The ghost artist

Tracing spectral embodiment as a figure of aesthetic resistance, in an unknown woman’s eighteenth century paintings, and works by Hilma af Klint and Louise Bourgeois

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The speculative interiority that this artist effloresced out of rotting logs in a wood pile in Bavaria in the 1780's was a radical experiment in Self portrayal. It reveals an idea of a body made visible in fifty-two parts, but unified by the body of the book itself. The painted circles inside, perhaps signifying a year of time, stack up like vertebrae within the scarred leathery skin of its boards. It becomes a body of two spines, the material one made of its binding propping up the psychic spine of imagined images, in a repetition of the double body construct of each individual painting. The tracing of time in the conceptual, or psychic, spine, brings its passage to this still object, and is underlined by the need to turn pages. This is not a form of portrayal we can absorb in a single glance. To more fully explore this, and a possible genealogy for the notebook in more recent women's art practices, this chapter looks at key twentieth century ideas of Self formation, and their trace in women's art works chosen to follow the eye's movement to, and then away from, the mirror made of glass.

Rare self-portraits of older women from the eighteenth century, like the one by Lisiewska-Therbusch, are an important part of the slim record of women's lives in this time, but the anonymous notebook is an imaginative exploration of the inside of a life, brought about by an artist's eye falling away from the actual mirror, in search of a different sort of self-definition. This is what the revenant Earnest Search-er of the introduction was pointing to, when she came back to mind alongside my discovery of notebook. For this anonymous artist to paint her own face would not have answered her need to show her experience to herself, as the social disciplining of her body, as an object, denied any relevance for her inner life. To explore the conceptual figure that I believe underlies the artist's movement way from the emptiness of such literal mirroring, and allows for the teasing apart of portrayal and mimesis through meditative study of...
our touchable world, I go back to Freud and Lacan. Thinking with their ideas of self building also opens up the ways in which the notebook meaningfully connects with our contemporary world.

The Aggression of the Screen

Freud's thinking on infant self development was further theorised by Jacques Lacan (1901–1981) with his idea of the mirror stage. Lacan understands the infant's developing self-image, its 'I', to be created in relation to an understanding of itself as an entity, and in relationship with others. This is a development of an earlier self-image created only by partial inner experiences, a fragmentary self-image of 'bits and pieces', which can only become unified when the developing subject sees herself reflected, by the mirror of the social world, as a singular subject with a border. This self-recognition is consolidated by seeing other infants, and by being seen by the mother. Lacan uses the language of the visual to describe this development, and so this first mirrored image is 'seen' to be perfect in its wholeness, and our subjectivity is formed by the simultaneous emergence of self-love (wonderful complete image) and self-loss (it is an 'Other', not part of my intimate, experiencing me). Lacan holds that the separation of this perfect image from our interiority is experienced as a fundamentally alienating process, as loss, or self-alienation, even as it forms the condition necessary for empathy and relation to others.

There is a gap between the mirrored image and bodily experience. These remain separate, while mutually dependent, in the development of the Self. The 'picture' of identity (wonderful complete image) will be that from which the subject will always judge herself, consequently experiencing herself (wonderful complete image) as a singular subject with a border. This self-recognition is consolidated by seeing other infants, and by being seen by the mother. Lacan uses the language of the visual to describe this development, and so this first mirrored image is 'seen' to be perfect in its wholeness, and our subjectivity is formed by the simultaneous emergence of self-love (wonderful complete image) and self-loss (it is an 'Other', not part of my intimate, experiencing me). Lacan holds that the separation of this perfect image from our interiority is experienced as a fundamentally alienating process, as loss, or self-alienation, even as it forms the condition necessary for empathy and relation to others.

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While mirrors in the home may well have increased a sense of social individuation, Lacan argues that the mirror stage can be understood as literal, but as a conceptual plane, and expression of the symbolic order. Dan Novis explores this in a text that quotes Semmari, 1980, in which Lacan states that the function of the plane mirror is governed by the voice of the other. Dan Novis, 'Life and Death in the Glass - A New Look at the Mirror Stage', in Key Concepts of Lacanian Psychoanalysis, edited by N. Robb, Other Press, 1998, p. 120. Novis further clarifies this as 'moral' as the symbolic governs the imaginary, a blind child can still assume a self-image, as long as the symbolic is there to negotiate it. For Lacan, the mirror is for it to then see itself through the words of the Other. The mother is often the primary symbolic 'mirror'.

He stretched his wing feathers in the darkness of the bay, showing her things: honour, interior, humanity. It worked, it made her see, and she stretched back, warming to it, and spreading the iridescent tips of a little personal history. She fanned them with a laugh and a shiver ran between them. He laughed back. She could not tell him, she thought he felt it. He could not tell her. Did a thing exist that could not be told?

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Kaja Silverman, ibid, p. 150


Kaja Silverman, op. cit., p. 201


Silverman (1947–) calls the dominant cultural screen within the social field, that "culturally generated image or repertoire of images through which subjects are not only constituted, but differentiated in relation to class, race, sexuality, age, and nationality." This is for the most part, as a 'specular body', Peggy Phelan has noted that this specular emphasis then becomes the dominant cultural aesthetic, and that this, in the West, still favours the looking done by white men. Phelan takes this position as the basis for her call for a more self-seeing inward cultural gaze, which, if we accept that the Self is partially formed by looking out and being reflected back, is, for anyone other than the owners of the dominant aesthetic, a look towards the non-visible, the blank of a missing realisation of oneself in culture. Until one can accept one's internal other as lost, invisible, an unmarked blank to oneself and within the world, the external other [as an internal experience] will always bear the marks and scars of the looker's deadening gaze.

The absence of a recognisable internal world in the cultural field of the image, is not something Phelan believes can be directly represented within that same culture, being experienced as lack, as an increase in the fundamental self-alienation of Lacan's Self formation, however she searches for a spectral shadow of it in Unmarked with the notion of the after-image. This is the battle that I believe the notebook records, the attempt to define cultural absence with the borrowed terms of absence with someone hearing the 'marks and scars of the looker's deadening gaze.'

The internalised image of perfect womanhood, produced by a dominant gaze that is not that of women themselves, hurts all women. The marks and scars with which it borders Phelan's unmarked blank only increase as women age, and take on the function "imparting a relationship between categories (no longer being reproductively viable)."

In The Threshold of the Visible World, Silverman explains how, in internalising images of ourselves in the world, we assume "the shape of either a desired representation or one that has come through less happy circumstances to mark the physical body." This 'less happy' shape she sees as a stain of the perfect image, a sort of future ghost, which we try on before fully assimilating it, or as a soul how it fits into someone else's skin. This metaphor offers us partial masquerading agency in relation to the social field, but it also shows how dependent we all are on reconstituting ourselves, either by looking at our own inner experiences, a fragmentary self-image of "bits and pieces", which can only become unified when the developing self recognizes itself reflected, by the mirror of the social world, as a singular subject with a border. This self-recognition is consolidated by seeing other infants, and by being seen by the mother. Lacan uses the language of the visual to describe this development, and so this first mirrored image is 'seen' to be perfect in its wholeness, and our subjectivity is formed by the simultaneous emergence of self-love (wonderful complete image) and self-loss (it is an 'Other', not part of my intimate, experiencing me). Lacan holds that the separation of this perfect image from our interiority is experienced as a fundamentally alienating process, as loss, or self-alienation, even as it forms the condition necessary for empathy and relation to others.

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mimicry, of repeatedly staining oneself with a false self. This idea was explored by psychoanalyst Joan Riviere (1883–1962) in Womanliness as a Masquerade, but it has also been considered by artists.

**Sherman's mirror**

The artist perhaps most famous for her work on women's masquerading attempts to perform womanliness is Cindy Sherman (1954–), and indeed Silverman analyses how the now famousUntitled Film Stills (1977–1980) do this. Unlike the notebook artist, or the Earnest Search-er with her mirror of blood, Sherman's oeuvre is entirely focussed on the external dressing of the body. This chapter will trace a path away from that marked and scarred, masquerading, body-object, and towards Phelan's call for a more self-seeing inward cultural gaze, but it begins with the ways a 62-year-old Sherman has worked with images of her now ageing self.

In Untitled #566 the artist revisits the Hollywood still, this time exploring the aesthetic language of a (slightly) older Joan Crawford and Greta Garbo from the Thirties and Forties. This 2016 series was shot in front of a green screen and the backgrounds Photoshopped in later, much as a painter might work, and in a contemporary re-creation of the 1920's studio photographer's backdrop. This nostalgic nod is revealed as an empty possibility however, as these self-portraits-of-theartist-as-another cannot, as we cannot, go back in time. The photographs re-open the cultural gap revealed in the previous series between the construction of an idealized image of womanhood (this time the successful older woman, silk clothes and cut'n'coloured) and a woman's lived life, by revealing the same 'good enough' theatrically constructed picture of a body, and, by going back so far in time for an aesthetic vocabulary, the poverty of contemporary imagery of this time in women's lives.

In an interview about these hollow constructions of worldly success, with their desirable backdrops of downtown skylines, glamorous holiday views, the garden of a palazzo, Sherman speaks about this poverty, and how much she admired the determination of the then 61-year-old academic Mary Beard, and it to be filmed on television looking her age. Sherman goes on to say that "of course you don't actually see that many portraits of older women or old women in fashion and film. So that's part of it." And there is a positivity to these photographs, they do present us with woman + age + financial success, but they also resonate with mortality. The shadowy lighting and muted colour palettes all highlight an unsmiling pallor of painted-doll faces that already suggest the cadaver to come. The artist also mentions that the heroines of this series were the direct outcome of her surprise at her own mortality. Like the older series however, these photos work with the window/mirror work of the social screen we all inhabit, and Sherman says that I want there to be hints of narrative everywhere in the image so that people can make up their own stories about them, but I don't want to have my own narrative and force it on to them. And it shouldn't seem so real that it looks like it was shot in a studio today. I want it to transcend time somehow.

Artworks always reveal their culture and time. Even the images of our inner archives are renewed, as we look anew at the world every day. Sherman works with this border to the inner image, blurring its function with 'just good enough' constructs that highlight our unending search for ourselves. In Untitled #566, this is underlined by the double take, which looks at first like a reflection caught in a double-glazed window, but is not. It is two shots from a camera working through time and emphasising the transience of the figure caught between the digital screen of the camera, or viewers, eye and the digital stand-in locale. Nothing here is quite what it is presented to be, and this doubling of every aspect of the image reveals Lacan's staining quality of the possible image—this image-cloak is not a good fit.

The next evening, she pined with tiredness as she looked for dinner in the supermarket. What she had in the trolley was inconclusive, but it would do. She paid, parked, and pocketed the coin. As she turned into the shopping centre, a wind from outside caught her, and a voice enfolded her head, asking 'Ademt ze?' In her mind she saw women outside, 'Ademt ze?' a voice enfolded her head, asking 'Ademt ze?'空

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One of the most striking aspects of the 2016 series however, is its contrast with work from around 2000. This earlier series was created before the artist had to face her own mortality, and it takes on the aggression of the screen with much less sympathetic portraits of the masquerade with which older women fight against social exclusion and dismissal. Together, these examples define the view from either side of the screen, and an action that age theorist Margaret Morganroth Gullette (1941–) calls being "aged by culture," a process received "along with Cable News Network, Coca Cola and Visa credit cards." The images inserted here in the printed thesis are not available in the digital thesis.

The Guardian.com

"Why am I in these photos?"


is to show that the frame never quite contained the
scene it was meant to limn, that something was already
outside, which made the very sense of the inside possible,
recognizable. The frame never quite determines precisely
what it is we see, think, recognize, and apprehend.

The woman blurrily present beneath Sherman’s masquerades
is in some ways comparable to the woman peeping through
the religious and alchemical masks of the notebook’s worlds.
Neither cloak quite covers the ghostly shadow of this less
recognisable life, that of Phelan’s cultural blank. Sherman’s
calm masquerading brutally reveals how far ‘outside’ the
frame this ghosted woman is, and the notebook artist marks
her erasure with the choice to enter representation as a log,
floating in space.

Lassnig’s Skin
The paintings of Maria Lassnig (1919–2014), are quite different
to Sherman’s photographs, but her shape-shifting self-portraits
also record a battle played out with Self immolation in the
screen. In Das Gesetz (The Law) 2010, the artist painted, aged
91, a realistic representation of a smiling young man lying in a
field, a stand-in for the natural world, or ‘the given.’ He luxuriates
in revealing a body he confidently expects to be both readable
and desirable to the gaze of the world. Beside him, doing the
work of looking, is a ghost. This ambiguous presence, the same
colour as the unpainted pictorial ground behind it, is outlined
in blood red, but only eyes and mouth define it as residually
human. This is the artist, chewing reflectively on a painted
line as she considers the ‘natural’ young man. Chewing the
red line suggests it to be a blade of grass, and so the field
of the world, but it is red and comes out of her ghosted body,
so it is also a blood vessel, a sign of her own interior nature.
The artist has portrayed herself as both literally and
metaphorically ‘chewing’ on the nature of her body, presented
as a spectre in comparison to the hyper-visible young man’s.
She is chewing on the law that blanks out her visualisation as
a natural body, while the young man’s can be depicted so easily
he need not even open his eyes to check. In this devastating
critique of the work of the screen, the artist is connected to
the man by the cutting blade of a double-edged saw. Is it her
mature invisibility that gives her the power to see how things
are? If Sherman’s photographs of the cloaks of ageing attempt
to shake the brutality of culture’s norms, then by calling her
work The Law, Lassnig reminds us of the still overwhelming
power of these forces.

In her sixties, Simone de Beauvoir (1908–1986) reflected
on the disappearance of her reflection from her life, when
she wrote that
Now I mind little about my physical appearance: I take care of it out of consideration for those around me […] Like everyone else, I am incapable of an inner experience of it [ageing]; age is one of the things that cannot be realized […] I am sixty-three: and this truth remains foreign to me. 204

De Beauvoir’s response to the distortions of the screen is to disdains it, even as she acknowledges that ‘truth’ is constructed there. With The Law, Lassnig’s blunt representation of erasure reminds us of the pain inherent to the void opened up by de Beauvoir’s ‘foreign truth.’ In Instant Repulsion, 205 Kathleen Woodward (1944–) proposes that with age, our ongoing mirroring interaction with the world in fact enters a reversal. Whereas in infancy, Lacan’s ‘bits and pieces’ of a fractured self-image—partial relationships with breast, face, faeces, experienced as hunger, sensual pleasure or other sensations—are brought into a pleasing gestalt by our self-recognition in ‘wonderful complete image,’ this process is reversed as we age, because

the harmonious whole [already] resides within the subject, and the imago prefigures disintegration and nursing dependence. If the infant holds his mirror stage in an amorous gaze, the elderly person resists it. The narcissistic impulse remains—it imposes itself upon all our desires—but it is directed against the mirror image. 206

The alienating forces within the essential ego function of narcissism become stronger as an ageing person increasingly finds only signs of their coming disintegration and what this may come to mean for their experience in the world. De Beauvoir resisted this reminder, which Lacan describes in terms of the screen becoming denser with age, as a socially accepted body, and the image above that. But in her later years, as she asserted, and continues that when “the subject starts dis-identifying her body-image through the sheer overload of stereotypical, discriminatory, youth-glorifying, and gender dividing images” and continues that when “the subject starts dis-identifying with her imaginary self in the mirror, the elderly person’s look in the mirror becomes equivalent to the child’s fantasy of a body in bits and pieces.” 207

In these three Lassnig paintings, completed when the artist was between 67 and 73, it is possible to trace the artist perhaps working out her changing relationship with this marker screen, and her attempt to embrace her renewed objectification in Sturm’s ageing fantasies of a body in bits and pieces. In Transparent Self-portrait, 1987, the artist’s eyes are covered by a transparent sheet, and the eyeballs are painted as rolling onwards, Phelan’s more ‘self-seeing gaze.’ While it can be seen into, the screen is the same colour as the body. It is merging with it, and both are painted with horizontal lines reminiscent of a flickering, malfunctioning analogue TV. This damaged psychic merger seems to overpower the natural body, which is flattened backwards, its arms, the tools the artist uses to define her world, becoming useless pincers that are being held down by almost invisible beings hiding behind this remnant of the depictable.

