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An Investigation of the Body as Location in the Context of Kristeva's Reading of the Maternal Orientation of the Abject

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**An Investigation of the body as location in the context of Kristeva's
reading of the maternal orientation of the abject.**

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Mphil. Thesis Submission

Dublin Institute of Technology

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January 2011

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer,
Things fall apart, the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,

W.B. Yeats.

Abstract

The aim of my research project is the generation and enhanced understanding of what is unspeakable, unrepresented, and beyond the resolve of logical thought in my art practice. I wanted to find a way to display the emerging evidence of what is there in the physical material manifestation and beyond. So I set up a studio based research context to begin an enquiry by engaging philosophic ideas in a set of physical relations through materials and making in the studio.

Using the theoretical work of Kristeva, Lacan and Schon enabled me to structure and language the enquiry. Mapping philosophic ideas on to the practice created an intensely detailed and prolonged engagement with and observation of my art practice giving rise to a very particular relationship with the nature of thinking through materials.

Ideas were materialised through the corporeal intimacy of stuff and commotion of making as thinking emerged in a multilayered speech of ideas, of the silent repose of the canvas, of the doing and being and thinking into materials. In this thinking in the moment to moment intimacy and dialogue with the experience of the work an unfolding evidence became apparent. Within this structure and location the abject became implicated and inscribed in the materiality of emerging language. Evident also was the relatedness of the abject to the maternal body in the growing image of the human form as it developed in the work/research. Unfolding within the mechanism of the abject as linguistic is the image and the story of the self, the self as source of narratives, the self as is represented in and by the human form, intact and failed in the rupture of its own boundaries and skin.

In this way the research demonstrates the art practice as a place of thinking, a location within which ideas/knowledge can be initiated, generated and expressed.

The research was conducted over a period of time in the studio and details of the methods and materials are contained in the text (Chapter 5).

The submission includes the outcome of the project by thesis and is presented in two parts, the studio research and the textual research. This work will be presented in the public domain as an interactive exhibition where empirical data will be sought from a participatory exchange with an audience.

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1.0 Introduction

This research project is an analysis of a contemporary art practice and its relationship to the generation of meaning. There is an engagement of ideas in a set of material relations. In other words there is a mapping of philosophic concepts on to the practice where ideas and concepts are implicated in the making, the activities of making and the thinking arising out of that engagement. The research is conducted in my studio (see Fig. 1 and fig.2)



Fig.1 Detail of studio in Clane where visual research took place



and takes the form of a physical enquiry through the medium of materials and making. The enquiry takes place through the practice and is externalized by visual methods. So the making itself in the studio practice is the research. It is in the studio space shown in Fig.1 and fig.2 that the physical material visual research/work takes place and where the relationships with text are first encountered for negotiation. My thesis describes how the research was set up and conducted and consists of a written document, two bodies of visual research and extensive documentation through notebooks, dossiers, photographic recording etc.

My thesis is an examination of the processes, procedures and components of practice in the context of the theoretical work of linguist and psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva. In particular the following areas of her work underpin my enquiry:

- a. the signifying process, the semiotic/symbolic dialectic
- b. the subject in process
- c. psychoanalysis as the study of the acquisition of subject identity
- d. language as the means by which we represent this identity
- e. the abject, the maternal orientation of abjection and language in the mother's body.

I would like to point out that this is by no means an exhaustive exploration of Kristeva's work; rather it is an elaboration of those areas of her work most relevant to my enquiry. Neither is it an analysis of her work but in the research her ideas serve as a structure within which to explore my own practice.

1.1 Research Question

My research question is;

“How is significance/meaning created in this practice of art making. How does this thinking through materials and making, this engagement with materials, ideas and processes in this particular way coincide at the level of linguistic structure with the intervention of the semiotic, so that drives are inscribed in the language of practice?”

My research question looks at how does this engagement with materials and making, with processes, procedures and ideas, this thinking through materials, in these activities of making, coincide at the level of linguistic structure with the intervention of the semiotic so that drives are inscribed in the constructed language of the made work.

The main focus of the research is to implicate these Kristevan concepts in the making process by mapping certain ideas e.g. the maternal body onto the materials and making. Given the centrality of the mother's body in my work I focus in particular on Kristeva's theory of the mother's body and its specific relationship to language and subject formation. I examine on the links between the activities of making in the practice i.e. tying, knotting, binding, plaiting, ripping and stitching and the relationship between that

and the manifestation of the maternal body in language and specifically this language of making.

In this way the engagement of ideas with the practice and the narratives arising out of that engagement can become established. So that the relationship between the Kristevan ideas and the activities of making can begin to be established and evolve in the work. In this sense the practice becomes a location where the links between the practice and the Kristevan concepts can become established and develop and be made visible and available for observation and engagement.

Looking at the art practice as linguistic structure allows for a framework within which to observe and analyse the processes, procedures, components and laws of the art work. By laws I mean the unfolding laws in the practice e.g. the materials, procuring the tools, the studio, the way of being in the studio, the procedural nature of making decisions etc. The research is not about illustrating or describing the process of practice, instead it facilitates the practice's construction of its own language of itself and the reinvention of that language. So that the process of practice and thinking through materials becomes the location and activity where the conceptual becomes materialized in a physical making. In this way the developing work i.e. the art making as research becomes a practice of knowledge i.e. knowledge in being and doing and engagement with the stuff, rather than an object of study. I mean that the practice in the evolving research became an instance of making to a wider pattern that embraces the whole evolving narrative presence of the work. By this I mean that the flow of work arising out of the engagement with ideas and making occurs in the developing research as an analogous thought form where ideas are initiated and begin their development in the structuring activity of making.

1.2 Thesis Structure

The written thesis is arranged in chapters as follows:

In chapter one I introduce my subject and describe my research question. I describe the studio based visual research undertaken as my art practice and illustrate the materiality of making and thinking through materials.

I introduce the subject of language looking specifically at Kristeva's concept of the semiotic in which she sought to illustrate the materiality of language. I introduce Kristeva's concept of heterogeneity and demonstrate how her concept of language as a signifying process provides a structure within which I can investigate, observe, analyse and make visible the process and mechanism of meaning making in my own practice.

I introduce the key Kristevan concepts that underpin my enquiry, i.e. the subject, the subject in process, drives, the maternal body, and language in the maternal body.

In chapter two I introduce the subject of language by looking at Saussure's theory of language as a system of signs. I elaborate Kristeva's own theory of language and illustrate her rejection of Saussure's theory in place of her definition of language as a signifying system. I discuss the role of language in the formation of subject identity and look at the relationship of the speaking subject to language formation and production. I look at my own art practice, its activities of making, the processes and procedures of that making process and demonstrate how as a language system it can be viewed as a signifying process in the context of my research question.

In chapter three I introduce the psychoanalytic theory of Lacan and Kristeva outlining their individual accounts of how subject identity becomes established. I identify how Kristeva differs from Lacan in her account of subject formation by giving a more central place to the maternal and the feminine.

In chapter four I look at the links between my art practice, its processes, procedures, components and laws and the key Kristevan concepts i.e.

- a. the signifying process
- b. the symbolic/semiotic
- c. the maternal body
- d. the abject
- e. the subject in process

I demonstrate those links by looking at the art practice, its specific activities of making i.e. knotting, tying, binding, wrapping, stitching, ripping, binding etc, the materials of making and the form that develops from that making. I identify the relationship between the parts and locate and make visible the links between the ideas and the art practice. In this way it becomes possible to demonstrate what happens in the art practice when these Kristevan ideas are mapped on to a set of material relations in the physicality of material making in the studio.

In chapter five I illustrate the development and activity of the semiotic in the research. I do this by demonstrating the links between the different components of the practice and the key Kristevan ideas relevant to my enquiry. In order to trace locate and make visible those links I focus on one specific element of the studio practice i.e. the color of the mottled canvas. By this I mean the process by which the mottled color became established on the canvas in the work practice and the relationship between that and the concept of abjection at both the physical and conceptual levels. By looking at the structures and regimes of practice within the research process I trace effective parallels between the art practice and Kristeva's theory of abjection.

The 5 chapters are deeply interfaced and interlinked as is consistent and appropriate for the paradigm which best suits this artistic endeavor, but also suits artistic research/procedure as mentioned by Gray (1995)¹.

1.3 Outcome

The outcome of this project by thesis is presented in two parts:

1. Studio Research.
2. Textual Research.

Part one consists of the bodies of visual research carried out in the studio.

Two bodies of visual research have been completed, 'The Croud' which is a body of sculpture and 'Overlapping' a series of drawings.

Part two consists of the written component of the reflective practice and includes five separate chapters of reflective practice.

As well as the above there is extensive documentation, notes, and worksheets to account for each component of research as the work progressed and developed.

It is planned to bring this work into the public domain in the context of an exhibition of the made work. I would like to have a public debate in conjunction with the showing of the work around the central concerns arising out of the practice and its methods and processes as the product of a research process. I feel that this would enable the dynamics of the project as a whole to be interrogated, extended and realized more fully.

The interpretative activity of viewing the work in a gallery would be enhanced within the spatial reckoning arising out of the articulation of space and work. The dynamic arising out of such a dialectic would I believe facilitate the plotting of the process of the work as 'linguistic structure', as a process operational in language, and as a language operational in the body.

As a body of work, the written thesis may analyse and extend contemporary critical theory through an engagement with a reflective and structured process of art making. The written component, which may be viewed also as a practice, in the sense that creating a written account of the work, in so far as that is possible is in itself a creative practice, and will I believe, make available in written form, a certain visibility that may

¹ Gray C and Pirie, I (1995) *Artistic' Research Procedure, Research at the Edge of Chaos?* Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen, Scotland. P1

well reveal further findings that have remained embedded in the practice and require further practice and rendering of further exploration of artistic intelligence and artistic methods. It is therefore an important product of the research, and will provide a framework within which to examine the structures within which the writing acts.

My individual experience of moving from a personal, self referencing approach to practice, to a more critical, conceptual and philosophical one, necessitated a different orientation in thinking and approach to practice. What was previously an individualistic self directed and apparently unstructured art practice involving a systematic reference to internal motivations has now become a practice that is under continuous analysis.

It is essential in the context of the research that all the components of the articulation of my practice are laid bare so that a high level of accountability for the activities of the practice can be established.

During the activity of practice and reflecting on the practice interactive, traceable negotiations are established between materials, ideas, speech and material narrative. These negotiations are made manifest in the made work and in the written component. I now find myself looking at the function of writing in the art practice. Through writing I have been able to come to a fuller knowing of how the research proposition can be defined, articulated and communicated. I am curious to know more about the relationship between ideas as they exist in writing, as they exist emerging in practice and how they are conceptualized to begin with. Do certain ideas, images, sensations become intelligible only through practice, do others become accessible only through writing or thinking and the questions around this are innumerable.

Demonstrating this enactment in the work is enhanced by writing. For me the tension that exists between the individualistic, expressive, self referencing activity of art making and the critical, conceptual, philosophical position of the art practice as research encompasses an important instructive element of learning. Furthermore I have become aware of a certain kind of knowledge emerging in the practice that seems to demonstrate that knowledge in practice, like an intrinsic intelligence of activity, of materials and practice, as aesthetic of artistic methods is distinct from artistic style, has become established through the activity of practice.

Here in order to contextualise my own project I include a review of the work of some contemporary artists to demonstrate how key Kristevan ideas have been engaged with other research and art practices.

Ruth Jones's work for her Phd practice based research (University of Ulster 2000) is concerned with the relationship between a feminine becoming and the liminal realm. She defines liminality as a state or process akin to being on the threshold. Culturally designated feminine and associated with disorder, danger and contamination it is often treated with suspicion and fear which is then often transcribed on to the feminine. Although Jones relies heavily on the work of Irigary in developing and contextualising her project she uses Kristeva's and Lacan's account of subject formation and initiation of the subject into language. In the context of Kristeva's work she examines how Plato's concept of the chora has been used to both justify the equation of feminity with the maternal and the violence inherent in patriarchal attitudes towards the feminine and particularly the maternal feminine.

Kristeva's semiotic/symbolic and her contention that the symbolic order is rooted in the maternal body is cited. Revolution in Poetic Language is used to demonstrate Kristeva attempts to subvert the masculinist theoretical and conceptual symbolic from within the jouissance of the semiotic expressed in rhythms and sounds, bodily drives and energies.

²

Viewing the liminal realm as having enormous potential for becoming it is primarily this creative potential of liminality that Jones seeks to make apparent in her project. She explores how contemporary women artists manifest a feminine becoming in their practices focusing in particular on how strategies of liminality, risk and repetition are engaged as components of the materiality of their practice. For the present discussion I look at the work of the Cuban artist Ana Mendieta in the context of her work being seen to occupy the liminal realm in a strategic way.

The Silueta series articulates Mendieta's dialogue with earth, matter and materiality in a repetitive return to origins which relate to the conception of matrixial subjectivity. In this work the artist used a number of different materials to inscribe a depersonalised

²para Jones, R (2000) *Liminality, Repetition and Risk, Towards a Feminine Becoming*. PhD Dissertation University of Ulster. P80

human form into the land in some cases by taking away something that was already there such as grass, flowers, snow and often by adding earth, flowers and cloth.³ Her articulation of the relationship between earth and body can be used as a mirror of the intersubjective relationship between mother and child.

In these works Mendieta does not impose the human form on the land, instead they explore the relationship between the human form and the land in terms of the ceaseless delineation and distinction of shared borders as is evidenced in how these borders are coming into existence, dissolving and leaving a visible trace for a short time. These boundaries do not mark out or claim territory but acknowledge that the earth is part of the human and the human is part of the earth as they attempt to explore subjectivity in terms of embodiment and acknowledgement that the source of subjectivity is in the maternal body.

The Silueta series addresses issues of the maternal feminine symbolic which is rooted in embodiment and depicts ambiguous boundaries between the human form and the earth, boundaries that are at times tentative and at other times blurred and extremely hazy. Here we find echoes of the Kristevan subject and its relationship with the maternal, where uncertain and obliterated boundaries challenge the subject and the flux of indeterminate meanings associated with an uncertain identity.

Mendieta herself had this to say in 1981 about these works;

“ I am overwhelmed by the feeling of having been cast from the womb (nature). My art is the way I reestablish the bonds that unite me to the universe. It is a return to the maternal source. Through my earth body sculptures I become one with the earth.”⁴

In this section I look at the work of Janinre Antoni in the context of her employment of the attributes of the monstrous in an attempt to address the body/self dilemma where corporeal boundaries engage an opened terrain that is malleable and ambiguous. I look at two of Antoni's works *Lick and Lather* and *Saddle* as a framework for the self/body to be understood in terms of partiality, of flux and flow.

³ *ibid*, 61

Lick and Lather presents as a series of fourteen heads/busts cast from the artists body as exact replicas, half are made in chocolate and half in soap. The busts are presented on pedestals and are arranged in two rows facing each other. By licking the chocolate busts and washing the soap busts Antoni has wiped away their equalities and partially deleted their boundary into deformed anonymities. In her essay “Antoni’s Difference” Ewa Layer-Burcharth notes that it is “Antoni’s difference to herself that emerged as the central aesthetic problem”⁵

There is no one true Antoni presented in the work. With repeated and excessive use of her own likeness the artist challenges the viewer to find the truth among several likenesses. Our attempts to locate the author of the work are confounded and the subject represented in the work remains concealed, unknowable and out of reach. Antoni’s use of chocolate and soap refers to the psycho-cultural process of identification, chocolate as a traditionally feminine guilty pleasure, arouses associations with excess both in terms of weight and sensuality. Soap serves to purify, to cleanse one’s self of the harmful to obliterate what has taken place. The implications that each of these materials brings refers to the self as defined on the basis of life’s rudimentary and personal acts (I am dirty, I am clean, I am good I am bad) ⁶

Given the transient quality of each material our attention is brought to notions of boundaries and interiority. By licking and washing her image and by defacing each portrait of self Antoni draws our attention not only to the artificiality of the medium but also engages our attention with the fragility and the obliteration of eroded faces that document the self as a malleable and permeable threshold between the I and non I. Here we find references to Kristeva’s shadow self positioned on the threshold and the body articulated as a provisional boundary through which identity flows, inhabited by forces and laws make and unmake the self, reinforcing Kristeva’s notion that its not a question of reality but of pointing out that a vision of reality is an integral part of a viable subjectivity.

⁴ Vasseleu, C (1998) *Textures of Light: Vision and Touch in Irigaray, Levinas and Merleau-Ponty* Routledge; London p12

⁵ Layer-Burchart, E. “*Antoni’s Difference*” in D. Cameron, et al., *Janine Antoni* (Switzerland ink tree, 2000), 55

⁶ para Erdrich, L *I am a Monster; The Malleable and the Indeterminate in Contemporary Female Self-Portraiture* p18

In relation to Antoni's piece entitled *Saddle* (2000) the artist created a fibre glass cast of her own body on hands and knees. Using a fresh cow hide she draped the cow hide over the cast until the skin dried and shrunk. The power of this work is tied up with the ambiguity of the boundaries displayed at the edge of the cow skin and the unsettling presence /absence of the body. As Antoni herself said " I think the startling thing for me was that I made a ghost of myself. When I'm with the piece I feel the absence both of my body and the cow, it's a kind of push pull that you feel of such a presence of the figure. For me the shocking was to realise that I've made a piece about the death of the cow, my own death"⁷ By freely acknowledging her integration with the animal the artist reduces both the metaphoric and physical space between the two parts.⁸

Unfolding as it does in the realm of the human, notions of privacy and exposure, protection and abuse. Specifically in the context of Kristeva's definition of the abjection it is Antoni's lack of respect for borders and clear distinctions that ultimately cast *Saddle* in the realm of monstrous. Here the human form presents as identical and somehow interchangeable with the self. What heightens the sense of uncanniness is the blurred boundaries between self and other. This self portrait, as it is not entirely the self or the other, invokes uncertainty regarding the difference between a body and its image.

I include here a reading of the British Palestinian artist Mona Hatoum's installation entitled *Recollection* (1994) in order to explore the function of human hair in the context of the abject. As we know from the main body of the thesis Kristeva distinguishes three main forms of abjection. These are constituted in relation to food bodily waste and sexual difference, however Kristeva's ultimate abject is the corpse. Although the body expels its waste in order to continue to live the corpse is a body that can no longer expel its waste.

In the corpse hair may no longer be read as a sign of cosmetic beauty, instead it becomes a bodily part that is closely related to the abject. Hair can be defined as a bodily waste element that even transcends death as it continues to grow even after death.⁹

⁷ Antoni, J, as quoted in S. Sollins, Art 21 ; *Art in the twenty-first century* (New York); Harry N. Abrams. Inc..2003 p79.

⁸para Erdrich, L *I am a Monster; The Malleable and the Indeterminate in Contemporary Female Self-Portraiture* p20

⁹ para Gutierrez-albilla, J D (2008) *Desublimating the Body, abjection and the politics of feminist and queer subjectivities in contemporary art* Angelaki; journal of the theoretical humanities, vol 13, no.1, April P72

Hatoum's installation comprises the artist's own hair hanging from the ceiling in very thin fragile lines so that the hair is almost invisible and yet available for the viewer to have tactile contact with. In the space also is a hand operated machine that weaves hair instead of wool thus parodying the kinds of domestic labours historically associated with the Kristevan abject what Antoni's work draws our attention to is the distinction between animal and realm of femininity. Hatoum has also displayed balls of hair spread across the gallery floor. This work disrupts the boundaries between the art object and the privileged space of the viewer and so generating an unease and disturbance in the audience field of vision.¹⁰

The claustrophobic effect is heightened by the hair's physical contact with the face and body of the viewer thus attempting to reaffirm the notion of tactility which is often repressed in the construction of a rational model of thought that privileges sight over touch. Hatoum's redefinition of the function of hair enables us to re-read the hair as a haunting abject body and her redefining of hair as a haunting abject body tends to render the body as a territory of cultural self-definition. The mobilisation of this strangeness within provides a more complex account of self, an internal mobility that allows for a greater awareness of its psychic and social self.

In the work discussed above the abject and its associated ideas i.e. margins between self and other, boundaries of the body and the distinction between inside and outside, is processed through engagement with the abject as part of the materiality of the practice. In this project the abject is manifest through the body, the human form in the practice because of the authenticity of the dialogue between the components of the research i.e. the process of thinking through materials, the physicality of making, and the emerging form. The making becomes a location within which the abject unfolds in the research as the material i.e. the canvas because of its specificity can be subjected to all processes associated with the abject. In this way the materials display the whole process of abjection i.e. disintegrating boundaries, the seeping corpse, the damp weight as the processes are laid out in the research.

The manner in which these components have been explored processed and validated in the research demonstrates the implication of the abject in the language of making and

the making of language in the work. Ultimately it is my interaction with the materials that creates the language and by not subordinating the making to thinking the making is able to become itself so the making illuminates the doing by getting the language to reflect the doing without coming to predetermined results. So that in pursuing the logic of materials I am getting the language to bend to the materials, the activities and processes. It is my interaction with the materials that creates the language so the traditional rules that govern the language of theory do not apply to this work.

1.4 Methodology

¹⁰ para 72.

In this section I outline the methodology of action research and elaborate its appropriateness in the research project. I outline my research question and explain how I plan to answer the question using the chosen methodology.

A methodology is a set of principles of method which constitutes a cycle of activities in which I can engage in order to realize the various components of the research. It provides me with a way of accounting for what takes place, of observing the details of the research so that a systematic description of activities, concerns, problems and proposed solutions arising out of the research process can be compiled.

In this project my research question is concerned with what it is that creates meaning/significance in this work.

“How is significance/meaning created in this practice of artmaking. How does this thinking through making, this engagement with materials, ideas and process in this particular way, coincide at the level of linguistic structure with the intervention of the semiotic, so that drives are inscribed in the language of practice.”

In order to address this question I have selected a method of answering which involves collecting evidence and relating that evidence to the question so as to draw a conclusion in an organised system of investigation. Before proceeding I want to define what research is,

“Research has been defined as accessible, systematic inquiry (Allison, 1992) and intentional, procedural, explicit and publicly accountable (Gray, 1993). Inquiry has been defined as ‘ the controlled or directed transformation of an indeterminate situation into one that is so determinate in its constituent distinctions and relations as to convert the elements of the original situation into a unified whole.’ ¹¹

This transformation takes place within the unfolding moment to moment flexible process of the work as details of the lived experience of working in the studio.

¹¹ Gray, C and Malins, J (1993) *Research/ Procedures/Methodology for Artists and Designers*, Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen, Scotland. P3
Allison, B (1992) *“Allison Research Index of Art and Design”* Leicester: Leicester Expertise

In my particular inquiry the emphasis is on discovery and exploration rather than on hypothesis testing so the research strategy and structure is relatively open. A project such as this where the material is fluid and changing requires an approach to research that can be sympathetic yet rigorous to my project. So the research approach is qualitative and phenomenological simply because this approach promotes the value of subjectivity, individuality, complex interaction, intuition, openness etc.

As my enquiry deals with matters of considerable complexity such as randomness, uncertainty, unconscious processes etc. it is essential that the chosen methodology is capable of dealing with such unpredictable components as instability, indeterminacy and chance.¹² The most appropriate methodology therefore is one of Action and Reflection on Action, in other words practice and reflection on practice, as this provides a reliable framework within which such emergent variables as intuition, emotion and invention can participate.

So my project is a worked project of action and reflection on action. Action research is research in which the process of making the work constitutes the methodology. In other words the procedures of practice and process are embedded in the art making, so that the methodology arises out of the process. In other words the methodology is the process of constituting the language.

In order to illustrate this concept more clearly I draw an analogy with my practice and the compositional work of John Cage. His practice was structured to allow for improvisation and his language evolved as he worked, his procedure traceable within the final work.

By way of practical illustration, he had this to say in a lecture in the series entitled “Composition as Process”

“ I decided to make a lecture within the time length of the Music of Changes (each line of the text whether speech or silence requiring one second for its performance) so that whenever I would stop speaking, the corresponding part of the Music of Changes itself would be played. The music is not superimposed on the speech but is heard only in the

Dewey, J., “Logic: Theory of inquiry” Henry Holt &Co., New York, 1938

¹² Gray, C and Malins, J (1993) *Research Procedures/Methodology for Artists and Designers*, The Centre for Research in Art and Design, Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen. p 7

interruptions of the speech-----which like the lengths of paragraphs themselves, were the result of chance operations”¹³

Similarly in my practice as my methodology demonstrates I cannot tell the story of the work until I make the work because of the highly experiential nature of what is going on in the studio, chance operations and events influence what emerges in the work, in its manifestation in form, structure etc. Similarly also, within the methodology chosen here the procedures of process and practice are visible and traceable within the final work in the same way that drawing can be to sculpture.

