

I will begin this paper by giving an overview of Irit Rogoff's text, *Looking Away: Participations in Visual Culture*, which examines spectatorship in galleries, and then I will move on to explaining how I think it relates to my own studio practice.

In her text Rogoff explains how through the process of 'looking away' we, 'produce for ourselves an alternative mode of taking part in culture in which we affect a creative *bricolage* of artworks and spaces ... that break down the dichotomies of objects and viewers'. (Rogoff, 2005: 133) She goes on: 'These thoughts chart the beginning of an inquiry into the possibilities that exhibition spaces might provide to accommodate the proliferation of performative acts by which audiences shift themselves from being *viewers* to *participants*,' (Rogoff, 2005: 122) Furthermore she points out, in a gallery context, breaks in attention do not automatically mean shallower thought. For Rogoff inattention provides the potential for rhizomatic networks in place of hierarchical ones. Her premise also references Deleuze's horizontal thought and philosophy of the event. Deleuze's horizontality (stemming from Nietzsche) posits there are only subjectivities or differences in the world. There is no objective 'good' value as in Plato's vertical philosophy. 'The vertical axis of objective "truth" is thus overturned by Nietzsche and Deleuze in favour of the horizontal axis of "values" ... the vertical axis embodies what is entrenched and relatively unchanging, whereas the horizontal axis is always in flux'. (Lechte, 199: 103)

It is these two ideas of subjectivity and flux that are key to Rogoff's 'Looking Away'. Firstly she suggests that we look at art in various forms of collectivity and in the process produce new forms of relations of *viewers* and *spaces* rather than relations of *viewers* and *objects*, thereby echoing Deleuze in his accounts of subjectivities and differences. Secondly, in her descriptions, movement and flux are recurring themes. 'Looking away' is by implication a dynamic act distinct from the traditionally static values associated with standing still in front of single artworks while 'beholding' them for long durations. It is both dynamic in its physicality i.e. the action of moving one's head around and about, but also in its performative intent i.e. the will to fragment and dissect exhibition spaces while navigating them. This broken reading of artworks is much more akin to the reading behaviours of hyperlinked text users than those reading traditionally linear books. In both cases, the attention of gallery visitors and hypertext readers becomes fragmented and the viewer or reader is left open to being led off in another direction by a further series of visual clues. Just as hypertext conceivably creates *viewers* as opposed to *readers* so does Rogoff's concept of 'looking away' in a gallery context.

Throughout the text Rogoff questions what forms of response replace the old vertical/reader model and suggests that new horizontal/viewer models might move us away from the viewer as galvanized receptacle to a new politics of active engagement. She cites Hannah Arendt's *spaces of appearance* as being an alternative model for looking away as well as coming together. Again movement and flux are alluded to. For Arendt they constitute a constant flow of made and remade 'spaces of appearance'. Indeed the 'space of appearance' is neither concretely inhabited nor is it temporally constant; it comes into being, 'whenever men are together in a manner of speech and

¹ This is the term introduced by Rogoff in 2005 in her paper 'Looking Away: Participations in Visual Culture', in *After Criticism: New Responses to Art and Performance* (ed G. Butt), Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.

action and therefore precedes and predates all formal constitution of the public realm and its various forms of government'. (Arendt, 1968: 198)

For the rest of this paper I am not going to 'look away' from Rogoff, but I would like to look sideways a little, and focus on a studio environment rather than a gallery one, effectively shifting the subject from spectator to artist. I hope this will move the debate on a little – certainly I've found that these ideas seem to relate to my own working processes and have helped me define my own thinking as an artist.

I want to first discuss my own process in a bit more detail including the often conscious and repeated act of hiding the digital images I employ as source material from view while painting. I use digital images widely as source material but always in manipulated, changed states. I never work directly from photographs, from photographs of artworks or even from photographs of photographs of other artworks. The act of looking or absorbing the image in front of me is always interrupted in some way, most often by the physical act of 'looking away' from the image I am directly using as source material. In the course of the physical process of re-making, or re-seeing recorded images through physically turning my head away from a printed image, or closing my laptop so that I can no longer see an image on the screen I aim to, in Lyotard's words, 'make seen what makes one see, and not what is visible' (Lyotard, 1991: 102). The source materials used to construct two of my own works *L.H.O.O.Q.* and *Hans Heights* can be seen in the Figures 1 and 2. *L.H.O.O.Q.*² is my shrine to Duchamp while *Hans Heights* is my way of tipping my hat to Jean (also known as Hans) Arp and his *Moustache Hat*.

