature land or dreamscape, whose origins might be located (as suggested by the incorporation of fragmentary neon components and workaday materials) in the urban everyday rather the unconscious. Warren’s work therefore seems to range across historical sculptural genres, from modelled form to constructed metal sculpture to surrealist assemblage and found objects.

Figure 15: Rebecca Warren, 2010, Installation View, The Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago.

Figure 16: Rebecca Warren, *She*, 2003, installation view, Maureen Paley, London.

Vitalism as Violation

Rebecca Warren's work is perhaps most striking when she amplifies her work's strategic aims into something more challenging through confrontations with the darker side of masculine imaginaries. Bice Curiger calls the gender politics involved in Warren's mirroring of clichéd male fantasies - the distorted, flailing, heavy breasted, high heeled, leggy raw-clay giantesses of a sculpture like *She* (2003) (fig. 16) - a kind of "psychosexual close combat" (Curiger, 2012, p.10). Curiger says Warren's strategy is not to clean up feminine subjectivity in order to shy away from what Warren has called "Bitch Magic", but to amplify it. Aggressively feminised, Warren's figures are brazenly and often crudely sexual. I can think of no other figure sculptors past or present who populate their sculptures with such an array of vulvas, breasts, buttocks, penises, miniskirts or high heeled shoes. Warren humorously combines these motifs with the totemic phallogocentrism of modernist sculptural clichés. Warren directly and hilariously mixes up popular stereotypes with art historical signifiers and thereby rebukes the gendered narratives of certain modernist ideologues, for example the critic Adrian Stokes.

Alex Potts, in his essay *Carving and the Engendering of Sculpture: Stokes on Hepworth* (1996) explains the pejorative associations around modelling for Stokes. Potts says that Adrian Stokes was wary of modelling due to its manifestation of the "all pervasive subjectivism of modern culture" (Potts, 1996, p.43). Stokes opposed modelling to ideas of mastery and assertion

that he associated with carving[26]. This is because he understood modelling in terms of its symbolic sexual violence:

> Modelling for Stokes came to be associated with naked sexual domination, and represented a violation in a double sense - firstly through the idea of the artist forcing his conception onto his materials…and secondly through the violence of the associated image of giving birth. As Stokes had imagined it, the modeller wrestling the figure he had conceived from within the block performed an act analogous to ripping a child from the womb" (Potts, 1996, p.47).

Rebecca Warren's direct challenge to Stokes is to foreground the problematic aggression that underlies his theories of creative expression. Rather than proposing that the psychosexual aggression of the creative act can be allayed by contrasting an alternate gentler mode of 'conception' (such as, in Stokes schema, carving) Warren recasts the violent subjective chaos of modelling as central to her modus operandi. Where a female artist like Hepworth caused problems for Stokes' gendered theories of creativity[27], Warren places ideas of female subjectivity front and centre. She reclaims from Stokes the 'violent' subjectivism of the creative processes that his theories proscribe. It would therefore appear that tactility plays a particularly strategic role in Warren's oeuvre. Warren 'politicises' tactility. Instead of exploring the complicated middle ground between alternate modernist legacies, a monotone limbo-land characterised by my exhibition *Sculpture Showroom,* Warren returns to modern sculpture's

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[26] Adrian Stokes saw the return of the carving ideal in the contemporary art of his time as a metaphoric one, rather than necessarily the operation of a specific skillset. Counter-intuitively, the best realisation of Stokes' idealised notion of carving was not to be found in relation to 3-dimensional sculpture at all, but in relation to painting. Tellingly, carving can perhaps best be understood as an analogy for a heightened concrete visuality. Meanwhile, modelling was meant by Stokes to refer to plasticity more generally, rather than applying specifically to modelling materials like clay. Thus a stone sculpture carved in the round could be 'modelled' in Stoke's formulation, as modelling is concerned not with the qualities of a material itself, but with the imposing of a subjectively imagined and preconceived shape onto a material.

[27] Hepworth's gender complicates Stokes' conception of creativity - overturning Stokes' gendering of creativity as a masculine 'wooing' of form from a feminine matter.

tactility in an exuberant high-contrast way. Rather than break down modernist dichotomies Warren actually amplifies them, using gender stereotypes to strategically challenge their assumptions.

In addition to Warren's gendered challenge to modernist ideology I would suggest that her sculptural reconfigurations also assert new possibilities for revisioning sculptural vitalism. Within her work Warren produces a dynamic interplay of form and material through the direct manifestation and fixing of creative energies through a primordial substance - clay. The amazing thing about Warren's modelling is the way she keeps visceral physicality sculpturally present. Simultaneously, her sculpture's visceral physicality is explored as already framed by socially preconceived and often repressed ideas around the female body, such as within pornography:

> Such transgressions into the sphere of the blatantly indecent and intimate are always significant in Rebecca Warren's work: they grant coherence to an artistic venture that not only refuses to shy away from areas that are socially taboo, but makes these an important focus of investigation. This is a woman's view of a pornographised society, in which a direct tension exists between the image of the 'bitch' and the fetishes of chastity and purity. Where the veiling and banishing of nudity simultaneously generates the laying bare and charging with sexual energy that stylises woman as danger and man as beast (Curiger, 2012, p.15)

It seems possible that the vitality of Warren's work is not *only* the voluntary ideal of the sculptor, as manifest through negotiations with process, material and archetype in a Readean sense. I would propose that the vitality of Warren's sculpture is equally the *involuntary outcome* of the objectification of sexual energy through societal psychosexual aggression. Instead of avoiding such problematic forms of vitality Warren engages with them, and I would argue, turns them back on themselves. This turning back of misogynistic energies onto themselves has a correlation with the (not unproblematic) idea of an aggressively feminine power - archaic and anarchic in its source. "Bitch Magic" refers to the title of one of Warrens early works, *Every Aspect of Bitch Magic* (1996), which she reuses as the

title of her 2012 monograph. It is also street slang for “extreme amounts of luck that will enable an unskilled person to win a contest against a highly skilled person” (Curiger, 2012, p.10). Curiger observes that ‘bitch magic’ is a colloquialism that “speaks of the fascination and mysterious power that radiates forth from what is at the same time the most pejorative image of woman” (Curiger, 2012, p.10). Curiger’s claim is that Warren’s “marked sensibility to gender” appropriates the pejorative as well as the mysterious power of gender in a “relaxed and exuberant" way. Warren’s sculptures “celebrate sex and sexuality” in a manner that is both less specific than the term “bitch magic” might allow for, and more powerful (Curiger, 2012, pp. 10-11). The underlying proposition is that “Bitch Magic”, for Warren, is the power of energies - be these sexual, creative, vital - to use stereotypes and clichéd imagery in order to break them open. In doing so Warren takes back the vitality of gendered physicality in its carnal form from the preconceived imaginaries of the ‘pornographers’, both as a re-signified symbolic and a sense of an authentic reclaimed reality.