In Inside Out, 1992, the same screen returns, but it now completely obscures and becomes the eyes. The organic body has been replaced by a machine cloak. In becoming object, the artist has fully merged with the viewpoint of the screen, and sees with this, instead of her own eyes. The battle being played out in Transparent Self-portrait is over. If the screen of the world has flung a damaging envelope, the artist has bitten down and is using it as a shield. This body has plugged in and found power. The bruised pink-green-yellow skin of five years before is upright and fighting back, but it is the flayed red of being skinned alive. There is no mouth but Inside Out is a scream. The sensing traffic between seeing and being seen define Lassnig’s life’s work, and the animated electrical appliance frequently returns in her later years, as the question of what sort of energised object she was, in the eyes of the world and in her own eyes, increasingly pre-occupied her. Lassnig’s final position on this is dearly articulated in The Law, but in these earlier negotiations with the frame and how she might imagine a self-aware return of her objectification, or ghosting, many paintings combine the organic body with everyday objects, in the creation of bodies of bits and pieces that extend her self-image into the materiality of her everyday life. Bar fires, kitchen equipment, the TV, all became tools of definition. In Rose Electricity, 1993, the flayed object of the body image becomes harder to trace and the screen becomes more of “a mask, a double, an envelope, a thrown-off skin, throwed-off in order to cover the frame of a shield.” 208 Jules Sturm (1974–) describes this distancing action as the subject losing “her body-image through the sheer overload of stereotypical, discriminatory, youth-glorifying, and gender dividing images” and continues that when “the subject starts dis-identifying with her imaginary self in the mirror, the elderly person’s look in the mirror becomes equivalent to the child’s fantasy of a body in bits and pieces.” 209

The animation of a household object into a body composite is already clearly explored as process in Lassnig’s 1971 film animation, Chairs however. See Maria Lassnig, The Pen is the Sister of the Brush, Diaries 1943–1987, edited by Hans Ulrich Obrist, published by Steidl Hauser & Wirth, London, 2010, for the artist’s extended thoughts on this and other aspects of her practice.

sexually gaping parts are all connected by what Lassnig calls her ‘nerve lines,’ the literal lines of feeling running through us. In this series and others, the canvas is asked to take on the role of holding body, in a construction like the notebook’s bound form. This surface, or skin, is often brought forward by being left unpainted.

Lassnig’s life-long search for a visual language of our sensate interiority depended on her utilizing her own body, her only research resource for such work. In her published diaries she writes about the difficulties inherent to this, and her struggle to paint beyond the security of the real, into uncharted territory – a physical feeling that is difficult to define visually, where does it begin, where does it end [...] is like trying to fence in clouds [...] I almost have to apologise for the fact that concrete bodies arose from an enterprise that sounds more like research than like art. The inability to ignore my knowledge of actual distances between forehead and nose, neck and chest is to blame.

Lassnig’s research was not an expression of Cartesian mind/body dualism. At no point does she write of her work in terms of the ‘spirit,’ and her painting never suggests this. In The Hospital of the Body; Maria Lassnig’s Body Ego Portraits, critic Donald Kuspit (1935–) nevertheless manages to identify this work as the artist’s “failure to objectify” her own body, and the Feminism that might be read into this becoming instead “a subjective fantasy of wholeness of being not an activist critique of patriarchal society,” a gesture that he sees as leaving the artist “stuck in a narcissistic plight.”

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I would argue that it is a mistake to see a simple autobiographic extension in a woman artist choosing to use her body as a site. Objectivity is the subjectivity of those in charge of the view, and Lassnig is asserting her ‘subjectivity’ as actually the only position from which any of us come. Kuspit’s placing of her bodies of bits and pieces in ‘the hospital of the body’ reveals how strongly his own position depends on his aesthetic imaginary of a feminine ideal, the very notion Lassnig spent her life seeking to dislodge, employing her particularity to do so.

Sturm’s proposal in Bodies We Fail is that a specular body ideal such as Kuspit’s might usefully be re-imagined, by and for those hurt by the dynamics of the screen, as a speculative, uncertain, or multiple body instead. These speculations might originate as a willed act of the imagination, a fantasy de-scripting of the culturally received body, the one ‘aged by culture’ for example, and that this action is a necessary political act of re-scripting what it is possible to see. This is the visual language Lassnig strove to find, as she sought out visual forms for experiences of life that have no given semiotics in painting history. As Butler clearly states, “the [new] image surely lands in new contexts,
it also creates new contexts by virtue of that landing, becoming a part of the very process through which new contexts are delimited and formed.” 214 The process of fantasy can be the process of changing one’s world, a process of re-negotiation with the image world, by making new images out there in culture that might usefully effect new images in there in the Self. If a subject embraces the fantasy of the body in bits and pieces, Sturm suggests that “the body-image of these individuals loses its unified appearance, spills over the borders […] becomes fictional […] and performative, through the enactment of a new form of self-seeing.” 215 For Sturm this process involves “expanding the mirror’s scope and transmitting its promises to other objects.” 216 Lassnig’s dispersed or amalgamated forms stretch and distort the idealized body as they incorporate other objects and perform new pictures of Self experience.

Thinking of the floating baubles of the notebook in a genealogical relationship to these more recent women artists helps to open up how its serial log forms can also be experienced as a record of partial sensations, mirrored back through a conceptual move away from a received imago. When the traditional mirror’s scope is extended to the potentially black mirrors of the wood-pile, the leathery skin of the book’s boards, like the raw canvas grounds of Lassnig’s paintings, are asked to be the holding vessel for a ‘new form of self-seeing.’

**Inner eyesight**

I have touched on Cindy Sherman’s work to destabilise the brutalising power of culturally received image ideals, and on Maria Lassnig’s attempted re-scripting of this disciplining and objectifying gaze, by focussing her eye inwards, towards the sensation of her skin from the inside, and her body as one made up of parts. This is an attempt to find a path for Phelan’s political call for ‘a more inward-looking gaze.’ Before considering the ways that artists Hilma af Klint (1862–1944) and Louise Bourgeois (1911–2010) took on this other approach to looking, in defiance of objectification and its insistence on surface, and to be able to link their practices to that of the notebook artist, I now look more at the pathways of seeing and imagining as they bounce within and between us.

**The Ghosts of Play**

The work of imagining differently holds both the power and the problems of the alternative view. The children’s book *The Little Prince* opens with a nice example of this, when the narrator explains that he is a pilot, and has just crashed his plane in the desert. Stranded, he begins to think about his childhood, his first experience of drawing, and why he decided to become a pilot.

After some work with a coloured pencil I succeeded in making my first drawing. My drawing Number One […]

The image inserted here in the printed thesis is not available in the digital thesis.
I showed my masterpiece to the grown-ups, and asked them whether the drawing frightened them. But they answered: ‘Frightened? Why should anyone be frightened by a hat?’ My drawing was not a picture of a hat. It was a picture of a boa constrictor digesting an elephant.  

The narrator goes on to say that this lack of success soon put him off art and that by the age of six he made the early decision to give it up and become a pilot. This story is one of our adult loss of faith in the utility of the imaginative life of childhood, and our acceptance of the law of the screen. In the notebook, we see an artist persisting with boa constrictors and elephants, even while doubt resurfaces in every return to received imagery. In every page that defies this reception however, the fabulosa was a choice for freedom. If the screen of the world has become too dense to find oneself in any more, then this choice is a survival. If such choices can find a public and be shared, then the screen itself becomes, as Sturm suggests, a little bit changed. This is the important work of fantasy, of imagining otherwise.

In Playing and Reality, psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott (1896–1971) observes how infants manage the first objects of their lives, in his theory of transitional objects. He then explores how our adult experience of culture is located in a similar space to this early environment, which he calls “potential space.”  

This potential space is established in our early life experience by the movement of ‘transitional objects’ between the auto-erotic space of me-extensions and the not-me space of objective objects, so the space between intimacy and the mirror, or the specular field. This space between the human and the thing is observed to begin around the same time as the mirror stage, and is a more generalised coming to terms with the object world. Infants begin to place objects outside of the area of their total control, and in doing this, learn to perceive of objects as external phenomena, entities in their own right. During this process the baby also tries to destroy the newly external object (spitting the dummy from the pram), and the objects that survive these attempts at destruction are the ones that will be valued, or ‘cathedected.’ This double process of loving while trying to destroy enacts, for Winnicott, the birth of fantasy in a child’s development, and so allows objects to be used, because the object develops its own autonomy and life, and (if it survives) contributes-in to the subject, according to its own properties […] this is a position that can be arrived at by the individual in early stages of emotional growth only through the actual survival of cathected objects that are at the time in the process of becoming destroyed because real, becoming real because destroyed.  

Destruction is therefore a core aspect of creating reality, where survival, in Winnicott’s terms, means ‘does not retaliate.’ This is very like the process of continual destruction and re-making that is painting. I call it trying, and trying again, but in effect, it is also destroying, and destroying again. If the object (paint) in the end ‘wins,’ then the artist has lost, and the painting is not a success. However, if the object, or painting, survives its ongoing destruction (re-painting), and becomes an artwork in the end, it will have moved outside of the area of the artist’s “projective mental mechanisms. In this way a world of shared reality is created which the subject [artist] can use and which can feed back other-than-me substance into the subject [artist].” The painting no longer exists only in the artist’s head, but as an independent object in the world. For the viewer, the ‘potential space’ that exists between the artist and their valued object, now also opens to them, if their imagination engages with the object, and they find themselves giving it personal value. The ‘potential space’ is the space of interplay between all our intimate, imagined worlds and a world of objects and phenomena remote from our experience, whether as makers or viewers. It is the space where we all find meaning and build value, some more easily than others, but through the same process of cathexis that is instigated by our earliest transitional objects. This is the ghost space that I refer to in the introduction, the reason certain artworks seem alive to us when others do not exceed their mute materiality.

A fundamental difference between our early creation of fantasy space, and that space in adult life, is, however, the altered roles of trust and anxiety. Winnicott states that the essential feature in the concept of transitional objects and phenomena is “the paradox and the acceptance of the paradox: the baby creates the object, but the object was there waiting to be created and to become a cathected object.” This same process happens when we suddenly come across an artwork that we find ourselves responding to, where we perhaps see reality that we can recognise as our own. Important to early play however, and an essential difference to the way we place value in our adult lives, is that as babies we have not yet been socialized, and our super ego has not yet developed the policing role it takes in adult life. Winnicott emphasises the importance of trust in the developmental process of accepting the paradox, a situation that is possible because “everything in the play has been done before, has been felt before, has been smelt before.” Thinking about this play space in adult life, he states that “the potential space between baby and mother, between child and family, between individual and society or the world, depends on experience which leads to trust.” You cannot cathect to a world that you experience as scarring and marking. As critics of capitalism from Marx on have pointed out, our wish to cathect, to find object stand-ins for that which our desire seeks, is fed by an endless river of options in contemporary consumerism. We become socialised into a looping relationship
with the object world, which Judith Butler identifies when she states that “If what I want is only produced in relation to what is wanted from me, then the idea of ‘my own’ desire turns out to be something of a misnomer.” The possibilities of adult cathexis and meaning creation in relation to the objects of our lives are therefore as deeply tied to the tension producing forces of anxiety as the liberating forces of joy, and the free ranging play of desire in infant lives becomes sublimated, through these repressive functions of socialization, into a more complex emotional territory where meaning creation is stymied by a fetishistic relationship to objects. Guy Debord (1931–1994), also following Lacan, names this as the Spectacle, “not a collection of things, but a social relation among people, mediated by images.” Debord’s ‘social relation’ is however, the Mobius other of Winnicott’s individual ‘potential space.’ In this shared adult space, our desiring flow is halted, through anxiety in relation to ‘what is wanted from me,’ what I am supposed to desire in order to be perceived in a certain way. This confusion of desire with insecurity and fear creates fetish objects, which as Giorgio Agamben (1942–) points out, tend to be stand-ins for something that we believe we are not allowed, that is considered taboo. Agamben suggests that this fetishistic quality within our adult experience of culture is one in which “metaphor substitutes one thing for another, not so much in order to reach the second, as to escape from the first.”

Debord’s objection to the cultural images created to entertain our gaze, to the image as spectacle, is the estrangement that contemporary culture produces in us, as it overpowers our ability to negotiate these images within our own life experience. Using the example of affecting images of need, Debord states that the more he [the spectator] identifies with the dominant images of need, the less he understands his own life and his own desires. The spectacle’s estrangement from the acting subject is expressed by the fact that the individual’s gestures are no longer his own; they are the gestures of someone else who represents them to him.

And so, the screen overpowers our intimate experience of ourselves. In Debord’s world, even though culture can exist only in relation to its spectators, we are no longer in negotiation. The agency of all is pacified by the disciplining totality of the Society of the Spectacle. Debord’s spectator can only take pleasure in art or theatre while ignoring the reality the cultural object conceals, and in so doing, betraying art’s possible political efficacy and contributing to his own alienation. This is the fetishistic stopping point, that the metaphors and metonyms of cultural production only dazzle and blind, halting rather than easing negotiation with the world. In The Emancipated Spectator, Jacques Rancière seeks possible disentanglement from this anxiety producing dumbness by questioning the ‘logic of straight, uniform, transmission’ of information between artwork and spectator that is proposed by Debord’s power relations of domination and subjection, by the discipline of the screen. Rancière introduces the possibility of an ‘emancipated’ spectator, a rebel who does not meekly receive the information that an art object states it holds, but is able to find a way to use that art object to seek their own further knowledge.

This democratizing ideal arose out of Rancière’s research into the diaries of French workers in the 1830’s, and his discovery of the way two workers used aesthetic experiences as a way not to be workers for a short time, and so to escape their given social roles, and seize their own pleasure in life. This democratizing ideal arose out of Rancière’s research into the diaries of French workers in the 1830’s, and his discovery that the house was in some way ‘his,’ and in the imagined role of householder, he allowed himself a little time to enjoy the view out the window. Taking this imaginative pleasure was not in the man’s ‘social contract,’ he was there only to work, and Rancière sees his emancipation in this break with his received Self-image as ‘worker,’ his given role in life, through a moment of fantasy of being someone else, the one who ‘owned’ the aesthetic pleasure of the view. When this break between what is given and what might be taken is moved into the aesthetic field of art, an emancipating art work becomes, not one that seeks to explain or teach (to be part of the disciplining screen), but one that encourages its viewers to themselves “venture into the forest of things and signs, to say what they have seen and what they think of what they have seen” and so to possess the capacity to translate and to use art works for their own purposes, whatever these may be. As critic Jeremy Spencer notes for Rancière, emancipation does not arise from the critique of consumer society, an approach which he suggests is paternalistic and elitist. Rather, it blurs the boundaries between looking and doing, the roles of specialist and amateur, student and teacher, and means for the proletarian, seizing hold of aesthetic experiences and the pleasure of spectating. Rancière considers the aesthetic not as the utopian principle of articulating the sensuous with the conceptual […] but instead as a process of ‘dis-identification.’