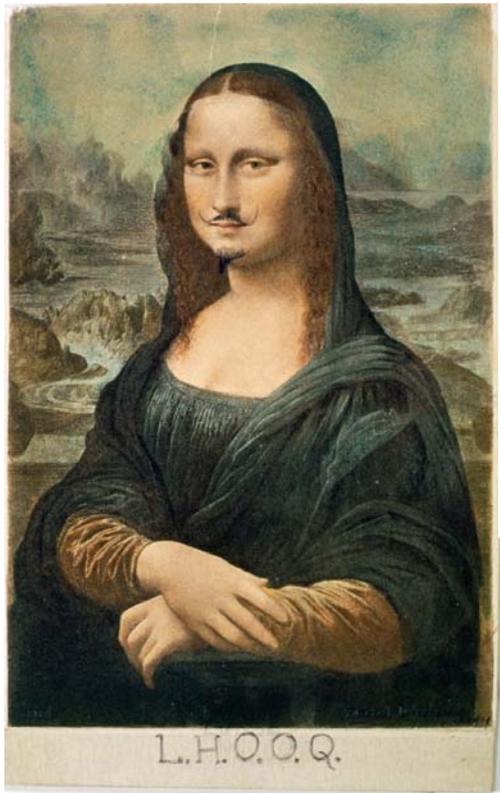


Fig. 1



Left: *L.H.O.O.Q.*, 1919, Marcel Duchamp

Right: *L.H.O.O.Q.*, 2012, Kate Hawkins, Oil on canvas, 30 (w) x 50.5 (h) cm/ top shelf: 110 (w) x 5 (h) x 26 (d) cm; bottom shelf: 30 (w) x 5 (h) x 26 (d) cm

² *L.H.O.O.Q.* was the title given by Duchamp to his postcard of the Mona Lisa with a moustache. It is also a pun when pronounced in French: 'elle a chaud au cul' can be understood as 'she has a hot arse'.

Left: Moustache Hat, Jean Arp, 1923

Right: Hans Heights, 2012, Kate Hawkins, oil on canvas, wood, 56 (w) x 219.5 (h) x 47 (d) cm, unique



Fig. 2

THE PHYSICAL ACT OF 'LOOKING AWAY'

I going to talk first about the *physical act* of 'looking away' in the studio and break it down into three parts: action, distraction & vulnerability. By 'looking away' I believe we experience all three things concurrently.

Action

Firstly 'looking away' in the studio necessitates a physical movement from the artist, which in turn 'activates' a dynamism of sorts in the work. In the same way that Pollock's dripped and splattered canvases expressed energy, emotion and process plus a physical engagement with materials, the action of 'looking' and sometimes 'moving' away from my source material brings another, if simpler, kind of physical energy to the work.³ Pollock's physical methods also emphasized his apparent psychological freedom. In a similar vein it could be argued that even a simple physical movement such as 'looking away' can help free and loosen an artist into producing more open-minded, unbound and uncontrived works: into producing 'Art' essentially. According to Jean-Paul Sartre, freedom is the central and unique potentiality that makes us human. Sartre rejects determinism, saying that it is our choice how we respond to determining tendencies. Freedom is existence, and in it 'existence precedes essence', (Sartre, 1946: 27) implying that what we do, how we act in our life, determines our apparent 'qualities'. It is not that someone tells the truth because she is honest, but rather she defines herself as honest by

³ Please note I am not trying to compare myself to Pollock, however I will admit to having been influenced by him.

telling the truth again and again. Essentially our *acts* define us. In his essay *L'Existentialisme est un Humanisme* he claims that there is no reality except in action. Correspondingly Harold Rosenberg writes of Action Painting: 'At a certain moment the canvas began to appear to one American painter after another as an arena in which to act ... What was to go on the canvas was not a picture but an event.' (Rosenberg, 1952: 22) In this way the 'act' of painting became the 'work' as opposed to the 'work' symbolizing the 'act'.