The most informative aspect about Warren’s work for me is not *directly* her gender politics. Instead it is the way that her gender politics repositions sculpture’s vitality. Warren allows me to consider the way that contemporary forms of vitality need not be so interiorised. ‘Vital images’ exist in Warren’s work in a wider, more strategic and more challenging way. For example, Warren’s tactile engagements through modelling are also an engagement with gendered stereotypes within art history. Furthermore, her vigorous imagery of chaotically modelled sexualised form repositions the archetypal image away from the interior depths of the collective unconscious, proposing that an image’s collectivity can be socially inscribed much nearer to the surface of the everyday. Neither of these things, the readdressing of historical stereotypes or the social inscription of images makes her work any less vital. Rather, I would argue the opposite. Warren’s strategic use of tactile methodologies like modelling and their combination with aggressively

sexualised stereotypes turn modern sculptural vitalism on its head. In doing so Warren breathes life back into sculptural vitality by re-strategising it as part of a more diverse contemporary creative context.

Part 2: Process

In the second part of this chapter I want to consider in more depth the way ideas of sculptural process within contemporary sculpture might also contribute to a revivification of sculptural vitalism. I will do so with reference to the contemporary sculptor, Phyllida Barlow (b.1944) whose process-led activities I argue demonstrate certain affinities with the Read's *Vital Image.* Barlow explicitly says her work returns to something she calls post-war sculpture's "compelling" qualities (Barlow/Fecteau, 2014). She investigates these qualities by means of something she calls 'invented form'. I will consider what Barlow means by invented form and consider my own work in relation to it. I will then explore the way that ideas of figuration and framing in my sculptures negotiate with Barlow's proposition that sculpture as invented form can be understood as something that evades capture by the image, because it is ultimately a radically uncontainable and un-categorisable thing.

In order to explore these ideas I will look not so much to Barlow's sculptures themselves as Barlow's thoughts and words about sculptural process. In a thesis concerned with ideas around sculpture's materiality this might seem contradictory. One reason for using textual sources rather than referring directly to Barlow's work is that, by comparison to the traditional materials used by the sculptors in *The Vital Image*, the spectrum of materials used by Barlow is vast. Similarly, the scale and nature of the relationships between Barlow's work and the spaces in which it is shown are radically different to the scale and nature of the relationships within

post-war sculpture. I am concerned that these differences might overshadow the underlying relationships that I am interested in drawing out between Barlow's work and her stated interest in post-war sculpture.

Barlow's thoughts and ideas are taken from two sources. One is the 2014 Townsend Lecture, given by Barlow at Slade School of Fine Art in November that year. The other is a conversation facilitated by the 2013 Carnegie International curatorial team[28] between Barlow and the sculptor Vincent Fecteau (b.1969), published in BOMB magazine in 2014. Like Barlow, Vincent Fecteau's work is an engagement with open-ended material process. Fecteau reconfigures the organic shapes of cardboard packaging inserts, generating new sculptural form out of these cardboard combinations before unifying the assembled sections with paint. This conversation between Barlow and Fecteau is useful to my discussion because the two artists consider sculptural process from the point of view of their own practical experiences and firsthand negotiations with material and form.

Invented Form

Barlow's art education took place in London in the early 1960s[29]. By then the types of practices that Read was concerned with surveying under his "new rubric, that of vitalism" (Read, 1964, p.162) were just on their way out. The influential tutor George Fullard who taught Barlow at Chelsea had already departed from his earlier work's modelled imagery and form that

[28] The Carnegie International is an international art prize held periodically since 1896 at the Carnegie Museum of Art in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

[29] Barlow's biographical profile on the Royal Academy of Arts website states she studied at Chelsea College of Art, London, between 1960 – 1963 and the Slade School of Art, London, between 1963 – 1966 (https://www.royalacademy.org.uk/art-artists/name/phyllida-barlow-ra). Accessed 9th November 2019 at 15.39.

Figure 17: George Fullard, *The Patriot,* 1959/60, Painted wood, 178 x 215 cm

Figure 18: Pablo Picasso, *Glass of Absinthe,* 1914, painted bronze and perforated tin spoon, 22.5 x 12.7 x 6.4 cm

more closely aligned this work with aesthetic approaches typical of *The Vital Image*. Instead in a work like *The Patriot* from 1959/60 (fig. 17) Fullard assembles found elements such as furniture, a door and a piece of dado rail with painted and cast elements. These painted elements include two portraits, giving the assemblage a figurative identity that lends the work a possible reading as a fragmented interior with two inhabitants, one of whom displays a Union Jack flag. Fullard's work, like that of other sculptors in London at the beginning of the 1960s such as Eduardo Paolozzi and Hubert Dalwood had already moved into proto-pop sensibilities. Their sculpture was sometimes related to 1950s lineages through the continued use of modelled and cast components, but in addition to these they use a greater variety of materials combined with text, collage and popular iconography or graphic motifs. Simultaneous to this, at St Martins school of Art in the early 1960s the so called 'school of Caro', or 'New Generation' sculptors were soon to impact on the art world[30]. Nevertheless, in her conversation with Vincent Fecteau, Barlow says that "…when it comes to invented form - a lot of post-war European sculpture is hideous, ungainly, ugly; but for me… absolutely compelling." (Barlow/Fecteau, 2014). So for Barlow, even though the practices surveyed in *The Vital Image* were already being directly challenged or surpassed by artists tutoring her at art school and active in the wider London art scene in the 1960s, there is nevertheless something she still finds "compelling" about European post-war sculpture more than 50 years later. Might the key to the compelling nature of post-war sculpture be this factor that Barlow's calls "invented form"?

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[30] According to the Tate Gallery website: "New Generation was the title used for a series of exhibitions of painting and sculpture by young British artists held at the Whitechapel Gallery in London in the early 1960s.The second of the surveys in 1965 *New Generation Sculpture* brought to wide public attention the work of Phillip King, together with David Annesley, Michael Bolus, Tim Scott, William Tucker and Isaac Witkin. The term 'new generation' was subsquently generally applied to their work" (https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/n/new-generation-sculpture). Accessed 9th November 2019 at 15.44.

In her conversation with Vincent Fecteau, Barlow locates her idea of invented form in relation to a small sculpture by Picasso, the *Glass of Absinthe* (1914) (fig. 18). The particular qualities of Picasso's sculpture that enable Barlow to call it an invented form she explains as twofold: Firstly, it is an object that does not relate to "mimicry, appropriation, found objects and readymades" (Barlow/Fecteau, 2014). Instead it marks out a sculptural territory that is located within the made - the made object is straightforwardly opposed to the found or readymade object. But this is not the kind of made object that either mimics other objects (such as figurative sculpture) or appropriates their qualities (such as a minimalist sculpture's use of the industrially manufactured standard unit). Instead, Barlow says that invented forms are "un-categorised" (Barlow/Fecteau 2014). I will enlarge on what I think Barlow means by this presently.

Secondly, Barlow says that the *Glass of Absinthe* is "unforgiving in refusing to offer a single optimal view" (Barlow/Fecteau 2014). What Barlow means by this is that the eye and the body must move, or "stalk" around the sculpture, trying to capture multiple images of its reality, in order to build a "sequence of fleetingly experienced images". The problem is these images can be forgotten "as quickly as they are experienced":

> Hence, the tragic loss of that unperceivable totality, which can only be experienced by being there, in real time, in a sculptures own reality - materially, physically and spatially (Barlow/Fecteau, 2014).