Aesthetic experience contains political potential if it allows the viewer to dis-identify, however briefly, with their given social role. To do this is to implicitly question what is given, and so to question the basis of power. Judith Butler makes this clear in Undoing Gender.

Having or bearing truth and reality is an enormously powerful prerogative within the social world, one way that power dissimulates as ontology […] Nothing can exist
as an element of knowledge if, on the one hand, it [...] does not conform to a set of rules and constraints characteristic, for example, of a given type of scientific discourse in a given period, and if [...] it does not possess [...] the incentives peculiar to what is scientifically validated or simply rational. 230

Separating Rancière's dis-identification from Capital's seemingly endless power to create new fetishes is where these ideas become difficult, but it was the mirroring recognition of fantasizing method, of dis-identification with a received world view, that led to my 'cathexis' with the notebook. Although the artist uses forms and gestures resonant of her time the de-scripts them in her unique, amateur way, and they no longer conform to an aesthetic rule book that had no time for ambiguity of method, form, or meaning. Art's role was to mirror the order deigned to be of value by an elite and not to be ambiguous about this. The notebook reveals nothing but ambiguity, and simply to have painted it was probably, as with the artist woman, a part of life, remain fundamentally attached to the specular body, but pulls it apart and returns it as a willed, speculative, uncertain, and multiple body of bits and pieces. This amazing de-scripting of a received world view still resonates with women's needs today.

It also resonates with Lassnig's bodies of bits and pieces, but Lassnig's co-productions between body parts, domestic objects, and the body of the canvas itself, while marvellous distortions of the idealised body, remain fundamentally attached to the specular body, but pulls it apart and returns it as a willed, speculative, uncertain, and multiple body of bits and pieces. This amazing de-scripting of a received world view still resonates with women's needs today.

As it turns out, Rancière's worker, a break with this woman's designated role. She went further however, and imagined a new sort of body with which she could reflect on her subjective experience, an imago she would not have been able to find in the world around her. This early feminist gesture of daring to imagine differently takes on the specular body, but pulls it apart and returns it as a willed, speculative, uncertain, and multiple body of bits and pieces. This amazing de-scripting of a received world view still resonates with women's needs today.

in order to appropriate the 'story' and make it their own story. An emancipated community is a community of narrators and translators.” 232

My translation of the notebook is of and for today, but it is extremely unlikely that the artist, working in Bavaria in the 1780’s, before even the key ideas of Romanticism had been articulated, would have thought about her work in quite this light. However, Rancière continues, “To know that words are merely words and spectacles merely spectacles, can help us arrive at a better understanding of how words and images, stories and performances, can change something of the world we live in.” 231 It is when we reify our cultural objects that they become fetish objects, and we are rendered dumb by their spectacle. Debord already pointed out in 1967 that tapping into people's fantasies, and then feeding them back as completed spectacles was a way to sublimate the perhaps troublesome needs behind such fantasies, by offering a false, fetishized realisation of them that only seemed to address the need. This is the core work of a great deal of contemporary popular culture. To understand how a fine art object might, despite this overwhelming aesthetic field, offer itself as a nurturing part of life, is to return to Winnicott's paradox, when he reminds us that 'the baby creates the object, but the object was there waiting to be created and to become a cathected object.' Meaningfulness is always held within ourselves. Although it may seem to be held within our objects, it is not, it is given to them, by us. A speculative, possible, body image has more chance of activating self-awareness of this act of giving meaning, as it requires a viewer to ask the simple question: what is it? And to find that the only answer that has any 'meaning' is the one the viewer finds herself, re-connecting as spectator to her own, freeing, imagination. The works of Debord's spectacle do the opposite, in their attempts to insert themselves into popular culture. It is when we reify our cultural objects that they stack up with the material residues of meaning creation, these objects all wait for us to re-animate their dead bodies with our renewed image needs; the endogenous images we carry in our heads continuously relating anew to the exogenous images in which we search for mirrors.

Does anyone care if you drip red or white?
Jardine’s Ghost of the Subject

The images in our heads, and in the world, both have a medium, one is the body, the other a physical material. Both these mediums own and contain the physical absence of what is represented however, as ‘it’ is not there, only the memory or the picture is there. This paradox of the image—that the medium, which is all that is present, nevertheless contains and symbolises the absence of that which is represented, is a ghostly reality of images made ever more present to us by the silvered screens of internet life. If the medium that holds an image already performs absence, then the purpose of a portrait is to put a name to this absence, as a form of survival of the mortal body and its moment in time. The right to transform life energy into aesthetic energy is the ‘right of portrayal’ and it is an expression of power in the present. Every Selfie taker is aware of this, as they search for the perfect backdrop from which to say ‘I was there.’ The right to have this absence, or previous presence, marked in the cultural archive, and how this is done, defines the culture from which this portrayal has sprung, and the right to transform life energy into aesthetic energy is the ‘right of portrayal’ and it is an expression of power in the present. Every Selfie taker is aware of this, as they search for the perfect backdrop from which to say ‘I was there.’

In 2011, design theorist and artist Fiona Jardine (d.o.b. unknown) created the exhibition Troglodytes at Paisley Museum in Scotland. This show highlighted how the frame, or the laws of the image, can alter over time, and questioned normative notions of portrayal as the most effective carriers of a now absent subjectivity. Jardine carefully selected examples of two specific classes of objects within the museum’s collection: portraits of ‘Victorian gentlemen,’ which she selected without regard for sitter or artist, and ‘ceramics,’ which she selected only for the way it is coded by signature. The anonymous notebook is not coded by signature. The essay describes how the Scottish mercantile class commemorated its radical presentation of a non-specular body can be further determined these in future. The men of these clubs would have commissioned and built Paisley Museum at the same time as they commissioned their portraits. The imaginations of such men, imaging their museum, their portraits, is key to Jardine’s project. They claimed the right to portray their likenesses and store them in the public record, which meant a museum, a picture of a man or the law, or equivalent means of portraying them, in which the laws of the portrait would be laid out. In terms of the Lacanian screen, they would have found examples of such activities in the existing screen of the world, and sought to replicate themselves within these established norms. The essay then introduces one of the hotly debated ideas of this time, one that was debated across Europe, the fashionably nineteenth century ‘science’ of physiognomy. This took Darwin’s new evolutionary theories and distorted them to typecast the poor as degenerate, and how this is done, defines the culture from which this portrayal has sprung, and the right to transform life energy into aesthetic energy is the ‘right of portrayal’ and it is an expression of power in the present. Every Selfie taker is aware of this, as they search for the perfect backdrop from which to say ‘I was there.’

The writer at the party, what had he meant about the academic necessity of the Imperially world-view? As she smoothed the exquisitely glory, she felt the scented isle from the small cut left by his universing self-love, a power she recognised might still be able to lock her out. She was back in Scotland, and her lump-overs mind conjured a quarrelled path in a tear-got, a boiling stream of Knowledge pouring onto its bloody surface as brown blood chugged from the mouth into a plaster mask with a map of the world.

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Dawn’s early light comes late in December, and the sun was still rising through bare branches as she stood at Sadie’s Kitchen window and sipped reparative muesli. Her thought caught in its beams. The handsome blonde soldier from her dream was James, the hopeless love of half her life. He had died in the summer and she had not said goodbye. Now he was back, striding confidently into her sleep and into the light, a man on a mission, his uniform loose, and his blond hair tangling with sun as he pushed it back. He had not seen her, but she welcomed him and his blond hair always enough. She stared as blood rushed and tingled through her. Was she the dark man walking? She got up and walked nevertheless, the dark-haired man was pulling a blonde severed head over his own like a mask. It was a bad fit; someone as part of a group or family, literally superimposing the sign of group allegiance onto the individual body, its opposite is the biometric measurement used in passports. Both the shield and the tattoo are signs rather than mimetic representations, mediatizations of a certain idea of a person, which we now see, in the criminal tattoo, as an eradication of subjectivity. Hans Belting (1935–) has suggested however, that the face is also a sort of heraldic device, that of a contemporary Self caught in the ‘cult of the body double [and that] subject description and body description are by no means synonymous, but they join [in the portrait] into a tense union.’ In Jardine’s objectification of a group of men set in countertop to a group of pots, de-identified and defined in terms of the size of a bodily attribute, their subjective absence is mimetically present, but also erased. Removed of linguistic supports, these portraits become blurred into multiplicity, and individual pillars of the community become a de-individualized multitude tattooed by their beards. What remains is their ‘right to portrayal,’ the power that this ‘gang’ possessed when these works were made. If we try to imagine this project with Victorian women’s portraits instead of men’s, perhaps hung in relation to the size of their breasts, the power within the right of portrayal becomes even clearer. Beard-objectification is only humorous because these men’s previous, individualised, power remains emblems of a Medieval coat of arms were an identifying ‘body sign’ that was distinct from a ‘body image,’ and visually encoded and legitimised whoever carried them as belonging to a family or territory, as a body belonging to a social estate. Today’s descendant of this might be the criminal tattoo that identifies someone as part of a group or family, literally superimposing the sign of group allegiance onto the individual body, its opposite is the biometric measurement used in passports. 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thinking and being that her social world would have decreed. This form of escape is an imagining forward, a tentative reaching towards the possibility of another form of life. The conceptual figure that underlies this, which floats within the structures of the log, is one that grasps hold of the ghostly blank that the artist’s mimetic self-portrayal would have presented to the world, and forcefully returns this as a body self-consciously insisting on a new form of presence that both takes on, and utterly rejects, its cultural erasure. This was the conceptual figure I had recognised when I first saw these paintings, and so it could not be unique to this work. If indeed ‘there is no reproduction of the social world that is not at the same time a reproduction of those norms that govern the intelligibility of the body in space and time,’ then this conceptual figure of erasure, returned as aesthetic insistence on presence despite and within this very erasure, was one I had seen before, and not just in my own work. This is a model that takes on the silencing power of objectification, and in the next two chapters I trace it in the work of Hilma af Klint and Louise Bourgeois, who also worked with the decoy of the stand-in, and who were working one and two centuries after the notebook artist.
I cannot dance upon my toes—
No Man instructed me—
But oftentimes, among my mind,
A glee possesseth me. 

At the age of 43, Swedish artist Hilma af Klint (1862–1944) took a break from making the academic paintings and illustrations on which she had built a twenty-year career, and after some time off, launched herself into The Paintings for the Temple, an astonishing cycle of 193 works that were radically different to both her previous output, and to any other paintings the artist might have seen. Completed between 1906 and 1915, but never publicly exhibited in the artist's lifetime, these paintings are what Af Klint is known for today. The story she herself told about this change in direction is that the voices of guiding spirits proposed she make the paintings, and she then followed their instructions. Hilma af Klint was a Lutheran her whole life, but was also committed to a Theosophical world view, in which disembodied spirits can speak directly to devotees, through the meditative practice of the séance. The Paintings for the Temple have mostly been approached through the lens of these beliefs, but as an artist, I felt a lack of material relationship with the world within these interpretations. Something in the paintings was slipping past—a more everyday ghost, one who ate cookies and laughed with her friends. By looking closely at the paintings in relation to such a life, to the artist’s childhood experience and friend groups, I have found a new conceptual figure rising out of the Temple cycle. There is a haunting presence within these paintings, and the meditative focus of the séance allowed it to be realised, but the séance was used as an artistic method. The visceral and joyful body that arises from this new reading seizes the ghost in the darkened room as a concept, one that might hold all it was not possible to paint of a woman’s life at this time.

By removing the representational portrait from her imagery, Af Klint was able to create another sort of body, one that incorporates, and grows from, the material ‘body’ of the canvas itself, painted and drawn upon. The canvas is a body that is
Georgiana Houghton’s Spirit Drawings, created through the 1860’s, are a beautiful example of the free expression that could come out of such practices. See Georgiana Houghton, Spirit Drawings, edited by Ernst Vegelin van Cleerbergen and Barnaby Wright, The Courtauld Gallery, London, 2016.

invisible in plain sight, just as women, as creative, independent, sexual, and equally experiencing bodies, were. Such a reality could not be portrayed with a fine art vocabulary designed around the opposite suppositions. The Paintings for the Temple take this impossible lack as the very structure upon which a new body is built, one that deconstructs and revitalises the image, not of what a woman looked like at this time, but of what she herself saw and touched and experienced.

Looking specifically at The Ten Largest, an early series within the larger cycle, I explore how these key works merge Af Klint’s Spiritualist interests with an idea of the body taken from maps drawn by her grandfather. By tracing a previously undocumented friendship, I then explore how this structural embodiment takes on the political concerns of the Swedish Life Reform movement. From these two key axis lines, a politically radical spectre emerges: a woman’s embodiment stripped not of clothes, but of direct representation, named in subtitles such as Youth and Old Age, but indirectly reconstructed, as a joyful cartography of lived experience. This is the body that haunts The Paintings for the Temple, a shimmering representation of that which it is still impossible to fully portray: of a life.

The Paintings for the Temple were created in groups, first Primordial Chaos, in 1906–1907, and then the key works of The Ten Largest, in 1907. By the end of 1908, the artist had completed the first 111 paintings and stopped for four years, before completing the final works of the cycle between 1912–1915. The paintings unfold as series and sub-series, a single body-of-work, designed so the viewer walks from painting to painting in a set choreography of seeing in time. The dancing patterns of colours and lines, which I will show directly reference the artist’s life, can then be experienced as building towards the concept of a single, white, body-of-light, and I explore the ways this seriality can be read as an embodiment of Nordic Romanticism’s wider cultural investment in the psychological qualities of the white light of midsummer, here diffracted back to us as flowing rainbows of patterns and colours, the many bodies-of-light within one body-of-work.

Re-interpreting the Spiritual

In the ten years leading up to 1906, Hilma af Klint was experimenting with multi-authored automatic drawings, created with a group of four friends with whom she regularly held Spiritualist séances. Spiritualism was a massively popular interest at the turn of the twentieth century, and spirit drawing an established practice. Traces of the drawings that Hilma and her friends made are clearest in the first part of the Temple cycle, Primordial Chaos, and in some of the motifs that followed, but these experimental drawings alone cannot account for the majestic outburst of creativity that would follow them. In the
The Theosophical Society was founded by Helena Blavatsky (1831–1891) in 1875, the outcome of years spent researching visionary religious practices in India throughout the 1860s. Synthesising her wide religious research with the visual interests of socialist artist Annie Besant (1847–1933), in new discoveries related to the visualisation of radio waves and electromagnetism, the two women created an idea of a parallel world, in excess of deep meditation of the séance, combined with a developed understanding of the history of human thought, this astral plane might become directly accessible. It was this deeper understanding of their already existing beliefs that Af Klint and her friends established their closed, women only, séance group to explore. They called themselves both The Friday Group and The Five. In “Theosophy, Anthroposophy, Rudolph Steiner,” Helmut Zander (1957–) points to the intellectual hunger that such Theosophical practices touched upon, relating them to a rapidly expanding world-view that was dislodging the religious assumptions that the power structures and colonies of the West had been built on.