Tangentially, Tala Madini, an Iranian contemporary painter, says she finds paintings that reference photographic works very often result in familiar visual experiences. She says she is more interested in making the space of the canvas a place for action: for her actions, as opposed to a replicated space or a copy of anything else. In both these examples action is seen as positive in its potential. Indeed I also want my own works to invoke 'action' in its many guises and I feel from experience that one of the best ways of doing this is to remain physically active throughout the making process. Furthermore action is also a key component of performativity – it allows painting to 'do' things as opposed to just say them – again encouraging performativity as opposed to theatricality. I will expand on what I mean by this later but quickly by 'do' in this context I am referring to John Langshaw Austin's definition of the performative in his series of lectures *How To Do Things With Words*. Austin defined the performative as words that constitute an action to take place, as opposed to just a description. I.e. I take this woman to be my lawful wedded wife is a performative speech act in the sense that something gets done – they get married.

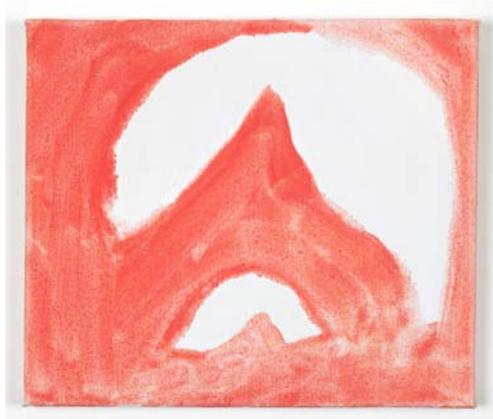
Distraction

Secondly the act of 'looking away' breaks the attention span bringing about a distraction. Below, two studies link distraction, as Irit Rogoff talks of in gallery contexts in relation to 'looking away' and the performative, to something like a science of intuition.

In a study published in *Nature Neuroscience* in 2009, researchers presented subjects with a series of kaleidoscopic, abstract images. The participants gave their full attention to half the pictures but were deliberately distracted by another task while viewing the rest. When shown the images again and asked to identify which they'd seen before, they fared better with the pictures they'd viewed while distracted. 'Our intuitive brains are processing information even when we're not paying attention,' says Ken Paller, a coauthor of the study. 'And with the brain's analytical system occupied by another task, the intuitive system—which excels at picking up the gist of a scene or situation – is better able to do its work.' (Voss & Paller, 2009)

In the same way that Rogoff views distraction as a positive, encouraging performative acts to occur in traditionally sober gallery spaces, Ap Dijksterhuis, a psychologist at Radboud University in the Netherlands, revealed that distraction can help us make better (complex) decisions. In 2006 he asked study subjects to evaluate four models of cars based on 12 variables. Dijksterhuis found that only about 25 percent of those who were given uninterrupted time to ponder their choice opted for the best model, compared with 60 percent of people who were asked to make a spontaneous decision after looking over the cars and then performing another task. 'While they were focusing on something else, the unconscious mind was processing the information and integrating it into a valid selection' (Dijksterhuis, 2006) he explains, concluding that complex decisions are best made after a period of distraction assumed to elicit unconscious thought.

Dijksterhuis' Unconscious Thought Theory hypothesizes that unconscious thought (deliberation without attention) is better for making complex decisions where there are many variables are in play⁴, whereas conscious thought is better for simple decisions with fewer variables. I would reason that 'painting' is a process with many variables i.e. complex, therefore requiring unconscious thought for better decisions. I ultimately understand painting as a series of interconnected (complex) decisions and judge that my strongest paintings result when those decisions are made quickly on something akin to an unconscious level. The painting *Two Moustache* was made exceptionally quickly and intuitively, in roughly two minutes, however if pushed I might argue it to be one of my most successful to date.



Two Moustache, 2012
Kate Hawkins
35.5 (w) x 31 (h) cm
oil on canvas
unique

Fig 3.

Pollock also seemed to rely on the unconscious while painting. Referring to his process, which stemmed in part from the automatic drawing of Andre Masson and the Surrealists, he said:

'My painting does not come from the easel.....On the floor, I am more at ease. I feel nearer, more a part of the painting, since this way I can walk around it, work from the four sides and literally be in the painting....When I am in my painting, I'm not aware of what I'm doing. It is only when I lose contact with the painting that the result is a mess. Otherwise there is pure harmony, an easy give and take, and the painting comes out well.' (Jackson Pollock, 1947-48)

So now it becomes possible to see how the physical act of 'looking away' which embodies a distraction of sorts, can trigger unconscious thought leading to superior decision making while painting – for instance in relation to the types of colours and brush marks to use. This kind of unconscious thought can also be understood as intuition.