The purpose of the research is to formulate a response to my research question as already stated. To illustrate how my research question can be addressed in the making of language in the physical practice of the studio work, I want to evaluate critically how the mechanism of thinking through materials can address the question. My research aim therefore is to engage the philosophic ideas already discussed, in a set of physical relations with materials, ideas, process, and structures within the studio practice; so that the process of meaning as it is established in the language events of the practice can be observed, analyzed, extended, and documented.

Action research which is steeped in doing and reflection on being and doing, because of its structure can be responsive to situations in ways that other research methods cannot, as it structures the practice to allow for improvisation, in that there can be evaluative response to emerging needs as they arise. Stroud Cornock (1984)¹⁴ has done considerable work in this area of research and has identified and outlined the following cyclical patterns of activities within which the research can be arranged and carried out.

Generation

Selection

Synthesis

Articulation

Critical Presentation, Discussion

¹³ Cage, J (1958) *Composition as Process*, from lecture at Rutgers University, New Jersey, p, 18

¹⁴ Stroud C, (1984) *Learning Strategies in Fine Art*, Journal of Art & Design Education vol 3 no. 2 p150

Within this general procedure of practice and reflection on practice lies a personal procedure intimately linked to my own particular intentions and reflecting the idiosyncrasy of my own working process.

The following diagram (see concept map no.1) outlines the areas of associative potential in the research between ideas and their representation in the practice. At that stage of the research there was considerable overlapping between certain ideas and the areas of practice and process where these ideas have become manifest in through process, form, structuring etc.

In my methodology I describe and illustrate how I answer my research question. My methodology employs formal artistic research procedures some of which arise out of the practice and some invented. So far my methodology has employed two projects within which several visual techniques are used to investigate the process by which the philosophic ideas are related to the formal activities of sculpture making.

The first project is called 'The Croud' and focuses on process and procedure rather than on productivity although made objects emerge as the chief component of the research. In other words the end product is an artifact, which in effect embodies the essential research. The research process and procedures are conducted in cycles of activity; the model used here was adapted by Stroud Cornock 1984¹⁵.

My art making process takes the form of the following cyclical activities.

¹⁵ Stroud, C(1984) *Learning Strategies in Fine Art*, Journal of Art & Design Education vol 3, no. 2

1.5 Planning, doing, evaluating.

In order to describe and illustrate my methodology I describe the methods employed in making one piece of sculpture.

Planning

Before starting the practice I needed a thorough knowledge of the work of Julia Kristeva so I had a period of extensive and in depth textual research. My literature review employed various means of accessing data and retrieving material and information. These methods included information gathering using the extensive library facilities at Mountjoy Sq., audio visual material, internet, journals, catalogues and texts. Interacting with this data through reading and data analysis generated ideas which led eventually to direct interaction with material relations in the studio.

Doing

I begin the process of making in the studio by:

- > unrolling long strips of canvas from the source.
- >cutting them into random sized pieces,
- >draping the cut canvas over a frame so that I could look at it for periods of time before deciding how to proceed.

developing the color happens as follows

- >preparing the dye, using different strengths of color
- >placing the cloth in the color in different sized buckets, leaving for 24 hours to develop.
- >removing cloths, placing on clothes line to dry,
- >when dry the canvas is placed in bleach in different sized buckets for different periods, depending on how well the bleach develops,
- >canvas is removed from bleach when appropriate color is manifest
- >canvas is rinsed and then dried on the clothes line

cutting the canvas happens as follows:

>canvas is cut into strips of random widths, testing several different widths,
>strips are placed randomly on flat surface, so that when needed for use any width of strip could be randomly chosen without any prior knowledge of its width. (The length of strips of cloth is all the same obviously because the roll of canvas is a certain width.)

The making takes place as follows:

the process begins with an initial engagement with materials and process that is apparently without form. By this I mean there is no plan, no predicted outcome, no idea of what will occur in the process, there is just a visual idea/sensation that arrests my attention. There is a vague idea of what is wanted from the materials and an engagement with them, a sense that there is more to this than I can tell, and a sense that engaging with materials will elaborate what it is. The exploration of that idea begins with a negotiation of ideas with materials, and the process proceeds as follows:

>a knotting activity begins the process
>narrow strips of canvas are chosen that have a particular bleached whiteness.
>the knots are made very tightly through a process of pulling, tying, stitching, so that the emerging structure is very hard,
>knotting process continues until I imagine the piece should be finished,

the process by which I seem to know that the piece is finished is as follows,

> the piece has a certain weight,
 a. it resembles something I seem to recognize but from where I don't know
 b. the rough scored texture seems to resonate something,
> Its form and structure demands more of the process and in that moreness of making something further begins to emerge.

The layering process begins by:

> selecting the cut prepared strips of canvas
> inserting the strips lengthwise into the spaces between the knots,
> pieces are stitched into place with stitching left visible,

- > process of layering continues until masses of torn canvas hangs in bundles from the knotted amorphous mass,
- > then the process ends and in the same way I know the piece is finished,
- > this process completes one piece of sculpture

1.6 Evaluation (Reflection on Practice)

I evaluate the work by:

- > looking at what has been made,
- > I place the work in different contexts in the studio e.g. suspended from the ceiling in daylight, laying it on the floor, draped over a chair,
- > documenting with photographic imaging, drawings, notes, ideas for further development
- > unconscious scanning, by this I mean sitting looking, in reflection at what has been done.
- > this is an important part of evaluation, it takes place in the studio when I go there first thing in the morning and sit with the work, just looking, perhaps some note taking, possible solutions to existing and emerging problems. Solutions, further ideas often come days later in the form of an image, a memory, an association.
- > open forum, with colleagues visiting the studio to discuss mutual concerns, issues arising out of practice, further development etc.
- > reflective conversation in the studio. This involves scanning processes seeking a fuller understanding of what's there. There is dialogical conversation with the process and the emergent unfolding of work as the process happens randomly and the work demands more or less but always something.

This cycle of work/research concluded with one finished piece of made work. I found the cyclical nature of the process very valuable because it encouraged responsiveness and gave me the chance very early on in the research to reflect and gain an insight into and identify areas that were not working, and where and how to implement new research activities that would prove more appropriate in solving problems.

1.7 Findings

In this endeavour I wanted to render explicit that which is implied in the work as I suspect that process is as important as that which is explicit in the work.

My findings can be divided into the following two categories:

At the physical level of preparing and manipulating material the following findings emerged:

- > different specific strengths of dye rendered a variety of depths of colour to the canvas,
- > different specific dilutions of bleach rendered very different tones, shades onto the same sheet of canvas

- > the stiffness of the canvas was softened with the bleach, thus changing significantly its texture, making it much more pliable and more amenable to the form of clothing, the dress, and drawing my awareness to how softness as an intrinsic quality of the canvas might require different engagements.

- > the fraying threads of the canvas were removed in the initial stages of the cycle of making, as the process developed it emerged that the fraying threads would serve as an important linguistic device and so I decided to leave them attached to the edges of strips of canvas.

- > the process of focusing on the fraying edges of canvas allowed me to use the concept of ‘edge’ as a strategy for engaging further ideas later on in the research, ideas regarding boundaries, surfaces, layers, etc.

As further cycles of making were engaged with these findings were worked back into the practice so that the process of engagement of ideas and practice was developing new techniques, mechanisms, and strategies within which to furnish the answer to my research question.

At the conceptual level the following findings emerged:

> Two key moments emerged in the thinking/making process, the first occurred when I came to realise that the knotted mass was finished. I was aware of a certain kind of knowing, of thinking, albeit unconscious knowing and thinking had come into play to inform the process. I could not say what this was yet it arrested my awareness in a very particular way and demanded to be responded to in the process. Donald Schon has described this kind of work and knowing as Reflection-in-Action, he had this to say,

“When we go about the spontaneous, intuitive performance of the actions of everyday life, we show ourselves to be knowledgeable in a special way. Often we cannot say what it is that we know. When we try to describe it we find ourselves at a loss, or we produce descriptions that are obviously inappropriate. Our knowing is ordinarily tacit, implicit in our patterns of action and in our feel for the stuff with which we are dealing. It seems right to say that our knowing is in our action.”¹⁶

In the process of working I become aware that there is something in the work that I don't immediately recognize. In a gut sense it arrests my awareness and begins a dialogue with self that can lead to departures in the practice that are unplanned, unimagined and remain ambiguous until in further bouts of work some insights emerge in the process. So that I become knowledgeable in and through the process of practice. This kind of attentive being and doing, of awareness of embodied experience, of knowing-in-action generates a response which forms part of the process of the silent speech i.e. an internal dialogue that engages an analogous thought form that accompanies the practice. This dynamic provides me with a process in which I can respond to how a piece of work, or an idea, or the process I am engaged in, is working or is not working yet but can be developed further in order to identify its potential and its relationship to my overall aim in the research which is to render explicit that which is implied in the work.

¹⁶ Schon, D(1981) *The Reflective Practitioner*, Jossey-Bass p49

Again Donald Schon elaborated,

“This is teaching in the form of reflection-in-action. It involves a surprises, a response to surprise by thought turning back on itself, thinking what we’re doing as we do it, setting the problem of the situation anew, conducting an action experiment on the spot by which we seek to solve new problems we’ve set, an experiment in which we test both our new way of seeing the situation, and also try to change that situation for the better.”

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> The second moment that I have traced out as being significant is the moment in the process when the layering of canvas onto the knotted section came to an end. The dynamics of this moment are tied up with an emergent sense of readiness. My attention shifts from elements of form and pattern to the synthesis of elements into organized wholes. This shift of focus towards organized wholes draws my attention to what is not emergent in the practice in terms of form, structure, material relations between these elements etc. and focuses on what needs to be done now that will engage a more appropriate relationship with the research question. I am conscious also of the imagery, sensations and awareness that mark that shift of focus. For example I am aware that there is something further that is discoverable and that aligns itself with certain as yet undefined imaginary.

Further Findings

> The interactive process of materials, ideas, and process, with vague notions of the maternal body and its associative ideas has brought the reality of the body into much clearer focus through the practice. I mean it has become possible through the evolving inanimate qualities of the piece, e.g. the colour of the canvas, its textured softness, the weight and porous textured surface of the knotted heads, the echoes of the human form in the emerging practice, to imagine a location within the emerging language where the body can be situated.

Handling the materials in a certain chosen way seems to allow for particular notions of corporeality to emerge through the practice, for example the very physically demanding

¹⁷ Schon, D(1987) “*Educating the Reflective Practitioner*” Presentation given to meeting of the American Educational Research Association Washington DC. P4 of 10

way the materials are handled. I mean certain elements of corporeality and surface boundaries are elaborated as if these very notions resonate within the practice initiating departures in thinking, process, and practice.

For example the activity of stitching, of marking certain areas of the strips of canvas interrupting the surface of the cloth, where the stitches resemble a text, a writing, or a language that stands out from the surface like a drawing in relief, a tear, a wound. So the strip of canvas moves from being a length of cloth to being a surface onto which activities of text and language can be added as inscription echoing the mechanism of signification as means of representation and communication at many subtle overlapping interfacing narrative levels.

Choices are made as to what size the stitches are, which strips of canvas to stitch and where to place the stitches/marks. These choices are based on and influenced by the elaboration of the notion of corporeality in the practice, and they manifest in the work as the developing draping canvas as it is implicated in the making and comes to represent the human form more clearly as the research develops.

In this way elements of the work, i.e. texture, surface, stitching, and structure have been identified within the methodology as locations and strategies to engage ideas, such as the physical reality of boundary, as well as the metaphorical notion of boundary and transition from one level of thinking/making to the next within the work. In other words a process has emerged in the making that draws attention to the canvas as a porous layer, a boundary, a skin that separates the inside from the outside, a border that articulates itself between two realities, between what is known and what is not known, what is conscious and what is not conscious.

Most importantly my findings have also revealed and indicated to me what I need to do next in the research in order to explore the research question. The following is an outline of what this will involve in the forthcoming research and what areas for further research are emergent:

> further projects need to be developed in which to engage further bouts of making where the negotiation of ideas and processes can be observed, in particular I want to

develop patterns of exploration in which the following ideas can be developed through the practice,

> to locate, identify, and develop the concept of the semiotic (preverbal), as a place and as a process in the language,

> further observation of how the silent speech participates in the articulation of the language in the non material process of its own dynamic, by that I mean the function of the analogous thought form accompanying all the making.

> to identify where in the language and in what relation the unknown becomes known through the making,

> to look at specific activities of making e.g. stitching, the gestural nature of knotting, tying, ripping, tearing,

> to observe the rhythmic and repetitive nature of making so as to develop my understanding of how these activities relate to for example, to primary drive based processes.

An important part of the art-making process was standing back, looking at and considering what has been made in the practice. In this way I could evaluate:

1. The ways in which what has been made has succeeded in manifesting its intended concerns
2. The ways in which what has been made fails to manifest its intended concerns

What is apparent in the work apart from its intended concerns?¹⁸

In this way, whether or not the intended dynamic is actually manifested in the work is explored. As well as that the resonance of the work, i.e. its materials, techniques, form etc can be reviewed in terms of its unintended yet emergent concerns and thus anticipate points of view other than one's own i.e. the added dimension. Different viewers ask different questions of the work and bring different interests to bear upon it which may

¹⁸ Hanrahan., S (1997) *The Fruit of Anxious Intercourse* paper delivered at Elia Conference, Dublin. 2001. (extract from Siun Hanrahan, *A Combined Artistic and Philosophic Research Methodology*, Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Ulster at Belfast

add or take from it. This has important relevance to the process as my own perception of the work could be restructured by engaging with or adopting alternative points of view.

This process of evaluation revealed that there was more and less in the made work than was anticipated, as the work can exceed expectations in some respects and fall short of expectations in others in the sense that the work has its own life in the process. The ways in which the made work exceeded expectation was relevant to its concerns in terms of how it could develop or inhibit those concerns. Considering the made works relevant perceived excesses and possible shortcomings provided a basis for further work in which the process of enquiry was started again.¹⁹

1.8 The Drawing Project

The second project engaged in the methodology was a drawing project entitled Overlapping. The purpose of this project was to specifically investigate the representation of the maternal body in a very literal way within the practice. I particularly wanted to use a different format from that used in the first project entitled The Croud, using a different set of relations with different mediums that could possibly do different things with materials and using entirely different techniques.

The aim of this project was:

- > to engage with drawing to test the notion of edge, of boundary, as my attention had been drawn to this in the previous project. I decided to do this in order to extend my exploration of the concept of the abject.
- > to engage structural elements of line and form in the medium of two dimensionality to develop a concept that is essentially a three dimensional thing
- > to employ making activities that engaged very different relationships within the making and with the philosophic ideas under review.
- > to use colour and tone as a language to create form,

Similarly the project was conducted cyclically as in 'The Croud'

⁹ ibid(no page numbers available)

Planning,

- > involved contemplation of materials, strengths of paper, lead pencils,
- > choice of visual resource i.e. the use of model for drawing or drawing from photographs,
- > choice of warm or cold colors etc.
- > setting up the studio space

Doing

- c. the drawing was done in the studio,
 - d. several color and tonal studies were conducted to begin with
-
- > the scale was decidedly small to begin with,
 - > demarcation lines were initially articulated with the use of a heavy lead outline,
 - > the sense of the body in terms of mass, was developed using techniques of layering, layering one wash over the other, one color over the other allowing each one to dry before adding the next wash

 - > initially the whole area within the demarcation line was covered with color.

Evaluation

- > evaluation took place in the studio
- > the drawings were placed on the wall above the desk where I sit,
- > I spent time looking at the work first thing in the morning,
- > a sense of what was not working was evident immediately but it wasn't possible to articulate what it was,
- > I have to give the process time at this stage, I disengage, and over a period of living and working with these drawings, suddenly I see what needs to be done.
- > this realization starts off another bout of drawing.

Findings.

- > the use of lead pencil outline was quickly abandoned as it emphasized a definition of the figure that wasn't relevant to my investigation.
- > instead the figure was not outlined in pencil but a sense of the body was built up by layering washes one on top of the other, wet on dry washes.

- > this transition focused attention on form rather than figure.
- > as the drawing progressed further bouts of work drew my attention to what wasn't present in the work, this focus of attention on what wasn't present gave rise to the question of the repressed discourses, and this idea will be investigated in the forthcoming section of research.

1.9 Reflection on Action.

Reflection on action incorporates the analytical and reflective components of the project. These reflective activities of the process involve producing in so far as that is possible a verbal model of the artistic concerns and practices. This part of the research process involves periods away from the studio where practice appraisal and reappraisal took place. It involves looking at patterns of exploration where ideas are rendered and explored, some rejected, and some developed further. The quality of these experiences and processes was recorded in verbal form, using diagrams, drawings, images etc. so that analysis carried out and judgments made were presented in observable form, thus providing visibility and accountability around the research.

This section of the research is presented in the form of a diary of routine activities engaged in, observations made and judgments arising out of these activities. It included notebooks, diaries, dossiers, photographic sequencing, etc. In this way the transparency and accountability of the research process is made available.

So how does the canvas become the skin, how does the working process become the process of language in the body? It is as if there is an obtrusion of what's unknown into the known, the unknown informs the known in the practice and that manifests in the practice and its processes in relation to materials, especially in the quality of their impure materiality.

To illustrate this activity of transition and to identify what is it that informs the practice in this activity, I want to look at how, in this particular relation of ideas, process and practice, the unknown is lifted into the known and the location and nature of the linguistic activities that enable such a process to take place in the work and the thinking of the work.

This looking constitutes an engagement with the silent speech, the invisible dialogue, the internal narrative that accompanies the whole production process, and identifying and locating the links between the thought processes, the developing narratives and the studio practice. The concrete analogical thinking possible through the studio practice, which anchors ideas in materials and facilitates concrete material engagement with them, provides a basis for the studio practice to participate through dialogue with other modes of thought. I mean the thought processes that originate for example, when the idea and process of the Kristevan concept of the abject is mapped on to the practice and process of the studio work.

Just as the physical materials of the language have demonstrated in the process of working and manipulating their own potential to construct language, similarly the silent speech participates in the articulation of language in the non-material process of its own dynamics. For example the associative potential of the idea of the maternal body and how that association manifests in and influences the making process by initiating for example departures in practice, decision making within the work etc.

In order to elaborate these thought processes and their dynamic activity I briefly address the semiotic chora both as a location, as a linguistic device and as a metaphorical place of language formation. The semiotic chora (this subject is dealt with in great detail later in the written thesis), is where the subject experiences its closest links with the pure

materiality of its own existence. In relation to its position within the structuring devices of language formation, the chora is not yet a sign i.e. it is not a position that represents something. Neither is it a signifier, as it doesn't represent someone for another position. It is not a model or a copy but a process, a modality of significance in which the linguistic sign is not yet articulated. It is located within the material poetic dimension of language and is analogous only to vocal or kinetic rhythm'.²⁰

Within the linguistic structuring operation of this practice, the process of the semiotic chora seems closely aligned to the linguistic activities that facilitates the drive ridden, dark unconscious to unfold in the mechanism of signification. I am referring to the activity of the semiotic and the rhythmic pulsions that insinuate on to the symbolic language of the practice as silences, contradictions, rhythms and absences.

The process of visual thinking through materials and practice in the research so far, has demonstrated that a negotiation is established between the different levels of practice through a dialectic interrelation between the parts. I'm referring for example, to the structuring of art making at the physical conscious level, and at other levels, the mechanism of the silent speech, the metaphorical space of the chora within the articulating device, and the process of the semiotic. The analogous thinking between these disparate components and opposing levels i.e. symbolic/semiotic, conscious/unconscious, order/disorder, known/unknown, subject/object, is established through a dialectical process, an interplay within a heterogeneous textual presence that combines the dynamics of each component, across the woven fabric/canvas of a membranous border

In the over and back osmotic process of this engagement with ideas, images, pulsions, rhythms, and drives there is an overlapping, a merging of perceived concepts, of ideas, of fragments of the psychic apparatus, of memories that seek to find articulation in this language. Through this oscillation activity, attempts are made to recuperate into rationality those fragments of psychic activity/processes that form part of the linguistic structure of the unconscious, of that which cannot be represented and remains beyond the reach of intellectual resolve at first instance.

²⁰ Para, Kristeva, J (1984) *Revolution in Poetic Language*, Columbia University Press, p26

It's all the attempts at reformulation of these processes, elements and components and their entry into language that germinates within the threads of the woven text of the silent speech. The trawling of these components across the porous boundary between what's known and what's not known, what's conscious and what's not conscious, seems to enable this object called language to open to practices within its own articulation, which enable it to realize itself. By practices I mean the presupposition of several categories of narrative text that bring into view a fuller picture of the process of signification in this particular art making.

I believe it is within the context of this particular linguistic configuration i.e. the mechanism by which the unknown becomes known, located within the negotiation that takes place across a membranous boundary in the making of this language, that the answer to my research question is formulated. My experience to date indicates that the manifestation of these findings is evident in the practice in the form of processes and elements of processes that emerge in the making. For example the process of how the meaning of color i.e. mottled (canvas) develops and reveals itself in the context of the developing practice in the art-making. Further mapping of ideas on to this practice will most probably lead to a broader scrutiny of language in the Kristevan application, including a broader consideration of its poetic dimension.

Chapter 1

1.01 The signifying process as practice

In this chapter I introduce my research question and explain how my art practice is engaged as a physical enquiry of thinking through materials. I outline the key Kristevan concepts relevant to my enquiry. I explain the relevance of the concept of the signifying process as it is applied to my practice and how is used as a structure and a mechanism within which to examine the art practice.

In relation to my research question;

How is significance/meaning created in this particular art making? How does this engagement with materials, processes, procedures and ideas, this thinking through materials coincide at the level of linguistic structure with the intervention of the semiotic so that drives are inscribed in the language of the practice?

My practice is a process of physical thinking through materials and is the primary component of the research. The physical engagement with art making takes place in the studio setting which is my place of work and my place of research. My routine in the studio involves an interaction with and a development of thinking through materials and processes. The main activities of my art making process are tying, binding, plaiting, stitching, wrapping, ripping, cutting, stitching and folding. The process is an engagement with practice and materials that is without form originating as it does in an unthinking automatic process where the language is discovered in the doing of the work. It develops as a text of thinking, of visual thinking that seems to have begun at a certain point but is at the same time without beginning.

The developmental research process is recorded and documented on an ongoing basis in note books, dossiers, diaries, and audiovisual material. The process is described and recorded, there is continuous evaluation of how things are set up, how they evolve and develop. Ideas are elaborated, problems are illuminated and solutions negotiated.

The main Kristevan ideas relevant to the enquiry are as follows:

The signifying process (semiotic/symbolic)

The subject in process

The abject

The maternal body, its relationship to language,
The maternal orientation of the abject and language formation.

The relevance of these concepts to my research and work is that they provide a structure within which I can examine the processes of my practice so that a visibility can be created around the relatedness of these theoretical underpinnings to the art practice. In this way a scrutiny of the language structure can be available for observation and analysis.

The linguistic structure within which I propose to place the practice as research is the Kristevan notion of the signifying process with its semiotic/symbolic dialectic. For the sake of clarity and given the importance of the signifying process as Kristeva's contribution to linguistics and its relevance here, I want to explain the origin of the concept and explain how its application in the context of my research can provide a framework within which to address my research question. This examination will provide also an account of the origin of the relationship between language and the mother's body.

1.02 The Signifying Process

Kristeva's interest in analyzing the heterogeneous (i. e. an open space within language through which unconsciousness finds articulation,) nature of language led to her concept of the signifying process which proposed language as a dynamic transgressive process capable of bringing the unanalysable, the inexpressible, radical otherness of individual and cultural life into articulation. Unlike the static view of language which is tied to the notion that language is reducible to those dimensions that can be understood by conscious resolve, the signifying process operates as an unlimited and unbounded generating process, an unceasing operation of drives towards, in and through the subject and his institutions.²¹

In Revolution in Poetic Language Kristeva focuses on the extent to which language both written and spoken is in the first place physical. She makes a distinction between two

²¹ Para Kristeva, J (1984) *Revolution in Poetic Language*, Columbia University Press, p17

modalities of language in the signifying process; the semiotic and the symbolic. The symbolic is the chain of signifiers through which culture is mediated and through which we become subjects. The semiotic, which is prior to signs and meaning, is the foundation of language, its rhythms, cadences, silences, tones and ruptures which originate in the body. For Kristeva these two modalities are co-existent, there can be no symbolic without the semiotic.