Everything appeared to be just history, where every idea was subject to relativist scrutiny, where [...] no absolute truth existed any longer, where no divine ideas existed independently of history. Theosophists claimed to provide an unshakeable, reliable, absolute answer once again [...] a philosophia perennis, which they believed existed prior to and independent of all history. 249

The merger of religious and scientific thought, as a response to a crisis of faith, was the same need that Ferguson had noted a hundred years before, when Enlightenment modernity also seemed to challenge established religious practices. This time around, the socially driven universalism of the Illuminati would carefully edited notebooks the artist left at her death, 246 Af Klint records how inspiration for the cycle came from external voices, images, and sensations that came to her within the contemplative focus of these séances, presences that came often, and had names and identities. We might understand this today as the psychic working to place challenging thoughts safely in the identity of the Other, in order to give the Self permission to entertain plans and projects that did not easily fit within social norms. Taking such ghostly voices as anything other than such an inner working of the mind is implausible today, but in 1903, Af Klint was merely tuning in to a significant movement of her time, one that attracted intellectual interest across Europe, and sought to deepen religious understanding by relating spiritual experience to new scientific discoveries about light at the invisible ends of the spectrum. This movement was the Theosophical Society. The tracks of charged particles in a magnetic field cloud chamber (image found in Hilma af Klint: The Five. In Tessel Bauduin, The Hilma af Klint Foundation records 1898–1951, 254 255

The image inserted here in the printed thesis is not available in the digital thesis.

The globalizing spread of industrialization that made Theosophy possible came late to Sweden, and brought with it frighteningly accelerated social changes that led to widespread deprivation and hardship, especially in the cities. At the same time, its railways, telephones, and trade created previously unimaginable connections between people, objects, and ideas. The mass movements of labour that these developments involved, took many men away from home, either to urban factories or to work on colonization projects. Women brought up in the latter nineteenth century to be wives and mothers, began to seriously outnumber them, across Sweden and Western Europe as a whole. These women needed to be allowed into the work force to support themselves and their families, and even to earn female suffrage. In Sweden, women flooded into the factories, but there was also a rapid expansion of the ‘white blouse’ job market, as middle-class women began to gain access to male bastions of educational privilege, and to seek more professional employment. And for a brief period towards the end of the century, before other employment possibilities opened up, a significant number of women, across Europe, began to earn a living as mediums. As the job market stabilized, this decreased, but during the latter part of the nineteenth century ‘Spiritualist’ was an acceptable identity that gave a woman really include everyone, “without distinction of race, creed, sex, caste, or colour.” 256 Blavatsky had formulated a syncretic notion of a genderless god, a religious text that existed solely in people’s individual imaginations, and a radical and progressive openness, which, at the same time, held onto familiar concepts of both god and the ritual of prayer; comforts that Marxism, the other great socialist movement of the time, denied. Spiritualism, and Theosophy in particular, attracted widespread intellectual interest up until the first World War, and when the Theosophical Society opened a branch in Stockholm in 1888, it is thought that Af Klint became a member. 257 At the same time as Ferguson was collating his hermetic Books of Secrets in Glasgow, Af Klint was researching the astral plane in Stockholm.
Art and Spiritual Paintings,
On Hilma af Klint’s Modern
and Depicting the Invisible.

Seeing friend Anna Cassel.
which was completed with her
Stockholm Veterinary Institute,
the dissection of a horse at the
1901 commission to record
commissions, including the
The artist often took illustrating

To be ‘following orders,’ was she masking intent in a way
which beha
danger she could only really see in her mind’s eye? That would come
consciousne
the registration of unconscious forces as traces within
inner voices and body sensations in the present, allowing
loosely understand as a form of ‘mindfulness,’ of deep focus
within, but what to do when the nature to be aped was one
These had been the genres Af Klint had previously worked
were not, at this time, thought able to create new imagery.
ones, but by forming a closed women-only group, The Five
neatly circumvented this potential problem of approbation,
and opened up a space where they as women would decide
which behaviours were appropriate. They could freely explore
whatever aspects of themselves came to the fore through
‘possession’ by alternative voices to those that governed their
socially conditioned everyday behaviour. In terms of developing
the psychological freedom to dare to express an alternative
world-view, this was a significant step. The fear of being
stigmatized, which this move may have been designed to
shelter them from, is a reminder of the observation by Tara
Nummedal in chapter two, that in the past, the hermetic nature
of the alchemical text was also often ‘a familiar language, in
which to couch more novel proposals.” Nineteenth century
Spiritualism, like alchemy before it, was for many women a
Lacanian cloak that offered them otherwise inaccessible social
and artistic autonomy, and protected their natural expressions
of selfhood by masking them in a more ‘familiar language.’ Af
Klint’s writings make clear that she retained her religious beliefs
all her life, but it is possible to both acknowledge that, and to
imagine that within the social acceptability of the séance, the
artist had found a way to sidestep questions that may otherwise
have arisen over a potentially unacceptable expression of
female creativity. If she could in some way understand herself
to be ‘following orders,’ was she masking intent in a way
reminiscent of the reproducing ‘ape of nature’ of the earlier
notebook? Tessel Bauduin (d.o.b unknown) remarks on the
cultural limitations around women’s creative expression at this
time when she points out, in an essay on Af Klint, that women
flocked to its meetings, Af Klint and her friends among them.

Active creation, for which a measure of genius was
required, was behelden to male artists; women could
only reproduce. Genres suitable for female artists were
therefore those that required observation and copying
of existing forms, such as portraits, still life and […]
illustrative work from nature.

These had been the genres Af Klint had previously worked
within, but what to do when the nature to be aped was one
she could only really see in her mind’s eye? That would come
dangerously close to ‘creativity,’ and disowning it would be
a neat evacuation of a social problem.

Participants at a seance meeting practiced what we might now
loosely understand as a form of ‘mindfulness,’ of deep focus
on inner voices and body sensations in the present, allowing
the registration of unconscious forces as traces within
consciousness. Today psychoanalysis offers us a model for
the unconscious as the sea of knowledge and experience within
which our conscious minds have no choice but to blindly swim,
but at the close of the nineteenth century, Sigmund Freud was
only beginning to articulate these ideas. In the absence of
this contemporary viewpoint however, Theosophy became the
late nineteenth century’s most fashionable articulation of what is
a perennially confusing aspect of being. Trance voices were
disavowed and given the role of external forces as the
theosophical ghosts of the astral plane. Perhaps embracing this
conceptualisation afforded the artist an explanation for internal
drives, which, in the ten years leading up to 1906, led to
automatic drawings and ideas for strange new paintings so
far from her academically trained creativity that they may
otherwise have been overwhelmingly confusing. She was also
only one of a great many artists, poets, and scientists, who all
turned to Theosophy in these closing years of the century,
searching for new ways to interpret their internal experience.
The movement claimed the interest of Strindberg, Rydberg,
Mondrian, Kandinsky, Yeats, Edison, and Ghandi, among many
others. It was at root a movement designed by women however,
it celebrated their roles as active participants, and offered them
independent voices. It is not surprising that so many women
flocked to its meetings, Af Klint and her friends among them.

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thesis is not available in the digital thesis.

If we discount the literal possibility of the ghost at the séance,
however, then what other influences might have led a Swedish
woman artist, working within a progressive cultural community
in Stockholm at the turn of the twentieth century, to create
these astonishingly original paintings? Could her own actions
have been the source of the visions, voices, and sensations that
she experienced, and wrote about as her inspirations? Could the
new visual language that the artist thought was being suggested
by external voices, be revisited today as a creative urge that
she knew was culturally unacceptable, but was nevertheless the
one she needed to record her own experience of life as a social,
acting, subject? Could we understand these strange paintings
as seeking a vessel for the invisible body of her self-experience,
for Emily Dickinson’s ‘glee’? Our bodies are continually

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Hilma af Klint was born in Karlbergs slot on Oct 26, 1862. Her father educated her at home, and she excelled in astronomy and mathematics. (Source: conversation with Johan af Klint, the artist’s great-nephew, January 12, 2019). Triangulation charts may have influenced the many lists in the notebooks, and the complex use of codes to serialise groups of paintings in a specific order of viewing – equations of looking.

Maps
Hilma Af Klint was the daughter of a naval officer, and born within the walls of Karlberg Palace, the Swedish naval academy in Karlskrona, where she lived until she was 10 years old. Her grandfather, Admiral Gustav af Klint, had been ennobled for the maps he drew of the seas around Sweden, and her father wrote important triangulation tables that assisted the reading of them. Sea maps would have been among the first images that Hilma ever saw, and they were emotionally entwined in both her family’s history, and their continued livelihood and safety. Sea maps make beautiful pictures, but they are also guides – the correct interpretation of them determining the life or death of people that the young Hilma knew and loved. Her earliest experience of images was therefore that they were embedded with layers of coding, the experience of which might be aesthetic, linguistic, and numeric, but was, over all these qualities, vital. Maps, dry and orderly as they might seem, ran with emotion.

A sea map is a different order of image to a painted seascape. It retains spatial contiguity, but its lines, numbers, and shapes do not mimetically represent what we see. It is also different to a map of the land, as much of the knowledge it encodes is underwater, invisible to the eye. While geological maps also define what lies beneath the surface, the sea map specifically records a physical body, the sea, that is in itself indefinable. In...
This ghostly body of a mapped sea, present but essentially indeterminate, is striated by invisible trade routes and currents that come to define it, and whose flows place the navigator between the past and the future. This map body is further tattooed with hidden geographies and the marked ship-wrecks of past human activity. And yet all these body markings are as invisible to the eye as the wrecks of our own pasts, and the underlying currents that will guide us into our futures. Thinking with this idea of the sea as an oscillating body without form, we can find a quality of time into its ghostly body, traceable only through a choreography of movements and actions. If we overlay this choreographic mapping, of a body that escapes direct representation, onto the aesthetic lines and flows of _The Ten Largest_, the key early production within _The Paintings for the Temple_, a reading of each painting as already a body opens up. The artist's subtitles for each painting, such as _The Ten Largest_ or _The Trace of a Footprint on a Floor. When I looked at the paintings in the Guggenheim Museum’s Hilma af Klint—A Pioneer exhibition_, reveals the hasty bones of images rushed onto paper. In Af Klint’s notebook record of the time, she writes “I was told I was a pioneer and committed to an incomprehensible working method,” *264* that permeated her childhood mind before she could ever conceptualise it. The permeable, partial, visibility of the sea, its indirect representation as mapped flows of energy, the precise figure that Af Klint takes on in _The Ten Largest_.

The landscapes and portraits that Af Klint painted before 1906 were to conform to the cultural norms that governed women’s artistic production at the time, but when the artist came to ‘draw up’ this new body of work she stepped away from her easel and her oil paints, and rolled large strips of canvas for vertical painting. This was the same cheap paper *The Five* used for drawing experiments. She then picked up the tempera paints of the map maker, adjusted the scale to super-large, and mapped it out, just as her grandfather had mapped out the sea, on large unrolled sheets of paper, each revealing only a part. The movement from painting on a vertical plane, at a relatively modest scale, to painting the series into Childhood, Youth, Adulthood, and Old Age, directly implying readings of a body-in-time. Af Klint’s knowledge of her grandfather’s maps make it possible to see the flat, single coloured grounds of _The Ten Largest_ in terms of Deleuze and Guattari’s smooth and striated space, the mapped body of the sea becoming an artistic Body without Organs, *259* given form, or social structure, by the painted striations that are与其密切相关的 thirst that permeate her childhood mind before she could ever conceptualise it. The permeable, partial, visibility of the sea, its indirect representation as mapped flows of energy, the precise figure that Af Klint takes on in _The Ten Largest_.

The pictures were painted directly through me, without any preliminary drawings, and [...] I had no idea what the paintings were supposed to depict. *263* we could understand her to have been expressing exactly such an artistic, material, generation of new knowledge through practice. Maps of the sea, an essential metaphor of the unconscious, seem to have offered the artist an aesthetic entry point to the depiction of her own interior sensations. It would appear that Hilma af Klint began her journey towards _The Painting for the Temple_ when she was a child in Karlsberg palace, gazing at her grandfather’s maps. She was trained in the academic, representational methods of late nineteenth century fine art, but only after she met with the fluctuating, structure-less, sea-bodies that underlay her family’s history. This skinless body was a structuring reality of the artist’s early emotional life, imprinted as a map, a visualisation of the world that permeated her childhood mind before she could ever conceptualise it. The permeable, partial, visibility of the sea, its indirect representation as mapped flows of energy, the precise figure that Af Klint takes on in _The Ten Largest_.

This connection would not have been philosophically conceived in Deleuze and Guattari’s terms in order to be making is, and the artist had spent the previous ten years developing her capacity to open herself to traces coming from her own unconscious. When she wrote that

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262 Ibid., pp. 474–501


264 February 10, 1908, notebook Hkl556, translation by The Hilma af Klint Foundation. This notebook also records that the artist asked others in _The Five_ to work with her on the Temple paintings, but they chose not to.

265 For an example of a ‘smooth space’ that we define, or socialize, with the striations of order that are implied by the numbers, words, and lines that flow across the smooth (therefore indefinable) sea-body in a single graphic containment of currents, depths, winds, and shipping routes. *259* The body of the sea itself has no shape, no skin with which it can be seen. If we try to touch the surface of the sea, our hands go straight through it, and this mirage of surface is usually represented on a map by either blank paper, or flat areas of colour. The body of the sea is an energy that moves in time, the lacy surf of its indirect representation as mapped flows of energy, the precise figure that Af Klint takes on in _The Ten Largest_.

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of paper, were not quite as new to the artist as they seem to be to us, as viewers of her work a hundred years later.

The strangeness of the project in relation to its times, however, only becomes more pronounced. The titles reveal a narrative impulse to depict a body in time, and viewing these huge paintings also takes time, and your own bodily engagement, moving up close then further away, a dance made of viewer and work, of parts of a whole, a body-of-work viewable only in bits and pieces. This indirect representation of a body in parts, through a suggestion of flows, returns us to another aspect of the map. The pull of magnetic North permeates all life on earth, and knowledge of it is what allows the sailor to literally move past the wrecks of the past, and follow the currents that lead to the future. Its indivisible presence is mapped by a sign: a line, an arrow, or a compass star. Tracing its invisible force ties a map to its territory, and turns a decorative picture into a tool of life and death. Such an invisible all-permeating force field is also a conception of God. For an artist with deep religious faith, the conflation of magnetic North with belief in both an all-encompassing God, and the Theosophical astral plane, may well have been the movement within which the visual processing that resulted in The Ten Largest was possible, brought together through the sign that unlocks navigation within this invisible, skinless body. The permeating force of magnetism, and its metaphorical connection with religious ideas of spirit, is an amalgam of the physical and the psychic in terms that were available to the artist at that time. In The Ten Largest this striated, mapped body of the canvas becomes visible as a representation of such an energy field, of being alive in the world.

This suggestion of Af Klint’s painted bodies-without-form as melting away the physical body as a unified object, and revealing it as a skinless cartography of sensations and energy flows, utilizes the Deleuzian concept of the Body without Organs. There is an interplay of the smooth and the striated, in a series made of parts, which understands embodied experience as ‘pure surface.’ This visual idea originated with Freud, in his descriptions of the libidinal intensities with which we experience ourselves in relation to the social world, an idea he developed as an alternative to the body as a passive and unified anatomy. Freud’s model understands a body that is mapped in this way to be a permeable form, but one having two sides, inner and outer. The Deleuzian map that is the Body without Organs, the part-body of constantly becoming sensations, is, however, a single flippable surface without interior. It is an abstract model for an aspiring engagement with the non-organic bodies of the world, in which parts of ourselves are in constant fluctuating connection with our social worlds, creating new energy bodies made up of the connection itself, or the planes of flow; these
energy-flows might be our linkages with any stratum of the world. It is an idea that does away with interiority, understanding only pure surface, and the body as aspiring to this vibrant, reversible, mobile mapping of itself while being constantly inscribed with the social functions that relate to its experience of sex, economy, and medicine. This is an abstract body, a single surface mapping aliveness as an energy connecting parts.