The implication of Barlow's statement is that 'being there' is not so simple. In fact, Barlow seems to propose that it might be an impossibility. The quest to 'be there' in the sculptures reality in order to perceive the whole is impossible because the viewer can never perceive the sculptural whole from any one angle. So the quest that Barlow suggests a sculpture forces us to engage in is actually a fruitless one. It is a search for the impossible ideal image of a sculpture's reality that might contain its whole being; a

whole which the sculpture “persists in refusing to offer”(Barlow/Fecteau, 2014). So the stalking must go on, the viewer endlessly searching for the ideal image which the sculpture endlessly refuses. This problem, says Barlow, is compounded by the need to disseminate sculptural form digitally or in print media. Barlow questions the convention through which the photographic image of a sculpture always seeks the best viewpoint, asking why the “most uncomfortable, fragmented, and least attractive” view of a sculpture is considered its “worst view?” (Barlow/Fecteau, 2014)[31].

When I started thinking about these ideas that Barlow and Fecteau raise around a sculpture’s representational uncontainability I wondered if they might relate to some of the ideas I discussed in the second chapter of this commentary. Here I re-contextualised the archetypal representations of *The Vital Image* within the wider semiotic constructs of the assemblage of enunciation. In an assemblage of enunciation meaning is relocated away from ready-made formations such as language or other codified systems of signification towards meanings that are produced by the relations between a variety of factors within the assembly. These relations are not necessarily known about or perceived in advance. Neither are they limited to conscious semantic registers but include somatic feelings or expressions and the ‘non-sensible’ or ineffable qualities generated between objects and perceiving subjects.

Fecteau proposes that it is certain *kinds* of sculpture that are irreducible and uncontainable, whose meanings might perhaps emerge in the kinds of productive relations I mention. But it appears that Fecteau is actually

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[31] I am alert to this problematic, especially in terms of my own project which proposes, like Barlow, that the unique qualities of a sculptural form are not necessarily related to its image. I have not fundamentally addressed this problematic in the photographic documentation of my work. I have however sought to amend it through positioning my work within the wider construct of the matter fiction. I include images of my own work as one element within the broader construct of the matter fiction that includes objects and texts in addition to photographic documentation.

proposing quite a radical category of sculptural object, that might even go beyond the productive relations of an assemblage of enunciation. Barlow enlarges and explores Fecteau's proposition by asking Fecteau whether sculpture isn't "the one visual art form that does not necessarily require sight? As such, does it have the potential to exist as its own physical thing? As you say, can it just be? I long for that" (Barlow/ Fecteau, 2014). Barlow's longing for the sculptural object that "just is" she explains is a longing for an object that is "not likened to this or that as a means to understanding, when no understanding is required" (Barlow/Fecteau 2014). More than simply positioning Barlow and Fecteau's engagement with sculpture in the kinds of somatic and non-sensible registers I have just mentioned, they seem to propose extending the possibility of these somatic registers beyond the necessity for *any kind of understanding at all*, to a place where the sculptural object 'just is'. This is a strange and contradictory place for a sculpture, and Barlow is alert to the contradictions in her proposition. She admits that her making processes are already loaded with certain kinds of images - recollections and appropriations of all the sculptural forms that are already in the world - both historical sculpture and everyday aspects of the world that she describes as "already sculptural" (Barlow/Fecteau 2014). These would seem to bring ready-made meanings to sculptural engagements, precluding a sculpture ever being able to achieve a status of 'just being'. Instead Barlow seems to be enrolling these quite extreme propositions as a way of negotiating with what I might propose as a sculpture's tricky in-between status. Preventing appropriation is impossible, but allowing for appropriation to enter into the work too directly leads to danger. Barlow insists that optimally a work must be released from its origins in the world in order to become an imagined form. To do so it must "arise from action". Barlow's commitment to sculptural process is a commitment to "free" or "release" a work from its origins in the world, enabling a "shape or form to emerge that *cannot be likened to anything*" (Barlow/Fecteau, 2014, my emphasis).

A Diagram of Forces

Freeing a work from the world by releasing it from the bounds of the image (also understood by Barlow to mean appropriation or representation) is quite an interesting idea that I would like to explore a bit more. How is this achieved for Barlow through actions or processes of production? Barlow says that her processes are not any kind of production, but arise from something she calls in her Townsend Lecture a “pessimistic view” of making (Barlow, 2014). By this Barlow explains that she means a way of making that allows things to go wrong - that uses mistakes in order to circumvent more logical processes. In this way Barlow opposes ‘sculpture’ to ‘design’. Sculptural matter and process are opposed to logic and abstract forethought, planning or pre-conceptualisation. This means that for Barlow a sculpture must be able to fail. It must engage the physical parameters of its own being, its physical limits, testing its presence in terms of the fundamental matter-forces that it engages with or strives against. In her lecture Barlow categorises her works in terms of these forces, arranging images of her works alongside headings that when detached from the slides read almost like a piece of concrete poetry:

> floor, ground, store, place / upright, stack, heap, spineless / collapse, break, mend, wrong / measure, organise, enclose / doing, quick, undoing, stretching / drop, weigh, lazy, casual / hold, pull, push, cover / approximate, hot, guide, could be / where / now remember, forget again…(Barlow, 2014).

The interesting thing about these headings is that they enact the contradiction or difficulty that Barlow raises around the sculpture as both apart from the human - the sculpture as an object that might “just be” - and simultaneously connected to the human. Many of them are verbs that describe performed actions, connected with the embodied intentions of the maker. But what I really like is the ambiguity that comes with certain words;

words such as ‘place’, ‘heap’, ‘drop’, ‘enclose’, ‘store’, ‘ground’, ‘hold’ or ‘cover’ can function as both verbs and nouns, describing not only embodied actions *but also* more anonymous places or things. These words help to reinforce the way that Phyllida Barlows' conception of sculpture is ‘in-between’ - not *only* a sense of a performed activity *but also* a ‘concretion’ - as well as a process, force, or operation set in motion by the artist it is a ‘thing’ too. The sculptural ‘thing’ is represented by the images shown on the slides. The processes, forces and operations are represented by the words that accompany the images. Taken together these processes and things form a relationship, described diagrammatically in the slides as a kind of ‘mapping’. Barlow’s descriptions of forces position the sculptural things in certain relationships to the world. They redraw the boundaries of sculptural objects as a zone of connection. The descriptive headings seem to hint at some of the ways that objects might negotiate their ambiguous relationships with other worlds of meaning outside their formal limits.