Vulnerability

Thirdly, the physical act of 'looking away' from your source material in the studio makes you blind and vulnerable as an artist. 'Seeing' is clearly intrinsic to both the making and reception of artwork, however while simultaneously aiming to 'see' or visualise the end result of my process, I also try to will myself a little bit blind. This blindness in turn encourages me to rely much more on my inner reserves and intuition as a result of the scaffolding (the form of the photograph) being removed. In this way the making becomes

⁴ According to Dijksterhuis complexity of choice is determined by the amount of information a choice involves. (1006 17 FEBRUARY 2006 VOL 311 SCIENCE www.sciencemag.org)

less of a transmission of the image already in existence and more of a means of constructing something new. This act of seeking something other than the original image can be challenging and sometimes even scary but then in Kaelen Wilson-Goldie's words about the artist and writer Etel Adnan 'who has been responding to wars and unconscionable acts of violence with great sensitivity and steadfastness for more than half a century ... an artist's commitment to their role as an increasingly endangered species of public intellectual and their belief in the capacity of their art not only to make sense of the world but to allow them to fall in love with it over and over again – are the qualities of work and living through work ... that give [art] its heart'. (Wilson-Goldie, 2012) Etel Adnan herself embodies courage, declaring: 'I write what I see, I paint what I am.' (Wilson-Goldie, 2012)

On the surface, vulnerability and courage seem like a contradiction in terms, but really I view them as allied. Courage can only come into play if you are already in a vulnerable state, for example, if your scaffolding has been removed in the form of your source image. Only in making yourself vulnerable do you give yourself the opportunity to be courageous i.e. to try something different from what you are comfortable with doing and only then perhaps can you come anywhere close to realizing your full potential. As A. Alvarez in *The Savage God* notes: 'the better the artist, the more vulnerable he seems to be.' Furthermore Brené Brown, who refers to herself as a researcher/storyteller, studies vulnerability, courage, authenticity, and shame. In the second of her TED talks she concludes after 12 years of research, that vulnerability is our most accurate measurement of courage. She goes onto say 'vulnerability is the birthplace of innovation, creativity and change ... to create is to make something that has never existed before – there is nothing more vulnerable than that.' (Brown, 2012) Correspondingly I would argue it is the physical act of 'looking away' in the studio that leaves space for vulnerability, and perhaps even encourages it, thereby encouraging creativity in the process. In the first of her Ted talks filmed in Jun 2010 Brown builds on ideas surrounding vulnerability claiming that only one variable in her research separated those who considered themselves 'worthy' from those who considered themselves 'unworthy'. According to Brown that was their ability to embrace vulnerability as opposed to numbing it. Through the courage to be imperfect, the compassion to be kind to themselves (and others) and the sincerity to experience connection she argues vulnerability paves the way to authenticity.

THE PERFORMATIVE ACT OF 'LOOKING AWAY'

It is this idea of authenticity that I want to focus on now in order to move us towards ideas surrounding the *performative* act of 'looking away'. Moreover it is authenticity that I would like to explore in relation to performativity versus theatricality rooted in the act of 'looking away'.

In relation to performativity Rogoff explains how through the performative gesture of 'looking away' conscious and contrived connections are disrupted in favour of new and innovative avenues. In the same vein I believe the act of 'looking away' from my source material in the studio can help me steer clear of making theatrical and overly conscious artworks. In relation to theatricality, Michael Fried's argument contradicts Rogoff. He believes that theatricality, not performativity, results because of a disruption to the viewing process. For Fried a painting is theatrical when it provokes a certain consciousness of viewing meaning the spectator is interrupted from (optimal) self-transcendence during the act of viewing. In the same vein the two works in Figure 4. actively encourage a consciousness of viewing.

Below: Two Black Marks on Mirror, 2012, Kate Hawkins, Paint on Mirror, 49 (w)x 32.3 (h)cm, unique

Right: Paint and Screws on Studio Wall, 2012, Kate Hawkins, digital inkjet on German archival paper, 29 (w) x 42 (h)cm, ed. of 50



Fig. 4

Two Black Marks on Mirror allows the spectator to line up their face with the two black marks or moustache on the surface of the glass, so in effect what they see is a slightly defaced image of themselves in the mirror. Alongside this, in viewing *Paint and Screws on Studio Wall* the spectator might at first assume they are looking at an image of a face. However as they look closer it would quickly become clear that all they are looking at is a studio wall with some wonky screws in it.