With this model, each of The Ten Largest could be understood in terms of viewer engagement with a painterly body that is not representative of skin and hair, but of fluctuating energy fields that we engage with in multiple viewing relations. However, while such a radical mapping of experience opens up the energy inherent to these paintings, the Deleuzian body of pure surface is a neutral non-gendered body, and that is not a model that is really available to women, now or then. Breaking down gendered stereotypes was an idea of interest to both Af Klint and Theosophy but to re-imagine women’s lives only within an idea of abstract planes and flows, as cartographies, does not acknowledge that the cultural position of non-gendered neutrality implied by this has always been occupied by men. The specific inscriptions of the social that women face become dissolved by this model in ways that Feminist Alice Jardine (1951–) questions when she asks whether this becoming body of abstract intensities might not in fact expand the possibilities of women’s lives being further ghosted within the social realm. Jardine wonders whether, for a woman, such a ‘pure surface’ might actually “reveal only her simulacrum: a female figure caught in a whirling sea of male configurations. A silent, mutable, headless, desireless spatial surface necessary only for his metamorphosis.” So to understand the Temple paintings as a cartography of sensed experience opens up a reading of the female body as ghost, Jardine’s anxiously defined simulacrum, may also be present. In Volatile Bodies, Elizabeth Grosz acknowledged this problem of the cartographic body and looked for a way to create more of a framework which acknowledges both the psychical or interior dimension of subjectivity and the surface corporeal exposures of the subject to social inscription and training; a model which [...] insists on (at least) two surfaces which cannot be collapsed into one and which do not always harmoniously blend with and support each other; a model where the join, the interaction of the two surfaces, is always a question of power. Grosz employs Lacan’s geometric model of a mobius flow of energy between these two surfaces as a way to re-consider the undissolvable particularity of individual bodies and the Lacanian cloak of the social, with its potentially scarring inner surfaces. Is there then a reading within The Ten Largest that more fully opens up the subject of a woman’s lived experience?

**Art School and The Swedish Life Reform Movement**

Hilma af Klint’s studies took her first to the Stockholm Technical School and then to the Royal Academy of Fine Arts, from 1882–1887. The academy began accepting women students in the 1860’s and this journey, through craft school and on, was, by the 1880’s, being replicated by a small but distinct group of progressive young women from middle- and upper-class Swedish families. Nearly all of those who would become important to Af Klint’s later artistic life went through the academy in the 1980’s. After graduation, many of these artist’s works. Af Klint was awarded a subsidised studio in this building upon graduation, and worked there with artists Ottilia Adelborg and Anna Cassel until 1908, selling her paintings and accepting commercial commissions.

During the same time period, Stockholm was undergoing a catalupted, late wave of industrialization. The city’s infrastructure became unable to support its rapid population growth, and extreme and visible deprivation had begun to focus middle class minds. A Life Reform movement grew up, led by feminist socialist Ellen Key (1849–1926) and seeking positive ways to address changing social needs. Ellen Key was a prolific writer and orator who believed that creative work, design, and pedagogy were the keys to improved living conditions for the general populace. She campaigned for social change through the aesthetic improvement of everyday life experience, seeing this as central to a more integrated and happier society. In 1898, she wrote of the need for a “religion of beauty” that would begin in the home, and be defined by that which was useful, informed by its purpose, and expressive of the inner life of either its maker or user. It was from this more pleasurable experience of home life, in every home, that personal lives, and so society, might be transformed. Key wrote that this new aesthetics, to be made affordable by nineteenth century industrial innovation, would be brought into the world mostly by women, because of what she understood as their primary role in home-making and
bringing up children, and the respect for an object’s utility that this work brought. In 1885, she kick-started this project by bringing together a group of twelve upper class professional women, called The Twelve, who organised educational social events on craft, home-making, and child-care for urban working-class children. Their articulate, interpretative and maternalistic take on a feminist socialism was not universally praised, but her ideas were deeply influential throughout Europe. By embracing mass production, her vision was a more affordable take on William Morris’s revolutionary English Art and Crafts movement, which belied industrial processes, and like Theosophy, Life Reform seemed to present a solution to a fast-developing urban social pressure that was a lot more amenable to the middle classes than a communist approach to the alienations of industrialised labour. 274

Swedish Life Reform saw answers to compelling social problems in a more unified approach to art and life, and sought to re-interpret aesthetic value as an essential everyday experience for all classes. The Paintings for the Temple of Everyday Life, studied in the Stockholm campaign for women’s rights. By 1904, when Af Klint’s inner voices were beginning to suggest her future paintings, Edvard Munch had created at Skansen, and Neil McAllister, an architect and writer, had created at Skansen, Sweden, a dangerous one thirty years later, but at this point it was linked to a spirit of renewal that found its voice in Swedish Life Reform.

Women’s work

Af Klint’s exact relationship with Anders Zorn and Carl Larsson is not recorded, but she undoubtedly knew their wives, through her life-long friendship with artist and illustrator Ottilia Adelborg (1855–1936). As daughters of naval officers, they been children together in Karlberg naval palace. They followed the same route through craft school and on to the Academy, and after Af Klint graduated, Adelborg shared her atelier for a time, noting in her diary on November 4, 1899, that: “I now have access to my old studio in the afternoons, Hilma Klint and Anna Cassel have the mornings, women also being involved in progressive social ideals, newly affordable mass-produced household goods, and access to art and literature. Together, these would produce a new, everyday culture for all, which she conceptualised as ‘the beauty of everyday life.’” 275 This synthesis of the aesthetics of everyday living with progressive ideas of Selfhood may have been an essential inspiration for The Paintings for the Temple of Everyday Life, as seen in the mornings.” In 1885, she kick-started this project by bringing together a group of twelve upper class professional women, called The Twelve, who organised educational social events on craft, home-making, and child-care for urban working-class children. Their articulate, interpretative and maternalistic take on a feminist socialism was not universally praised, but her ideas were deeply influential throughout Europe. By embracing mass production, her vision was a more affordable take on William Morris’s revolutionary English Art and Crafts movement, which belied industrial processes, and like Theosophy, Life Reform seemed to present a solution to a fast-developing urban social pressure that was a lot more amenable to the middle classes than a communist approach to the alienations of industrialised labour. 274

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and as the nineteenth century progressed, men left the farms in search of paid work for longer and longer periods. Women did the farming and ran their communities. Creating cash within such a structure was difficult, and Adelborg’s first action in Gagnef was to set up a lace-making school and workshop. This would both save a local tradition, and increase these independent women’s earning capacity. Alongside this, she collected historic examples of local lace and embroidery, in a classic expression of Life Reform’s ‘looking back’ to regenerate the future. Her diaries go on to record that early in 1904, only a few months into her new project, her friend Hilma af Klint visited for a ten-day shared painting trip.

January 28, 1904: Hilma Klint arrived.

February 1, 1904: We enjoy being together and we are not overworked. We met the warden of the church and he said ‘it is excellent to have your good friend for company and to paint with.’

February 7, 1904: Today Hilma Klint left. She brought a lot of good companionship. We managed to work together very well. She talked a lot about Theosophy and Spiritualism, and some parts of that I do like, but I don’t believe in the voices. 286

This was a key early moment in the conceptualisation of both The Ten Largest, and Ottilia’s own project. Both women were preparing something new. The practical Ottilia did not believe in what the other women were wearing. reveals a daring personality, and someone interested in the meanings inherent within clothing. The archived diaries, Ottilia Adelborg Museum, reveals that Hilma also looked very closely at the objects her friend was collecting.

The first sign of this is in a poster design from 1903. Af Klint took commissions for illustration work, and comparing this 1903 children’s Christmas gift print (Julkläppen) with one shown in a photo of the artist from 1895, it is possible to see that in 1895 the artist depicted a child in a contemporary city outfit, but by 1903, the child is dressed in a traditional costume from Dalarna. Each image is framed by flowers, the earlier one with lilies, a motif the artist has repeatedly recorded in her notebooks as ‘male,’ and then with (Christmas) roses, Af Klint’s recorded motif for ‘female.’ So, from the first moments of Ottilia’s engagement with Dalarna, Hilma is also recording its traditions, and merging them with a symbolic image language she was in the process of developing. Lilies and roses would go on to become the key motif of the first of The Ten Largest, Childhood, No. 1, painted as the head garlands traditionally worn by children on festive occasions, a subject often also painted, in more cloying form, by Life Reform artist Carl Larsson.

The earlier automatic drawing is also from 1903, created during a séance. 287 It is hard to imagine the tension that must have been created by pursuing such different creative approaches to image making at the same time. What is also notable in the séance drawing however, is the double coil. This is not necessarily an abstract shape in the Swedish context, as it also resembles a traditional St Lucia saffron bun. The single coil of the ubiquitous cinnamon bun is also repeated many times in other works, and is radiantly present in The Ten Largest, Youth, No. 3. It may seem prosaic to reduce paintings to such everyday visualities, but the unconscious does not have the same algorithmic attention to cultural value that our social self does. Given the trance source of the artist’s imagery, it seems quite possible she was reaching into such a sensual experience, perhaps in a way not dissimilar to the manuscript artist reaching for her logs. These motifs of St Lucia curl and cinnamon spiral were two of the key motifs that the artist laid out in a sort of aesthetic trig. table that was part of the very first paintings of the cycle, Primordial Chaos. Af Klint wrote about receiving her imagery during the séance, but a table like this reveals her desire to share the logic of her production. This is the opposite of esoteric mystification, and in this further evidence of the importance of her family’s navigational history to her construction of her own visual language.

The images inserted here in the printed thesis are not available in the digital thesis.
The Ten Largest, Youth, No. 3

It is with this painting that the degree of the artist’s attention to the Gagnef textile collection also becomes clear. The tangerine ground of this painting, and its freely spiralling lines next to floating flower-like forms, some made of layered circles, appear to directly quote the tangerine silk bonnets worn by Gagnef’s young girls at party celebrations. The museum has three of these nineteenth century bonnets in its collection today, all sewn with similar orange silk, and only slight variations in motif. Af Klint was quoting a teenage girl's party cap.

Silk bonnet, Ottilia
Adelborg Museum.

The Ten Largest, Youth, No. 4

In The Ten Largest, Four, Youth, the patterns women used to decorate their neckerchiefs rise out in the floating star form with extensions, and in the vertical rods. Similar rods appear across The Ten Largest, and they repeat on all Dalarna neckerchief designs. The one on this painting is also reminiscent of a kurbits, a sort of flower-tower imagined by Gagnef women as a stand-in for a Jerusalem flower, mentioned in the bible, but which no one in this northern community had ever seen. These imagined flowers were often painted on large sheets of paper that people hung on the wooden walls of their log cabins on special occasions. Such wall hangings were also perhaps an inspiration for the huge scale of The Ten Largest, and for the use of paper. They were widely used in Gagnef and this photo shows a version painted on sack cloth, which has been whitewashed into the plaster lining the log cabin of Gagnef’s Minnestuga (memory house).
Proof that Af Klint was working with metaphors of baking and the decorative world of Dalarna’s women comes from a diary entry from October 1906. A large St Lucia curl can be seen on the reverse page, and a small pile of spirals nestle together. Immediately below the horizontal pencil line are the words

Surdegens fält (Sourdough’s field)
Kurbitsens fält (Kurbits’ field)
Andens fält (Spirit field)

In a page on image-making, the artist uses the metaphor of a field as a stand-in for a painting, and then moves through a field of rising dough to a field of the imagined flowers of the mind, in a literal form, the kurbits, to a field of the spirit. This use of metaphorical baking (a very everyday alchemy of women’s lives) is already mentioned in January of the same year, when the artist writes ‘the sourdough is thoroughly fermented’ in a statement on the developing work of The Five. The transformations of baking are an apt material metaphor of the inchoate processes of material creativity, and they return in a drawing from 1908, this time entwined with both coils and double curls.

The Transformation of Baking

In this painting, the sea map returns, with choreographic routings covering the smooth surface of the ground colour in a semblance of islands, shipping channels, currents. The large black shape however, is also reminiscent of a pattern used on the back of women’s wrist warmers. Such a focus on traditional pattern making seems odder to us today than it would have at the time. There was a frenzied interest in historic textiles in Stockholm that was part of the success of Skansen Outdoor Museum, and a scrapbook of textile design drawings that has recently come to light further supports the idea that it interested Af Klint. It is believed to have belonged to the artist, and to have been purchased in 1942, from an antiquarian bookseller in Stockholm.
These traditional birch bark patterns are stencils that were used to cut out the patchwork for women’s purses. These curling shapes of sun, tree, antler, had specific positions within traditional designs, but seen in a loose pile on a friend’s table, these tools of women’s handicraft become an artist’s compositional aids, ways to work with the spirals already finding their place in the notebooks, and ready-made deconstructions of the social formulas that guided their original use.

The Ten Largest, Old Age, No. 10
In The Ten Largest, Ten, Old Age, the scrolling St Lucia curl, also a design on men’s leather trousers, is overlaid with tables of blue and yellow, colours the artist defined as masculine and feminine, and tables painted bloody red, and underscored with the mathematical sign for infinity. Is there a suggestion here that our blood all runs red, in the end of the day?

When Af Klint came to map her séance experiences, she seems to have gone back to the first images she ever saw, maps of the skinless body of the sea. To create the visual language that would trace social life across this smooth surface, the artist looked to the decorative traditions of a working woman’s life, motifs she and her friend found in a community defined by women’s self-reliance. In doing this, she incorporated into fine art practice the unsigned language of endless Swedish women before her, designing and colouring their lives, caring and baking for their families. The swirling compositions of The Ten Largest do not record what these women looked like to an outside eye, as Adelborg’s paintings do, but are an ingestion of the everyday beauty with which they chose to pattern these lives.

The translation of these maps, textiles, and baking into an art practice may have been made possible through Theosophy’s conflation of scientific discoveries such as magnetism with religious ideas of God, allowing the artist’s experience of mapping to become a ghostly conceptual figure of a visible while invisible painterly body, a skinless representation arising from the skinless sea-body revealed by the map. This potentially neutral body is then tattooed with social markings that define a women’s experience, the traditional patterns of clothes and food. The whole complex process, which Af Klint wrote that she did not really understand, made conceivable with a metaphor of rising dough. What Af Klint’s did with The Ten Largest was to embed women’s invisible working lives within a new aesthetic language of painting, one that turned women’s cultural invisibility inside out, and in this act was an artistic embedding of the Suffragette goals of her friends in Swedish Life Reform.