These ideas can also relate Barlow’s interests back to the organicist preoccupations present within the art making of the modern period that were influential upon Read’s own theories of organic vitalism. As such they indicate certain continuities between Read’s theories and Barlow’s approaches. These organicist preoccupations can be found within a famous biological text by D’Arcy Wentworth Thompson from 1917, *On Growth and Form.* This is a book which David Thistlewood describes in his own book on Herbert Read, *Form and Formlessness,* as being of “orthodox importance at the ICA” (Thistlewood, 1984, p.127)[32]. Thistlewood demonstrates the way that Read saw an extensive consistency between Thompson’s ideas of biological growth and the development of artistic imagery in terms of a ‘diagram of forces’. Thistlewood juxtaposes within Thompson’s original text

[32] The ICA is the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London, founded by Roland Penrose, Peter Watson, Herbert Read, Peter Gregory, Geoffrey Grigson and E. L. T. Mesens in 1947. Read was a central contributor during the institute’s early years, curating several exhibitions and delivering numerous lectures during its first decade.

a reading that is held within the quote in parenthesis, in order to illustrate how Thompson's biological constructs were adopted and applied by Read and his colleagues within the visual arts:

> The form, then, of any portion of matter (of a work of art)… and the changes of form which are apparent in its movements and growth (in its development) may in all cases alike be described as due to the action of force. In short the form of an object is a 'diagram of force', in this sense, at least, that from it we can judge or deduce the forces that are acting or have acted upon it: in this strict and particular sense it is a diagram - in the case of a solid (in the case of a finished work of art) of the forces which have been impressed upon it when its conformation was produced… in the case of a liquid (a work in progress)… of the forces which are, for the moment acting upon it to restrain or balance its own inherent mobility (Thompson, quoted in Thistlewood, 1984, p. 128).

The implication of this hypothesis - that a work of art may be conceived as a diagram of forces, and that in the formation of the work these forces are mobile - has an implication that is relevant not only to Read's organic vitalist conception of sculptural practice, but also to the way that Barlow speaks of her own work. These implications are that the execution of the work should be direct, not overly planned through design or pre-conception. The development of a work is process dominant. Creative activity is not determined by standards, pre-set goals or criteria, but established as the work progresses. Barlow draws out this distinction through ideas of "showing" versus ideas of "telling". Telling, says Barlow is "embedded in things such as the title, and relates to the necessity to explore the work through a deconstructive trail that leads to an answer… works that are subject-led, whose ideologies - political, autobiographical, social commentary - tell you what they are about rather than allowing that to be discovered" (Barlow/Fecteau, 2014). Showing by contrast is usually more internally manifest, and made apparent particularly within a sculpture's formal qualities:

> Is it horizontal, vertical, suspended, leaning, small, large, high up, low down, plinthed, loose, contained, open, hidden, outside, or inside? And what do it's other attributes say? Its materials? Is it

> designed, studio built, factory built, hand made, manufactured, figurative, appropriated, non-representational, familiar, unfamiliar, readymade, new or old? (Barlow/Fecteau, 2014).

Barlow recognises that these qualities of showing and telling are not mutually exclusive. However, Barlow says that the thing that ties them together is the invented form, and the invented form is achieved through process. Process foregrounds that way that, for Barlow: “At the heart of all the processes is something close to chaos… a state of never quite knowing what is going to happen and how the work can and should develop” (Barlow/Fecteau, 2014).

Figuring and Figuration

In her 2014 Townsend Lecture Barlow says that she doesn’t “have ideas” (Barlow, 2014). As I have just been exploring Barlow’s ideas in some detail this statement is clearly not absolutely the case. But the statement comes in the context of considerations of sculptural process, such as those I have just been discussing. I'm interested in these considerations as they have an instinctive truth for me too. Process for Barlow, as for myself, means that whatever ideas Barlow *might* have are nothing, meaning they can come to nothing, without physical or corporeal factors such as material, process and sensation. Simon O’Sullivan, in his book *Art Encounters Deleuze and Guattari* (2006) notes that a sculpture might be paradigmatic of all art in the sense of it being “an assemblage of elements in the world” (p.36) that work with other factors or subjectivities in the world in order to allow different affects to arise. But in order for this to happen, sculpture must bring some kind of order or control to the chaotic forces - the artist’s sense of not knowing or not controlling - that Barlow and Fecteau identify at the heart of process. Might what Barlow and Fecteau mean by invented form be precisely this sense of a sculptural figuring - the

kinds of signifying potential that sculptural process can bring to chaotic forces?

I would like to think about how my own work figures chaotic forces through process. I propose to do this firstly by considering how my own approaches to sculptural form and process differ from Barlow's concept of the invented form. Barlow says that invented form must avoid mimicry, appropriation, found objects and readymade images. One problematic departure for my work from Barlow's idea of the invented form would consequently seem to relate to ideas of figuration. My own work often contains figurative allusion or suggestion. However, I don't think that the figurative associations in my work are a simple case of mimicry. They are not directly copying or appropriating existing figurative formations in the world. Figuration in my work is the outcome of a process, not its starting point or even necessarily its aim. I never set out for my work to represent something in particular, although it may end up doing so. This would not seem so very different from Barlow's aims for the invented form.

Many of my own sculpture's relationships with figuration are also more ambivalent or coded than straightforward. This ambivalence can sometimes be amplified by the double meaning within some of my titles. For example the title of my work *Turning Arch* (2018) describes the physical nature of the sculpture's arched structure - a doorway or portal which also seems to be a giant pair of legs that are frozen mid turn. However the word 'arch' can also convey a sense of amused superiority. Likewise the title *The Couple* (2018), refers to the humdrum fact that the upright nature of the sculptural lampposts seem to be similar and connected, but could equally refer to a marriage, romantic or sexual relationship. These titles are both physical descriptions and a suggestion towards possible interpretative frameworks for the objects. A tendency to both describe and suggest using titling is shared by Barlow, the titles of whose installations - *Siege, Cast, Folly,*

Demo, Tryst, Mix, Set, Dock, Hoard, Scree, Brink, Rig, Tip - work in a similar double coded way. Although the emphasis within Barlow's titles are on physical structures and working processes allusive suggestion through titling is a quality of 'figuration' we share. Titling is our way of showing and telling at the same time.

Perhaps the figurative departure of my work in relation to Barlow's arises from wider ideas around anthropomorphism then? This idea can be expanded through something that Barlow describes in an interview in *Sculpture Magazine* as her desire to make work "free from association" (Barlow, 2018). However, Barlow speculates that association is such an ingrained human capability that making an object that "refutes association" (Barlow, 2018) may not be possible. So rather than describing an absolute distinction between the associative qualities of my own and Barlow's work, I am describing a difference in intention. That is, where Barlow says her intention is to guard against association, particularly in its anthropomorphic guise, only allowing association to pop up in ways she describes as "surprising, absurd and off-guard" (Barlow, 2018) my own intention is to sometimes exploit or dramatise certain figurative associations. Sometimes I deliberately anthropomorphise even when the form is not so directly or obviously connected to a figure. This might be seen in works in the exhibition *Sculpture Showroom*, where a twisting upright sculpture towards the front of the exhibition area I understood as a sculpture of a 'leg' (see p.56), and a see-through grid like vessel I saw as a 'torso' (see p.57). Particularly in the latter case, the associations were archetypal - my reading of the sculpture as a torso related to vessel-like form, and the archetypal associations a vessel has with a body. A vessel is often described in bodily terms; for example having a foot, a mouth and a body.