For the sake of clarity I briefly introduce the subject of drives here and explain the relevance of this concept and its relationship to language as it will recur throughout the thesis. The idea of drives originates in Freud's early theory of instincts developed from his discovery of childhood sexual instincts. Birth confronts us with the experience of needs and in response to that experience there can be two reactions, one leads to seek satisfaction, the other is the drive to annihilate the perceiving self. Freud equated this drive with the death instinct, the drive to return to the inorganic, that is death.²²

These instincts or drives and their relationship to language are best elaborated in the context of subject formation. Drives involve pre-oedipal semiotic functions and energy discharges that connect and orient the body to the mother. The pre-oedipal stage is defined by primary oral and anal satisfactions, by a lack of differentiation between need and desire and by a piecemeal body that is not yet identified as one's own body because the identity of the ego already depends on language and the father.²³

According to Kristeva these subtle primary processes constitute language events that are taking place in utero and that connect and orient the body to the mother. They are tied up with materiality and regulation that takes place between the mother and the fetus prior to separation and later on in the subject's life prior to the formation of subject identity and entry into language.

This semiotic modality of the signifying process is the one Freud refers to in postulating not only the facilitation and structuring disposition of drives but also the so-called primary processes which displace and condense both the energies and their inscription.

²² para Segal, H *Psychoanalysis, Literature and War*, Papers 1912-1995, edited and introduction John Steiner, p18

Discrete quantities of energy move through the body of the subject who is not yet constituted as such. As he develops these traces/marks are arranged by various constraints, i.e. social and cultural imposed on the body. In this way drives which are energy charges as well as physical marks articulate what we call a chora, a non expressive totality formed by drives.²⁴

Freud notes that the most instinctual and destructive drive is the death drive. He gives prominence to the death drive in both living matter and the human being. What establishes the crucial link between language and the drives is the defensive position of language against the death drive. Language constituted as symbolic representation protects the body from the attack of drives by making the body a place, the place of the signifier, in which the body can signify itself through positions in language and representation.²⁵

Because of the centrality of the body, the mother's body, in my work I focus in particular on Kristeva's theory of the mother's body and its specific relationship to language. I focus on the links between the activities of the practice of this art making i.e. knotting, tying, ripping, binding, plaiting, stitching, and the relationship between that and the manifestation of the maternal body in language, and specifically, in this language of art making.

Through the research process I identify and locate the links between those ideas and my practice of art making. I illustrate how the process of making meaning can emerge and be made visible in the process of this relatedness, through negotiation with ideas process and materials.

The research is a worked project, and the reason for this is because what is under investigation is the process of the art making, the physical, rhythmic nature of the physical making, of structuring the language, the physical language, of the studio practice. Therefore the project is practice based and conducted in the studio, so the main focus is on the nature and function of practice, its laws, components, elements and rhythms within the research process. As a work of physical thinking through material

²³ para Kristeva, J(1986) *Interviews*, edited by Ross Guberman, Columbia University Press, New York, p110
16 para, *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. by Moi, T(1986) Blackwell UK & Cambridge USA. P 93

relations, the practical studio based work is the primary component of the research. The physical relations and interaction with materials, processes, ideas and form is the method by which the conceptual reality of the work becomes the made reality in the physical dimension of made objects.

The purpose of the research therefore is to examine the practice, process and procedures of my art making. In order to do this I use the metaphor of language. I regard the studio practice as a language construction constituted by laws and components so that my research involves an exploration of that language, its structure, elements, components and laws. In this way the mechanisms by which meaning is created in the practice can be illustrated, located, made visible and accessible in the process.

Kristeva's work is committed to an examination of the subject- in -process, created through entry into, acquisition of and internalization of language and the signifying process. Her work engages subjects ranging from linguistics to psychoanalysis, to semiotics, literary theory and feminism. She asserts the position of the revolutionary potential of the speaking subject. She proposes that transformation can be effected through change in our representation of self and others, which involves an analysis of the process of signification. Through a combination of semiotics and psychoanalysis Kristeva's work assumes a psycho-linguistic dimension concerned with the process by which subjectivity is brought about through entry into and use of language.

This is the area of her work that is the main focus of my exploration and research analysis of my practice, as it provides a framework within which to chart the exploration of linguistic configurations that enable a meaning to come out of what I do not know. I mean, for example what exists in the work that is not in the first instance amenable to intellectual resolve and what emerges linguistically, what Kristeva refers to as the transgressive, dynamic formulation of language that encompasses a representation of the other in language.²⁶

Most importantly Kristeva's signifying process provides a structure within which the origin and nature of the semiotic, the drive, can be traced to the beginning and articulated into language through the process of the semiotic.

²⁵ *ibid*, p103

My interest as an artist in this project originates from a need to engage with a coming to know what it means to work as a woman artist who makes a language in which the other²⁷ may be placed, accommodated and integrated. An analysis of process, procedures and practice and the relationship with a negotiation with ideas opens a structure through which the female imaginary can be articulated into language. To explain what I mean by female imaginary I want to refer to Irigaray's term morphology which means forms of an embodied subject.

These forms would not be static but would be in a perpetual state of becoming and in this context it means feminine becoming. If woman does not explore her own morphology she is in danger of using or reusing that to which man has already given form.²⁸ A feminine becoming of the feminine imaginary would therefore refer to how a woman artist would manifest her exploration of morphology in her art practice. In this way, in this particular practice there is a representation of the female imaginary in the symbolic. Margaret Whitford writing about Irigaray's subject of the feminine has this to say,

*"the logic of Irigaray's project is not to volarise an incommunicable mystical state, or an essential woman, but to overcome the deficit of woman unsymbolized as woman."*²⁹

There is also the desire to speak, to represent in a very particular articulation of art practice, the process of a visual representation of otherness. Through a process of locating, identifying and articulating through making the language of the mother's body, the maternal body emerges in representation in this particular practice of art making.

As a language practice the work can be viewed as a signifying practice i.e. a particular language system whose underlying structure is expansive enough to accommodate the multiple discursive layers and all the possibilities of existence of the individual. As my thesis may demonstrate this practice as language has the capacity for meaning to extend to include language elements which originate in the maternal body and dimensions of

²⁶ para Kristeva, J (1984) *Revolution in Poetic Language*, Columbia University Press p12

²⁷ other is term used by Lacan to describe that which is repressed in the subject, from *Four Fundamentals of Psychoanalysis. The Seminars of Jacques Lacan*, p 36

²⁸ Irigaray, L(1994) *A Natal Lacuna* "in *Womens art magazine* vol 58, May, pp 11-13

²⁹ Whitford, M Irigaray L (1991) *Philosophy in the Feminine*, London and New York, Routledge pp84 -5

the unconscious that don't function within the laws of formal logic. In this way it functions as a model of representation of the female imaginary and in this way facilitates the entry of the female imaginary into language, into the symbolic and into culture.

As such it provides woman with a place from which to speak, to speak as woman. For the sake of clarity here I elaborate on the idea of female imaginary by referring to Irigaray's work on feminine definition as it is dealt with in the PhD thesis of Ruth Jones 2003³⁰

*"The feminine has thus far only been defined (in many contexts) as opposite to masculine and we are lacking the necessary language, symbolism and imagery to define it in any other way"*³¹

Contemporary art practices therefore provide a means by which the woman artist can articulate her own morphology³² in her particular art practice, by finding language, materials, and forms that most appropriately explore and manifest this representation of the feminine imaginary.³³ Furthermore Jones suggests that artworks can have a major role to play in the development of the female imaginary precisely because they do not need to have recourse to Logos³⁴ in order to generate meaning.

I posit this practice of art making as a signifying process in which the semiotic/symbolic dialectic develops the process of language and thinking. Apart from the signifying process as a process of language construction, and as a model of representation, the practice of this project employs materials and language, processes and articulations of form that facilitate an exploration of the female imaginary and a representation of that imaginary through an art practice in the Symbolic.

Referring to this art practice as representing a place from which the woman can speak and a medium through which the female imaginary can enter the symbolic, what is unique is the centrality of the relationship between the indigenous nature of the language

³⁰ Jones, R(2000) *Liminality, Repetition and Risk, Towards a Feminine Becoming*. PhD Dissertation at The University of Ulster. P3

³¹ Irigaray, L(1994) *A Natal Lacuna*, Womens Art Magazine, vol 58, May/June pp11

³² Irigaray's term used to describe the form or forms of an embodied subject in *A Natal Lacuna* in women's art magazine Vol.58, May/June 1994 p11-13 (p11)

³³ para, ibid 2

³⁴ Logos is a term used to describe logic, conscious logical thinking.

as process within the art making, with the activities, materials, and processes of the making itself.

I mean the activities of knotting, tying, binding, plaiting, ripping, wrapping, wringing, and their obvious association with the domestic and the homespun, the creation of human work in language, as echoing the plight of the woman confined to domesticity as a place and as a process.

In this sense the language of making in the practice can be viewed as a discourse in itself. By this I mean that this process of language construction does not describe language but makes its own language, which becomes a process, a process of knowledge in its capacity to generate a theorised art practice.

Looking at the form, the amorphous knotted masses that emerge in language from this engagement of ideas with materials; it seems that its impulse originates outside the domain of logical symbolic representation. Because it doesn't resemble anything else, it seems to emerge at a level of linguistic structure that is aligned to and begins in a non logical, non knowing articulation, thus allowing for a reading of it in the context of it representing expressions of the expulsion of drives as they enter language and generate a signifying process.

Kristeva herself said that this type of linguistic representation (I include the language of this art making) is not sufficiently explored. What she was referring to was a level of psychic representation that is extremely primitive and imprecise, the representation of affects that are psychic inscriptions, extremely fragile drives and psychic components.

In "*Interviews*" she has this to say:

*"it (the linguistic representation) hasn't been sufficiently elaborated and it hasn't been linked sufficiently to the problem of linguistic representation"*³⁵

She spoke of ways in which 'aesthetic' or 'intellectual' sublimation could be used to enable the repressed to speak,

³⁵ Kristeva, J (1996) *Interviews*, ed by Guberman, R M Columbia University Press, New York p 22

“What is needed in the west to-day is a reevaluation of the “maternal function,” seeing it not as explosive and repressed but as a source of practices considered to be marginal (such as “aesthetic” practices) and a source of innovation³⁶.

I regard this research practice, this exploration of linguistic representation of the otherness of the unspeakable self and its implications with the maternal function, to be one such aesthetic practice. I demonstrate throughout my thesis how, through analysis of its processes, procedures, and practices and the relationship between these parts, this practice accommodates a representation of the repressed, the other. My analysis illustrates how that representation of the repressed discourse of otherness unfolds as a flow of structures, of materials, processes, procedures and narratives, and how this open linguistic structure can embrace such inconsistencies as disruption, undecidability, and multiplicity. My particular defense of this position is widely elaborated through the written thesis and the visual research in my exploration of the research question.

Chapter 2

³⁶ *ibid*, 108.

2.01 Introduction

In this chapter I introduce and discuss the subject of language. But firstly I propose my practice as a signifying practice in the Kristevan sense and examine in detail the art practice as a language practice where the object of language is open to a practice in which it can realize itself and become something more than itself.

In the activity of its structuring of itself the art practice as a language practice develops into a commotion of activities, a repetitious and endless doing, of engagement and events, of physical thinking through materials onto which concepts such as abjection, the subject in process, subject formation are mapped. Out of this commotion of process and making analogous thought forms begin to arise. These thought forms through the activity of making and thinking become implicated in the practice so narratives arise within the practice and the thinking of the practice.

An awareness of this process allows me to account for how the work has developed so that forces, fragments, components, laws and processes can be located, made visible and available to observation, accountability and analysis in the research.

2.02 The Subject of Language as Metaphor

Before going on to detail some key Kristevan concepts in relation to the practice I broadly outline the structuralists approach to linguists, relying on Saussure's linguist theory of language as a system of signs. Kristeva's rejection of structuralism in place of her own theory of language as a signifying process is explained. I outline the importance of the place and role of language in the context of the development of subject identity and the means employed by the subject to represent that identity. I do this by elaborating the linguistic formation and production of language in relation to the speaking subject and the process of signification in which the subject is implicated.

I look at the practice of my own art making, its activities of making i.e. tying, binding, plaiting, ripping and stitching, and situate that practice in relation to a language practice that is more akin to language process which arises out of materials and making, and the narratives that develop and emerge out of relationships within the components of that making.

I illustrate how this language of art making is closer to Kristeva's signifying process and her concept of the semiotic which sought to illustrate the materiality of language, its capacity to encompass a representation of that which remains outside the resolve of formal logic and conscious thought. In this way the practice allows for multiple narratives to emerge and serves as a location within which to address my main areas of enquiry.

As my debate unfolds I examine theoretically and demonstrate in my practice the heterogeneous nature of the practice as a language of making, as a signifying process. In this way I look at the practice in terms of its inherent linguistic structures and processes so that its expressive potential as a form of representation can be located, made available and visible in the research.

In the context of the centrality of the maternal body and the relevance of its linguistic orientation in the practice and Kristeva's insistence that the task of rethinking the maternal body as inseparable from the rethinking of language I outline the areas of Kristeva's work most relevant to the maternal body and discuss their relevance and application to the practice of making in the studio.

One of the main features of Kristeva's work and her contribution to linguistics is her distinction between the semiotic and the symbolic, the two modalities that constitute the signifying process. I describe the semiotic, its function within the signifying process, its relationship to the maternal body in the context of the semiotic chora, the site of initial linguistic intervention between the mother and the undifferentiated subject and its relevance as the location where drives gather and are discharged into language

Before going on to discuss the key Kristevan ideas in some detail I examine the concept of language. The question of what is language and what is its object is an especially difficult dilemma. At whatever period one looks at language whether in a remote historical period or the present day it presents itself as an extremely complex system. Seen from the outside language takes on a material diversified character. It is a chain of articulated sounds; it is also a network of written marks and a series of gestures.

Once we approach the manner of being of language we have to enquire into the relationship between speech, writing and gesture. Why do these differences exist and what do they mean.³⁷

Within the history of linguistics it was Saussure who laid the foundations for modern linguistics. In his linguistic theory he shifts the focus of study from the history of language in general to a focus on the relationship between the elements of that language. According to Saussure language is always organized in a specific way. It is a system or a structure where any individual element is meaningless outside the confines of that structure. It is a system of signs and each sign is composed of two parts a signifier i.e. the word or sound pattern and a signified i.e. the concept. Individual natural language viewed as a structure or system is what Saussure refers to as *langue* and individual speech acts or acts of language as *parole*.

Kristeva's relationship to language went beyond the use of language for communication. A predominant feature of her work is the concern to bring the unsayable, the unanalysable into the experience of language as the inexpressible, heterogeneous, radical otherness of individual and cultural life. Her theory of *semanalysis* focuses on poetics as the materiality of language (its sounds, rhythms, and graphic disposition) rather than on its communicative function. As materiality poetic language disrupts meaning and opens the way for a range of new meanings.

Her interest in analyzing the heterogeneous nature of poetic language distinguished her from other linguists who remained interested simply in formalizing the conventional workings of language. In her theory of the semiotic she outlines the connection between language and its importance in the formation of subject identity. This subject will be explained in detail in Chapter 3.

*“The conception of language as the key to man and to social history and as the means of access to the laws of societal functioning constitutes perhaps one of the most striking characteristics of our era”*³⁸

³⁷ De George, R and F ed. by (1972) *The Structuralists from Marx to Levi-Strauss* Anchor Books, Garden City, New York. P114.

Man and society are so intimately linked to language that they are inseparable. There is no society without language anymore than there is society without communication. Language taken as a system has precise operational rules, a given structure, and structural transformations all of which obey strict operational rules.

All language that is produced is produced to be communicated as social exchange, so that language is a practice realised in social exchange in the process of communicating a message between two people. For the purpose of this debate I want to establish how the circuit of linguistic communication leads into the complex realm of the subject.

Each speaking subject is both the addresser and the addressee of his own message because he is capable of saying the message and understanding it at the same time and in principle would not emit something that he does not understand. In this way the message intended for the other is, in a sense, first intended for the one who is speaking, so in this sense, to speak, is to speak to ones self. So we can see the constitution of the subject in relation to his other, the way in which he internalises this other and is confused by him.

The purpose of this research project is to look at the language of this particular art making so that the process by which signification is generated in the practice can be located, analyzed, and made visible and accessible. By language I mean the process and procedures by which the conceptual reality of the practice becomes the made sculpture. Clearly the made language- objects emerging out of the process of making in the studio cannot be classified as language in the way that spoken or written language can be. Constructing the work in the studio can be viewed as language in the sense that it is a human activity, the function of which is to communicate, to generate significance. Kristeva had this to say,

“all human practices are kinds of language since they have as their function to demarcate, to signify, to communicate, to produce objects of art or explanatory

³⁸ Kristeva, J (1989b) *Language The Unknown, An Initiation into Linguistics*, trans. By Anne M. Menke, Columbia University Press, New York, p3

discourses such as religions or myths, etc. is to form a sort of secondary linguistic system with respect to language.”³⁹

It is in this context of it being a linguistic system that I regard the language of this practice and its structures. In order to frame this structuring operation of studio practice so that it can be subjected to scrutiny and analysis, I speak of the work metaphorically as language. I introduce the concept of language as metaphor and clarify its specific use and relevance to my work and research in the context of it being viewed as signifying process.

The communicative function of language is a practice of articulated sounds, a network of written marks i.e. writing, and or a play of gestures. Written and spoken language are organised around specific grammatical structures which arise out of the science of signs. The grammatical structure referred to here being the signifier, the signified, and the sign.

As Jacobson has pointed out

*“Every message is made of signs; correspondingly, the science of signs termed semiotic deals with those general principles which underlie the structure of all signs.”*⁴⁰

As a social function language is manifest and known through its exercise of speaking and writing. This articulation of sound in spoken language is primarily a system. No creation or use of language is possible without an underlying system. The origins of this system can be located in the relation between the speaking subject and society and the subject’s initiation into language, which is what allows the subject to enter into the symbolic, to society and culture. By system is meant a system of organization, a movement within a restrictive structure and law, the law of the father, symbolic law.⁴¹

The written, uttered or gestured materiality of language produces and expresses i.e. communicates thought. It is the only manner of being of thought, it is thought’s reality

³⁹ Kristeva, J(1989) *Language The Unknown, An Initiation Into Linguistics*, translated by Ann M. Menke, Columbia University Press p4

⁴⁰ Jacobson, R (1971) *“Language in relation to other communication systems’ Selected Writings* Vol.11 p698

⁴¹ (Para.)Lacan, J *The Seminas of Jacque Lacan*, Book x1, ed by Jacque Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan, first published as Norton paperback 1981; reissued 1998 p92

and its accomplishment⁴² It is important to affirm that language is not just the instrument of thought. This gives rise to the question, does the thought language expresses exist in any other form other than language?⁴³ Does language exist without thought, or thought without language?

Even mute thought uses the network of language and cannot do without it, it seems impossible to affirm the existence of extra linguistic thought unless we leave the material realm. For example differences between the use of language for communication and that of dreams or the unconscious have been noted and science tries not to exclude these distinctive phenomena by attempting to broaden the notion of language by allowing it to encompass that which seems to escape its realm.

In this particular context, it is essential to go beyond the communicative function of language to elaborate its linguistic formation and production. The formation and production in question are those of the speaking subject and the process of signification in which the subject is implicated. Whatever the scope or function of language either as a system of signs or as a signifying process, it is essential to acknowledge the complexity of its system. As Saussure has said;

*“Taken as a whole, language is many sided and heterogeneous; straddling several fields, physical, physiological, and psychological, it belongs both to the individual and to society; we cannot put it into any category of human facts for we cannot discover its unity.”*⁴⁴

The concept of heterogeneity led Kristeva to supplement the tradition of structuralist semiotics which (as has been illustrated) perceives language and meaning as a sign system, for language and meaning as a signifying process. Of the heterogeneous nature of the semiotic she had this to say,

“The position of the semiotic as heterogeneous does not derive from a desire to integrate, within a language.....a supposed concreteness, a raw corporeality, or an

⁴² para Kristeva, J (1989) *Language The Unknown, An Initiation into Linguistics*, translated by Ann M. Menke, Columbia University Press, p6

⁴³ *ibid*,p6

imminent energy”. More akin to rhythm and mobile traces than structure, it describes regulated movements and their ephemeral stasis, moments of gathering and irruptions which lead to no identity, no body proper.”⁴⁵

The signifying process characterises the specificity of the practice by encompassing that which falls outside the sign system in which the subject is implicated.

“What we call significance then is precisely this unlimited and unbounded generating process, this unceasing operation of the drives towards in and through language.”⁴⁶

2.03 Revolution in Poetic Language

In her investigations in *Revolution in Poetic Language* and also in her later work *Desire In Language* ⁴⁷ Kristeva analyses what traditional linguistics excludes i.e. a crisis or the unsettling process of meaning within the signifying phenomena. Kristeva advocates a new linguistics that would not only classify the signifying phenomena but would also embrace within them moments of multiplicity, of disruption and undecidability. To carry out such an analysis she proposes to turn from the theory of language as a universal sign system to language as a signifying process.

Kristeva’s signifying process defies the fundamental Saussurian distinction between *langue* (language as a collective system) and *parole* (its individual usage). This is

⁴⁴ de Saussure, F *Course in General Linguistics*, (1907 -1911, first published posthumously 1916), eds. C. Bally and A. Sechehaye, London, 1974, p78

⁴⁵ Ziarek, E (1992) *At The Limits of Discourse: Heterogeneity, Alterity, and the Maternal Body in Kristeva’s Thought*, Hypatia, p90,

⁴⁶ Kristeva, J (1984) *Revolution In Poetic Language*, with an introduction by Leon S. Roudiez, Columbia University Press, p17

⁴⁷ Kristeva, J(1984) *Revolution in Poetic Language*, with an Introduction by Leon S. Roudiez, Columbia University Press, New York, Kristeva, J (1980) *Desire in Language, A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* ,edited by Leon S. Roudiez, Columbia Press, New York,

because each signifying practice is not just the manifestation of a general code but results from the dialectic between the system of signs and the transgression of drives. Since it is through language or the limits of language that we are forced to negotiate new boundaries, to transform language and create new meanings, the question arises, is the underlying structure of language expansive enough to allow for the multiple differences of experience, and possibilities of existence of the speaking subject? Does its capacity for meaning extend to include dimensions of the unconscious that don't operate according to the laws of formal logic. Terence Hawkes has this to say regarding the 'stretching of our concept of language'

*“such stretching is the great achievement of semiotics. What semiotics has discovered says Julia Kristeva, is that the law governing, or if one prefers, the major constraint affecting any social practice lies in the fact that it signifies; i.e. that is articulated like a language”.*⁴⁸

In order to elaborate the linguistic formation and production of language it is necessary to go beyond its communicative function. The formation and production in question here are those of the speaking subject and the process of signification in which the subject is implicated. In the key Kristevan concepts she describes the subjects' relationship to and implication with language i.e. the semiotic/symbolic, the signifying process, the maternal body, the maternal orientation of the abject, the subject in process.

Looking at my own practice of art making as a language construction, structurally it does not coincide with the model of the Saussurean sign. It is more akin to a language process which arises out of materials and making and the relational elements and dialogues that emerge and develop out of relationships within that making. Examples include the process of tying, knotting, ripping, plaiting, stitching and wrapping and the narratives arising out of these activities and the form that emerges in the work and relationship between both as well as the dialogue that's set up and develops and emerges through specific components of the practice and the thinking within the practice. For example the relationship between color and the implication and development of the concept of the abject in the practice.

⁴⁸ Hawkes, T(1978) *Structuralism and Semiotics*, Methuen, London, p125.

Although the abject is dealt with in great detail later in the thesis I want to introduce the subject here. The abject refers to a level of development where there is no awareness of boundaries only the closest relation to the pure materiality of existence where the self is dominated by drives and language and not yet articulated. In Kristeva's view subject identity is established by the exclusion of the "other" i.e. the repressed desire for the mother's body. The threat of the return of the other in language represents a challenge to our identity and this is what constitutes the subject's state of abjection.