Af Klint was clearly close to reformist Ottilia Adelborg, but it is possible she got artistic inspiration from the work of another close friend of Adelborg’s, Karin Bergöö Larsson (1859–1928).
Ottilia and Karin had been students together, but after her marriage, Karin's artistic interest mutated into the textiles she produced for her family home in Dalarna. Inspired by Key's ideas on the aesthetics of everyday life, she and her artist husband Carl Larsson re-designed this home to be a living art work, with affordable, artistic gestures that have since made this modern looking, light-filled house a museum to the couple's work and ideas, and to early Swedish Modernism. The house was immortalised in its own time by the popular watercolours Carl made of their family life. These saccharin idealizations were fundamentally expressions of Swedish Life Reform beliefs, reproduced in a series of best-selling books that were enthusiastically reviewed by Ellen Key. In one of these, Ett Hem, Larsson acknowledges that his paintings were a 'manifesto' aimed at reforming ‘taste and family life’ rather than true to life depictions, a position further underlined by Key in her most widely read publication, Beauty for All. These paintings have come to define this house, but Karin's textiles are of a completely different order, lie closer to the heart of Key's ideals of art as a practice of everyday life, and to Af Klint's Temple paintings. Karin Larsson's most creative period was between 1900–1910, when most of The Paintings for the Temple were also created. Adelborg was a frequent visitor, loved the house, and often went on joint field trips with Karin to look for lace.

11 September, 1907 – I left Gagnef and went to Falun where Karin Larson and Brita [one of Karin's daughters] met me […] The next day to Svardsjo, where we drove to different farms to look for lace. We didn’t find any lace, but embroideries and festive embroidered hats. There were also red cross-stitch embroideries all along the edges of sheets and pillowcases – a tree of life, a star, in a repeating pattern.

The colours that Af Klint used across The Ten Largest reflect the colours of these collected textiles, the bright red of cross stitch and of knitted sleeves, and the soft Indian Yellow created out of birch leaf dye. Karin Larsson's weaving and embroidery also incorporated them, and in this early wall hanging from 1903, The Four Elements, there is a similar merger of abstracting and representational principles to that in The Ten Largest, an even more so, the later parts of the cycle, the Dove and the Swan. The combined geometric and biomorphic abstractions are woven around the central device of a maypole, a key signifier of the celebratory rituals of Nordic Romanticism. Could Karin's freely experimental reworking of this traditional motif within in a diffracted sea of light have planted an aesthetic seed? There is no record of the artists meeting, but they shared a close friend, a strong artistic interest in the powers of renewal made possible by Life Reform ideals, and this garland of roses, from a 1923 weaving, certainly suggests that Karin had seen The Ten Largest.
The images inserted here in the printed thesis are not available in the digital thesis.

**Bodies of Light**

In the key years leading up to 1906, Hilma af Klint lived within a community of artists and intellectuals dedicated to Swedish Life Reform. At the core of this lay a belief in the value of ritual, and of light and colour as aesthetic experiences that helped in the passage of time. The wider Nordic Romanticism within which these politics had grown, tapped into atavistic values in relation to the seasonal ebb and flow of the northern sun, especially the midsummer recurrence of day almost without night, which was traditionally celebrated as a cosmic or primal communal experience, in village parties that might go on for days. This was given new vitality by the Reformists, whose artistic and literary supporters created artworks overtly suggesting the ecstatic merger of inner psychological experience with the energy held within the light of endless day as orgasmic amalgamations of the experiencing body and the light and air of the world.

When Henri Matisse’s *The Joy of Life* was exhibited at the Paris Salon des Indépendants in 1906, its bright colours and spatial distortion caused a public outrage that was discussed across the European press, and closely followed by artists working in Stockholm. Af Klint could hardly have avoided this conversation on Fauvism’s leading artist, as it was happening in newspapers and in magazines such as *The Studio*, which Ottilia, Karin, and her all subscribed to. She may never have seen an actual Matisse painting, and her work does not reveal the influence of his use of colour or line, but black and white reproductions would also have revealed his revolutionary subversion of space, his emphasis on a flat picture plane, large scale, and thin paint that revealed the brush marks of its making. The Ten Largest do share these methodological approaches to the application of paint, and in an article from 1908, Matisse wrote “I simply try to put down colours which render my sensation.” Af Klint’s notebooks record how much she struggled with the inner sensations she felt commanded to put into paintings, so the Stockholm discourse on what Matisse was trying to do may well have engaged her. Was this famous, controversial painting already in her mind as she formulated her plan for The Ten Largest, studied the patterns from her friend’s textile collection, and perhaps remembered the flat planes of her grandfather’s maps? Matisse goes on to emphasise that his colour choices remained attached to his worldly reality, but then as digested by his sensing body. This is another suggestion of the merger of outer and inner experience that midsummer celebrations sought out, that Af Klint may have used sea maps to model for herself, and which the direct references to women’s textiles locates, like Matisse’s choices, in a particular body of experience. In 1908 Matisse briefly opened a school in Paris, and when the first Stockholm artists, both men and women, returned from it in 1909, the work they brought back was completely rejected by the Stockholm art world. Matisse’s values utterly unappreciated. Af Klint had just completed The Ten Largest and around 100 other works for *The Paintings for the Temple*. If she had been secretly influenced by Matisse’s ideas, the reception of his returning disciples was bad news.

Af Klint’s own spiritual interests had led her to Theosophy, which also looked to light, if through a more scientific lens, and within a wider European context, light was the subject of the French Fauves, whose revolutionary work was widely reported on. Many Swedish artists from Af Klint’s Stockholm community had visited the Swedish colony at Grez-sur-Loing and returned with Fauvism in their minds, and Life Reform’s turn to the countryside in search of rituals focused on merging the aesthetic values of light with political goals became a natural subject. For an artist interested in portraying a world defined by her inner sensations, such an understanding of light, as a force capable of uniting all matter—baking bread, flowers of the mind, the life of the spirit—without and within, of a visual equivalent of a body held within the force fields of magnetic north and the ‘astral plane,’ light, as a substance without substance would seem to be precisely the ghostly body the artist needed. One way to engage with *The Paintings for the Temple* is to understand them as painterly stanzas for an idea of a human ‘body of light.’

When Henri Matisse’s *The Joy of Life* was exhibited at the Paris Salon des Indépendents in 1906, its bright colours and spatial distortion caused a public outrage that was discussed across the European press, and closely followed by artists working in Stockholm. Af Klint could hardly have avoided this conversation on Fauvism’s leading artist, as it was happening...
scientific research into invisible wave forms, and the idea that human thought created vibrations in the [...] body, accompanied with a marvellous play of colour, like that in the spray of a waterfall as the sunlight strikes it [...] The body under this impulse throws off a vibrating portion of itself [...] as figures are made by sand on a disk vibrating to a musical note [...] We have then a thought-form. This body Besant wrote of as created by such thought is an object of great beauty, the delicacy and rapid motion of its particles giving it an aspect of living iridescent light [...] [this] desire-body composed of the finer qualities of astral matter, with the colours, rippling over and flashing through it, fine and clear in hue. 222

Besant writes of this imagery, created by a person's thought and desire, as invisible, a sort of aura existing only as a form of energy, but the book then goes on to offer a colour palette and painted examples. Thought-Forms was widely read, and although her attempts to pin down her ideas with painted colour is not clear, the underlying idea of an energy body does describe the only place the Theosophists ‘astral plane’ could be said to exist, as a particular individual experience that nevertheless exists within us all. Besant's ideas were produced as part of the work of a society that offered women creative freedom, and as an artistic approach seeking out new visualisations of inner experience, such a body-of-light is also an interesting premonition of Deleuzian planes and flows. And as Alex Owen suggests, it is easier to believe in ideas that help us live the lives we want, than in those that do not.

With the final paintings of the Temple cycle, an idea of the body as ‘the spray of a waterfall as the sunlight strikes it’ becomes fully realised as The Dove and Swan, which are filled with radiating light. Many of these final works also combine the mapped flows of earlier paintings with suggestions of the low hills and reflecting lakes of Dalarna, full with the prismatic light of sun and rainbows, the outer world from which the initial inspirations for the cycle came. The disassociation from her creative desires that belief in the séance offered Af Klint may have been a necessary liberation from a disciplined upbringing and education, 223 and the vibrating invisible bodies of Besant's vision would have resonated with these séance experiences. Identifiable traces of the maps and the trig tables of the artist's childhood reveal her to have also been looking back to her childhood inspirations for the resolution of dream and reality into an “absolute reality, a surreality,” 224 with the patterns women historically made to decorate their unrecorded lives. Conceptualised as a single figure, a cyclical body without form, given materiality by reference to maps of the sea and their correspondence with our own invisible worlds, and shot through with the all-permeating force of light as a freeing sexual concept within Nordic Romanticism. The Temple cycle thus seen presents a painterly choreography of the female body in time, made visible within the jouissance confusions of the midsummer light of a Nordic sun.

A genealogy following on from Af Klint’s exploratory figuration of lived experience can be seen in the surrealist automatic drawing experiments of twenty years later, and their search for the resolution of dream and reality into an “absolute reality, a surreality,” 225 in Alchemy in Contemporary Art, Urszula Szulakowska (1950–) traces this Surrealist work back to the experimental imagery of alchemy, which she sees as “the dream-work par excellence manifested in art and literature, the end-product of the dream work of countless individuals.” 226 With Freud, this ongoing current within art practice found a language that made sense of a tradition that had been maintained through early Modernity by the Spiritualists. The Surrealists were able to realise “that alchemical imagery was, like the dream-work, an expression of unacceptable sexual desire [...] an insight discovered [...] from their reading of Freud's dream analysis.” 227
It is not clear if either Hilma Af Klint or the notebook artist understood their work as a re-directed expression of unacceptable sexual desire, but they did not have to. It is enough that their meditative methods, the séance, or the slow study of logs, created the intellectual space for the aesthetic innovations that we can appreciate today. With the Surrealists came the further, social realisation that “sexual desire could be an aggressive political instrument for destroying the bourgeois social and political systems.” The Surrealists were a group dominated by a masculine world view however, and there was little space for women’s differing experience in their group. It seems likely that Hilma af Klint, working twenty years earlier, knew that she had touched on both this power and this prejudice, when she chose to keep her work hidden. In tracing its visible connections to the work being done by the women of the Swedish Life Reform movement however, it is possible to trace a feminist politics embedded within these paintings of a female body of desire, which is still activating viewers today.

Af Klint’s way of seeing can be traced in the work of the later Surrealist painter Ithell Colquhoun (1906 – 88), as well as in the luminous heads of light created late in life by Maria Lassnig. In a different register, it can be found in the geometrics of Agnes Martin (1912 – 2004). Af Klint’s ghostly figure of the permeable, feminine, body of experience, realised as a serial form to be experienced through time, also moves through the visually penetrable walls of the late Cells of Louise Bourgeois (1911 – 2010). The Cells cannot readily be defined as vibrant images of a female body of desire however, and the next chapter explores Bourgeois’ quite different take on the conceptual figure of the ghostly body as a return of women’s historical erasure.
Much has already been written about French American artist Louise Bourgeois’ late Cell cycle, but this chapter focuses on the hauntingly ambiguous way Bourgeois registers her own body within this late cycle of works, and how this has the capacity to re-frame the way we now interpret the work of Agnes de Klint and the notebook artist. Bourgeois often talked about the connections between her work and her personal history, and when she states that she has “endeavoured during my whole lifetime as a sculptor to turn woman from an object into an active subject,” she is making a wider claim for the political forces embedded within this, and this intentional, public goal differentiates her practice from the others. By looking at key examples from the Cell cycle, I will track how Bourgeois re-worked the methods with which the Surrealists sought access to unconscious forces, and re-deployed this approach for her own feminist ends.

The paintings of the notebook and The Ten Largest reveal an embrace of domestic objects as an extension of the still life genre historically ‘allowed’ to women. These were then ‘turned,’ aesthetically worked into body stand-ins for subjectivities struggling to find any other form within cultural screens that did not include them. This was an aesthetic act of resistance that Bourgeois, working in a later historical period, was able to articulate, but the aesthetic method was common to all three. By embracing the depiction of actual objects as the representational ‘stage’ for their non-visibility, these artists found a form capable of both holding the “marks and scars of the looker’s deadening gaze” within nature mort, and of returning this self-alienation—the realisation of their object status in the eyes of others—in images that hold subjectivity within the ‘skins’ of those chosen and depicted objects. It is in ghosting themselves in this way, removing actual self-portraiture, that they achieve this politicised return. These
It is not an accident that I have found this ghostly conceptual figure of return in the work of older women artists. Renegotiating our relationship to our own skins becomes an essential act when looking in the mirror begins to reveal the impossibility of maintaining any semblance of the 'self'. For perfect womanhood that remains women's greatest vulnerability within the cultural screen. At a certain point in mid-life, 're-scripting' our relationship to our skins becomes a survival strategy. And while several later twentieth century women artists have focussed on direct portrayal of this particular objectification, and I have looked at later works by Maria Lassnig and Cindy Sherman, The Ghost Artist is focussed on the artist's eye as it falls away from the morning mirror, and looks for a body that teases portrayal apart from body mimicry, in order to re-direct this negative social force into new, possible, ways of seeing.

Bourgeois began work on the Cells when she was in her late seventies. The cycle contains 63 works, and she was engaged with it until the end of her life. Each piece is structured as a container: either jerry-built cages made from salvaged architectural materials—window frames, doors, wire mesh fencing—or perfectly built glass vitrines. These containers hold and reveal an interior 'still life' of carefully placed objects, both found and made. Bourgeois understood the Cells to be representations, but of states of being rather than the specular and red as the colour of both affirmation and aggression. See Marie-Laure Bernadac (editor), The Law, 2010, and resist it, as Saint-Exupéry’s hat becomes once again a boa constrictor. It is not an accident that I have found this ghostly conceptual figure of return in the work of older women artists. Renegotiating our relationship to our own skins becomes an essential act when looking in the mirror begins to reveal the impossibility of maintaining any semblance of the 'self'. For perfect womanhood that remains women's greatest vulnerability within the cultural screen. At a certain point in mid-life, 're-scripting' our relationship to our skins becomes a survival strategy. And while several later twentieth century women artists have focussed on direct portrayal of this particular objectification, and I have looked at later works by Maria Lassnig and Cindy Sherman, The Ghost Artist is focussed on the artist's eye as it falls away from the morning mirror, and looks for a body that teases portrayal apart from body mimicry, in order to re-direct this negative social force into new, possible, ways of seeing.

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Bourgeois began work on the Cells when she was in her late seventies. The cycle contains 63 works, and she was engaged with it until the end of her life. Each piece is structured as a container: either jerry-built cages made from salvaged architectural materials—window frames, doors, wire mesh fencing—or perfectly built glass vitrines. These containers hold and reveal an interior 'still life' of carefully placed objects, both found and made. Bourgeois understood the Cells to be representations, but of states of being rather than the specular and red as the colour of both affirmation and aggression. See Marie-Laure Bernadac (editor), The Law, 2010, and resist it, as Saint-Exupéry’s hat becomes once again a boa constrictor. It is not an accident that I have found this ghostly conceptual figure of return in the work of older women artists. Renegotiating our relationship to our own skins becomes an essential act when looking in the mirror begins to reveal the impossibility of maintaining any semblance of the 'self'. For perfect womanhood that remains women's greatest vulnerability within the cultural screen. At a certain point in mid-life, 're-scripting' our relationship to our skins becomes a survival strategy. And while several later twentieth century women artists have focussed on direct portrayal of this particular objectification, and I have looked at later works by Maria Lassnig and Cindy Sherman, The Ghost Artist is focussed on the artist's eye as it falls away from the morning mirror, and looks for a body that teases portrayal apart from body mimicry, in order to re-direct this negative social force into new, possible, ways of seeing.
background, and married to a successful art historian, Bourgeois always had her ‘five hundred a year,’ but the creative explosion that followed the MOMA show underlines the energy that is held within cultural recognition, and therefore also its opposite.