Framing the un-categorisable

I think this simple difference in intention around figurative connotation indicates both some interesting differences and some important similarities between the way my own sculptures represent sculptural process and the way that Barlow's do. The differences arise out of some of the specific ways that my work uses figuration to generate encounters between known representations and unknown or indeterminate ones. The similarities arise out of both Barlow's and my own engagement with her idea of the invented form. In the last part of this chapter I would like to consider in more detail how these differences and similarities operate.

In this project I have brought together groups of sculptures within framing constructs. Specifically I used a plaster and jute scrim coated room in *Sculpture Showroom* and a large plinth like floor structure in *The Language of Flowers.* In the case of the room I was interested in the way the plaster and jute provided a sculptural analogue for the hessian sometimes found on the walls of galleries, as in certain images of exhibitions I had been looking at from the 1950s and 1960s. In the case of the large floor plinth in *The Language of Flowers*, the structure was made from Orientated Strand Board (or OSB - a type of chipboard) overlain with plaster and jute scrim. The fabric weave of the jute and the shallow depth of the 9mm thick OSB panels immediately brought to my mind a rug or carpet. I enhanced this reading by fabricating a 'fringe' for the 'rug' from left over OSB (see pages 27 - 38) .

Both these approaches exploited the figurative connotations the framing motifs invoked; as rugs, carpets and wall coverings. In exploiting the fabric weave of the jute a specific kind of unplanned figuration occurred, allowing

the sculptures to be read as if they are ‘actors’ in some kind of ‘scene’ or ‘setting’. What or where the scene *is* precisely, or who or what role the actors *play* is for me not actually that important. My emphasis is more on the use of the framing device itself as a formal motif. Framing allows for compositional groupings or arrangements. Within these groupings the individual parts achieve a certain sense of consistency, timbre and relational purpose. Simply defined, the framing devices provide some basic compositional parameters that help group individual parts in order to generate relationships that form sculptural wholes. Explained in more specific detail, what this means in an exhibition such as *Sculpture Showroom* is that I bring together sculptures that seem to represent something known; whereby a certain kind of sculptural figuration such as a body, a chair or a light provide points of significatory access or traction within the arrangement. These figurations are grouped alongside other kinds of forms whose figuration is more ambiguous, not defined or unknown. I arrange these known and unknown sculptural forms within an overall framing that brings together individual parts in a way that seems to enhance rather than resolve their uncertain meanings and relations.

This does not seem to be a dissimilar territory to that which Barlow negotiates. This territory seems to be one of suggestion, proposition and counter-proposition, where manifest and undeniable sculptural presence is also characterised by speculation, failure, refusal or a dissolution of meaning. I think whatever the precise similarities and differences in method and approach between my sculpture’s and Barlow’s, I can really relate to these qualities of proposition and dissolution in Barlow’s work. Going further, I might suggest that process in Barlow’s work could be considered analogous to the kinds of framing devices I use in my own. It is only when Barlow engages objects and materials in sculptural processes that they become active. Process frames what Barlow describes as all the sculptural forms already in the world within a specific ontological and historical set of

activities, considerations and perspectives that remodel them in terms of the category of object she calls an invented form. Whether framing is understood more literally (as in my case) or more obliquely (as in Barlow's), in both of our practices it involves engaging with Barlow's category of the invented form. Barlow is exceptionally articulate about her work, but many of her statements acknowledge the impossibility of really articulating something more fundamental about sculpture. This relates to sculpture's ontological slipperiness and uncertainty in her project. The category of object that Barlow calls an invented form is exemplary of this; paradoxically it can only be categorised by way of its un-categorisable qualities.

In terms of my wider project, these contemporary conceptions of sculpture as unknown or un-categorisable seem to revision Readean vitalist paradigms. They shift the location of the mystery, what Read describes in *The Vital Image* as the "artist's inner sense of numinosity or mystery" (Read, 1964, p. 212) from the artist to the *sculpture itself*. Sculptural process for Barlow is a mechanism for figuring a sculpture's irreducible present-ness - perhaps even its vitality (although she never uses this word) - in this latter sense. Process brings a sculpture to life in a way that is specific to the singularity of its being. Its vitality has no image other than its own - and this is anyway not an image but a kind of physical manifestation - an un-categorisable physical ability to, as Barlow puts it, "just be" (Barlow/Fecteau, 2014). Movements into such realms can lead to a fundamental uncertainty, not about whether sculptures exist as such - both Barlow and I are both absolutely affirmative in that regard - but whether and how they can be adequately articulated or properly known by an agency outside of their own irreducible reality (such as a viewer or an artist). My own approach to sculpture responds positively to Barlow's because, like hers, it sometimes opposes a sculpture's manifest physical presence to an artist or viewer's thoughts about it. The challenge that a sculpture's physical presence poses to thought is really an affirmation and a

proposal. This suggests that contemporary sculpture, when realised in accordance with the un-categorisable qualities of invented form, might only *really* become vital on its own terms. Sculpture, as invented form, 'comes to life' when its force is physically and undeniably present; but only when its forceful presence is something that is not yet 'known'; that cannot be explained away or categorised by any other means.

Conclusion

In this conclusion I provide a summary of my enquiry chapter by chapter along with some initial findings, before going on to revisit my research questions and the construct of the matter fiction outlined in the introduction.

Summary Findings

This research project set out to negotiate between Herbert Read's vitalist aesthetics and more recent aesthetic understandings arising from vital materialism. The aim of these negotiations has been to both revivify the symbolic imaginaries of Read's *Vital Image* through contemporary vital materialist ideas and to give vital materialism an imaginary valence through the symbolism, tone or qualities associated with *The Vital Image.* I have achieved this through adopting strategies in my studio practice that have enabled me re-investigate vitalist ideas within sculpture in light of recent theoretical developments within new materialism, whilst maintaining a commitment to the legacies and imaginaries of modern sculpture's vitalism.

During the course of my investigations I have found that care is needed when outlining delineations between modern sculptural and contemporary materialist approaches to vitalism. Modern sculpture's subjective agencies cannot be clearly and cleanly opposed to contemporary vital materialism's expanded agencies. Certain aspects of Herbert Read's vitalist aesthetic theories, such as his palpable methodologies, were focussed on expanding artistic agency through sculptural materiality. His interest in Alfred North Whitehead's process philosophies also anticipated more contemporary engagements with sculptural process. Therefore instead of working on the basis of a clearly defined dichotomy between a modern or subjectively oriented and a contemporary material or object oriented vitalism my project

has been to negotiate the intersections between these two approaches. My practical, theoretical and creative responses to modern and contemporary vitalism have aimed to draw out relationships, differences and similarities, rather than construct clear ideological boundaries or operate within over-simplified historical definitions.