In this configuration of physical and conceptual making there is the presupposition of several categories of narrative text that bring into view a fuller picture of the process of signification in this art practice. I believe that it is within the context of this particular language activity i.e. the process and mechanism embedded in the practice by which the unknown becomes known, implicated in the activity that takes place across a membranous boundary in the physical and conceptual making, that the location of my enquiry is situated. In this sense it is closer to the Kristevan language structure that embraces the overlapping and multiple narratives that can provide articulation for voices of suppressed discourses. Instead it is closer to what Kristeva refers to as Freud's representation of things,

*"Freud speaks of the representation of things, the representation of words, the representation of affects that don't have the same status in the psychic apparatus."*⁴⁹

What Kristeva is referring to here is Freud's primary processes, and she goes on to elaborate

*"the primary process doesn't necessarily work on signs but can also extend to traces, to psychic inscriptions that aren't of the same order of the sign, but are instead colors, sounds, frequencies--- that is intonations and rhythms."*⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Kristeva, J (1996) *Interviews*, edited by Ross Mitchell Guberman, Columbia University Press Ina Lipkowitz and Andrea Loselle 'A conversation with Julia Kristeva', p22

⁵⁰ *ibid* 23

In its relationship to the unconscious and to psychoanalysis in particular, language and its manner of operation within that particular practice has a particular function in representation, Kristeva has this to say,

*“Psychoanalysis has found in language the real objects of its investigation, for it is indeed in linguistic structures and in relation between the subject and his discourse that psychoanalysis analyses the structures known as psychical.”*⁵¹

Kristeva in her concept of the semiotic sought to illustrate the materiality of language, its capacity through its dynamic transgressive formulations to encompass a representation of that which is unspeakable and can be known only through its affects.⁵² Her theory of the subject-in-process focused on the subject not just as static subject of consciousness but as a process also of the unspeakable, unnamed, repressed form, which can be known only through its affects.

Regarding my own practice, it is in the context of Kristeva’s attention to the analysis of language, and the linguistic dynamic in the signifying process that this enquiry is located. As my debate unfolds I examine theoretically and demonstrate in my practice the heterogeneous nature of this practice as a language of making, of art making as a signifying practice. In the context of the centrality of the body, the mother’s body and the relevance of its linguistic orientation in this practice, and Kristeva’s insistence that the task of rethinking the maternal body as inseparable from the rethinking of language⁵³, I attempt to locate the articulation of drives, of traces, and how that process may be facilitated through the articulation of the maternal body in the language, in this practice of art making as a signifying process.

I examine more fully my own process of language construction and how meaning and the generation of significance can be located in that process. I look at the practice in terms of its inherent linguistic structures and processes, so that its expressive potential as a form of representation can be evaluated and demonstrated.

⁵¹ Kristeva, J (1989) *Language The Unknown, An Initiation Into Linguistics*, Trans. By Anne M. Menke. P221

⁵² para Kristeva, J (1984) *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez. New York; Columbia University Press, p16

Because my enquiry is contextualized within certain philosophical concepts of Kristeva, I locate traceable and visible links between the practice of art making and those philosophical ideas. In order to do this I have compiled below a precise of the most relevant areas of Kristeva's work and I go on to discuss their application/resonance in the practice of making.

2.04 The Semiotic/symbolic

One of the main features of Kristeva's work and her contribution to linguistics is her distinction between the semiotic and the symbolic. These are the two modalities or processes that constitute the signifying process. The symbolic in language encompasses all the effects of meaning that appear from the moment that language is articulated. It is the domain of position and judgment. It is associated with the grammar or structure of language that makes it possible for signification to occur. In relation to my studio practice of language construction, it relates to the made artworks that have come about through a process of engagement with materials and process.

The semiotic refers to the effects of meaning that are not reducible to language or that operate outside of language even if language is necessary as an immediate context. For example the child's echolalia⁵⁴ before verbal language is actually articulated. Here the child's attempt at speech presupposes the possibility of language because he lives in the environment where his parent's speech exists. So in a sense his desire to speak exists in the discourse of the parents.⁵⁵

Fundamental to the semiotic symbolic distinction is the recognition of the heterogeneous nature of language which allows for multiple meanings and interpretations. According to

⁵³ Ziarek, E (1982) *At The Limits Of Discourse; Heterogeneity, Alterity , and the Maternal Body in Kristeva's Thought*, Hypatia, A Journal of Feminist Philosophy, p93.

⁵⁴ The term echolalia refers to the child's initial babbling and attempts at vocalisation

Kristeva, heterogeneity in language implies a corresponding heterogeneity in the subject in that the taking up of a subject position is equivalent to the temporary positioning of meaning which is necessary for communication.⁵⁶ So that the semiotic, symbolic modalities of signification do not exist independently of the bodily subject. Instead they are processes through which the body is both represented and constrained in signification. Situated between the body and culture the semiotic and symbolic dynamic, and the dialectic relationship between the two, produces significance⁵⁷ She describes the signifying process as,

*“an unlimited and unbounded generating process, an unceasing operation of the drives, towards in and through language: toward, in and through the exchange system and its protagonists – the subject and its institutions.”*⁵⁸

In the application of the semiotic/symbolic dialectic to my practice, my enquiry attempts to locate the activity of that dialectic so that it can be made visible in its articulation in the practice. The process of creating such visibility requires an analysis of particular activities of making i.e. tying, knotting, binding, plaiting, etc the repetitive and rhythmic nature of these activities and the relationship of that to the articulation of drives, and pulsions as discursive informants in the linguistic mechanism.

For Kristeva all theory of language and meaning is necessarily a theory of the subject i.e. the subject as manifest in language, and not simply language as such, that is her concern. It is out of the dialectic between the semiotic and the symbolic process that all discourse arises. These two modalities are inseparable within the signifying process that constitutes language and the dialectic between them is also what determines the type of discourse (narrative, poetry, etc.) For the purpose of further clarity I want to discuss the semiotic and the symbolic in more detail and look at what makes them distinct in the signifying process.

*“We understand the term semiotic in its Greek sense; distinctive mark, trace, index, precursory sign, proof, engraved or written sign, imprint, trace, figuration.”*⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Para Kristeva, J(1986) *Interviews, A Conversation with Julia Kristeva*, by Ina Lipkowitz and Andrea Loselle, p25.

⁵⁶ para Duggan, S (2002) *Analysing Difference: Julia Kristeva's ethic of Alterity*, Mphil Thesis, Trinity College, Dublin. p15

⁵⁷ Kristeva, J (1984) *Revolution in poetic Language*, trans. Leon S.Roudiez. New York; Columbia University Press, p17

Because of the relevance of ‘trace’ as linguistic component in the language of this particular enquiry, I want to expand on its relevance to meaning making here and to point out its association to Derrida’s definition of the trace,

“Whether written or spoken, no element can function without relating to another element which itself is not simply present. Each element is constituted on the basis of the trace in it of the other elements of the system”⁶⁰

I think the significance of Derrida’s notion of the trace to this investigation of my process and investigation of materials lies in the suggestion that all language is subject to undecidability. The play of the trace is a kind of deforming, reforming slippage, an inherent instability which language cannot escape. He sets the trace as an undecidable presence-absence at the origin of meaning, so that language is positioned on an interweaving movement between what is there and what is not there, hence language is always an interweaving, a textile. I mention this here by way of illustrating the relevance and use of this analogy of trace to the semiotic activity within the signifying process within my art-making. Also I want to point out its relevance to the weave of meanings and narratives as well as the actual weave on the physical level of the canvas.

The semiotic corresponds to the rhythm and tone of the poetic function. The poetic function in question refers to the poetic dimension of language which is an exploration of the full potential of language as a means of representation. It stands for the infinite possibilities of language and all other linguistic representations are merely partial realizations of the possibilities inherent in poetic language. Rather than focusing on the transparency of communication it emphasizes the materiality of words. Kristeva calls poetic language a “return” a “repetition” a “regression, and yet a

“transformation of the unconscious, of the most archaic elements, fear, passion, abjection”⁶¹

⁵⁸ para Kristeva, J (1984) *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trad. Leon S. Roudiez, New York, Columbia University Press, p17

⁵⁹ *ibid* p.25.

⁶⁰ Collins, J and Mayblin, B (2002) *Introducing Derrida*, ed. by Richard Appignanesi, Icon Books Totem Books U.S.A. p70.

⁶¹ Kristeva, J (1986) *Interviews, Avant Garde Practice*, interview with Vassiliki Kolocotroni, ed. By Ross Mitchell Guberman, Columbia University Press, New York, p 211.

She initially used the term “poetic” in the sense that Jacobson used it that is of poetic language that consists of poetry but also of prose. She later expanded her understanding of the term “poetic” to incorporate the inclusion of the semiotic within the symbolic. She explained further,

“I call semiotic the rhythms, the alliterations, the primary processes that, according to Freud, are represented in the oneiric scene⁶², the psychic function closer to the unconscious. Charged by drives of life and of death, this scene can pass over, can be codified within the language of communication, the language of signs constructed in grammar and logic⁶³.”

2.05 Signifying Process

To return briefly to the idea of the trace, it is this Greek origin of the word semiotic that allows for a connection to be made to a precise modality of the signifying process.

“This modality is the one Freudian Psychoanalysis points to in postulating not only the facilitation and the structuring disposition of the drives, but also the so called primary processes which displace and condense both energies and their inscription.”⁶⁴

The semiotic element is the organization of drives in language, not drives as represented in language but as they are discharged in language. The word drives here has its origins in the Freudian idea of instincts, i.e. the death instinct and the life instinct. The term instinct here,

“designating the most fundamental elements that psychoanalysis is able to identify in breaking down sexuality.”⁶⁵

⁶² From the Greek word *oneiros* dream

⁶³ Kristeva, J (1986) *Interviews, Avant Garde Practice*, Vassiliki Kolocotroni, ed. By Ross Mitchell Guberman, Columbia University Press, p 212.

⁶⁴ Para *The Kristeva Reader*, (1986) ed. by Toril Moi, Blackwell UK & Cambridge USA. , P93

⁶⁵ Laplanche, J and Pontalis, JB (1973, 1988, 2004, 2006) *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, intro. By Daniel Lagache. London, The Hogart Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, p74.

For the sake of clarity I return here to the subject of drives.⁶⁶

Freud repeatedly addressed the subject of how the ego responds to fragmentation, destruction and decay. Through recognizing the certainty of death the ego tries to get around the irrevocability of death by reassuring itself that life can be preserved at all costs. Thus the fear of annihilation much like the fear of separation is one of the most basic primal anxieties in human existence. So there is a huge gesture towards self preservation in an effort to conquer and control death. Through the practice of psychoanalysis death is located in the psychic apparatus in the following ways.

- a. decomposition and decay demonstrate how death gains presence in life in the realm of the real.
- b. death is articulated in the pure destructive force of the unconscious and needs to be constrained if our personal and social existence is to be upheld.⁶⁷

The drives involve pre-Oedipal semiotic functions and energy discharges that connect and orient the body to the mother. These activities are processes of exchange that the fetus engages in with the maternal body and are regulated by that body.⁶⁸ They relate to the complex of bodily drives and erotic interchanges evolved in infancy, arising in oral and anal impulses and organised through a system of tactile and auditory responses. Kristeva uses the term *jouissance* to describe these pre-genital activities and she locates them in the *chora*.

Khora is a term used by Plato in *Timaeus* in his enquiry into the primordial origin from which all things come. He referred to the *khora* as a

*“virtually untranslatable term referring to a kind of placeless place from which everything that is, derives. Deploying a number of allusive metaphors – nurse, mother, a perfume base, winnowing sieve, receptacle, Plato acknowledges how khora challenges our normal categories of rational understanding.”*⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Para Hinshelwood, RD (1989) *A Dictionary of Kleinian Thought*, London, Free Association ,p 266-267

⁶⁷ Para Wright, E (1992) *Feminism and Psychoanalysis, A Critical Dictionary*, London, Blackwell. p58

⁶⁸ Kristeva, J (1984) *Revolution in Poetic Language*, introduction by Leon S. Roudiez, Columbia University Press, p27

⁶⁹ Kearney, R (2003) *Strangers, Gods and Monsters, Interpreting otherness*. Routledge, London and New York p 193.

Borrowing from Plato's term "khora" Kristeva calls this heterogeneous and defused field of drives, the semiotic maternal "chora" The term chora functions as a precise technical term (chorion) from embryology, which specifically defines the bodily site of the first signifying site of the fetus. At this level of development there is no awareness of boundaries, only the closest relation to the pure materiality of existence where the self is dominated by drives and there is as yet no articulation of language. Kristeva refers to this as the logic of signification operating within the materiality of the body. So the chora became the articulation of drives, the generating force that provides our need to speak, our need to represent. She describes the chora as,

*"not yet a position that represents something for someone, (i.e. it is not yet a sign) nor is it a position that represents someone for another position, (i.e. it is not yet a signifier either) it is however generated in order to attain to this signifying process."*⁷⁰

It is associated with rhythms and tones that are meaningful parts of language and yet of themselves do not represent or signify something. The semiotic is the bodily drives as they are discharged in signification. The drives here refer to the death drive and the life drive.

2.06 The Maternal Body

Kristeva's theory of the semiotic is tied up with the subject and its origins, with the instinctual events of infancy and the expression of these drives in language. It includes a level of psychic representation that is extremely primitive, with effects that are psychic inscriptions such as colour, sound, intonation and rhythm. It is a place that allows the archaic memory to exist. The semiotic, which can be interpreted as an articulation of unconscious processes or an open space within language, functions best on the level of the imagination. Prof. Richard Kearney had this to say,

⁷⁰ Kristeva, J (1984) *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez. New York; Columbia University Press. P26.

“And yet the very semiotic relations that make up the space of khora are only, Kristeva properly attended to ‘dream logic’ (Timaeus, 52a), or in more accessible guise, in the semiotic rhythms of certain experimental literary texts. ‘Indifferent to language, enigmatic and feminine’ concludes Kristeva ‘this space underlying the written is rhythmic, unfettered, and irreducible to its intelligible verbal translation; it is musical, anterior to judgment’”⁷¹

The whole of Kristeva’s work, particularly her contribution to linguistic and psychoanalytic theory, involved a consistent elaboration of the semiotic and its interaction with the symbolic. The semiotic for Kristeva is a term that relates both to her interest in avant- garde practice e.g. the work of Joyce, Mallarme, Artaud, and literary style, and to her analysis of the establishment of subject identity. Looking at the manifestation of the semiotic component in this type of literature she tried to show how this writing practice paralleled the logic of the unconscious, the dark drive-ridden nature of its prose illustrating how for example regression could be communicated.

Psychoanalysis later became the means by which she applied her early research into literary use of language and the development or breakdown of subjectivity at points of language acquisition or dissolution, in childhood or in psychoses. It is in these situations that the semiotic exerts the most intense pressure on the symbolic because the subject position is unstable, either not completely formulated as in the child or in a state of breakdown. The child’s echolalia and mimesis of adult speech and the incoherent, a – syntactic speech of the psychotic are the clearest example of the expulsion of drives which generates the signifying process without the structuring effect of the symbolic. In this way the semiotic functions as the raw material of signification, the corporeal, libidinal matter that must be harnessed and appropriately channeled for social cohesion and regulation.

Through her insistence on the semiotic as the discharge of bodily drives into discourse Kristeva has re-introduced the body into the signifying practice. It is drives that activate the linguistic chain; all language would be empty and meaningless without the semiotic eruption into the symbolic. Without the symbolic function we could not communicate

⁷¹ Kearney, R(2003) *Strangers, Gods and Monsters, Interpreting otherness*, Routledge, London and New York, p 197,

our bodily drives. The threshold between the semiotic and the symbolic is called the thetic phase where the subject takes up a position through harnessing individual drives and impulses.

From the point of view of the evolution of the subject and the specificity of the semiotic symbolic dialectic, Kristeva points out that the choric rhythm of accumulation and dissolution is sublimated at the moment of language acquisition into the thetic stage, that is the stage of the bipolar division of the signified and signifier and the formation of syntax. I return to this aspect of the drive in the next section on language acquisition and subject formation.

From the linguistic perspective the thetic phase is:

“the precondition for signification i.e. the precondition for positing language. The Thetic phase marks a threshold between two heterogeneous realms the semiotic and the symbolic.”⁷²

The thetic phase is the breaking and rupture of the semiotic/symbolic dialectic ⁷³which positions the subject and positions meaning. It separates out or establishes boundaries in what would otherwise be free floating. It represents a very fundamental deep structure, the point in the subject where ideas are not really formed but their conditions of possibility are. That is the phenomenon of separation, of cutting, of being able to distinguish one thing from another even if distinctions are somewhat arbitrary. It is an ongoing position of meaning and identification from the flux of the semiotic and serves as a fixative through which bodily drives are discharged in language. It is important to point out that the thetic does not stand for a once and for all meaning.

“though absolutely necessary, the thetic is not exclusive: the semiotic which also precedes it, constantly tears it open and this transgression brings about all the various transformations of the signifying process that are called creation.”⁷⁴

⁷²Kristeva, J (1984) *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez, Columbia University Press p48

⁷³ para Duggan, S(2002) *Analysing Difference, Julia Kristeva's Ethic of Alterity* Chapter 1, Mphil thesis, Trinity College, Dublin, p20,

⁷⁴ Kristeva, J (1984) *Revolution in Poetic Language*, p 62

It is the continuous re-activation of thethetic as rupture of the semiotic/symbolic dialectic that constitutes the subject as a subject-in-process. For Kristeva the subject-in-process is suspended between semiotic and symbolic processes, between the demands of drives and cultural demands. Hence her reading of the subject position as being formed through a continuous comprising of instinctual drives and social demands. In relation to the constructed language of the studio practice for example, the semiotic process occurs in the interrelation between elements of the materials such as color, tone, form, the inanimate qualities of the canvas such as the weight, the scale, the folds and how they hang etc, and the analogous thought form that arise out of these elements and components. These particular aspects, while they might lack significance in themselves do have meaning in the context of the whole piece. It seems to me that it is here in this space of interrelation that the effects of certain articulations are elaborated in the engagement with the material process, with ideas and decisions.

In this way the visibility of the links between this physical process of structuring and the content of the work, is located in the semiotic activity operating in the constructed language. So the semiotic component of language enables the articulation of states of being, of feelings that exist within the subject but which remain concealed within the limitations of symbolic language. The semiotic operates at the level of utterances in the language, where there is an intersection of different voices, i.e. color, tone, tension weight, light etc. and at the level of where aesthetic intervention in the decision making process occurs.

I demonstrate that this practice represents the place of the subject-in-process because it holds open a linguistic space where traces and fragments meet, where drives are articulated and cultural demands are met.

“The subject-in-process is always in a state of contesting the law, either with the force of violence, of aggressivity, of the death drive, or with the other side of this force: pleasure and jouissance. The subject-in-process then gives us a vision of the human venture as a venture of innovation, of creation, of opening, of renewal.”⁷⁵

⁷⁵ Kristeva, J(1985) *Julia Kristeva, Interview*, in conversation with Ina Lipkoqitz and Andrea Loselle in Ross Guberman (ed) p26,.

The symbolic element of language is the domain of position and judgment. It relates to the tributary signification of language, all the effects of meaning that appear as soon as language is articulated into grammar. The symbolic relates to the various discourses that organize public life, religion, law, economics, politics etc. The symbolic is concerned with both the acquisition of language, and its syntactical structure. It is important, however to differentiate between Kristeva's symbolic and that of Lacan (which will be dealt with in detail in the following section). Lacan's notion of the Symbolic includes the entire realm of signification while for Kristeva the symbolic is one element of that realm. For Kristeva the symbolic order is composed of symbolic and semiotic processes, the semiotic being part of the symbolic and not opposed to it. Kelly Oliver clarifies this in the following,

“Kristeva uses the symbolic in two senses to refer not only to the Symbolic order but also to a specifically symbolic element within the Symbolic order that she opposes to the semiotic element. The symbolic is the element of stasis within the Symbolic, whereas the semiotic is the element of rejection. Both of these elements are crucial to signification. For Kristeva, signification, the symbolic order is always heterogeneous which is why revolutions within the Symbolic order are possible. The Symbolic order is not just the order of the law (but) it is also the order of resistance to the law.”⁷⁶

The Symbolic as the domain of position and judgment is the “social effect of the relation to the other.”⁷⁷ Our positioning of self as different from the other is dependent on our entry into the Symbolic through the acquisition of language. It is Kristeva's aim to rewrite this position as a process to illustrate that identity is established through repression of heterogeneity and difference within the subject.⁷⁸

The Symbolic order of signification through which we assume our identity is composed of conflicting processes of disruption and identification, and Kristeva seeks to analyse the subject by analysing the processes which constitute the subject.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Oliver, K(1993) *Reading Kristeva: Unravelling The Double- Bind.*, Indian U,P., 1993, p 10

⁷⁷ Kristeva, J (1984) *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez. New York; Columbia University Press. P. 29.

⁷⁸ Para Duggan, S(2002) *Analysing Difference, Julia Kristeva's Ethic of Alterity*, Mphil thesis, Trinity College, Dublin, p23.

In relation to this project, in order that the research question be addressed in the context of the language of the art making being viewed as a signifying process, it is essential that an analysis of subject formation, its relationship to language acquisition and separation be addressed in some detail. I focus on the ways in which Kristeva has situated the maternal body back into theories of language by her proposal that bodily drives are discharged through language, and that the logic of signification is operating in the material maternal body. In this way she sees language also as having a physical reality in the body.

⁷⁹ Para Duggan, S (2002) Kristeva maintains that her use of the term “analysis” preserves its Greek meaning of an-alysis or “dissolution”. See ‘Julia Kristeva Speaks Out’, in Ross Guberman (ed) *Julia Kristeva: Interviews.*, p 257-270.

Chapter 3

3.01 Introduction

In this chapter I introduce the psychoanalytic theory of Lacan and explain the principal terms associated with his work. Most of his work on subject formation developed in the context of the concept of the imaginary, the real, and the symbolic order. These theoretical concerns constitute the basis of what was to emerge in Lacanian theory, i.e. the subject, the unconscious and the drives.

I outline his account of how subject identity becomes established through the mirror stage and the introduction of the other within the oedipal crisis and the subject's entry into the symbolic and the wider world of culture and language. This entry into the symbolic order coincides with the acquisition of language and the separation of the child from the mother. It initiates the castration complex, the inscription of loss and its repression and the opening of the unconscious.

I introduce the psychoanalytic work of Kristeva and identify how she differs from Lacan in her account of subject formation by giving a more central place to the maternal and the feminine. She argues that the principles of separation and difference are operating in the body before the child begins to use language. Unlike Lacan Kristeva proposes that the child is subject to maternal regulation and linguistic processes before the effect of paternal law.

Because of the centrality of the mother's body in my work I examine Kristeva's theory of the mother's body, its specific relationship to language and its significance as a location for signification through the discharge of drives in the semiotic. This includes an illustration of the importance and relevance of the semiotic chora and its relationship to the maternal body in the role of subject identity.

This leads to the subject of abjection which is the main theme of Kristeva's work *Powers of Horror*⁸⁰ and details and explains what it is that constitutes the subjects state

⁸⁰ Kristeva, J (1982) *Powers of Horror, An essay on abjection*, trans. by Leon S. Roudiez, Columbia Press, New York.

of abjection. It leads into the development of the mother's body as the site of abjection hence the maternal orientation of the abject and its relationship to language and the semiotic. I demonstrate through the art practice as well as the written work how the inherent presence of the abject as it is implicated in the practice by identifying the links between the nature of the art making i.e. its activities of making i.e. tying, binding, plaiting, knotting, fraying, stitching etc. and the process and presence of abjection as an analogous thought form in the work.

I discuss the maternal body in relation to the subject in process, how the speaking body is brought back to language and how the other through the activity of the semiotic becomes located in language.

3.02 Subject Formation/Language Acquisition

In the development of her own psycho-linguistic theory of subject formation Kristeva was greatly influenced by the work of Lacan. So it is important here to examine in more detail some of the fundamental concepts of Lacanian psychoanalytic theory. The imaginary (which is the pre oedipal phase) the unconscious and the symbolic order constitute the basis for what was to emerge in Lacanian theory.

It is in the elaboration of these terms and their related states that Lacan's concept of the 'the subject', the unconscious, and the drives eventually emerged. The imaginary corresponds to when the child believes himself to be part of the mother. There is no separation between himself and the world, there is no difference and no absence, only identity and presence.

At around the age of six to twelve months what Lacan describes as the mirror stage emerges. Here the child begins to get an integrated image of himself and experiences some sense of 'I' when he finds an 'I' reflected back to him from the mirror by something outside of himself (which includes its mother who acts like a mirror). The mirror image splits us in two and introduces the other within. So the mirror image both is and is not the baby. Lacan argues that all future identifications originate in this initial taking of identity from outside the self.