As part of this exhibition, the artist created Partial Recall, a slide-show film of annotated family photographs from her childhood. This glance back through the photo album presents an emotionally invested account of the artist’s early life in her large family home on the edge of Paris, which also housed her parent’s extensive tapestry restoration business. Many of the photos depicting Louise’s teenage years are written over with memories of her father’s affair with her live-in tutor, and the emotions aroused by this psychological complexity. This, and memories of the early death of her mother in 1932, dominate Partial Recall. Curator and Bourgeois archivist Philip Larratt-Smith (1979–) points out that the short biographical narrative Bourgeois created with this work instantly became the “definitive critical lens on her production, [and] advanced the interpretation that supplied critics with a hermeneutic device that was no less aesthetically convenient than ideologically congenial.” Only is it with the posthumous archiving of Bourgeois’ more complex psychoanalytic notes that it becomes clear that in her thirty years of analysis, the artist had developed a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between the emotional conflicts of her adult life and the events of her childhood that could be placed in context. Bourgeois, in taking control of her biography in this decisive way, and sticking with it in the years after, she both created a ‘congenial hermeneutic device’ of her own design, and deflected art historical interest from her more complex adult life, the one she shared with her family, colleagues, and friends. The title of Partial Recall always acknowledged the unconscious connections: ‘dream work’ and ‘automatic writing sessions’ was, in Breton’s words, ‘the problem of the woman is the most marvelous and disturbing problem in all the world.’

However, as an older woman she could see how hopelessly prejudiced Breton and his group had been against the possibility of female creativity, but she retained an older way to explore ‘dream work,’ through psychoanalysis and the extensive diaries and notes she kept, which often wove in word associations and semi-automatic drawing elements. In a 1994 interview she said that “although I was now close to them, I objected to them violently. They were so terribly prejudiced.” But she retained this interest in the value of the unconscious forces of our desire, contained a charge of energy. The Surrealists were looking for ways to contact the unconscious in all the world. ‘For the Surrealists that was the slip of the tongue and inadver...

**Surrealist Roots**

An interest in the psychological testing can be traced back to the work Bourgeois sought out as a young artist. In 1936, she was living above the Gradiva Gallery in Paris, the Surrealist epicentre run by André Breton (1896–1966). By this time, the work of Freud was being widely read, and the automatic drawing techniques of Spiritualist artists were being explored by a new generation for whom a psychoanalytic lens did away with the externalizing logic of religion. The Surrealists could fully claim their experiments as their own. In *Fantastic Reality*, Bourgeois scholar Mignon Nixon (1962–) traces how the artist tried to engage with this group, as part of a wider interest in French Modernism that also led to a trip to Moscow to meet the Constructivists in 1934, and study with Ferdinand Leger in 1938. The Surrealists were looking for ways to contact the force of their unconscious desires, seeing this energy as having direct political potential as a destabilizing instrument. Bourgeois approached Breton to be a pupil in his studio, but was rejected, and would never engage with the publicly revolutionary impulse of this group. Later in life, she found her own way to explore ‘dream work;’ through psychoanalysis and the extensive diaries and notes she kept, which often wove in word associations and semi-automatic drawing elements. In Thirties Paris however, rejected by Breton, she re-directed her artistic interest towards the formal abstractions of Modernism, and moved on from her erasure as a potential Surrealist. In 1938, she met, married, and moved to New York with American art historian Robert Goldwater (1907–1973), and she would live there until her death in 2010.

With the value of hindsight Bourgeois was able to distance herself from this rejection. Breton had arrived in New York only a year after she had, one of many fleeting the war, and although she was finding a place in the New York art scene, she was aware that these émigrés brought the power dynamics of the old world with them. In a 1994 interview she said that “although I was now close to them, I objected to them violently. They were so terribly prejudiced.” But she retained an older way to explore ‘dream work,’ through psychoanalysis and the extensive diaries and notes she kept, which often wove in word associations and semi-automatic drawing elements. In Thirties Paris however, rejected by Breton, she re-directed her artistic interest towards the formal abstractions of Modernism, and moved on from her erasure as a potential Surrealist. In 1938, she met, married, and moved to New York with American art historian Robert Goldwater (1907–1973), and she would live there until her death in 2010.

For a detailed biography, see Philip Larratt-Smith, 2012, op. cit., pp. 289–298


In a letter to a friend, sent shortly before she left for the U.S., Bourgeois seems to have hoped that her new life would offer a better relationship with this art world. Fortunately, in New York she shall be joining artistic circles […] Chirico and Salvador Dalí are Robert’s friends and will be in our house regularly. Picasso and André Breton will also be there,” Louise Bourgeois to Colette Richarme, October 1938, quoted in Mignon Dixon, ibid., p 15


André Breton famously wrote in the Second Manifesto of Surrealism, 1929, that “The problem of the woman is the most marvelous and disturbing problem in all the world.” Combined reflection and objectification nearly summed up the male Surrealist exploration of sexual desire.

Fewer New Yorker Dorothy Tanning (1901–2012) did call herself a Surrealist, and her/and Hélène de Pascaud, Chambre 202, (1970–1973) may have been an important precedent for the Cells, which were begun ten years later. Further aesthetic connections can be traced in the soft fabric body sculptures that Tanning also exhibited in the 1970s, both in New York and Paris. Both artists arrived at these works in the second half of their lives, the mature realisations of their much earlier explorations of what Surrealism might have to offer them.

words, the re-creation of a state of mind which can be fairly compared to that of madness.\textsuperscript{332} This journey into a state of f\textsuperscript{uror}\textsuperscript{333} also revealed the idealizations within which this male desire slid however, and Nixon points out that the hysterical position Surrealism celebrates marked by passivity, fragmentation and helplessness holds the danger for a ‘woman artist’ of being confused with femininity itself. It is one thing to identify, as an artist, with the hysteria of the other, as the male surrealists did: to turn hysterical might feel exciting or terrifying, liberating or rebellious. It is something else to lay claim, as a ‘woman artist,’ to the hysteria that is culturally synonymous with being a woman.\textsuperscript{334}

It seems likely that Hilma af Klint and The Five had already worked out that there was a social problem with women ‘letting go,’ when they chose to form a women-only séance group, and the silent vivacity of the notebook may only ever have had an audience of one, or two. Louise Bourgeois found her own way to attract with this potential force through her reading of Melanie Klein (1882–1960).

In 1951 the artist entered psychoanalysis, and began a serious study of its literature.\textsuperscript{335} Her diaries reveal a developing interest in the work of pioneering child analyst Melanie Klein, along with other theorists, throughout the 1960’s and beyond.\textsuperscript{336} and her verigious descent [...] into the forbidden zone\textsuperscript{337} of Breton was not one focussed on hysterical jouissance, but on its lack. When in 1994 she remarked that “My work is not about sex, it is about its absence;”\textsuperscript{338} this would not have been a lightly placed comment. Klein had developed an alternative psychoanalytic position to Freud, one that moved the analytic focus away from Freud’s concentration on the libido—what can a person or society recognize about their own destructive tendencies?\textsuperscript{339} Open aggression is not part of what is culturally synonymous with being a woman, and cannot be assimilated into the Surrealist idea of transgressive liberation within hysteria. Klein’s emphasis on the negative impacts of aggression and destructiveness therefore opens the male-orientated position Surrealism celebrates marked by passivity, fragmentation and helplessness. This journey into a state of mind which can be fairly compared to that of madness, but in relation to the real cultural transgression for a woman, an allowance of her aggressive impulses. Bourgeois has recounted that

Once we were sitting at a table. I took white bread, mixed it with spit, and moulded a figure of my father. When the figure was done, I started cutting off the limbs with a knife. I see this as my first sculptural solution.\textsuperscript{340}

A note-to-self from 1964 is even more direct: “I have the missing link.”\textsuperscript{341} The absolute social taboo on such a ‘missing link’ to female creativity is a point Juliet Mitchell specifically makes, when she notes “that women’s hysterical violence is pathologized where men’s is legitimate may be a major factor in the over-determined world-historical absence of women artists.\textsuperscript{342} Transforming anger and pain into an art practice was the revolutionary work that Bourgeois took on, and she wrote of the Cells that she hoped “to give meaning to pain and suffering. What happens to my body has to be given a formal abstract shape.”\textsuperscript{343} She worked to share, to give cultural voice to her experience of life, as a woman. She also sought out the unknowable roots of this experience in the complex relationships between the Cells, writing that “The Cells either attract or repulse each other. There is this urge to integrate, merge, or disintegrate.”\textsuperscript{344} This is the artist’s interest in the fragmentation and helplessness of hysteria, articulated as a product of pain and absence. This gap somewhere might have been is pointing to a ghost space, to something that cannot directly be articulated, but relates to the pain.

\textbf{Cages}

Cell, Eyes and Mirrors, 1989–1993 is one of the first works in the cycle. Its ‘room’ is constructed out of salvaged wire mesh fencing on front, back, and top, with old window frames at each side. The interior space is closed off but visually permeable, as ‘each Cell deals with the pleasure of the voyeur, the thrill of looking and being looked at.”\textsuperscript{345} The objects inside this frame are dominated by a large sculpture of two sections of industrial H-beam. The front face of the marble is polished flat and angled up to the front. Within two smooth circular cavities sit two shiny marble orbs—eye balls in their sockets. Directly above these ‘eyes,’ a large circular mirror is attached to a cut-out section of the wire mesh roof. This portal is swivelled to reveal the orbs towards a front view. Flattened and unified into an image by the mirror, and placed at the apex of the work, this cut-out reflection becomes more of a face than the stone below, which in this relationship becomes a lower body, balls in a sack, the balls of Fillette,\textsuperscript{346} but also ovaes, stripped of their body. Both upper and lower orbs stare forwards, one down, one up, encasing us in a look made of stone. The roof mirror is hinged so it might swivel, and when seen as part of the vertical body created by both it and the stone below, it brings to mind the French miroir a psyché.

This nineteenth century dressing mirror, seen here in a painting by Berthe Morisot (1841–1895), was a common household item by Berthe Morisot (1841 – 1895), was a common household item. This nineteenth century dressing mirror, seen here in a painting by Berthe Morisot (1841 – 1895), was a common household item. This nineteenth century dressing mirror, seen here in a painting by Berthe Morisot (1841 – 1895), was a common household item. This nineteenth century dressing mirror, seen here in a painting by Berthe Morisot (1841 – 1895), was a common household item. This nineteenth century dressing mirror, seen here in a painting by Berthe Morisot (1841 – 1895), was a common household item. This nineteenth century dressing mirror, seen here in a painting by Berthe Morisot (1841 – 1895), was a common household item. This nineteenth century dressing mirror, seen here in a painting by Berthe Morisot (1841 – 1895), was a common household item. This nineteenth century dressing mirror, seen here in a painting by Berthe Morisot (1841 – 1895), was a common household item. This nineteenth century dressing mirror, seen here in a painting by Berthe Morisot (1841 – 1895), was a common household item. This nineteenth century dressing mirror, seen here in a painting by Berthe Morisot (1841 – 1895), was a common household item. This nineteenth century dressing mirror, seen here in a painting by Berthe Morisot (1841 – 1895), was a common household item. This nineteenth century dressing mirror, seen here in a painting by Berthe Morisot (1841 – 1895), was a common household item. This nineteenth century dressing mirror, seen here in a painting by Berthe Morisot (1841 – 1895), was a common household item. This nineteenth century dressing mirror, seen here in a painting by Berthe Morisot (1841 – 1895), was a common household item.
until mirrored wardrobes made them obsolete. The largest of the mirrors that surround the stone further underlines this connection.

It is one of six placed around the central body parts. They are all on stands, and either highlight areas of the work we would not otherwise see, or reflect each other. Their stands are industrial steel however, not gently gleaming wood. There is no boudoir here, no pleasurable aspect to this site of body discipline, and our looking quickly becomes entangled in the mirrors’ crossing reflections, as they disorganise our over-view of the space. Our expectation of a single, controlling viewpoint is disrupted by the simultaneous presentation of the back, the top, the area below. These mirrors fill the space around the marble and are supplemented by two small wing mirrors soldered onto the back fence. These are attached as if they were last-minute additions to some panoptic need to see into every possible corner, but the prying vision they press home does not enhance our panoptic viewing pleasure at all. These multiple viewpoints only create a fracturing optical dissonance and, despite an apparent abundance of visibility, we still have to pace the perimeter of the cage to see what is inside, in a choreography of looking through holes in the fence or clear patches in dirty windows, only ever seeing a part, as we catch sight of ourselves in our spying.

Cell, Eyes and Mirrors is a symphony of cuts, a violence that reappears throughout the cycle, whether it is into fabric or marble, revealed as a pile of stripped bones in Passage Dangereux (1997), or by a prosthetic leg in Couple (1993), or, in In and Out, 1995, meat grinders built into the walls. Our viewpoints are also cut, by obstructing cages and mirrors that chop up internal unity, creating the views that paste us also into the interior. In Cell, Eyes and Mirrors, hacked marble sits on sliced H-beams, while its mirrored face above moves as we move, its now oblique look cutting into our sense of perception itself. These continual impediments to clear vision are what...
trigger our desire to see more or better, and tinge our experience with its transgressive, voyeuristic edge.

We peep into this artist’s room through salvaged fencing and window frames that are claggy with dirt; humanised by dirt that we almost touch, as it is the outmost shell, and we go close, the easier to see. This awareness of dirt evokes an abject connection with our own skin, a little shock of repulsion. This is an energy from the work that opens the cage to being experienced as a form of body, and the voyeurism of looking in through the skin of a visually penetrable subject, experienced in full knowledge we are looking at an object, is rammed home.

Bourgeois grew up with caged animals in her childhood garden. When the artist’s father came back from World War One he began to collect farm animals, and kept them in the grounds of the house in Antony. The temporary enclosures of animal pens shiver through all the salvage material Cells—old doors, mismatched bits of wall, and mesh fencing, spaces of both refuge and entrapment. When she writes in her diary that every day brought its wound and I carried my wounds ceaselessly, without remission, like a hide perforated beyond hope of repair, the artist writes of her body as animal, and as visually opened up by pain. As the domestic woman/house analogy runs all through the artist’s practice, the walls of Cell, Eyes and Mirrors easily become such a perforated hide, and we are invited to look through holes in this body’s unity. These ‘wounds’ of surface allow us optical access to interior forms, and conceptual access through their interpretation as aspects of a psychic body. If the suggestion of mapping in The Ten Largest evokes a sea surface or open bottomed, so the only precious liquids they could ever contain are either as invisible as air, or those of our own imaginations. These invisible ‘precious liquids’ rising up through the water tower seem to stand in for our own physical interiorities, in the forms ‘that might hold our love, a form that might hold our deaths’ and their merger with our blood and guts. Voided of such physical weight, the vials lift upwards on industrial steel trees, but the sparkling aesthetic pleasures of this are in tense dialogue with their bottom-less malfunction. The bed, the place of dreams that the trees surround, has a drain built into the metal base board. Like the dirty walls of the previous Cell, the drain, once noticed, provokes an involuntary step back. The body as blood and guts rushes back, as this site of rest and refuge repulses us with this detail. Nothing good comes from a bed with a drain.