In spite of these complex continuities and grey areas I have nevertheless discovered certain important distinctions between modern and contemporary approaches to vitalism. Within my research I have related these to a change in emphasis between the role and capacities of the artistic subject, especially the artist's unconscious, in developing sculptural form, when compared with the role and capacities of other kinds of agencies. Where modern sculptural vitalism emphasised the artist's subjective penetration of form and material in order to recover what Read called 'images' or 'icons' - "plastic symbols of the artist's inner sense" (Read, 1964, p.212) - a contemporary vitalist approach is slightly different. Contemporary vitalism's emphasis is on expanded and heterogenous ideas of 'life' within matter distributed at large; what Deleuze and Guattari called "a material vitalism that doubtless exists everywhere" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, p.411). In my practice based research I have tried to draw out this shift in emphasis. I have used modelling materials such as plaster to draw on ideas of plasticity. These rework post-war sculptural engagements with subjective expression in terms of a more operative or procedural idiom. For example, I have used studio methodologies such as casting to translate singular forms inspired by aspects of post-war sculpture's imaginaries and approaches into serial assemblies. I have arranged these assemblies using non-subjective ideas like chance or forces such as gravity, as well as more conscious reflective engagements. Thirdly, I have used ideas of framing and fictioning in order to contextualise individual works within larger sculptural wholes, and

sculptural wholes in relation to broader material, historical or social imaginaries through the construct I call a matter fiction.

Chapter Summaries

In **Section 1, *Documentation of Artworks*,** the sculptural forms that emerged from these negotiations between modern and contemporary vitalist approaches were presented in the form of photographic documentation of three exhibitions carried out in the second year of my research project. Additional practice-based research has been presented within this thesis in the form of three pieces of creative writing that reflect upon and enlarge these sculptural works.

Section 2, *Historical and Critical Commentary*, presented sculptural activity, the studio and the exhibition as sites within which modernist and contemporary vitalist contexts can be renegotiated and remodelled.

> **Chapter one, *Methodological and contextual frameworks*,** provided (in part 1) the methodological and (in part 2) the contextual surveys relevant to my enquiry.
>
> **Chapter 2 , *Situating The Vital Image,*** explored approaches to vitalism within Herbert Read's work and within wider post-war contexts.
>
> - Part 1 was a historical contextualisation of *The Vital Image* in relation to Read's vitalist aesthetics and the thoughts of those who influenced it, especially Henri Bergson, Alfred North Whitehead and Carl Jung.
> - Part 2 examined the role played by the unconscious in post-war sculpture, comparing psychoanalytical and schizoanalytical approaches to the unconscious. This

chapter sought to open up *The Vital Image* through some basic functions within Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy such as the assemblage of enunciation. It re-positioned the archetypal imagery of *The Vital Image* within a complex, multiple and playful formation, allowing me to speculatively re-define it. I was able to re-appropriate it within the terms of my own work, responding to its archetypal imagery no longer as 'proof' of a deep unconscious reality, but as a fictional construct arising out of the mutable relations between material, form and the artist.

Chapter three, *Remodelling The Vital Image,* explored the way that speculative re-interpretations of *The Vital Image* might be built upon through my studio processes, materials and methodologies. This chapter repositioned my studio, its materials and operations away from the passive notion of a modernist studio as a container for the will or vision of the modern artist.

- Part 1 compared two photographic sources; one documenting Giacometti's studio by the magnum photographer Robert Liberman and one documenting my studio by the artist Lorna Macintyre. Macintyre's photograph introduced the idea of latent agency. Here I speculated on the way the studio itself, its materials and operations, might play a role in determining the activities that take place within it. I then drew upon the theorist Stephen Shaviro to extend this idea of latent agency in relation to an idea he calls 'alien vitality'. Alien vitality is a strange form of agency that exists within tools and operations; it is the uncanny tendency of things to appear 'alive' in excess of their ordinary qualities.

- Part 2 dramatised this idea of an excessive alien vitality, exploring it in a piece of creative writing called *A Description of an Exercise.* Here, rather than the agency of the studio lying principally with the artists intention, the studio set the candidate a number of tasks for them to carry out in order to manifest new sculptural form.

Chapter four, *Contemporary Sculpture's Vital Materialism,* was concerned with the way that Herbert Read's vitalist schemas might be revisioned with reference to the work of the contemporary sculptors Rebecca Warren and Phyllida Barlow, as well as my own practice based research.

- Part 1 revisioned Read's notion of the palpable, a sculptural methodology based upon touch that allows the modern sculptor to explore the expressive capabilities of form and material apart from the visual. This idea was explored through a material break-down of the optical within my own exhibition *Sculpture Showroom,* which sought to extend and complicate opposed ideas of opticality and tactility within modern sculpture. I did so through a consideration of Rebecca Warren's engagement with gendered histories and imaginaries arising from modernist histories around modelling. Rather than being based in unconscious archetypes, Warren's strategic use of such histories revision palpability within her work as a social and historical construct.
- Part 2 explored ideas of sculptural process in relation to the sculptor Phyllida Barlow's work. Barlow's commitment to sculptural process allows the sculptor to develop works that are unknown in advance. Barlow expands upon ideas of sculptural process in terms of something she calls invented

form. Invented form is a sculptural quality which cannot be articulated in other ways. I compared my own work with Barlow's idea of the invented form in order to establish whether it could be used as a basis for revisioning vitality in sculpture. I proposed that through engaging with Barlow's invented form, contemporary sculptural vitalism can be re-articulated as immanent to a sculptures own 'un-categorisable' reality. Life within sculpture is revisioned as life on a sculpture's own terms, no longer necessarily reliant on an artist or viewer's intentionality.

Residual Cultures

My research question asked whether *The Vital Image* might be considered a residual culture? It considered how my studio work might set up encounters between modern sculpture's residual cultures and contemporary vitalist ideas, and how such encounters might lead to the emergence of new kinds of form. In my contextual framework I explained how residual cultures are understood by David Burrows and Simon O'Sullivan in their book *Fictioning.* Burrows and O'Sullivan say that according to Marxist theorist Raymond Williams, residual cultures are the left overs from previous hegemonies within contemporary culture. These left overs might offer alternatives or might even "challenge… the dominant culture" (Burrows/O'Sullivan, 2019, p.86). Residual cultures are one aspect of a number of factors that contribute to an idea they call mythopoesis. Mythopoesis in my own project has been investigated in accordance with Burrows and O'Sullivan's account as situating the artist within a wider field of interaction. I have investigated the way that sculpture in my project can be considered a collective enunciation that crosses temporal and zoomorphic boundaries. My sculptural use of the residual challenge to the 'dominant culture', as Williams calls it, has been less a critique and more a

methodology for generating new and different kinds of forms. In responding to *The Vital Image* as a mythopoetic collective enunciation one factor I have tried to balance in this project are the gains to be had in understanding it in terms of its historical context, versus the gains to be had from treating it more freely, imaginatively or speculatively. Rather than seeing *The Vital Image* purely as a historical entity I have also tried to develop ways of working with it as an active collection of elements. This has entailed proposing *The Vital Image* as a resource full of ideas, approaches, images, forms, people, values and so on, that can act upon me and my project in different ways. In drawing upon *The Vital Image's* resources I have not necessarily appropriated its histories wholesale but allowed them to enter into my project partially or speculatively, remodelling their forms and precedents in a variety of ways.