“we misrecognise ourselves in the alienated image of what we want to be, because this ideal image denies the chaos we feel in our own being.”⁸¹

This mistaken self-identification in the mirror begins the tendency for the subject to seek imaginary wholeness through external identification which conceal internal conflict and crises, in other words to replace the abundance of the Imaginary through Symbolic identification.

In the development of the child the imaginary corresponds to the pre oedipal stage when the child believes himself to be part of the mother. There is no separation between himself and the world, there is no difference and no absence, only identity and presence.⁸²

The process by which the oedipal crisis is set up begins with the child having to relinquish his sexual ambitions towards the mother's body. He must begin to acknowledge the reality of submitting to the painful and humiliating reality that he must lose the mother to his most powerful rival the father, i.e. Symbolic castration by the father. The child must relinquish his primary identification with her and the father now becomes the agency which represents the world beyond the mother i.e. the social and cultural world in which the child finds himself.

Here the father enters and represents something intrusive and annihilating on the child's idyll with the mother. The child recognizes the father for what he is an insurmountable obstacle to the fulfillment of its passionate wishes (for the mother). In this way the subject enters into the constraints of the wider external world of culture and language and his primary identification with the mother is relinquished. To enter the Symbolic, the child must move to a position where there is an external other to relate to. He must move away from the stage where 'other'⁸³ is seen as not different or distinguishable from self, to a position where 'other' can be declared, affirmed and spoken to.

⁸¹ Minsky, R (1996) Jacques Lacan *The Meaning of The Phallus*, in *Psychoanalysis and Gender*, An Introductory Reader ed. by Rosalind Minsky, Routledge, p 145.

⁸² Paro Moi, T (1985) *Sexual, Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory*, Routledge, London and New York, p99

⁸³ *ibid* p101

This entry into the symbolic order coincides with the acquisition of language and the separation of the child from its primary source, the mother. It introduces the phallus representing the law of the father. The law of the father then comes to substitute the desire for the mother's body. The child experiences this separation from the maternal body as a tragic loss and begins to console himself with words. This shattering of the child's illusion forces the repression of its longing to be eternally bound to the mother. This loss must be repressed if the child is to make a successful transition into language. This first repression is what Lacan refers to as primary repression, i.e. repression of desire, desire for symbolic unity with the mother's body. He proposes that it is this repressed desire that opens up the unconscious. In this sense the unconscious is desire. *"If for Lacan, it is the entry into the Symbolic order that opens up the unconscious, this means that it is the primary repression of desire for symbolic unity with the mother that creates the unconscious."*⁸⁴

Lacan postulates that this positioning of the subject in the Symbolic order takes place through the discovery of sexual difference and the repression of the heterogeneous drives. This is how Lacan identifies 'castration' as the means by which language imposes a division on the subject against itself and against the 'other'.⁸⁵

"Lacan identifies 'castration' as the means by which language imposes a division on the subject against itself and against the other."

*"The castration complex is thus synchronic with language acquisition – language is a system of differences and the taking up of a position in language is dependant on the internalisation of this concept of difference."*⁸⁶

At the heart of the meaning of both the father and language, is desire, 'the power of pure loss'⁸⁷ In language however we can never recover the ultimate meaning from which all meanings arise, because in language we are always cut off from the object of desire i.e. the mother. Lacan maintains that the repressed unconscious desires are returned to us in the language with which we attempt to bridge the gap created by the loss of the mother.

⁸⁴ *ibid* p101

⁸⁵ Kristeva, J (1984) *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez. New York; Columbia University Press. P 27,

⁸⁶ Duggan, S (2002) *Analysing Difference: Julia Kristeva's Ethic of Alterity*. Ch.1 Mphil thesis, Trinity College Dublin, p13.

'The unconscious is constituted by the effects of speech on the subject, it is the dimension in which the subject is determined in the development of the effects of speech, consequently the unconscious is structured like a language'.⁸⁸

Confined within the realm of the Symbolic and language, the subject is in a permanent state of desire that can never be satisfied. For Lacan desire behaves the same way as language, driving the subject from signifier to signifier in pursuit of satisfaction which can never finally be reached in the way that meaning can never be seized as full presence.

The function of this primary repression becomes evident in the child's newly acquired language/speech which is his initiation into the Symbolic. So when the child learns to say, "I am" and to distinguish that from "you are" or "he is" he acknowledges that the 'I' that speaks is not the 'I' that is spoken. A split has occurred between self and self-representation. This split is experienced as desire for what is lost, so the speaking subject who says 'I am' is in fact saying I am he who has lost something. The speaking subject only comes into being because of the desire for the lost mother.

"To speak as a subject is the same as to represent the existence of therefore repressed desire, the speaking subject is lack, and this is how Lacan can say that the subject is that which is not"⁸⁹

Language becomes the means by which repression is achieved by driving our unconscious desire underground into spaces between words. Access to our repressed desire can be regained only in language where desire becomes the driving force behind the signifiers that propel all acts of speech, all refusals to speak, and all other conscious and unconscious representations.⁹⁰

Unlike Lacan, who maintains that entrance into language is dependant on the Law of the Father and requires separation especially from the mother's body, Kristeva offers a more

⁸⁷ Para Minsky, R(1996) *Psychoanalysis and Gender* 1996, Routledge, P147

⁸⁸ Lacan J.(1978) (1981) *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book XI, ed. by Jacques-Alain Miller, trans., by Alan Sheridan, first American edition 1978, first published as Norton paperback 1981, p149

⁸⁹ Smith, A (1998) *Julia Kristeva; Speaking The Unspeakable*, London, Pluto Press, (1998) P67

central place for the maternal and feminine in the subjects psychosexual development. She seeks to free the subject from the Law of the Father by illustrating how the semiotic process of the maternal chora begins the emergence of a subject position.

Kristeva maintains that there are extremely important processes in operation between the mother's body and that of the fetus, and before the mirror stage and paternal castration threats. Unlike Lacan who attribute language acquisition and socialization to the paternal function and ignore the function of the mother as anything other than the primary object, Kristeva elaborates and complicates the maternal function. She insists that there is regulation and structure in the maternal body and the child's relationship to that body before separation at birth and prior to language acquisition.

She argues that the principles or structures of separation and difference are operating in the body even before the infant begins to use language. So before the effect of paternal law the infant is subject to maternal regulation. Kristeva calls this 'the law before the law'.⁹¹

She is referring here to processes of exchange in which the fetus is engaged with the maternal body that are regulated by that body. These pre-oedipal primary processes are the basic pulsions that gather in the chora'⁹² As has already been stated in an earlier section, at this level of development there is no awareness of boundaries, only the closest relation to the pure materiality of existence where the self is dominated by the drives even though language is not yet articulated. Kristeva calls this the logic of signification operating within the materiality of the body.⁹³

Once the subject is established in the symbolic order, the chora is repressed and will be experienced then as pulsional pressure on symbolic language. It represents in other words that disruptive dimension of language, which can never be caught up in the closure of traditional linguistic theory.

⁹⁰ Para Minsky,R(1996) *Psychoanalysis and Gender*, Routledge, London and New York, P 156.

⁹¹ Para Oliver,K (1985) *Julia Kristeva: Summary of Major Themes, Kristeva and Feminism*, by Kelly Oliver 1985, p603.

⁹² Para. Moi, T (1985) *Sexual, Textual Politics, Feminist Literary Theory*, Routledge, P 99

3.03 Language, the maternal body

In the context of my research question, regarding the subject of drives and abjection, I look at the maternal body as it is implicated linguistically and its relationship to the signifying process. I illustrate the corporeal relationship of the maternal body within the articulation of the linguistic process focusing in particular on the physicality of materials, making and the thought processes arising out of that. In this way a framework can be established in which to identify the drive based dynamic operating as part of the dialectic interrelation between semiotic and symbolic in the practice. In this way it becomes possible through the investigative process to locate in the construction of language where drives become part of the articulation.

In Kristeva's take on the formation of subjectivity what comes to the forefront is the juncture or meeting point between body, the maternal body and language. Kristeva positions the basis for linguistic process in the body by showing how the drives gather in and are discharged from the maternal semiotic chora, instigating the desire which is the basis for signification. She argues for the intrinsic value of drives to the signifying process. Kelly Oliver had this to say,

“ Kristeva attempts to bring the speaking body back into discourse by arguing both that the logic of language is already operating at the material level of bodily processes, and that bodily drives make their way into language. She postulates that signifying practices are the result of material bodily processes. Drives make their way into language through the semiotic element of signification, which does not represent bodily drives but discharges them. In this way all signification has material motivation ”⁹⁴

⁹³ Para. Oliver, K (1985) *Julia Kristeva, Summary of Major Themes, Kristeva and Feminism*, by Kelly Oliver, p600.

⁹⁴ Oliver, K (1997) ed. *The Portable Kristeva*, New York: Columbia University Press.p xvi

3.04 Abjection

Kristeva is interested in forms of communication that have their origin in the pre-Oedipal period and that is why she emphasizes the semiotic chora and its relationship to the mother and the mother's body in the role of subject identity. As has been shown, in Kristeva's view, subject identity is established by the exclusion of the 'other', the repressed desire for the mother's body. Subject identity is continually threatened by the return of the 'other' in language. This return of the oppressed, i.e.

*'the not me, the dweller on the threshold who beckons to the ego as an aspect which threatens it with death, and yet which it is death to reject'*⁹⁵

provides a necessary challenge to our subjective identity. This is what constitutes the subject's state of abjection. Dr. Szulakowska had this to say,

*"In its presence "it is not I who expel: 'I' is expelled. It is something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself."*⁹⁶

In 'Powers of Horror' Kristeva describes the abject as the human reaction to a threatened breakdown in meaning caused by a loss of distinction between subject and object or between self and other. The abject is situated at a place before we entered the symbolic order. As Kristeva puts it

"⁹⁷The abject confronts us, on the one hand, with those fragile states where man strays on the territories of the animal.

The abject confronts us, on the other hand and this time within our personal archeology, with our earliest attempts to release the hold of maternal entity even before existing outside of her, thanks to the autonomy of language."

The infant, in order to separate itself from the mother's body must experience her body as both fascinating and horrifying. The experience of horror at the lack of boundaries

Szulakowska, U (2002) catalogue essay for exhibition *A-Stray*, p2, Galway

⁹⁶ Kristeva, J (1983) *Powers of Horror. An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez; New York. 1983. P 3-4 (taken from catalogue *A-Stray*, 2002.

⁹⁷ Kristeva, J (1983) *Powers of Horror, An Essay on Abjection*, translated by Leon S. Roudiez, Columbia University Press p 13

between his body and the mothers is what drives the infant away and facilitates the child's entry into language and the symbolic. This process of division in the maternal body implies not merely a separation of mother and the child but also an inscription of otherness into every identity and linguistic practice.⁹⁸ The abject marks the moment when we separate ourselves from the mother, when we begin to recognize a boundary between 'me' and other.

The abject corresponds to what Kristeva terms a primal repression, one that precedes the establishment of the subject's relation to its objects of desire and of representation, before even the establishment of the opposition, conscious/unconscious. Kristeva refers instead to the moment in our psychosexual development when we establish a border or separation between what is human and animal, between culture and what preceded it. On the level of archaic memory, Kristeva refers to the primitive effort to separate ourselves from the animal:

“ by way of abjection, primitive societies have marked out a precise area of their culture in order to remove it from the threatening world of animals and animalism, which were imagined as representative of sex and murder. ”⁹⁹

In this process of abjection the subject is initiated from the semiotic 'chora' of immediacy and non-differentiation into the symbolic realm of positionality and differentiability as it forms identifications and represses primary heterogeneity. The abject represents the threat that meaning is breaking down and constitutes our reaction to such a breakdown. What is excluded is not however permanently repressed but remains hovering at the borders of our identity perpetually challenging its unity. Kristeva describes it,

“ There looms within abjection, one of those violent dark revolts of being, directed against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside seduced ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable. It lies there quite

⁹⁸ para Ziarek, E (1992) *At the Limits of Discourse*, Hypatia, vol.7 p 103.

⁹⁹ Modules on Kristeva, II *on the abject*, p 1 of 3, www.sla.purdue.edu/academic/engl/theory.htm.

close but it cannot be assimilated. It beseeches, worries, and fascinates desire, which nevertheless does not let itself be seduced."¹⁰⁰

The relevance of the abject in the context of my research question lies in the fact that the abject is maternally orientated and has its origins in the pre-Oedipal, pre-linguistic domain. It is through the semiotic that the abject, the 'other' becomes lodged in language. In terms of linguistic articulation, abjection corresponds to what Kristeva refers to in *Revolution in Poetic Language* as the continual pressure of the heterogeneous semiotic.¹⁰¹ This is what constitutes the disruptive potential of language, and reduces subject identity and its unity.

In relation to the language of my art making I highlight the process of the abject, its purpose and relevance in the process of signification inherent in the process of the making, both in terms of process of making and representation. I demonstrate this by identifying moments and events in the linguistic process of making and thinking through making and materials. By looking at the relationship between these events and the activities of making, links can be made between the drives and for example the gestural nature of knotting, tying, plaiting etc. and their connection to the research question. In this relation it is important to remember that the abject cannot be turned into a sign, it is beyond the signing system, it hovers at the edges engaging in the process of becoming.

The abject is manifest in the repulsion we feel towards certain bodily processes and states which force us to rethink our divisions of subject and object, inside and outside, and remind us of our own materiality, corporeality and mortality. Bodily fluids, blood, semen, faeces, and ultimately the corpse, indicate the abject, and to ensure containment of our own proper bodies, we abject our waste and bodily excesses. The corpse especially exemplifies Kristeva's notion of the abject since it literalizes the breakdown of the boundaries and distinctions between subject and object and is crucial for the establishment of identity. So the abject does not represent what is excessive of our daily functions, it is that same excess. The corpse above all, as the essence of abjection, rather than representing death it shows us death, our corporeality and mortality.

¹⁰⁰ Kristeva, J(1983) *Powers of Horror, An Essay on Abjection*, Columbia University Press, New York, p 1.

*“.....refuse and corpses show me what I permanently thrust aside to live..... if dung signifies the other side of the border, the place where I am not, and which permits me to be, the corpse, the most sickening of wastes, is a border that has encroached upon everything.....The corpse seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life”.*¹⁰²

The subject's relation to abjection is rooted in the struggle every human being carries on with the mother and the maternal body. Operating between nature and culture the maternal body never ceases to be a speaking subject. Kristeva models all subjective relations on the maternal body with its two in one or other' within. This process of division in the maternal body implies not merely a separation of the mother and the child but also an inscription of otherness and distance into every identity and linguistic practice.

*“A mother is a continuous separation, a division of the very flesh. And consequently of language-and it has always been so. Then there is this other abyss that opens up between the body and what has been its inside: there is the abyss between the mother and the child.”*¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ Kristeva, J (1984) *Revolution in Poetic Language*, introduction by Leon S. Roudiez, Columbia University Press, New York, p17

¹⁰² Ibid.,p 3, 4.

¹⁰³ Kristeva, J(1986) *Sabat mater*, from *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. Toril Moi, New York, Columbia University Press p 178

3.05 The subject-in-process

Like the maternal body, each of us is what she calls a subject-in-process. Kristeva posits the maternal body as the most literal and most dramatic model of the subject-in-process. As such we are always negotiating the other within i.e. the return of the repressed maternal function and its importance in the development of subjectivity, and access to language.

“In abjection the death drives are powered by a loathing which is intrinsically a loathing of the maternal, separation from the maternal body is still crucial.”¹⁰⁴

Just as she brings the speaking body back into language by putting language into the body, Kristeva brings the subject into the place of the other by putting the other into the subject. It is at the level of and through the activity of the semiotic that the other that estranged space becomes located in language.

Kristeva’s intention has been to dissolve the difference between inside and outside, so that established concepts of inside/outside, subject/object become, through the activity of the semiotic, a space that accommodates difference, the other inside. In this way strangeness, the strangeness of the other becomes lodged in language.

Kristeva cites three categories of discourse in which the abject can be purified, religion, psychoanalysis and art. In the context of the semiotic, art has a privileged relation to the abject.

“The artist, who is in constant contact with the drives at their most primitive and who strives to give them form in the language of art, shares a privileged relation to the semiotic with the mother, who must educate the infant driven by bodily needs.”¹⁰⁵

There is a similar relation to the semiotic with the psychoanalyst who provides a structure for the client’s regression. It is Kristeva’s belief that both writing and art, along with the mother’s socializing of the infant through language and psychoanalysis all have

¹⁰⁴ Kristeva, J (1982) *Powers of Horror, An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez, Columbia University Press, New York P27.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, P36.

transitional status in that through the apparatus of the imaginary, they inscribe the realm of the imaginary within the socio-cultural symbolic process.

She regards art as one of the most cathartic processes for the purification of the abject. It is because of the openness to the imagination inherent in art, that it can explore the place of the abject and facilitate the naming and representation of that which remains unspeakable in the established vernacular. It is a place where boundaries begin to disappear, where we are confronted with an archaic space before such linguistic binaries as self/other, conscious/unconscious, inside/outside, have prevailed. Kristeva had this to say,

“Creating a work of art obviously requires a certain lifting of repression that is already an unveiling of risk and danger: the struggle between symbolic authority and the drive based call from an archaic mother is always present and is at the very heart of the creative process.”¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶ Kristeva, J (1986) *Interviews*, speaking to Elaine Boucquery P111,

Chapter 4

4.01 Introduction

In chapter four I look at and make visible the links between the practice and the relationship with ideas. I illustrate how the practice engages and reflects those ideas in the representation of sculptural form. I propose to do this by looking analytically at the different components and aspects of the structuring process in the studio in terms of materials, process, content, and form.

I look at the relatedness of each of these aspects of structuring a sculpted form and structuring a meaning in the context of the part these forms play in the semiotic/symbolic dialectic within the practice. In this way certain informing mechanisms in the work can be located and assimilated in terms of their origin and function in the practice. It is within this articulatory mechanism in the making and in the thinking through making that my research question can be addressed. In this way I can establish how it becomes possible to illustrate in this thesis, how such categories as drives and the semiotic as linguistic devices operate to inform the practice in signification.

In this section I look at the structuring practice of my art making as a signifying process and as a process of representation, in the context of the particular ideas discussed in the previous chapter so that I can locate and identify the links between those ideas and the structuring operation of language construction in the studio. I focus on my art practice, the ideas and processes operating within its structure, e.g. the semiotic, instinct, the maternal, the unconscious etc., and the links between both as they form part of the articulating mechanism within the practice.

4.02 Practice as text

The language of this art making viewed as a signifying process provides a framework within which to explore my art making in the context of the Kristevan ideas e.g. the mechanism of the semiotic, its relevance and function as linguistic component and its relationship to the discharge of drives. In this way the context for addressing the subject of drives and the semiotic as articulated in my research question can be addressed.

To facilitate this exploration I view the practice as a text in the Kristevan sense of the word “text” as a place and as a process within the activity of articulation.

Ann Rosalind Jones had this to say

*“The interplay of semiotic and symbolic produces a ‘signifying process’ rather than a fixed univocal meaning and the place where the signifying practice occurs is a text, a site in which the energies of the unconscious simultaneously attack the formal conventions of language and are supported by them.”*¹⁰⁷

My use of the word text here is in the context Jones describes in the same essay that is the text as being a site in which the pulsions of the unconscious attack and erupt upon the formal structures of language and are supported by them. In this sense the semiotic can be seen as a site that makes provision for the dialectic relationship with the symbolic in the process of the practice in the research.

Kristeva calls the presence of the semiotic in the text ‘heterogeneity’.

Heterogeneous in the context of the linguistic articulation of my art practice as research refers to that disruptive potential of the language where for example the concept of the abject as linguistic corresponds to the continuous pressure of the semiotic, thus keeping the maternal body implicated in the language of this practice and its production.

In the practice this process corresponds, for example to how, through the presence and activity of the conceptual narrative of the abject, the corporeal, the maternal can exist in the materials and give rise to decisions as to how those materials are manipulated and handled, and how departures in practice arise out of this decision making within the

¹⁰⁷ Jones, A R (1984) *Julia Kristeva on Femininity: The Limits of a semiotic Politics*, Feminist Review, V 18 Winter, p59

work. A detailed analysis of the procedures and processes by which this mechanism of heterogeneity becomes established and manifests in the practice is dealt with in great detail in Chapter 5.

“an eruption of instinct, a counter movement, destroys the stases and finalities of language as a symbolic code. Grammar and memory, authoritarian and paternal, are broken up so that a new potential for signifying, a return to fusion with the mother can arise.”¹⁰⁸

The truth, the meaning however, signified by such a text is far from univocal, instead it is multilayered, and uncertain.

“The truth signified by the text is no longer single but plural and uncertain; the object being represented is called into question. The speaking subject risks losing its identity (while) the topic of the text becomes its own semiotic functioning.”¹⁰⁹

Roland Barthes in ‘From work to Text had this to say,

“The text is plural. Which is not simply to say that it has several meanings, but that it accomplishes the very plural of meaning:

The text is not a coexistence of meanings but a passage, an over crossing; thus it answers not to an interpretation, even a liberal one, but to an explosion, a dissemination. The plural of the text depends, that is, not on the ambiguity of its contents but on what might be called the stereographic plurality of its weave of signifiers (etmologically), the text is a weave of signifiers”¹¹⁰

My studio practice as a process of structuring language as a text of thinking belongs more to an apparently open unstructured articulation than a particular practical or theoretical unity. It proceeds as an experimental openness, a thickness of signifiers, of multiple narratives that develop and emerge in the process of practice, of process, of rhythms, of thinking, of ideas, images, and memory.. It is an engagement with practice and materials that is without form, having its origin in an unthinking, non logical,

¹⁰⁸ ibid p60.

¹⁰⁹ ibid p60

automatic process, where the language is discovered in the doing of the work and in the intelligence of materials and not in the thinking of the work.

For the purpose of locating the language I elaborate on the idea of origin. Origin in this context and as viewed by Kristeva in the psychoanalytic context, and in relation to language origin, she has postulated that a journey to distant forgotten and often traumatic memories of childhood and beyond, initiated a strange mutation in our language. She had this to say,

“In speaking, in traversing the universe of signs, we arrive at emotions, at sensations, at drives, at affects and even at what Freud called ‘the umbilicus of the dream’. This is something unnamable, which becomes nonetheless the source of our investigation. I am interested in language, in the other side of language which is filtered inevitably by language and yet is not language. I have named this heterogeneity variously; I have sought it out in the experience of love, of abjection, of horror. I have called it the semiotic in relation to the symbolic.”¹¹¹

The studio practice develops as a text of thinking, of visual thinking, that seems to have begun at a certain point but is at the same time without beginning. There is initially only a vague idea of what the work is or what it will amount to, so that in an unknowing way the practice proceeds as if the hands know what to do. As Kristeva has said,

“The language of art.....follows (but differently and more closely) the other aspect of maternal jouissance, the sublimation taking place....within the mother’s body, arising perhaps unwittingly out of her marginal position.....the artist speaks from a place where she is not, where she knows not.”¹¹²

Through a process of thinking through making, I locate the links and the relationship between the ideas and the practice. I investigate those links and expose the activity of their relatedness to the practice and what emerges in the process of language itself. For

¹¹⁰ Harrison C and Wood, P (1992) *Art in Theory, 1900-1990, An Anthology of changing ideas*, ed. p941

¹¹¹ O’Grady, K (1998) *Julia Kristeva, Aesthetics, Politics, Ethics, Parralax*, 1998, V 8 PT July – Sept. P5-6,

¹¹² Jones, A R (1984) *Julia Kristeva on Feminity: The Limits of a Semiotic Politics*, *Feminist Review*, V 18, p63

the sake of clarity and convenience I look at this relationship in terms of what happens in the practice at the level of materials, process and content.

It is important to draw attention here to the centrality of the mother's body in the conceptual, practical and material reality of the practice. I mean the maternal body as the site of the subject-in-process through which the speech of the other is materialized in the work and the maternal body as vehicle for my aesthetic discovery. Art practice is, according to Kristeva, a privileged practice open to the linguistic fluidity of the subject-in-process and as the mother's body is the most immediate and most explicit site of the subject-in-process, it, in this sense validates the application of signifying process to this practice and this enquiry.

The maternal body is also the location for the links with the main articulatory events of the emerging language. I mean for example the relevance of the abject in the context of my research question lies in the fact that the abject is maternally orientated and has its origins in the pre-Oedipal, pre-linguistic domain.

In the context of any such analysis I would like to reiterate the importance of the unconscious, not just as a thinking, nor simply as a psychic apparatus, but as the place that discharges and implies the heterogeneity of the subject, the subject-in-process, and its relationship to the drives and how they are discharged in language. What prevails over this whole structuring process as a language is the contention that

'the unconscious is structured like a language'¹¹³.