Fried stipulates that whenever a consciousness of viewing exists, absorption is sacrificed, and theatricality results. For Fried theatricality doesn't mean theatre-like. Fried regards theatricality in negative terms as being artificial and mannered – the opposite of authentic. He also situates 'theatre' as antithetical to the idea of truth throughout the whole book *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting in the Age of Diderot*. So although both Rogoff and Fried view theatricality, in relation to the viewing of artworks, as a negative, they understand disruption of viewing in contradictory terms. Fried believes that disruption to the viewing process is negative as it disrupts absorption and is therefore more likely to bring on theatricality. Contrastingly Rogoff regards disruption of viewing positively because of its potential to promote performativity, a view that I am personally more drawn to, as it seems more relevant to our contemporary society.

For Rogoff, performativity relies on an actual action taking place, as opposed to the artifice inherent in the staging of the action. In the same way I believe the disruption caused by the averted gaze, the 'looking away' in my studio, stimulates 'a performative' where artworks are forced to *act* their, as yet, unknown identities, as opposed to – say – just putting on the same costume as the source images and re-playing an already established role. This performative means they have to go beyond merely 'looking like art': they have to be art.

Finally I am going to share with you a slightly longer extract from Rogoff's text in which she describes a visit to the Tate to see a Jackson Pollock exhibition. She says:

'G.B. and I have gone to see the Jackson Pollock exhibition at the Tate Gallery, London ... In short I am critically on guard and approach the whole visit with weariness and a sense of cultural obligation. I have dragged G.B. along in the hope that his superior knowledge of the period and of the work, the fact that he has already visited the exhibition on several occasions, will provide me with insight and animate the encounter, chip away at my weariness. Shortly after entering the exhibition and beginning to look, through the compulsions of chronology, at the early work, we spot the actress who plays the beautiful nurse Carol Hathaway in the fabled TV series ER. We are mesmerized, we follow her around the exhibition, she is even more beautiful in real life than on the screen and we speculate on the colour of her hair and on her relationship to her companion at the exhibition. Our attention has been well and truly diverted and one mythic structure – the heroic modernist figure of Pollock and the art history that instates him and claims that singularity of our attention for him and for his art – has been interrupted by another mythic structure, that of Hollywood celebrity. In the case of the disrupted viewing of the Jackson Pollock exhibition ... not only was one mythic structure mobilized in relation to another ... but a viewing position, an alternate of imbricated fan as opposed to reverential spectator, was put into play in this disruption.' (Rogoff, 2005: 129-130)

Rogoff's description here also suggests another dichotomy. By G.B. I think she is referring to her esteemed colleague at Goldsmiths and editor of her text, Gavin Butt. Alongside being spectators *and* fans, as Rogoff positions them, I think it is also plausible to perceive them as both spectators *and* critics. Either way the end result was that the exhibition was unframed from its mythic structures because of two disrupted viewing positions. Yet promisingly Rogoff and Butt walked out of the exhibition being able to tell *both* stories in which they had *both* participated. In the same way that Brené Brown (who I mentioned earlier in relation to vulnerability) situates herself doubly as a researcher/storyteller stating, 'Maybe stories are just data with a soul', (Brown, 2010) 'the relation of narrative and of its structuring properties within the mythic is to do with the fact that what it communicates is *itself* its process of communicating' (Rogoff, 2005: 130) i.e it is self-communicating.

CONCLUSION

To conclude this seems to me to be what 'looking away' in the studio does⁵ – it allows you to communicate both as artist *and* spectator. It enables participation simultaneously within two identities, two mythic structures. Also in 'looking away' while painting I give myself the power to unframe my studio from its own mythic structure and initiate a performative. This performative means that something gets done, artworks get made. Furthermore the *action* triggered by the physical process of looking away frees me up to make better work, the *disruption* inherent in the act of looking away stimulates intuition, while the *vulnerability* felt by looking away promotes authenticity. All in all, I hope by 'looking away' in the studio to make more free, more intuitive and more honest work.

⁵ By using the word 'does' here I am alluding to Dorothea von Hantlemann's performative text 'How To Do Things With Art', and also J.L.Austin's definition of the performative which states that in any performative utterance (or speech act) the sentence actually does something as opposed to describing something being done. I.e something gets done through the speech act. For example: I *bequeath* this watch to my sister or I *pronounce* you man and wife.

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