The outcome of this remodelling has not necessarily been to depart from what might typically be understood as modern sculpture's post war formats (a format typified by medium sized figurative, semi-figurative or organic-abstract sculptural objects, as surveyed in *The Vital Image*). Instead, the way my project has contributed to new understandings and developments within contemporary sculpture might be better considered a re-investment, re-invigoration and a re-articulation of such post-war vitalist formats within a new set of contexts. As such it fits within a wider 'meta-modern' trajectory within contemporary art first formulated by Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker in 2010 (Vermeulen/van den Akker, 2010). Metamodernism is characterised by the re-engagement and re-activation of past, sometimes obsolete, qualities or forms. The worlds proposed by artists identified by Vermeulen and van den Akker in their essay *Notes on Metamodernism*, (2010) are described as "unsuccessful negotiations" (p.11) because they can never be one thing or another, but exist in a constant state of oscillation between poles such as irony and sincerity, modern and postmodern, the humdrum and the mysterious.

The motif I have used in my own project to negotiate between past and present is the idea of sculpture's vitality. I have resurrected ideas of modern sculptural vitality (such as Herbert Read's own theories of vitalist aesthetics or organic vitalism) from relative obscurity within contemporary sculptural discourse. I have sought to recondition these ideas in light of more contemporary considerations arising from vital materialism. I have represented these reconditioned ideas around sculptural vitality in the form of new material instantiations. In fact, as mythopoetic, I *do* see these instantiations as expanded; but the expansions I am interested in have more to do with depth than breadth. The kind of forms I have been interested in generating in this project are layered ones, that engage with nested temporalities, materialities and concepts in generating their new enunciations. These new mythopoetic collective enunciations (more traditionally called sculptures) are characterised by a certain density that I hope rewards close engagement and reading. My hope is that the sculptural work I have produced in this project re-negotiates and re-interprets, in light of contemporary contexts such as mythopoesis, metamodernism and vital materialism, the density and complexity, if not the encyclopaedic volume, of Read's own *Vital Image*.

Matter Fictioning

The difficulties I have encountered in my project have tended to relate to the diverse approaches to vitalism within the fields of art history, critical theory and contemporary sculptural practice. Vitalism is a concept that can be used in a range of different ways and from a variety of different perspectives. Contemporary sculpture's vitality in particular can no longer be clearly identified in terms of a set of defining images, symbols or characteristics. Therefore I have found understanding the means through

which contemporary sculpture might be termed vitalist to be a complex task. This has not been helped by the dearth of literature on the relationships between contemporary vitalist theories and contemporary sculptural practice. I have had to extrapolate from the existing art theoretical literature, such as in the work of Simon O'Sullivan or Stephen Zepke in order to apply their explicit or implicit vitalist ideas to contemporary sculptural practice. Equally, although modern sculpture's vitalism by comparison is relatively well researched, it is by no means a self-contained body of knowledge. One authority on the subject, Olivar Botar, has observed that a history of twentieth century neo-vitalism is "urgently in need of being written" (Botar, 2011, p.18). As such a history has not yet been forthcoming I have had to read widely and join the dots from numerous sources in order to develop my field of investigation.

I chose to gain purchase on these problems in a particular way in my practice based research. As I indicate in my introduction, I adopted a concept I call a matter fiction to describe the way that within my research, materials, objects, texts and processes assemble into composite entities. Sometimes this might occur quite formally, as in an exhibition or in this thesis, and sometimes more informally, as in the studio. Sometimes this idea might be understood though a simple mechanism. For example by expanding and reframing a sculptural activity textually (as in *A Description of an Exercise* in part two of the commentary) I have found that the matter fiction has helped me to situate ideas from outside sculpture (in this case contemporary vital materialist theory) in relation to sculptural histories, materials, processes and activities. My focus on the matter fiction as a sculpturally situated construct is slightly distinct from other possible modes of fictioning explored by Burrows and O'Sullivan in their book *Fictioning,* which (generally speaking) focusses on more performative or textual approaches. The matter fiction, by way of extending and contributing to

Burrows and O'Sullivan's project, is a particular kind of fictioning practice that focusses instead on material instantiations.

The development of my practice in this project through the model of the matter fiction has been informed by the way that sculptural vitality is revisioned in the work of Rebecca Warren and Phyllida Barlow. Where Rebecca Warren repositions the vitality of her tactile material engagements within socially constructed (especially gendered) sculptural histories, Phyllida Barlow by contrast seeks a particular kind of impersonal autonomy for sculpture. She repositions sculptural vitality as immanent to a sculpture's own reality, existing regardless of the intentions, desires or social location of its makers or viewers. Although Warren and Barlow's alternative positions might seem contradictory - with one emphasising social construction and the other a relinquishing of artistic and social structuring to open ended material process - what both artists help to inform is a re-articulation and re-prioritising of a peculiarly vitalist set of histories and capabilities for contemporary sculpture. They both return to modernist ideas around the irreducible presence and the autonomous agency of sculpture, but do so in new ways. Sculpture's particular capabilities are predicated within Warren and Barlow's work upon the idea that there are complex relations *immanent* to the dynamic of a sculptural practice that operate, articulate or are articulated in multiple ways. These immanent sculptural relations inform the way that, in my project, agency or intentionality is extended beyond the individual artist, or even in certain cases, beyond the human.

The Lives of Sculptures

Historically, the idea of vitality within sculpture was also an engagement with ideas of its life. For me, during the course of this research project, the presence and agency of particularly sculptural forms of life have remained

instinctive and central to my own studio processes. However, the context and manner in which ideas of sculptural life might become active or relevant within my practice has shifted and developed during the course of my project.

At the outset of my project, when I thought about what it was that makes a sculpture in my studio a sculpture, as opposed to some other accumulation of material that is yet-to-become-a-sculpture, I would often refer back to qualities that might traditionally be described as ‘presence’. I defined this as a sculptural artefact’s taking on of a singular or concrete identity. As a sculpture progresses in my studio it seems to move towards these qualities of animate singularity by slowly accruing to itself some portion of this greater thing in the world that can be described generically as its ‘life’. During the course of my research project I explored, in relation to histories of modern sculpture, how such a notion of a sculpture’s life was commonly understood as a factor that set sculpture apart - a special kind of object with special kinds of capabilities. I investigated the way the narrative of the qualities intrinsic to a modern sculptural life was key to certain Bergson and Whitehead inflected strands within modernist thought, that in turn were essential to understanding Read’s aesthetic philosophies. In my studio, my interest in contemporary sculptural practice’s material vitalism has not been to refute this narrative of life within sculpture, but instead to find ways to extend and deepen it; in the words of Deleuze and Guattari to “descend from the strata to the deeper assemblage within which we are held” (1988, p.161).