Lacan has referred to the specific functional activity of the unconscious in its role in the construction of language,

"I have constantly stressed the pulsative function of the unconscious, the need to disappear that seems to be in some sense inherent in it—everything that for a moment appears in its slit seems to be destined by a sort of pre-emption, to close up again upon itself, as Freud himself used this metaphor, to vanish, to disappear."¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁴ Minsky, R ed by (1996) *Psychoanalysis and gender*, Routledge, P 155,.

¹¹⁴ Lacan, J (1977) *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans, Alan Sheridan (New York) Norton P43,.

Kristeva draws attention in the signifying process to the analogy between semiotic/symbolic and conscious/unconscious,

“While this division is not identical to unconscious/conscious, nature/ culture, there are analogies. In both there are constant dialectical processes at work, one that has its source in infancy and is implicated in sexual difference. Such a dialectic comprises drives and impulses on the one hand and family and culture on the other.”¹¹⁵

4.03 Materials

The materials of my search have ancient and intimate associations with the body. Cotton cloth is perhaps the oldest and most silent companion of the human race. For centuries it has provided comfort and warmth, and has had assigned to it every imaginable role from commodity in trade to liturgical appointment, from sacred object to symbol of sovereignty. The ubiquitous of cloth across time and cultures suggests a commonality and it is within this common experience that the intimate, tactile relationship of cloth with the body is most relevant to its use in my work as the primary component of my visual language. Why have I chosen this simple, ordinary, everyday, immediate, opulent, and deeply symbolic material, which is the very antithesis of high art, as the principal vehicle for my aesthetic ideas.

The process of sculpture here, with cloth and thread as its main medium makes manifest the cultural values that consigned the mother to the place and position of apparent subservience. This position, providing the woman with a space of intervention where those very ephemeral values could be translated into material objects, allowed for an articulation of suppressed voices, of agents of transformation. In order to explore the importance of canvas as a medium, I look at its associative potential within the process and the practice and the relevance of that to my inquiry. Speaking of textile as language Janis Jeffries had this to say in her essay Text, Textile, Sex and Sexuality

¹¹⁵ Kristeva, J (1984) *Revolution in Poetic Language*, introduction by Leon S. Roudiez, Columbia University Press, New York P 4,

“It weaves into language (or other signifying materials) the complex relations between ‘nature’ and ‘culture’ between ‘desire’ and the ‘low’ the body, language and the ‘metalangue’¹¹⁶ What we discover then with textile is the function of the subject caught between instinctual drives and social practice within practice, within language that is to-day divided into often incommunicable, multiple systems.”¹¹⁷

So that in the use of woven canvas as the main signifier, the activities of making can be seen as a weave, a gestural weave which becomes a process and a location within the practice into which the rhythm of drives and pulsions can get caught up before being articulated into the practice.

In the preparatory stage the canvas is dried hanging up on the clothes line. Held against the light the texture of the weave is revealed. Technically a woven fabric is constituted by two kinds of elements with different functions: the fixed vertical threads (warp) and the mobile horizontal threads (weft), intersecting perpendicular and passing over and beneath the fixed. Although the structural set of the weave is permanent, it seems to possess in its fixity i.e. the weaving grid, a sort of inner movement. Anni Albers had this to say,

“Although it is small, each thread seems charged with uninterrupted energy: the underlying units twine and intertwine with nonstop vitality, as if to say that they exist singly but also as part of something greater.”¹¹⁸

To elaborate more fully on the significance of the weave as a structure a location, a process and a concept in my project, I want to refer to the ‘woven texture’ and its analogy with the metaphor of ‘sieve’ in Plato’s discourse on the chora in Timaeus.

“For the Timaeus in effect utilizes what Plato no doubt calls abusively a metaphor, that of the sieve, in order to describe the way in which the place (the chora) filters the contents ‘the forces or seeds that have been impressed upon it.’¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ metalangue is a term used to describe a language that speaks about another language.

¹¹⁷ Jeffries, J (1994) *Text, Textile, Sex and Sexuality*, essay in catalogue for exhibition of work by Hohenbuecher sisters in Sydney p7

¹¹⁸ de Zegher, C(1985) *Cecilia Vecuna’s Ouvrage, knot a not, notes as knots, in Generations and geographies in the Visual Arts*, *Femist Reading*, ed by Griselda Pollock, P 203. (from Anni Albers, *The Woven and Graphic Art of Anni Albers*, Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington DC

In particular I want to inscribe the figure of the sieve in this reading of the woven texture of the canvas in terms of its structure for meaning and the process of meaning making and its process in this language construct of art making. I mean for example how the metaphor of the sieve can be used to allude to the place of the chora, and as the psychic apparatus in a process of osmosis that filters the known from the unknown in what emerges in the language of this art practice.

“Neither vertical nor horizontal, an extremely solid frame that would resemble at once a web, a sieve, or a grill (grid), etc. it would have a certain relationship with the filter.”¹²⁰

The relevance of the metaphor of the sieve and the contents of the sieve, to the multiple narratives that inform the process of meaning making in this project can be further evidenced in the following passage from Plato,

“And its contents were in constant process of movement and separation, rather like the contents of a winnowing basket or similar implement for cleaning corn, in which the solid and heavy stuff is sifted out and settles on one side, the light and insubstantial on another.”¹²¹

The reason for this choice of heavy, roughly woven, deeply marked, dirty looking canvas may not be apparent to me now but its associative potential arouses curiosity. I mean its power to evoke a sense of permanence and transient fragility. What are the mechanisms by which a pile of torn canvas on the floor transforms itself into something that is entirely different, with its own reality, its own power and knowledge?

The physicality of the working process is established through an activity of making. The making is an activity of making and of unmaking, deconstruction and reconstruction of materials. By way of illustrating how process and content are inextricably linked in the work and how those activities of process and content are linked to and aligned with processes, for example of abjection, the maternal body, language in the body etc. I want to consider what happens to the materials in the process of preparation and making.

¹¹⁹ Derrida, J and Eisenman, P(1985) *Choral Works*, ed by Jeffrey Kipnis and Thomas Leiser, The Monaceelli Press, 1985, P 98,.

¹²⁰ibid, P 98,.

4.04 Process

The preparatory stage begins by tearing the canvas into random sized pieces and steeping them in dye. The cloth is then dried and steeped in bleach. This whitens the cloth but leaves mottled areas where the bleach hasn't reached. This happens because the fabric is very tightly fitted into a very small bucket. These seemingly inconsequential preparatory events, i.e. the use of a small container/bucket in the process of creating color on the surface of the canvas come to reflect what that color will represent later in the work.

I'm referring in particular to how the process and element of color place certain emphasis on ideas associated with mottled canvas. As the narrative develops the mottled canvas becomes mottled flesh and mottled flesh is associated with the body after death. In this sense the process of articulating the language allows for the development of certain ideas, the actual process of making and thinking through materials becomes a location and structure within which ideas can be initiated and developed. When the canvas is dry it is flattened and torn into narrow strips.

The dyed and bleached bundles of mottled torn canvas are layered, knotted, tied, plaited and stitched in an activity of repetition, and endless cycles of making. The layering of canvas and the way the layering becomes something other than an aesthetics of surface, instead it becomes a structure, an elaborate shroud concealing the presence of the absent body, in a chaotic assemblage of suspended narrative. Layers stitched together and etched with a thick stitching that marks the surface with an interruption of imposed text, creates an anti surface, a thickness of hanging forms and vertical blankness. Stitching with very thick cotton thread brings into focus the gathering weight of the canvas, the thickness and strength echoing the ferocious need to hold things together, to bring attention to articulate the need, the compulsion to initiate and maintain a boundary.

The techniques of knotting allow for a mobility of doing and undoing, of covering and concealing as much as an offering of something to be seen. The repetitive activity of knotting seems an attempt to return in time, a movement back into the past to recover

¹²¹ Ibid, P 98,.

something, a connection perhaps, in a Kristevan sense, with the lost mother's body.¹²² This simple yet intricate configuration of layering knots acts as a lacing together in which each knot is entirely incorporated into the next. There is an endlessness in the process rendering the structured heads fundamentally precarious yet structured, but without finality or conclusion. In this process also is the accumulative medium of cloth, increasing the meaning, power, value and visual display of process.

Briony, Fer in a rereading of Eva Hesse's work following a recent retrospective exhibition of her work, refers to similar structures in her latex works,

*"The metaphors spark of a structure that laces the image together, a peeling spiral, a latticework of strips, an order in chaos. The falling apart of a recognizable surface becomes an extraordinary series of intersecting layers and conflicting destinies."*¹²³

This configuration of intersecting layers can similarly be applied to the layered representation of the body in this practice at the level of form, and as a structure in which the visibility of this process is exposed. The falling apart of this layered structure that masquerades as a surface, becomes a disintegration of a recognizable surface revealing a network of narratives, an endlessness of intersecting layers and conflicting stories that carry us beyond the reality of suspended, bundled canvas.

The conceptual equivalent of narratives and conflicting destinies relates to the plurality of voices at work within this text of thinking through making. This plurality coincides with the Kristevan notion of the heterogeneous nature of the signifying process and the transposition of one textual intervention onto another in an endless multiplicity of participation. I mean participation not just at the level of meaning but at the level of process and that includes the gestural activity of the various processes e.g. knotting, layering, plaiting, etc.

As Kristeva points out, the discovery of this transposition of texts, of voices, one on top of the other, has led to an intra psychic finding concerning the status of the 'creator', the artist who is positioned at the intersection of the many voices informing and emerging

¹²² Fer, B(2006) *The Work of Salvage, Eva Hesse's Latex Sculptures*, from exhibition catalogue Hesse, Jewish Museum, New York, P 79.

¹²³ Ibid, p 94

from and within the activities of process . Kristeva positions the subject-in-process at this intersection of voices where identity is threatened as the subject presents here as an open system, not merely a structure but a structure open to its surroundings and other structures, narratives and repressed discourses. Here at this intersection, the subject redefines itself and remodels its identity by putting itself on trial again and again. I am referring to this here by way of illustrating how the subject-in-process is set up linguistically in this particular practice and how it becomes implicated in the construction of female identity and the representation of that identity in the Symbolic.

Within the activity of this process is the constant problem to reconcile representation, the imposition of content with the play of form within the activity of the articulated sculpture. By way of illustrating how this semiotic intervention can disrupt the linguistic code I include a comparison made by Kristeva of the maternal experience of childbirth with the practice of art in that they are both situations in which there is transcendence of the self and other,

“The speaker reaches this limit (of the symbolic).....only by virtue of a particular, discursive practice called “art.” A woman also attains it.....through the strange form of split symbolization (threshold of language and instinctual drive, of the “symbolic” and the “semiotic”) of which the act of giving birth consists.”¹²⁴

Relating to the process of making it is through this endless repetition of brutalizing, tearing, deconstructing, then reconstructing through addition and subtraction, that the pieces are worked and manipulated in a continuous gesture of making. The process develops its own articulation until the language becomes a ritual of tearing, ripping, bandaging, plaiting, binding, wrapping and tying. The direct interaction with the canvas and materials involves the continuous use of my hands and fingers for the stitching. The arms and the whole body wrestles with the force of the process, it's like a gesture of struggle to recover the process and to hold it in the making as an end form in the work. In this sense the process is the work, the focus being on the doing, the process of process rather than the product or the made object.

¹²⁴ Ziarek, E (1992) *At The Limits of Discourse; Heterogeneity, Alterity, and the Maternal Body in Kristeva's Thought*, Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy, V7, PT 2, p 97

The process is the performance of a continuous relentless attack on the surface of the cloth, representing an all consuming and endless struggle to get to some other articulation. To get onto the inside, both literally and metaphorically to reveal the process underlying the signification of the practice of physical process at a physical and conceptual level. There is the pressing need to open things up, to turn the inside out onto the outside, as if the solution lay concealed on the inside. An all consuming attempt to locate those experiences in the body, of loss, and estrangement, of exile and death, and bring them into language.

This activity and metaphor of struggle seems to echo the struggle that every human being has with the mother's body, the struggle to separate, to establish the individual identity and to articulate that. In the Kristevan sense this solution is the solution of the language, language that is contained in the body, the body that constantly struggles to negotiate boundaries and to maintain its contents within those boundaries. In this process of struggle and making, is evidenced Kristeva's intention through language, to dissolve the difference between inside and outside. So that established concepts of inside/outside, subject/object become, through the activity of the semiotic, a space that accommodates difference, on the other side of language, where strangeness and the other can co-exist.

4.05 Form

Through the very physical and aggressive manipulation of materials, sculptural form emerges. Implicit in this articulated form is the centrality of the body and its representation in a most abstract way. The work presents as rows of dissimilar, irregular, knotted and tied up heads, some with tightly worked collars bound around the necks. The lower body takes off in a swathe of layered, torn and mottled canvas that sweeps in a hanging movement to the floor. In this dramatic narrative of representation there is a quiet insistence on corporeal presence without there actually being the presence of the body. Through the process of physical and conceptual struggle, the movement of suspended layers are endowed with a strangeness, a presence/absence that alludes to the physical corporeal nature of the human form in the sense of its absence.

In preparing and installing this swarm of heads, the pieces are arranged in rows to make a crowded composition. Random piling, loose stacking, and hanging of the canvas gives passing form to the work. Chance is accepted and indeterminacy is implied since another installation of the work will result in another different configuration. Considerations of gravity and weight become as important as those of space, because gravity and weight are so fundamental to the form.

There is a focus on form and material as a means of representation of the body, while considerations of ordering are apparently causal and imprecise. The pieces as individual works remain unemphasised, so that rather than an emphasis on the relationship of each piece to the next, the pieces perform as relational elements to the whole work. By this I mean that seen as a collection of pieces in a single installation each piece serves to heighten the chorus of the work by its presence in relation to all the other pieces.

This simple crowded ordering of heads seems to belie yet draw attention to another ordering that is not physical. Relationships themselves when separated from what is physical present another order of facts.¹²⁵

What I'm referring to here is a discursive informant from another dimension that forms part of the dynamic process out of which form emerges. It's what Kristeva refers to in *The Politics of the Signifier*, as the process that

*“puts the body into a signifying system, but not in a literalist way.”*¹²⁶

Kristeva is referring here to the poetic capability of those deeply ambiguous signifiers that allow the body to slip through the linguistic stream. These signifiers are relevant here because of the reference they establish to bodily experience and because this reference is different from an emphasis on structure in and of itself.

That other dimension associated with deeply ambiguous signifiers, seems to imbue the work with an estranged quality, a hauntedness that is grounded in early bodily experience. It is as if through this human form the picture emerges through memory and association of what life has been like, the events, the deaths, the despair and loss, the

¹²⁵ Morris, R (1968) *Anti Form*, Artforum, P 35,

¹²⁶ Kristeva, J (1994) *The Politics of The Signifier*, October, Cambridge, vol 67, p16

ruptures and dark seething urges. It seems that this hidden and comprehensive network of meaning is drawn to the surface where it resides in the work as the shadowed and half forgotten self.

In the context of referring to the body, between that point of reference and the representation of the body in this practice is a distance in which a discourse opens. A discourse on process and materials, tools of making, activities of that process of making e.g. layering of canvas, layering of narratives, a layering of relationship of one piece to the next, a layering of memory etc. The relationship of one act to the next, one type of articulation to another, considerations of scale, gravity, and placement are part of that discourse as well.

My attention is drawn to the matted knotted structure of the head and held in particular by the weight. I am conscious of how the developing weight in the process continuously sought associations within the negotiation of the silent speech, as if this inanimate quality of the canvas had its own articulatory charge within the linguistic process. The gathering weight of the worked material seems to suggest the presence of a thing or a structure that might cover or protect, conceal or hold together, weigh as in weigh down, a heavy weight that could oppress, that you'd want to get rid of. Like the weight of a corpse, in other words the imagery associated with this section of the practice was that of the remains of a recently deceased child whose body I had handled in preparing for its wake and subsequent burial.

The weight of the body after death is a very particular kind of weight, it's a stiff unyielding weight, and seemed far heavier than it should have been for such a tiny child. The associations of the imprint with which it left me seemed to measure out the weight that each head should be. I use the term measure here instead of weigh because it provided the practice with a measurement of how to know and acknowledge the moment when the piece was finished.

Engaging the process of manipulating canvas with the idea of abjection for example has given rise to a departure in the physicality of handling the canvas. Instead of imposing certain activities onto the canvas in order to bring about a particular result, by focusing on the malleability of the material, it was allowed more freedom to manifest its own capacity to articulate itself, to inform itself in the practice.

This was done by developing more openness and trust in the process and involved a fuller response to the inherent qualities of the canvas e.g. weave, softness, color, weight, tension etc.

As the work progressed, the materials began to demonstrate specific qualities which when allowed to form more fully, both informed the work and elaborated the techniques and my engagement with them. I'm referring in particular to how the canvas frays when cut into strips and torn off.

Initially I considered the frayed threads superfluous and therefore not part of the language or of the process of constructing the language, so they were cut off to reveal the pure clean edge of the canvas and also its smooth texture. In this way for example, edge and surface were emphasized as part of a strategy for engaging ideas. As the uncut frayed threads began to accumulate, they bundled and matted into tangled masses that hung freely and randomly from the endless strips of the large suspended pieces. They resembled chaotic drawings draped and concealed within the masquerading cloth.

The analogy here with corporeality, and notions of boundaries are apparent. Metaphorically the inside of the body was now on the outside, the inside had become the outside. Suspended and concealed the bundled drawings of raveled threads reached down to and piled up on the floor resembling coils of human folded entrails neatly hung beneath the layers of billowing canvas.

Returning briefly to the subject of color, the mottled staining all over the canvas of these constructed forms suggests that something has leaked out. Ooze has started somewhere and slowly seeped out leaving traces and marks on the surface, drawing attention to the radical impermeability of the skin and its failure as an object of separation and identity. Here we find echoes of the abject, of self-division and the instability of the subject.

The associative potential of the materials relates to activities and dynamics that participate in the making process but not directly in a physical way. I'm speaking about a narrative process, a dialogue that takes place between thinking and making where instinctual life becomes linguistic and unfolds within the realm of the conceptual and practical reality of the work.

That process (which I refer to in my particular practice as ‘the silent speech’) which represents the conceptual reality of the work can be viewed as a practice in itself. The activity of the silent speech and its emergence as a practice can be evidenced in the dialectic between rhythm and making, where the multivalent discourse beneath the material speech of physical making can be located and disclosed. To elaborate this concept more fully I want to explain the mechanism by which this discourse could enter into and inform the practice by referring to Heidegger’s trajectory on the nature of art as poetry. He had this to say,

“Poetry is the saying of the unconcealedness of what is. Actual language at any given moment is the happening of this saying. Projective saying is saying which, in preparing¹²⁷ the sayable, simultaneously brings the unsayable as such into a world.”

In this disclosure through practice of the unconcealedness of what is, there is rhythm of making and imaging as linguistic device, as substantive other of language, as ultimate and primordial leash holding the body close to the mother before it can become a social speaking being. In the dialectic of the silent speech certain ideas are played out which seem to have their origin in and are dominated by a chaotic currency of perceptions, feelings, memories, rhythms, drives and pulsions, and operate rhythmically as an accompaniment of otherness to the physical activities of making. This rhythmic otherness echoes the silent woman speaker of Kristeva’s *Chinese Women*, Andrea Nye had this to say,

“ silent anguish choking on the rhythms of words, the tones of sounds, the colors of images, but without words, without sounds, without images; outside time, outside knowledge, cut off forever from the rhythmic, colourful, violent changes that streak sleep, skin, visceras.”¹²⁸

¹²⁷ Heidegger, M (1971) translation and introduction by Hosstadler, A. New York, *Poetry, Language and Thought*, Harper and Roe, P 74.

¹²⁸ Nye, A (1987) *Woman Clothed in The Sun; Julia Kristeva and The Escape from/to Language*. *Journal of Women in Culture and Society* vol 12, no. 4 p 664-75
(Kristeva, J (1997) *Of Chinese Women*, trans. Anita Barrows (New York: Urizen Books, P 15.

Looking at my research question;

'How is significance/meaning created in this art making. How does this thinking through materials and making, this engagement with materials, ideas and processes in this particular way coincide at the level of linguistic structure with the intervention of the semiotic, so that drives are inscribed in the language of practice?'

It seems to me that if my particular process of art-making is to investigate certain philosophic ideas in relation to my practice, in a set of material/conceptual relations, the dynamics of the dialogue that negotiates the thinking and making referred to, will be a most useful research tool. In my developing thesis I illustrate how this practice, because it functions within the framework of a process of signification, can, for example incorporate drives as linguistic structure.

This particular process of art-making provides me with a way of thinking the key Kristevan ideas through in the complex and elaborate physical relations of the making process. Certain elements of those ideas are explored in the physicality of the process, exemplifying those particular ideas within the practice. The different techniques of making i.e. knotting, tying, binding, plaiting, ripping, tearing, place different emphasis within the ideas. For example the activities and rhythm of the making process can be viewed as activities that reflect and are analogous to primary processes, i.e. drive based activities in that drives in the Kristevan sense are integral parts of the signifying process and have their origin in the maternal body.

To illustrate this more clearly I briefly focus on rhythm as an activity of making and as an articulatory charge within the process. The activities of making the work, the repetitive, endless and obsessive tasks, and how the rhythm that marks the momentum of their arduous and exhausting nature develops in the making. Its rhythm can be equated with the momentum of the activity of primary processes. To develop the idea of primary processes here I include the semiotic as a precise modality of the signifying process. In Freudian psychoanalysis this modality postulates not only the facilitation and the structuring disposition of drives but also the so called primary processes, which displace and condense both. In this sense the rhythm of processes is an activity of signification

comparable to Freud's primary processes. Kristeva had this to say about Freud's primary process,

*"I think it is important to point out that the primary processes (i.e. Freud's primary processes) doesn't necessarily work on signs but can also extend to traces, to psychic inscriptions that aren't of the same order of the sign, but are instead colors, sounds, frequencies—that is intonations and rhythms."*¹²⁹

This process of emphasis within the ideas is associated most often with particular imagery. For example the activities of making, of stitching, of ripping, tying, plaiting etc. as representations of the activities of maternal function in the material reality i.e. the mother as carer of the children engages in these activities to clothe and provide for them. As drives and rhythms are discharged within the maternal continent these activities of making evidence the inscription of the maternal body in the language and the discourse arising out of the language of making.

Certain Kristevan ideas e.g. abjection, the maternal body, language in the body, the location of the other in language through the activity of the semiotic, form much of the imagery of the invisible narrative that accompanies the construction of the practice. The activity of this imagery within the narration of the silent speech forms part of the dynamic of the discursive informants being brought to bear on the process and the forms that emerge in the practice.

In this way the practice, through its material engagement with the concept of the body, proceeds in its own making to advance particular relations within the ideas and process. The resonance and meaning of the initial idea of language in the body, the body in language was made manifest in a particular set of material relations i.e. the sculpted form. As the research progresses there is a developing awareness of how adjustments in relations between physical parts effected adjustments within the set of ideas begins to emerge through the process.

¹²⁹ Kristeva, J (1986) *Interviews*, ed. By Ross Mitchel Guberman, Columbia University Press, New York. 1986, p23

The stitching of the canvas at the physical level has become an act of violence on the skin, a breaking into the canvas, a penetrating into the boundary that separates and distinguishes the body as an object and as a process. Through a process of making, the canvas has become the skin, the stitching has worked itself into the body, and the language in the body has been stitched out onto the surface of the skin. The resonance of these ideas of violence and wounds, of seepage oozing onto the skin, of stains and traces, has led to particular manifestations in the practice and the activities of the practice, not just in how the structured form emerges but in the process of that structuring. I'm referring in particular to the sheer physical struggle of the activity of the working process, the wrestling with materials, and its resonance with the struggle to bring the philosophic ideas to language.

However such imagery does not necessarily inform the work at the level of image formation, rather the activity of imaging at a conceptual level can inform and extend the notion for example, of process. By this I mean the process by which abjection ceases to be confined to the abject objects of the made pieces, instead, through the process of process, abjection becomes the process that functions as part of this formal representation of the body, the mother's body. I include this reference to abjection here by way of illustrating the transgressive process of the work and the different levels of process within the overall linguistic structure.

I would like to include notebook entries here to illustrate my own response to, and regarding the place and function of the idea/image in this element of the research process.

*" [...] and the doing seems to come about because there is an idea and an image of that idea, or in response to an image somewhere, and maybe the image is what fuels everything else, so does the process have the power to generate images, or is it that the image is there first and drives the whole production process. "*¹³⁰

In order to be more specific and to demonstrate the associative narrative arising out of making and the materials I want to include references to particular ideas and imagery, for example, that relate to the canvas I use. The imagery associated with this particular

¹³⁰ Keena,P (2003) *Reference Notebook*,

material is closely linked to ideas of corporeality and the relationship of cloth to the body.

“[...] the materials, the canvas, the thread, the stitching, are having certain qualities that reinforce the concept of the discarded, the locked up, i.e.

The ordinariness of the cloth

The color of the canvas

Its easy to get, everyone has clothes

*Its resemblance to, associations with clothes, clothes that cover the body,
that protect the body, that hide the private, dangerous, unclean parts of the body*

Cloth shelters and protects the body

Cloth wraps and binds

It shrouds the dead, it swaddles the newborn.”¹³¹

Certain elements of color place certain emphasis on ideas associated with mottled canvas. Such ideas return again to the maternal body, and to the narrative of the corpse. By this I mean that the mottled marking on the canvas presents almost as a pictorial element, yet at the same time the mottled trace on the surface of the cloth presents as incredibly delicate signs of rupture, of leakage, that disrupts the surface of the cloth. As the narrative develops the concept of mottled canvas becomes mottled flesh and mottled flesh is associated with the body after death.

In this way the practice becomes a process in which to materialize ideas and demonstrate the importance of language for structuring experience, experience such as coincide with opening of drives and pulsions onto the practice.

I am aware also that a great deal more goes on, takes place conceptually at the level of fragmentary images, intuitions, that isn't languaged into the making or accounted for in the written thesis and yet it remains part of the unintelligible narrative that accompanies the work.

The pencil and watercolor drawings, although with different materials and techniques, continue to engage with notions of the human subject, and corporeal boundaries. Suggestions of Kristeva's ideas of death and decay, of the process of the maternal body

¹³¹ Keena P. *Reflective Notebook* .

are evident in the decision making process regarding materials, techniques, and processes. For example the use of heavy lead pencil, to draw lines, straying, fragile, wandering and uncertain lines, that structure the outline of distorted, unsteady, headless figures. These straying lines become a mapping of a discourse of the body. The transparency of pale blue watercolor paint washed over the surface of these figures and spilling over the pencil lines in certain areas seems to test the opacity of human skin, highlighting the fragility of corporeal boundaries. (Fig 3)



Fig.3 Detail of drawing project drawing attention corporeal boundaries.

Muted tones laid over transparent washes of red when left to dry and lighter tones added, develop a sense of weight in the body. This developing bulk or awkwardness is achieved by mixing primary color and adding that to wet wiped neutral tonal areas. When dry these drawings convey a sense of the body as a mass of mottled flesh and such abject defiling elements as decay, seeping body fluids, signifying death and decay are unmistakable.

Fig.3 illustrates a developing sense of the human body as primary source of ruptures, of stains and traces by the absence of color altogether on certain areas of the paper. For example, faded primary diluted red and blue, juxtaposed with black lead lines, on pure white paper over the area of the hip joint and lower back, and dark purple blobs representing the hand and arm, suggest to me that this is a drawing of a corpse, a leaking, bleeding, human remains.

Chapter 5

5.01 Introduction

In this section of the research I assemble specific data that will enable me to illustrate the origin, the development, the activity and articulation of the semiotic in the research so far. To do this I trace, locate and to make visible the links between the different components of the practice. By this I mean the links between the processes and procedures of practice, the materials, the content i.e. the key Kristevan ideas relevant to my discussion and the form that emerges out of the engagement with these elements within the art making process.

I think the most appropriate way to track and make visible those links is to focus on one element of the practice i.e. color, mottled canvas. I mean the process by which the mottled pattern became established on the canvas in the work practice and its relation to abjection at both the physical and conceptual level. I look at that relationship and examine the process by which mottled and abjection became established in the practice so far. By exploring that relationship I examine and expose the manner in which the mottled/abjection dialectic becomes manifest through form i.e. the human maternal form in the constructed language of art making.

5.02 Documentation of Visual Research

By looking at the structures and regimes of practice within the research process I track the origin, the formation and development of the process of mottled in the art practice. Through the same process I want to expose and make visible the dialogical relations between the components of that process and practice at the level of both the physical and conceptual practice.

The most appropriate process by which these relationships within the practice can be located and made visible is to trace effective parallels between the practice and Kristeva's theory of abjection.

For the sake of clarity and convenience I deal with the process of tracing these parallels in two sections:

1. The process by which mottled became established in the practice and the emerging relationship between mottled and abjection,
2. The process by which that relationship is manifested through the body in the practice.

1. The process by which mottled became established in the practice and the emerging relationship between mottled and abjection.

As the research developed the relationship between mottled and abjection and the manifestation of that relationship through the body in the made practice became established in different ways. These relationship processes became apparent and are elaborated most significantly in the presence and the process of the trace and how it became established as an articulatory device in the work. I explain more fully in the following findings;

In the trace i.e. the mottled pattern on the canvas there is an initial linking of cloth with the body, the abject body, the interrupted boundaries of seeping skin, the connotations of waste and a continuous return to a reinforcement of the corporeal material nature of the language.

The canvas used in the project is a very particular type of fabric chosen from a variety of fabrics through a process of testing and analysis.¹³² By particular type I mean that the canvas had to be a suitable ground on which to develop the mottled pattern. It had to have the capability to withstand the corrosive procedures of process necessary for the mottled pattern to become established. These processes and procedures involved specific cycles and patterns of

¹³² See notebook page 8 to 21 for visual documentation.

activities within the research and are described in detail with visual images in the accompanying notebook.¹³³

I want to draw attention here to the parallel between the abject as being maternally orientated, having its origins in the pre-linguistic domain and the inscription of mottled on to the canvas. One of the most important links between the practice of process of mottled and the abject can be located in that part of the practice that I refer to as 'confinement', and refers to the maternal location and orientation of the abject.

In the initial stage of setting up the mottled process the canvas is fitted very tightly into a small bucket with hot dye. Here the canvas is tightly held and confined for a specific period of time to allow that process to become established to imprint the canvas with color. When the color is established the process is repeated but with bleach this time in order to mottle the color. During this time the processes/exchanges between the canvas, the dyes and bleach result in the imprint on the canvas of the mottled, marked trace. So that the plain canvas becomes a ground onto which an endlessness of marks has become inscribed that don't begin or end anywhere.

The fetus is held and confined for a specific period of time, inside the mother's body prior to birth, where bodily processes take place between the mother and the infant. These exchanges take place between the infant and mother largely through rhythmic movement, and exchange of body fluids.¹³⁴ There is a parallel here between the exchange taking place between the canvas and processes which mark the canvas with the trace of mottled pattern and the process of exchange in which the fetus is engaged with the maternal body and regulated by that body prior to birth. Outlining the research procedures involved in establishing the mottled colour on the canvas creates a visibility around the relevance of the abject here and its relationship to mottled in the project and in the parallel between the maternal orientation of the abject and its links with the inscription of the trace, the mottled mark on the canvas. In the way that rhythmic exchange marks the fetus in linguistic exchange similarly the confinement process engages the canvas with the mottled process and marks the canvas with the trace.

¹³³ See notebook page 20 to 39, and reference 13 to 16, and 1A on page 36.

¹²⁵ See thesis page 74

As we already know Kristeva posits this Pre-Oedipal location and its rhythmic activity as the basis for initial linguistic processes in the body. The relevance of the abject here and its relationship to mottled in the project lies in the parallel between the maternal orientation of the abject¹³⁵ and the links with the inscription of the trace, the mottled mark on the canvas. As has already been established exchanges take place between the infant and the mother before the infant is born.

That rhythmic exchange inscribes unarticulated language in the infant. Also the abject is set up in this period as the infant separates from the mother i.e. it must abject the mother's body in order to be. I draw a parallel here with the inscription of the linguistic trace in the infant while it is confined before birth and the inscription of the mottled trace on the canvas while it is confined to the bleaching process in the container. Like wise here the confinement process inscribes the canvas with the mottled trace. So in the way that rhythmic exchange inscribes unarticulated language in the infant, the confinement process inscribes the canvas with the mottled trace.

Further links between mottled and abjection can be established by looking at the linguistic orientation of what Kristeva refers to as the semiotic chora. The maternal body is where drives originate, gather, become implicated in the linguistic process and are discharged from the location and source of semiotic chora. As we have seen the rhythmic process of exchange between the mother's body and that of the infant connects the body to the mother and is regulated by that body i.e. the mother's body and dominated by drives originating from the chora. In this way language is in the body and the body in language.¹³⁶

The semiotic chora is where the abject is set up when the infant separates from the body of the mother in order to be. The infant in order to separate from the mother's body must experience her body as both fascinating and horrifying. This experience of horror at the lack of boundaries between his body and the mother's is what drives the infant away and enables him to enter language and the symbolic. This process of division in the maternal body implies not only a separation of mother and child but it inscribes otherness into every identity and linguistic practice.

¹³⁵ See thesis page 66 to 69.

¹³⁶ See thesis pages 68 to 71,

The abject marks the moment when we separate ourselves from the mother, and coincides with the inscription of otherness and the beginning of repressed desire for the mother's body. So it is through the semiotic that the abject, the 'other' becomes lodged in language. The semiotic element in language is the organization of drives in language and is associated with rhythms and tones, bodily drives are discharged through rhythms and tones. So we see how Kristeva brings the body back into language by putting language into the body and how she brings the subject into the place of the other by putting the other into the subject.

In this way the maternal body i.e. the human form in the process of emerging in the practice can be considered a location for links with the articulatory events of the emerging language of the practice in this project. Subject identity is continually threatened by the return of the other in language and in this particular context I will illustrate later on the links between mottled and the inscription of otherness in the art practice as its articulation develops around the maternal body in the developing studio practice.

Further links between mottled and abjection can be explored here in the context of the maternal chora, the initial site of the abject. The trace on the canvas, the mottle patterned marks become linguistic, not just by their presence on the cloth but through the developing narrative arising out of associative ideas. For example how the shaved threads on the mottled bare canvas focused my attention on the subject of raw edge, of boundary. These ideas arising as they do out of the process of practice, the commotion of making, become part of the weave of narratives that begin to emerge within and to accompany the making. As the work, the making continues to develop and depart in its own construction of itself the gathering articulation of emerging narratives begins to insinuate itself both physically in the making and conceptually in how the mottled trace for example incorporates other elements which themselves are not present in the made work. For example the abject is present through its association with the trace.

In the trace there is the suggestion of stains, of body fluids, of a leak, of seepage, a rupture of boundaries between inside and outside. The layering of canvas as the horizontal placing of the layers becomes a visual experience of interiority as the inside outside is displayed in the swathes of cloth. So that on the surface of the canvas there is

the physical reality of dissolved, shredded boundaries. In this evidence of the body whose boundaries are no longer intact, i.e. the corpse, the abject becomes present through bodily processes represented by the trace as it exists in the associative narrative that implicates the abject linguistically as the trace becomes implicated in the practice of making.¹³⁷ So the abject becomes linguistic in the practice in the physical trace, in the overlapping narratives and through other elements incorporated through their associative potential such as the weight of the material and the implications of that narratively in the context of the corporeality reality of the work.

It is most important to point out and emphasize that the essential element in how drives, the abject, the trace become linguistic is in the way the work is made. The physical activity of making, and components of that making e.g. repetition, all the repetitive endless acts of tearing, ripping, plaiting etc, as well as the physicality of what emerges, has been central to the development of the narrative of the abject and the implication of the abject as linguistic. This is because the process of practice with the gathering weave of narratives arising out of the activity and commotion of making set up a relationship with materials and a text emerges in which for example, the abject, the trace could develop its own separate state of being. In this way the made work provides a framework and structure within which philosophic ideas such as abjection can be inscribed in language and facilitated to develop its own articulatory narrative in the art making of this particular project.

2. Process by which mottled/abjection relationship is manifest through the body in the practice.

In this section I look at the mottled/abjection relationship and its manifestation through the body in the practice both through the manipulation of materials and the representation of the human form in the made work. Although the theoretical subject of abjection is dealt with in considerable detail in the thesis¹³⁸ I return briefly to the subject here in the context of its relationship to mottled.

¹³⁷ See thesis pages 88 to 91.

¹³⁸ See thesis page 92 to 97

The abject is the moment of and mechanism of separation. The location and inscription of the abject is anchored in the whole bodily identification and differentiation in the pre-subjectal subject. By this I mean the abject is present to and arises out of a similar differentiation process as the inscription of language in the body in pre-subjectal life at the level of matter. Hence the logic of signification is already operating in the body in the environment of the abject at the pre-subjectal level. In this way the events of inscription of language, differentiation, and separation establish the abject as part of the corporeality of language.

The mottled/abject relationship in this work and its manifestation through the body in the made language of art making arises and develops out of the process itself of making the language. That includes specific activities of making, e.g. the rhythmic nature of certain processes of making, the processes within processes, the materials and the conceptual practice as it develops out of the making. Also relevant here is the procedural nature of the practice in that it takes place over a time frame in a laborious and painstaking manner. Further research findings illustrate that the relationship between mottled and the abject and its manifestation through the body in the practice became established in the following way;

a. the trace, the mottled pattern on the canvas is paralleled in a very literal sense on the peripheries of the newly born infant whose mottled appearance immediately after the separation of birth illustrates the connection of mottled/abject with the bodily process of separation and division which, as we have seen, insert the abject into the semiotic chora.

b. as the process of working the materials develops in the making, the dialogue between mottled cloth and abjection is set up, and narratives develop and emerge to ensure the constant implication of the body. For example materially the body is present through the trace on the canvas, through and the activities of making and my own relationship with the materiality of making and thinking through materials. Narratively and conceptually the body is present through associative links with mottled and abjection i.e. dissolved boundaries, the leaking body, the oozing corpse seeping out onto the cloth.

These findings have been made available solely through the making process, its components, processes and procedures and have emerged and been made apparent in the different components of the process of making. For the sake of clarity and visibility, I would like the process to be considered under the following headings;

Materials

Activities of making

Emerging form

5.03 Materials

Although the subject of materials, process and form has been dealt with in considerable detail in the previous chapters I return to certain aspects of these processes here so that I can locate and make visible the links between mottled and abjection. I want to demonstrate the manifestation of that relationship through the body in the practice and how the materials participate in the development and manifestation of that relationship.

However, because the relational elements and dialogical narrative between these parts are so inextricably linked together and linked also to the mottled/abjection relationship, inevitably there will be considerable overlap between the parts as I proceed with the discussion.

The presence of the trace on the mottled canvas introduced the idea of abjection into the practice in the sense that the conceptual narratives linked with abjection now became part of an accompanying narrative practice to the making process.¹³⁹

By conceptual narrative I mean ideas associated with the abject such as the maternal body, disintegrating boundaries, interiority, absence of boundaries, seepage, leaking body fluids etc. began to emerge in the silent monologue and accompany the making process. So that the abject becomes implicated in the process through the trace of mottled on the surface of the cloth and the narrative process arising out of the trace and

¹³⁹ see concept map marked 'Abjection'

implicate the abject linguistically through the activities of making and conceptually by the developing ideas in the emerging practice.

The linguistic disposition of the abject, I mean the process by which the abject begins to participate in the practice as parallel narrative, coincides with more attention being drawn to certain inanimate qualities of the cloth such as its weight, its length and how the mottled canvas hung when suspended in the developing practice. For example by weight I mean that mottled has a particular relationship to weight both at the physical level and through the narrative process because of ideas associated with weight such as the impression created by the mottled canvas of dampness.

However although mottled has a specific relationship to weight it isn't weight, but it draws attention to and emphasizes weight as an interactive component of the canvas in a very particular way. Mottled gives rise to the impression of dampness in the made form and the relationship of mottled to weight lies in the centrality of the connection between that impression of dampness, the emerging human form and the marks on the canvas. In this way the mottled/abject relationship becomes linguistic through the physicality of the body as linguistic in the work.

The weighted mottled dampness, heavy from the seep of something in the work, gives the impression of some smoldering decay that has begun somewhere and is moving out closer to the surface of the structure. This is what suggests dampness, a process within the structure of the human form that presents as a seeping that moves out towards the surface through the layered strips of worked canvas. So that in the end weight is associated with the narrative imagery linked with the destruction and decay associated with the abject.

So that the articulatory process of abject as a linguistic device was beginning to insinuate into the practice of making and beginning to emerge and be evidenced in work practice in the following ways:-

1. an increasing awareness of materials, their potential and properties e.g. the softness, the paleness of the color, the weight of the developing pieces,
2. the interrupted surface of flat pieces of canvas, how that arrested my attention.
3. the textured surfaces of layered knots the small knots beside the broader knots.
4. how the cloth presented when it was hung up and how that looking presented other ideas of how the research might proceed in relation to the following

5. how the cloth handled,
6. the texture of worked surfaces emerging,
7. texture of knots etc.
8. the relationship of knotted masses to flat uninterrupted surfaces.

As abjection became implicated as linguistic device and began to determine how the practice might proceed in terms of how materials might be managed, the mottled canvas began to demonstrate certain tendencies by demanding to be handled in a certain way. I began to fold and press the canvas so that it was possible to look at large flattened areas of the mottled pattern. I also began to cut and tear the canvas in particular widths of 4 inch approximately using the full width of the mottled sheet of canvas, the reason for this becoming apparent only as the process developed.

5.04 Process

Gradually as the mottled abject dialectic became established and the mechanisms of that relationship began to articulate in the process of materials in the practice, evidence of a subtle shift began to emerge within the process. What I mean is that in the process of making, mottled no longer served as simply a color but had become part of the process of practice and thinking through practice. As an element of practice, mottled had become a relational element to other elements of practice, for example the element of repetition, of gesture, of rhythm, of the stitch, the knot, the weave, etc.

To elaborate further I look at the meaning of relational element. The knot for example is relational to other elements such as the concept of weave and the physical reality of weave. I mean these elements form part of the textual weave that implicates and holds the drive mechanism as it becomes part of the narrative text of the made work to elaborate their state of being. At the physical level the knot holds the structural weave and represents the principal making activity out of which the body, the mother's body emerges in the made form. The elements become relational to each other in the motion and process of the practice of the work and the process of the developing narrative imagery.

It is in its relational position to these and other elements of practice such as layering, that the articulatory power of the mottled/abject relationship began to formulate its voice in the language of practice. There is evidence of this in the way mottled heightened the articulatory power of the canvas by drawing attention to mottled and certain configurations of materials. I mean mottled knots juxtaposed with paler washed out knots, and juxtaposed with an empty space in the knotted mass, emphasizing mottled by contrast and by texture.¹⁴⁰

Further configurations of materials in practice such as layers of canvas, thicknesses of layers, fraying mottled weave of canvas (Fig. 4) serve to intensify the charge of this articulation of the mottled/abject relationship. The image in Fig.4 illustrates the layering, the mottled trace on the canvas, the fraying threads and demonstrates the suggestion of weight in the cascading falling canvas.

¹⁴⁰ See notebook pages 64,65, 67,68,79,81,82, ref. 25, 26, 32, 33,

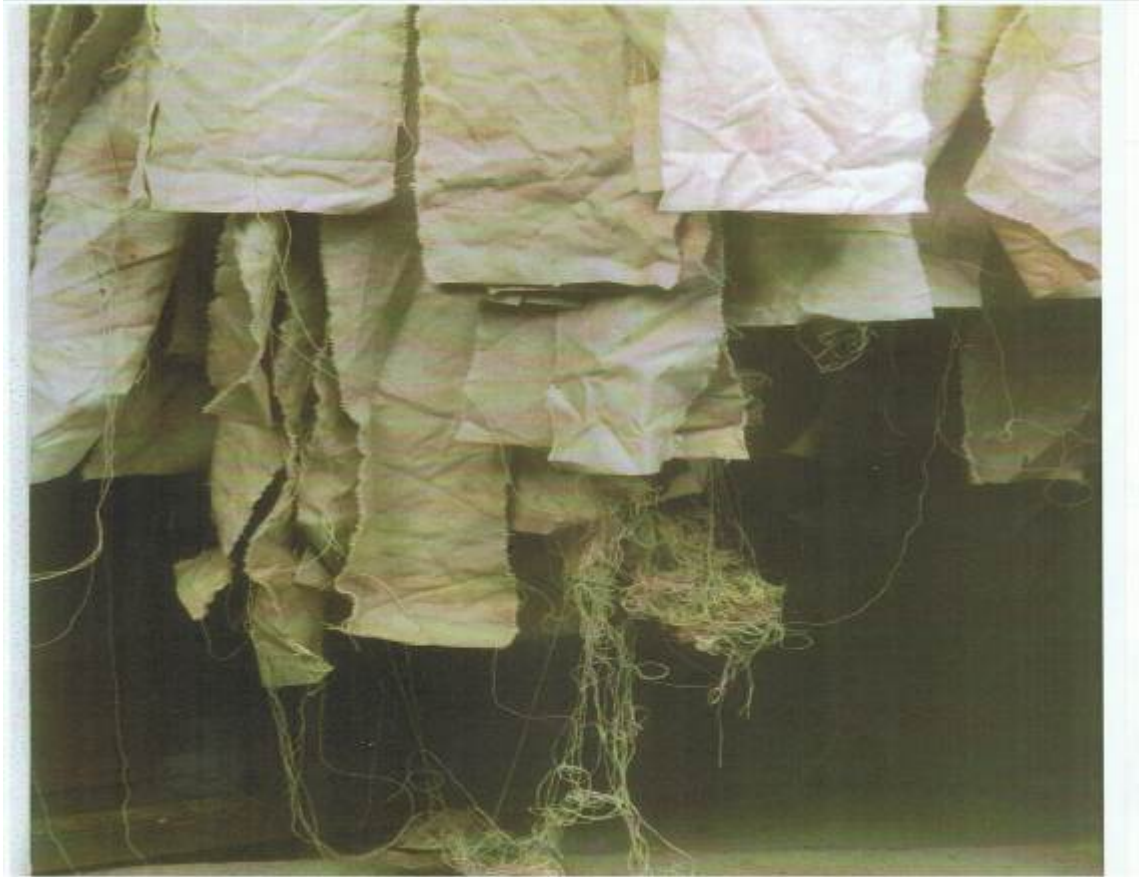


Fig. 4 Detail of process illustrating manifestation of abject/mottled relationship at material level.

Other factors serving to increase the charge of the mottled/abject dialectic in the practice is the re engagement with the abject as process through its narrative presence in the work. This is evidenced in how, for example attention is drawn to certain inanimate qualities of the mottled canvas such as weight, weight not just as in the concept of heaviness, but weight as interactive component of the canvas in the context of the connotative meaning of weight.

I mean the weight of the knotted masses of mottled canvas, the weight of layers on top of layers of mottled canvas as if the weight too had moved from being an inanimate quality of the mottled canvas to being a process in the making of the language. As the work developed weight began to emerge as mottled weight, mottled weight as a physical reality in the process, drawing attention to and linking weight with the analogous narrative imagery associated with the abject. In this way the narrative presence of the

body, the maternal body and the corporeal orientation of the object is reiterated through the practice.

This became manifest in the practice at the level of making through my increasing awareness of weight, mottled weight and how it provided a means by which an understanding of the emerging form could develop and become part of the making. For example the weight of the canvas dictated the form in that the form was pronounced finished when a certain weight was reached, a certain mottled weight.

I am aware that the mottled weight of mottled knotted masses and layers of mottled canvas as opposed to just weight was a much more demanding voice in the chorus of narratives at work in the process. For example the mottled layers seemed much more dense and heavy because of the mottled traces and demanded to be finished because a certain weight and thickness had emerged and become established through making.

5.05 Form

I became aware that the position of finished was tied up with the increasing resemblance of the emerging form with the human body. In other words the presence of the object as it is linked to the body through the narrative process coincided with the materials demanding to be managed and responded to in very specific ways. I mean as the forms got bigger and more established interacting with them became a different experience.

Their presence was more demanding, I mean it seemed to me that it was now necessary to name some aspect of the work and I could not find a way or a link with which to name it. So I proceeded with the practice and noticed that the association of the knotted canvas and the layered mass of canvas with the body, the mother's body created a very particular response to the mottled canvas. The mottled introducing the notion of dampness and dampness tying in with and reinforcing the connotative association of corporeality, weight, seepage, and rupture.

As the developing form became a human form, a human mottled form further links with the body, the mother's body, the place of the abject, became apparent through further departures in the practice. These associations of mottled canvas with the body reinforced the presence of the abject by linking it with the mother's body which was by now established as a form and a presence in the work.