As this research project has progressed, extending and deepening ideas of the lives within sculpture has involved working out both the distinctions and the relations between the capabilities of sculpture itself and my own capabilities. I have come to view sculpture as a technology, in the precise

sense of that word. Sculpture *is* technology[33] - the study or development of an art or craft. Sculptural technologies, as I now understand them, are living technologies[34]. They develop methods and processes of production that extend the self; they cause the self to enter into relations with the nonorganic living forces of others. These others might be materials, or they might be something more complex, composite, historically located or even occluded. All these qualities might then come to be associated with the autonomous, animate, nonorganic living form that is sculptural 'life'.

In articulating my sculptural practice in this thesis by means of the matter fiction I have tried to re-present and re-contextualise the way I have come to understand sculptural life as the aesthetic development of living relations with nonorganic others. Specifically, I have sought to communicate the way that my practical studio process and its allied theoretical, historical or aesthetic considerations become active, animated and alive by negotiating between Read's *Vital Image* and contemporary vitalist considerations. Developing my sculptural project within a construct I call a matter fiction has helped me to remodel this complex array of vitalist positions, perspectives and relations with others both human and nonhuman, historical and contemporary, in an open-ended, imaginative and experimental manner. It has helped me to communicate my own vitalist sculptural commitments whilst providing room for other voices - other organic and nonorganic lives, agencies and beings. Rather than aiming for closure it therefore seems fitting to leave the last words to some of these

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[33] The Oxford dictionary locates the etymology of the word technology within a compound formed from the ancient Greek word 'tekhne' meaning art or craft and 'logia', meaning to study.

[34] As mentioned previously, according to Heidegger, in ancient Greece art was "simply called techne". For Heidegger the "realm of art" is "akin to the essence of technology… and fundamentally different from it", because "the more questioningly we ponder the essence of technology, the more mysterious the essence of art becomes". Art, understood in the terms I call a 'living technology' could, I propose, be understood in this dual regard; a project that attempts to questioningly use art as 'techne'; the art or craft of liberating objects from our clear grasp of them. (Heidegger, 1977, pp 34-35).

other voices, agencies and beings. These beings, *Thing One* and *Thing Two* might be considered the voice of the matter fiction itself, that speak on behalf of my research one more time in the postscript that follows.

Postscript

Thing One: *It is interesting now that these descriptions are nearly over we should be discussing their nature as open-ended… Surely it is no coincidence that this interest in avoiding closure should coincide with a paradigm shift in understanding physical systems as themselves open - no longer isolated from flows of matter and energy that move through them, but as dynamic systems?*

Thing Two: *Exactly. After all, it is the process of flux, of chaotic repetition that leads to self-organising phenomena in a system - such as the sensitivity of chemical systems to small fluctuations during self assembly. Such systems are known as bioids or non-organic open systems capable of generalised Darwinian evolution.*

Thing One: *Are you suggesting that there may be some kind of spontaneous ordering system intrinsic to the dynamic of all physical systems?*

Thing Two: *It has been quite popular for a while now to describe nonlinear flows of matter and energy as spontaneously generating machinelike assemblages when internal or external pressures reach critical levels. These non-linear flows have been generalised as the machinic phylum. The idea of the machinic phylum is to indicate a single process describing the spontaneous generative capabilities of all living and nonliving phylogenetic lineages.*

Thing One: *But what are the use of such general descriptions to us sculptors? Surely these models have limited application in the kinds of realities we inhabit in our studios?*

Thing Two: *Perhaps we might best understand them as fictions. And they should also be understood in relation to historical structures. An entity is not simply a collage of states of matter, but folded layers of different lineages combined together through time - The machinic phylum describes only the de-stratified non-linear flows of matter-force immanent to a system - the appearance of a system may be actualised through much more stable historical processes of stratification.*

Thing One: *Such as the generation of a mineral like gypsum from seawater through evaporation?*

Thing Two: *And its subsequent deposition within geological strata, yes. But stratification does not only apply to geological processes. Any sphere of reality may be defined in terms of flows of matter and energy and the reservoirs driving these flows. At any given moment in time portions of these flows will be involved in any number of actively self organising processes; other portions of flows will have sedimented into more or less stable structures, but because these states are neither irreversible nor exclusive we can speak of the various components in terms of the degrees of stratification they exhibit.*

Thing One: *It sounds as if it might be possible to apply these descriptions to exercises in our studios, to determine the various flows of matter-force and the degrees of stratification they display within sculptural operations?*

Thing Two: *To apply a sort of 'wisdom of the rocks' to sculptural operations… Intuitively this may be the case. Although as a matter of fact it might be necessary to determine how such a wisdom of the rocks might relate to pre-established, or stratified ideas of sculptural practice. After all, what is the use of consolidating pre-existing interpretations of artistic knowledge that lead to pre-determined outcomes?*

Thing One: *What do you mean?*

Thing Two: *It is a commonplace within studio or artisanal practice to use combinations of instinct and empirical know-how collected through ideas of canonical intelligence in order to create synergistic combinations that 'spontaneously' become more than the sum of their parts. Allowing a material's imperfections or accidents to have a say in the final form, mostly through sensual interactions with materials and processes… An artist working in an artisanal way could claim to have developed a special sensitivity to the phylum, tracking machinic effects through sensual knowledge.*

Thing One: *And what is wrong with this, why would this lead to pre-determined outcomes? Surely the opposite would be the case?*

Thing Two: *The problem arises in as much as a machinic interpretation of sculptural practice is strongly bound to its attractor.*

Thing One: *This jargon! Please say what you mean!*

Thing Two: *What I mean is that ideas of artisanal or sensual knowledge have had a historical tendency to become idealised, with the artist believing that their special function is to uncover these ideal forms of knowledge. The artist may believe for example that particular forms were already hidden within rocks, or within other more ambient phenomena, taking the special talents of the artist - their genius for example, or their special skills of discernment or craft to free them. Alternatively they might believe that images could be mined ready-made from the depths of their unique artistic subjectivities and arranged holistically into ready-made gestalts…*

Thing One: *…when what is actually needed is a machine that will unbind sculptural operations from these idealisations. Sensual or artisanal knowledge, or skills of discernment, or artistic subjectivities need to be re-interpreted as non-essentialist, meaning contingent to actual entities - bodies, processes, materials and histories. Practical exercises will need to be developed which use sensual, artisanal or subjective knowledge in less stratified ways - capable of de-stratifying by pushing knowledge away from idealised forms towards these new machinelike solutions!*

Thing Two: *Correct. And these exercises, we both know that they need to use sensual knowledge merely as a catalyst, allowing knowledge to be redefined non-organically, and to modify its destiny in open ended ways. Exercises that understand that the corporeal realities of sculptural operations are themselves mutable - understanding that their materials, processes and bodies interact automatically, quasi-autonomously, in order to carry out the exercises. These corporeal realities are plastic assemblies that depend not on some external givens but on the internal dynamics of the formations (aka sculptures) that arise out of them. Therefore, we claim just one thing; our sculptures might be understood only as a collection of heterogenous components. These do not encode any hierarchy, but symbolise only their own mutability, plasticity and transformation, operating within and operated upon by forces and images alike within more or less open systems of configuration.*

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