These links between the mottled/abject relationship and its manifestation in the body through the practice became manifest again through the mottled canvas and the new responses it invoked in the way the canvas demanded to be worked. Long strips of mottled canvas were layered together vertically in endless thicknesses that opened randomly to reveal an interior space.

This development in handling the material brought immediate attention to boundaries. The falling apart of this layered structure masquerading as a surface became a falling apart of a surface, an interrupted boundary of the body, revealing a network of processes and narratives as the whole process of making was now located inside the body, the boundaries having dissolved in the making process to reveal a whole different mechanism of interiority. In the process of making the language, the body had opened, boundaries had been eroded into an ambiguous interiority of human biology as if to recover the language of the mother's body. (See Fig 5)



Fig.5 Detail of made research in studio.

Here in the image fig.5 there is visual material evidence of boundaries disintegrating onto an interiority of ambiguous narratives, echoing a rupture of the corporeality of the human form.

The unraveled weave of the draping layers of mottled canvas as it hung length ways towards the floor brought attention again to boundaries and the notion of interiority. Now, instead of cutting off these frayed edges, they were left intact to coil up in chaotic

bundles along the lines of hanging layers of mottled canvas resembling fragments of interiority, human drawings of suspended entrails.

In this configuration of thickening, draping layers and its association with disintegrating boundaries there is a parallel here with Kristeva's abject as it initiates the process by which the fetus abjects the mother's body because of the revulsion felt at the lack of boundaries between the mother's body and that of the fetus. The parallel with body contents, with its potential to leak and seep are also apparent and provides further manifestation in the body of the mottled/abject relationship.

In this dissolution of boundaries through the making process the narrative of the corpse is reintroduced and again there is a reengagement with the trace on mottled canvas and a return to the maternal body and the abject. The manifestation of the abject/mottled relationship through the body in the practice has emerged here and is accompanied by a dialogue between the image of the body, the process of abjection in the language of making and the corporeal nature and materiality of the mother's body and the materials of making. Out of this dialogue, this physical dialogical making, the emergent form comes more and more to resemble the body, the ambiguous hanging body unfolding in language, both body and corpse at the same time.

Although the process of making is dealt with already in great detail in the previous chapters¹⁴¹ I look briefly here at how specific activities of constructing this language of art making seem to provide a structure within which the relation between mottled and abjection becomes manifest in the body. The particular activities of making, i.e. tearing, ripping, knotting, tying, binding, plaiting, and layering engage the body in a very physical way. Because the material is so densely woven and therefore so heavy it demands considerable physical effort to manipulate i.e. tearing off large sheets, hauling wet sheets to the clothes line and hanging them up, removing them when dry, folding the canvas into bundles etc. So the body becomes implicated in a very physical way, there is a struggle, a relentless wrestling with materials. This physical wrestling with the canvas draws attention to corporeality of the making and sets up a rhythmic commotion of work, an endless swarm of chores resembling the work of a laundry.

¹⁴¹ see thesis Chapter 4

There are parallels here with the domestic and homespun, the chores of the mother, the minding mothering matriarch confined to the voiceless position of the home, engaged in a making of human work in language that might form an articulation of suppressed voices, the silent voice of the abject mother confined to the home. The repetitive endless and obsessive tasks of making and the rhythm that marks the momentum of their arduous and exhausting nature develops in the physical making process. This momentum of making connects the body rhythmically to the work through the physicality of the practice and connects and implicates in the thinking through materials the gathering weave of narratives, of making, of concealing, of constructing, of boundaries, of inside, of outside.

There is a parallel also with this rhythmic dynamic of making in how it reflects and is analogous to primary processes i.e. drive based activities and processes that in the Kristevan sense are integral parts of the signifying process. As we have seen drives have their origin in the semiotic maternal chora and drives are organized in language through the semiotic element. Rhythms do not represent bodily drives but drives are discharged through rhythms in language.

It is important to point out here that when the mottled as process combined with specific activities of making such as knotting, tying, binding, tearing, ripping etc, that combination began to manifest in the practice as a huge momentum of making, and with very specific departures in the practice. These developments are described in detail with visual documentation in the accompanying notebook.¹⁴²

At this point the practice seemed to have a life of its own responding to articulatory charges that were no longer amenable to logical explanation but seemed to arise out of the whole process of making and thinking through the physicality of the work, of dialogical relations between materials, the physicality of working the materials, the process, the form and the narrative arising out of this orchestration of components and elements.

There is a clear link here with how the mottled as process seemed to imbue the abject with an articulatory charge that allowed the abject to become part of the linguistic

¹⁴² see notebook pages 60 to 80, references 27 to 32.

process in the emerging form of the maternal body. There is evidence also of how further developments of that form strengthened the position and presence of the abject as a voice in the language of the body in the practice. It is the emergence of mottled through the developing practice with specific combinations of practice, thinking through practice and materials and elements of these processes that coincide with departures in practice and so evidence the relationship mechanism of the mottled/abject dialectic.¹⁴³

There is further evidence of these links between mottled and abjection manifest in the form when the work is placed in a particular context in the studio.¹⁴⁴ Again it is the particular arrangement of elements within the spatial and sculptural context that draws attention to the corporeality of the language through the mottled falling canvas. The work presents as rows of dissimilar, irregular, knotted and tied up heads with the lower body taking off in swathes of torn, layered mottled canvas that sweeps in a hanging movement to the floor (see Fig 6). Arising out of this presentation of work there is an unsettling sense of seething, a mass, a dispatched and disembodied race thronging for survival.

¹⁴³ See notebook page 85 to 97, references 35 to 43.

¹⁴⁴ See notebook page 98 to 110, reference 43 to 50.



Fig. 6 Detail of visual research/work installed at Broadcast Gallery Jan. 2011

In this image Fig.6 there is evidence of the abject, the unspeakable self, weighed down and suspended, fragile and open, failed and intact, present and waiting.

Suspended by fragile lines from overhead beams which bend with the weighted figures as they fall in heavy bundles of layered canvas piling up as each piece rests on the floor. In this dramatic narrative of representation there is a quiet insistence on corporeal presence without there being a literal presence of the body. As individual works the pieces remain unemphasised but present as relational elements to each other and to the whole work.

Installed in this context the work presents as a quiet thronging narrative of corporeal presence. The mottled presents as stains suggesting the presence of bodily processes, a wet seep beginning somewhere in the shrouded draping dresses has eased out onto the surface giving the impression of dampness and weight. Although there are suggestions of disintegration and decay, of profound fragility in the absence of boundaries and lack of distinction between inside and outside, which is reinforced by the endless layers of surface, nevertheless the work remains figurative and intact.

Its as if the body here, the maternal body, is held poised between life and death, between the body and the corpse. The parallel with abjection in its relation to mottled is wholly manifest in this concluding configuration of the body in the practice as the damp mottled language of the canvas insinuates the speech, the corporeality of abjection in the narrative of death and decay that pervades the whole work.

This simple crowded ordering of heads (see Fig 7) though it seems to belie order, it draws attention to another ordering that is not physical yet manifests in the physicality of the work. The image in Fig.7 demonstrates the random apparently disordered placement of one form next to the other. The thin strained strips of canvas holding the pieces in place on the beams draws attention to the weight, the heaviness of the heads warping the overhead timber structure and placing further emphasis on the disordered crowded assembly of forms. It is as if it is an ordering that is in relationship to another assembly of facts, a narrative, a discursive informant from another dimension that implicates the body in the signifying process but not in a literal way. The importance of this unseen narrative, this silent signifier lies in the fact that it establishes reference to bodily experience that is different from an emphasis on structure in and of itself. What I mean for example is, there is the implied narrative of the human form, the failed human form that exists in the conceptual reality of the work and through the work has become

established as location, a place where ideas of the human form can emerge and perpetuate themselves as a source of narratives.



Fig. 7 Detail of visual research installed suspended from overhead beams.

5.06 Further Findings

In relation to the body as a mechanism and a location, a place within the language that holds the manifestation of the mottled/abject relationship the research revealed the following:

-because of the process of narrative arising out of the dialogical relations between the parts and the dimension that it lends to the language, a location is formed where the body as process in the work represents a metaphorical space where narratives meet and intersect. It is here in the mechanism of narration that the abject has become linguistic and a determinant in the formation of language. In this way the abject is implied in the text and it becomes an implied antagonist in the narration of the story. So the narrative form of the abject exists through the mottled as process and as mark in the practice and the made form.

Through the practice and manipulation of materials the body becomes a process, a location of negotiation where many articulations merge in an intersecting weave of narratives. Here mottled and abject coexist with many other elements of language as part of a flux, a plurality of voices at work within a text that has its origin in a thinking through making. Here there is a direct parallel with the Kristevan idea of the heterogeneous located in the language of the made body.

This position of the body, the human form, as location and mechanism for text within the practice, and the potential of the text to open to include other narrative texts, ensures the implication of the body as location for the semiotic in the heterogeneous nature of the language process. There is the signifying process and the transposition of one text on to another in an endless multiplicity of participation making this language of art making. So the human form as it emerges through the process in the work becomes a metaphorical place from which language could be formed and discharged.

In this way the semiotic dimension of this language of art making as a place and as a process through which drives can be discharged and become linguistic in the art making is assured. Ultimately it seems to me that the woven text of the silent speech, out of which narratives and thought forms originate and enter the dialogical process,

provides the mechanism of the drive with a location and a process within which it can become implicated in and become part of the articulation of the language.

It is through this location within language that it becomes possible for the drive process to elaborate its state of being. In the art making process this elaboration becomes implicated in the linguistic mechanism and establishes the abject/mottled relationship within the body as linguistic mechanism that manifests in structural form. The very fact of the articulation of this mottled/ abject relationship in the form of the body ensures a discursive practice.

Ultimately the body is present in the work within the mottled/abject relationship through its absence in any literal sense. This absence emerges because the cloth is endowed with the language of the trace and subjected to cycles of process and manipulation. Its links with all the narrative structures arising out of the process ensures that this absence which eludes expression finds its own articulation in the language of making and in the made form and in the context of how the work is presented.

Finally it seems to me that it is in the syntheses of dialogue between the parts i.e. the materials, the physical processes and procedures of making, the conceptual practice and the thinking through materials, the multiple narratives and the made form, that the links become established. The relationship between mottled and abjection became manifest through the body in the practice because of the authenticity of the dialogue between the materials, the process and content and how these were explored, processed and validated in the components of the research.

The mottled canvas becomes the co-author of the story. By this I mean that I'm collaborating with the mottled canvas in the sense that as the physical thinking unfolds the canvas because of its specific nature, i.e. Its softness, its porous weave, its ability to hold form, it allows me to subject it to all the processes discussed so far. In this way it displays the whole process of abjection, it allows me to witness the decay, the disintegration, as the processes are laid out in the research process, as well as being a witness itself to the process of abjection.

5.07 Conclusion

In this section of the writing I outline and summarize the components of the written thesis and explain the important connections made in the context of the theoretical underpinnings and the practice arising out of the research. I outline in detail what has emerged in the research in terms of what is now known and understood by me having engaged with the minutiae of the moment to moment conceptual, physical and made work in the studio.

In order to address my research question i.e.

“How is significance/meaning created in this art practice? How does this thinking through materials and making, this engagement with materials, ideas and processes in this particular way coincide at the level of linguistic structure with the intervention of the semiotic so that drives are inscribed in the language of practice.?”

The main focus of the project has been to set up a studio based research context to begin an engagement of philosophic ideas in a set of material relations with the physicality of materials and making. In this way the key Kristevan concepts (see below) have been mapped on to the practice in the physicality of making.

In the narrative processes arising out of that relationship of engagement, the concepts have become implicated in the processes and procedures of making and thinking through making and a dialogue has been set up in the work between the different components of the research established in the material making.

Key Kristevan concepts underpinning the research are:

The signifying process (semiotic/symbolic)

The subject in process

Psychoanalysis as the study of subject formation, language as the means by which we represent this identity.

The abject

The maternal body and its relationship to language.

So my thesis outlines and explains how my art practice has been engaged as a means of enquiry into meaning making in the work. The written component of the research outlines and explains what has evolved in the research as the engagement of ideas with practice has developed and evolved in the making and the thinking through making. The visual component of the research is presented in the made work.

In my written thesis I outlined and explained the key Kristevan concepts and examined her theory concerning the semiotic/symbolic elements of the signifying process, the abject, the maternal body, the orientation of the abject and the maternal links with language. I have examined the art practice in the context of these key Kristevan concepts by looking at the materials, the activities of making, the content and emerging form. This has involved looking analytically at the materials, the different components and aspects of the structuring process and the interrelatedness of each of these processes and procedures within the research.

In order to establish this level of scrutiny in the processes and procedures of practice I have used the metaphor of language as a structure within which to examine the art practice. I have regarded the studio practice as a language construction, (by language I mean in the Kristevan interpretation of language as a signifying process i.e. language that exists not just as a means of communication but that has the capacity to articulate that which eludes explanation and is not amenable to intellectual resolve) constituted by laws, processes and procedures. I have considered the art practice as a mode of thinking, of materializing ideas through a physical making. This has provided a means by which analogous thought forms have become established and implicated in the practice and developed out of the physicality of making. This process of making, of analysis and looking as well as developing sculptural form has located within the

activity of the practice a place where ideas can be initiated, develop and materialize in the making process.

The research has involved an exploration of that language construction in order to illustrate, locate, make visible and available the different components of the research and to demonstrate the mechanisms by which the inscription of drives and the semiotic became established in the language of the work.

Finally in order to illustrate the links between the key Kristevan concepts and the art practice I have taken one aspect of the practice i.e. the mottled color on the canvas and its relationship to the concept of the maternal orientation of the abject. I have traced the parallel between the concept of the abject and mottled as it became implicated in the practice and the process and practice of materials. By examining this relationship within the practice and by looking at the process by which the mottled color became established on the canvas and how the concept of the abject became implicated in the art practice, I demonstrate how the relationship between mottled and abjection and the manifestation of that relationship through the human form in the art practice became established in different ways.

These particular manifestations have taken place in the practice through the use of very specific materials and engaging with specific procedures of making and engaging ideas with the physicality of making. I became aware of these particular manifestations in the practice when for example certain very specific moments were identified and engaged my attention in a particular way. For example the fraying threads on the edges of the canvas were removed in the initial stages of the research and as the work developed it became apparent to me that leaving the frayed edges intact could serve as an important linguistic device. So I made the decision not to remove them. This process of focusing on the frayed edges allowed me to use the concept of “edge” as a strategy for engaging further ideas such as the idea of boundaries, of surfaces, of layers. I have outlined how further links between the concept of the abject and mottled have been demonstrated through the analysis of the abject in the developing practice and the materiality of the corporeal nature of the language of making. For example I mean the links between mottled and abjection are explored in the context of the concept of the maternal chora, the maternal orientation of the abject as the language of the art practice becomes a

location within which new narratives arise and further ideas are developed in the ongoing process of thinking through materials.

In this intense detailed and prolonged engagement with and observation of my art practice a very particular relationship developed with the nature of thinking through materials. It is as if an experiential theory of how the stuff is made/manufactured begins to unfold in the development of ideas and thinking. I find myself asking how much more do I know, how do I know, what do I know, what do I understand, and what has been taking place in the thinking, in the silent speech, in the ideas, in the unfolding evidence of what is there in the physical material manifestation and beyond.

What exists in the writing and in the writing about the practice that is so deeply interfaced with the made work in the research? Where are those points of interfaced connections? Is the materiality of ideas fully elucidated in the practice and what does the writing add? All the stuff I thought about that arose out of my engagement with materials that isn't evident anywhere either in the writing or in the practice. So how would I locate an idea in the physical practice? How would I know or recognize the idea in one medium as opposed to another for example with regard to weight i.e. the weight of the knotted section of the practice, how do I describe weight? How do I write about an inanimate thing like weight, how do I represent weight, and what is the heaviness of weight.

The difficulty is that I have a certain relationship with the heaviness of weight in the materiality of how it presents in the research and then the awkwardness of there not being enough said to describe it. I am aware that I don't conceive of thinking about weight except in making, so in the making the concept gets to be realized, it's like the concept of weight becomes implicated as a component of weight as it gets to emerge in the materiality of making. No matter what there is an uncertainty in every attempt to describe or represent that talking to that dialogue with the art making process as it takes place in the studio. It's like an encounter with a multilayered speech and dimensions of that speech speak of weight or draw my attention to aspects of weight. For example the looking at the deeply textured knotted parts of the work I can see how the very tightly knotted section contributes to the notion of hard and subsequently heavy.

So what is going on is like an experiential account of what is there, of how the stuff is made. It is developing out of the dialogue with materials, with myself as the making is going on and what happens is that as the whole experience is taking place, the manufacturing commotion, the labor involved in the minutiae of the practice and materials in the making I get to notice what is going on in the making. In all of that I'm experiencing the silent repose of the canvas, the silent performance of material engagement, the silence and the ongoing doing and being. I notice the silence as strategy in the developing idea of weight, the difficulty of speaking something to myself that I am experiencing in the doing and the immediacy of materials, the touch and the feel of the stuff and what it becomes in the process of encounter.

In this silent uninterrupted dialogue in the practice, in the mind, in the materials in the studio as I work the thinking out in the materials and the practice, I have the chance to see, to view the thinking as if the apparatus of thinking is flowing before my mind displaying the thinking process so that different forms of knowledge emerge.

I notice the precise and visionary ways of working, some aspects can be located inwardly, from within from somewhere I don't know yet and through a process of engaging with thinking or just thinking i.e. being thinking in the materials and commotion, the handling, the tearing. For example I always tear in the same way yet each strip is different from the next and the last one but it becomes something else in the process of handling, of manipulating, of knotting, of hanging and of getting heavier. Sometimes I think I'd like to freeze the whole process so that I can experience and observe the whole commotion in order to record it, to capture what it is and how it might function to formulate an insight and understanding of what is there. I wonder am I describing something of my process and art practice or am I providing evidence of something, proof of what is there and what has occurred. My relationship to what is going on, my experiencing it and at the same times my being and doing within it seems so impossible to capture or prove because it is happening/occurring/being at so many different levels, in so many ways, that as soon as it is experienced it is over/lost.

It seems to me that what is possible in writing about the practice is an experiential theory that develops out of the dialogue with the practice as it goes along in the making, like a narrative of things, an authentic intimacy and interiority with the experience. It is like a writing about the stuff as if it is a formulation of that which is not, or cannot be except as

it exists in the creating, the moment to moment thinking of and with each engagement with the stuff.

As I talk, as I speech silently it is a speech that exists in a making with materials, challenging existing categories, challenging what went before and what I thought was certain now proves to be not certain at all and that uncertainty is being revealed to me in the stuff of the practice. The awareness of practice and speech brings in an understanding of the inventive power and energy of making in live time, the artist's labor, the experience of time, of action, of production, the inception, the generation, the maneuvers, the strengths. What is in the silence, the shapes, the form and textures, the positioning of fragments, the messy realism of living experience, the prefiguring, the planning, the concerns that arise, the sensations, the touch, where do I feel powerful, what takes my attention, how the work speaks back to me, how I respond to that speaking, the ambitions, the flow of it, what questions arise, what questions can be answered, where is the truth, the work starts to speak back to me, it takes me over I have to leave and come back the next day.

I am looking at myself, it makes me more what I am, drawing up an account, an image of an encounter with self where everything that needs to be said can only be said by making, can only be looked at by making. Theorization of what is before me is mirrored in the making, the writing and the thinking. By not subordinating the making to the thinking, the making is able to become itself so the making illuminates the doing by getting the language to reflect the doing without coming to predetermined results. In pursuing the logic of materials the language bends to the materials, the activities and the process. I realize it is my articulation, my interaction with the materials that creates the language, so the traditional rules that govern the language of theory for example do not apply to this work.

I am conscious of the conceptual density of the visual materiality of my work and I wonder how writing about that density will bring me closer to the language I need to understand the theorizing potential of my encounter with the work. I would like to describe the inventive power of the practice, and to establish the importance of the live time and the descriptive criticality of what I do. When I look at the work, its impact as an art making, its presence, I realize that the made practice in its materiality is the most knowledgeable and the clearest account of what happened.

So the work confronts me, it contests disciplines, I understood it was one thing and realize that it is more than that but I don't know how it is more or how that more could be accounted for. In this sense the work refuses any fundamental assumptions about how theory might be evidenced.¹⁴⁵

So where is the language that would fully account for what this is, what it means, what it does, where it comes from. How can I find a way to invent the critical moment of the production of this work, together with an analytical account of its own purposes, which might propose a new understanding and allow me to meet the work in a theoretical form, in another formulation of language, For example I want to provide evidence, to demonstrate to myself that weight, both as something that I experienced physically and conceptually in the work, is a mechanism in the practice that became and contributed to a place of thinking, a place and a physicality of the idea of weight as a thinking that became implicated through the making in the logic of materials.

What is the activity of thinking of weight, what is the process of imaging of weight, how did weight as critical mass become categorical in the materials. How do I evidence weight as thinking?

To summarize, in Chapter one I outlined my research question. I described how my art practice is engaged as a means of enquiry and represents the main component of the research. I outlined the main Kristevan ideas underpinning the research. I described that the relevance of these concepts to my research and work is that they provide a structure within which to examine the processes procedures and components of my art practice. In this way the processes and procedures of the practice and the thinking arising out of the practice can be made available and a visibility created around the links between those concepts and the practice. I introduced the subject of language and its use in a metaphorical sense as a way of looking at and exploring the art practice as a signifying process. I introduced the subject of drives, paying particular attention to the relevance of drives in my research question and examining its meaning in the Freudian sense and in

¹⁴⁵ Macleod, K (2007). *A singular encounter with Art theorization: A Speculation concerning art/writing in the context of Doctoral Research.* p15.

the Kristevan sense of how she describes subject formation and language acquisition in the context of the process of drives and the relationship of drives to language.

In chapter two I discuss the subject of language by outlining the structuralists approach to linguistics, relying on Saussure's theory of language as a system of signs. I explain Kristeva's rejection of structuralism in place of her own theory of language as a signifying process. I demonstrate that by using the metaphor of language I regard my art practice as a language construct, I illustrate that the art practice i.e. the process and procedures of making, and the materiality of thinking through materials is closer to Kristeva's signifying process and her concept of the semiotic which sought to illustrate the materiality of language, its capacity to encompass a representation of that which remains outside the resolve of formal logic and conscious thought.

I demonstrate how my practice as a signifying process allows for the emergence and development of multiple narratives and serves as a location and a structure where ideas begin and develop in the emerging research. I outline and explain the centrality of the mother's body, its linguistic orientation in my art practice and Kristeva's insistence that the task of rethinking the maternal body as inseparable from rethinking language.

In chapter three I outline the psychoanalytic theory of Lacan and Kristeva in the context of subject formation and language acquisition. I identify how Kristeva differs from Lacan in her account of subject formation by giving a more central place to the maternal and the feminine. I examine the main Kristevan themes that underpin my enquiry i.e. the signifying process, the semiotic chora and I look at the relationship of that to the maternal body in the role of the subject-in-process, the abject, the subject's relation to abjection in the context of the maternal body, and the inscription of otherness on into every identity and language practice.

In chapter four I demonstrate how the art practice as a signifying process provides a structure within which to explore my practice in the context of the key Kristevan ideas as outlined above. This demonstration is achieved by looking analytically at the practice, its processes, procedures, components and laws in terms of materials, process, content and form. In this way a visibility and an availability is created around the links and relationship between the practice and the underlying theoretical ideas.

I look at the interrelatedness of each of the parts of the materiality of making and the analogous thought forms that arise within the physicalness of the practice and the relationship of that to the signifying process.

In order to facilitate and expand this exploration I use the metaphor of text. By text I mean text as a location within the work that accommodates a plurality of voices and overlapping narratives within the text of thinking through materials.

In chapter five I trace, make visible and available the links between the different components of the research i.e. the links between the ideas, the practice and the emerging form that develops out of the engagement with these ideas and elements.

This visibility and transparency is achieved by focusing on one element of the art practice i.e. the mottled pattern on the canvas and the relationship of that to the subject and process of abjection in the work. By outlining the processes and procedures of practice that specifically implicate the maternal body I examine the process by which the process of abjection becomes implicated in the practice and the relationship of that to the manifestation of the abject and the drives in the context of the maternal body at both the physical and conceptual level in the practice. I describe how that process is evidenced in the making, in the analogous thought form and in what emerges in the constructed form. In this way effective parallels are traced between Kristeva's theory of abjection and the art practice.

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