Precious Liquids (1992) is one of the few Cells created out of a single found room, the solid wooden walls of a Brooklyn water tower. We can only peek in through a small door cut into the side of this space, which we are invited to walk through. Once inside, ancient alchemists seem to seep from a dingy interior dominated by trees of glass vessels guarding a bed. An ambiguously gendered change of black clothes hangs on the wall above two huge black balls, a mnemonic of Cell, Eyes and Mirrors. The laboratory-like glass vials are either sealed spheres or open bottomed, so the only precious liquids they could ever contain are either as invisible as air, or those of our own imaginations. These invisible ‘precious liquids’ rising up through the water tower seem to stand in for our own physical interiorities, in the forms ‘that might hold our love, a form that might hold our deaths’ and their merger with our blood and guts. Voided of such physical weight, the vials lift upwards on industrial steel trees, but the sparkling aesthetic pleasures of this are in tense dialogue with their bottom-less malfunction. The bed, the place of dreams that the trees surround, has a drain built into the metal base board. Like the dirty walls of the previous Cell, the drain, once noticed, provokes an involuntary step back. The body as blood and guts rushes back, as this site of rest and refuge repulses us with this detail. Nothing good comes from a bed with a drain.

The space of all these tense oppositions is intimately lit by an alabaster sculpture that sits on the floor facing the bed. This smoothly carved double curve glows from an internal light source; it has been lit up. The natural beauty of its alabaster ‘skin’ placed within the rough wood of the water tower, performs in a manner similar to the black orbs in Cell, Eyes and Mirrors, and becomes a sexually suggestive clitoral rub. The radiating desire this association offers up however, is hard to comprehend next to the awful bed.

We have walked into this space through a small door but there is not much space, and as the interior objects repel and attract, we are made uncomfortably aware of our own presence, as we take on the tension of vessels that cannot contain, and a bed with a drain. Rest or torture, orgasm or death, container/uncontainable, there is no symbolic resolution here, only the dissonant experience of its lack. In Cell, Eyes and Mirrors, we
are similarly destabilized by the lack of panoptic ‘master’ narrative, and both *Cells* present a stage for a vulnerable, unclothed body, seeing and feeling. The only one present is our own. Both works nudge us towards a claustrophobic sensation linked to loss of meaning, and the experience of a psychic zoo whose cages are impossible to get clear in our minds. The mutability with which we experience the attracting force of desire, and aggression, in repulsion and the thwarting of vision, is disorientating, producing cuts in thought as visual tensions become difficult to ‘compute.’ These dissonant breaks bring forth hysteria as a subject, but one tied to fear, not desire, to the aggressive face of disfunction, to anger at our lack of ‘understanding’ only partly readable objects. When this happens, the *Cells* begin to move us towards the place where processing fails. Sensing remains — I don’t know but want to keep looking — as an excess that cannot be fully resolved in language. This nudges us towards the destabilizing acknowledgement that, in relation to our own unconscious, none of us are master in our house. The sense of entrapment within what we ourselves seem to compel, in our choosing to look, is the movement towards the urge to ‘integrate, merge, or disintegrate,’ with which Bourgeois describes the cycle. 351 This movement is the helpless dissolution or fragmentation of hysteria, but brought about through fearful confusion rather than ecstatic abandon.

**The Portrait Cells**

The narrative Bourgeois sought to create with *Partial Recall* circled around an Oedipal drama, but archivist Philip Larratt-Smith suggests this may have covered a deeper wound. 352 In 1915, when the artist was four, her father was injured in the first world war, and sent to a hospital in Chartres. Louise and her mother travelled to the hospital so her mother could help look after her husband. In a diary entry from 1959, the artist writes “keep me in the dark, in the closet at Chartres – prevent me from seeing.” 353 The artist was apparently locked in a cupboard so she would not see the worst horrors of the hospital, but she would inevitably have encountered damaged bodies with missing limbs, faces destroyed by mustard gas, dirty metal beds, stained linens, and broken minds. These were the artist’s reality between the ages of four and seven and must have a ricocheting encounter with the real. Exposure was controlled using a cell, seeing and not seeing two parallel forms of violence. Traces of this early horror, mingled into the power dynamics of adult sexuality, run throughout the *Cells*, but perhaps most directly in the soft, vulnerable materials of the eyeless, guillotined heads of the *Portraits*.

Created between 2000–2005, the *Portrait Cells* are an important sub-series within the cycle. These cages are purpose-built glass vitrines with only traces of salvaged fencing, and they are the...
Julienne Lorz, ‘From the Bell Jar to the Cage,’ in Lorz, op. cit., p. 33

abattoir of the cycle. Hand sewn patchwork fabric heads and limbless cloth bodies are placed in riveted metal cases that confuse scientific isolation tanks with museum vitrines. They are stripped of individualizing detail and function more as, in the words of Julienne Lorz, ‘placeholders for elemental human feelings […] portraits of emotional states.’ Some of the heads bear a striking resemblance to those in the observational studies Théodore Gericault (1791–1824) made in preparation for painting The Raft of the Medusa in 1818. Such a link to the history of French Modernism is further underlined by Bourgeois’ repeated use of its essential motif, the guillotine, in several other Cells, notably Cell (Choisy), 1990–1993. The guillotine, and its immense role within the French cultural imaginary, perfectly embodies the amalgamation of violence and desire that is revolution as the ecstatic dimension of death. Guillotined bodies and heads reappear across the Cell cycle, the separation of mind from body a key and repeated mutilation, ecstatically let loose in Cell, Arch of Hysteria (1993). The guillotined or ripped off heads in the Portrait Cells look either flayed or burnt, human life made meat and isolated from the absent bodies suggested by the clothes, furniture, and prosthetic extensions of the salvage Cells. The social skin of clothes has only been incorporated however, not removed. The heads are often sewn, or sutured together, from the sort of cloth we place next to our skins, or from bed ticking, or most abjectly, towels. They present the convulsed remnants from all that social salvage, placeholders for that which could not find its place in the representational ‘screen’ of the more complexly discursive cells. Social constructions are flayed remains here, and they bear ‘the marks and scars of the looker’s deadening gaze.’

Paulo Herkenhoff (1949–) describes Precious Liquids as an immersive theatre of experience, and finds a resonance of Antonin Artaud (1896–1948) and The Theatre of Cruelty within it. While we cannot walk into, immerse ourselves, in any of the Portrait Cells, Artaud’s belief that theatre should confront the spectator with truthful precipitates of dreams, in his taste for crime, his erotic obsessions, his savagery, his fantasies, his utopian sense of life and of things, even his cannibalism, poured out on a level that is not counterfeit and illusory but internal” still resonates. I have already explored how walking into Precious Liquids opens us to our feelings of aggression and desire, and Artaud’s manifesto goes on to state that “the theatre, like dreams, is bloody and inhuman.” Blood and dehumanisation merge in the screaming, blinded heads of the Portraits, as eye sockets of soft pink corduroy or towelling are punctured and closed by sewing threads and stuffed tongues push out. Artaud rejected the logical narratives of European theatre as too safe, and his theatre of cruelty included the audience in its space,
and made performing hieroglyphs of its actors. He was influenced by Balinese dance, but also by the glossolalia he experienced when in the grip of his extreme schizophrenia.

The magnetic removal of analytic distance was part of his aim, and this is also realised in any felt engagement with the Cells. Their part bodies, whether depicted, or suggested by a bed, a set of clothes, a pile of remains, also perform a dual hieroglyphic role. They are readable, but they also suggest narratives that never fully form, and this theatrical image excess stages a voyeuristic encounter that draws out attraction along with a wave of repulsion. Body identifications are created with controlled viewpoints, symbolic tensions, and material illogic, and they all seek out Artaud’s desired rupture of the safe space of logical representation. We are the missing body in Bourgeois’ para-domestic stage sets, and with this imaginative movement, the Cells also become not ‘illusory but internal.’

Still Lives

With the Cells we experience an artist conducting an alchemical symphony of physical forces around our viewer experience, as we are ensnared by the work, back into ourselves. The flayed heads of the Portrait Cells are the tortured shock troops of the cycle. Their flayed and encased forms literally work through the poetic doubling of being ‘skinned alive’ of Peggy Phelan.

To look for things that cannot be seen. The impossible double vessel, flayed and encased, is key to all the Cells however. Bourgeois wrote that ‘what happens to my body has to be given a formal abstract shape.’ Bourgeois’ working method was her own take on the Parisian Surrealism of her youth, bent through years of personal investment into one that would serve her own, different, goals. With the Cells, she takes on the domestic room and its objects, and sets them up as a still life. Salvaged architecture brings references to the social body, to work places, water supply, or with a disused electric chair (Passage Dangereux, 1997). These specificities ground the work in the artist’s life in New York: a particular subjectivity, working in a particular time and place, but in their social connections they also tie the work to what Judith Butler would call the "vectors of power and of history." This ‘skin of the social’ is then filled with clothes and props and perfume bottles, the intimate surfaces cloaking the private self. These choices appear to be steeped in personal significance, and if anyone doubted this, there is Partial Recall. These are domestic rooms, the site of a millennia of women’s unwritten histories, but they are also hers. Personal attachment becomes an aesthetic energy, doubling...
her still life set-up into a skin and its organs. As viewers, we are invited in, with our bodies or our eyes. Our ‘perspective’ is then from within these bodies, skinned alive. A life made objects, an ‘objectified life’ is returned to us. There is still no direct representation of a person, but this absence is now present. This inside out body is the artist’s ‘formal abstract shape’ for what happens to the body, the precarious ghosts of interior drama.

The used, personal, objects Bourgeois chose were similar to those reworked by the notebook artist and AF Klint. Logs, bonnets, and maps were objects these artists could reach out and touch. When curator Marie-Evé Lafontaine visited Bourgeois’ former home, she found it

an eye-opening experience to see first-hand how different elements of the house’s interior were carried over into her artworks. In the Cell series, for example, the perforated metal which she uses for the walls of the enclosure is the exact same metal grating which can be found separating the different workspaces in her basement. 361

By the time she was working on the Cells, Bourgeois’ home was completely doubling up as her workspace, but it was also full of a lifetime of her things. She was a collector. The old Shalimar bottles in Cell II (1991) were her own, and when she needed clothes for other Cells, she was able to unpack her mother’s, who had died in France in 1932. Freud was also a collector. He famously collected small antiquities, the compacted material carriers of society’s oldest stories, but he was really a collector of other sorts of objects, the dreams and language slips of the unconscious. John Forrester (1949–) makes the point that it was the collection and study of these cultural products, our usually discarded human ticks, that became psychoanalysis, and he reminds us that Freud’s thinking grew out of the analytic mind-set of nineteenth century natural sciences, redirected towards the invisible realms of the person and their intimate habits. In her own visual way, the notebook artist also took up the mind-set of her time and re-directed it, and when Bourgeois pools the amulets of her past into her work, she is aiming for a similar movement. The rooms of the artist’s actual basement become the structuring device into which she could pour together, by newly made forms and connectors, chiselled marble, blown glass. The fingers that reached out to touch, also made new. Dionea Rocha Watt (1969–) writes of Bourgeois as a ‘poet of touch’ and it runs through her work as an underlying subject. Her richly considered surfaces compel us to think of our own touching, our skins from the inside rather than as an optical experience. We are redirected towards sensing, towards what we feel. Maria Lassnig’s ‘body-awareness’ paintings seek to directly visualise this dialogue between internal sensing and the image in the mirror, but with the Cells, image-less interiority finds external form in what the finger tips reach out to.

Melanie Klein often used artistic metaphors to describe the ways children build their inner worlds, their subjectivities, from their experiences of the external one, beginning with a mother’s body, and an experience of bits and pieces. This related to her development of play techniques for the psychoanalysis of children, the ways drawing and making could help children to nurture and express their inner repairs, through the psychoanalytic process, of marks and scars left by deadening engagements with the world. 365 Real reparation happens at the level of wounds we do not know we have, and the somatic work of aesthetic experience, for both maker and viewer, allows for movements outside of language and ordered thought. As we know when we cry, confusingly, in front of artworks. 366 We have been ‘touched’. Bourgeois’ insistence on the primacy of such sensing and aesthetic excess, is noted by Meg Harris Williams (1951–).

Louise Bourgeois stresses that it is not just the artist but the viewer who must work unconsciously. Her work is not ‘literal’ but ‘suggestive’ and if the viewer does not recognise this, he ‘cancels himself out of the game’ and the purpose of art is made redundant. The game is one in which meaning is revealed rather than imposed. 367

The Cells drag our embodied experience into the ‘game’. In being held by them we come closer to our own surfaces, touch the ghosts of our own loving, and our own dying. Freud wrote of the appearance of an art object from the complex strands of the unconscious as surfacing ‘like a mushroom out of its mycelium’. 368 The abundance of personal history that the Cells incorporate freely reveals itself, but, like those of the mushroom, they are impossible to individually trace. They are there as suggestive objects both physical and inner, and include ‘reparations’ of Julian Mitchell, is grasped “from the repressed in which her individual history is but one instance of what we all share, she must force [it] into the art object where we can understand it.” 369

Bourgeois’ notes often referrence repair, and the work is full of it. 370 It is possible that the theory was doubly resonant because of her family’s history as tapestry restorers. Her childhood was filled with the repair of old fabrics covered in pictures of imaginary worlds, and her teenage role in this was to redraw the feet and legs of the people and animals, to metaphorically make

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363 Dionea Rocha Watt, ‘Peaux de Lapins, Chiﬀrens Ferrailles à Vendre,’ in Lorz, op. cit., p. 81

364 Melanie Klein, Narrative of Child Analysis: The Conduct of the Psycho-analytic Treatment of a Ten year old Boy, (1960), the international Psycho-Analytical Library, 55:1–536, is a detailed account of a single analysis during which this happened, and includes reproductions of key drawings.


373 Ibid., p. 61

374 It is also directly referenced in the drawing Untitled, 2017, ink and pencil on music paper, collection the Easton Foundation.
them walk again. Later connections with Kleinian reparation must have come thick and fast. In the Cells, the open weave of tapestry canvas is re-imagined in three dimensions with wire mesh and window frames, which sometimes also contain salvaged tapestry fragments, restored to a new artistic role. Instead of sewing erased bodies back into a picture, Bourgeois has sewn their remains into three-dimensional ‘still lives,’ and the needle repeatedly penetrating the canvas grid to complete the picture is replaced by our optical penetration. In a note about a dream, the artist wrote

All of a sudden, a person […] asks do you know what a symbol is- it is something that pretends to be something else. You know this woman that you call your mother – she really is ‘Death’ her body is like a wicker basket underneath her dress. 

This is the canvas and wool of tapestry become a three-dimensional image and invested with the psychic pressure of a loved one’s body. In the dream, a mortal and a sculptural body have become interchangeable in a description which, thirty years later, the artist would begin making into the Cells. Her mother’s body, now without organs, is a direct connection back to Artaud, and to a ritualised and reparative drawing practice that both artists shared. Bourgeois would often draw during the night when she couldn’t sleep, and for Artaud, a sheet of paper could be a stand-in body for his own human one, which, because of his schizophrenia, he found to be a prison. Ursula Szulakowska writes that Artaud found his own body to be an illusion that held entrapped within itself another more ‘real’ body which was both physical and somatic. He termed this entity ‘the body without organs.’ It was a symbol of the liberated human psyche and was to be found through drawing. He would first outline an image of the representable body, the one with organs, and then aggressively draw over this, in hybrids of scribble-images and words. The tension between these visual elements, which did not make up a narratable, logical whole, was intended as an affective presentation of his re-designed bodily experience, one that he carried into the theatre of cruelty with his hieroglyphic performers. Artaud’s ‘body without organs’ was a wishful aesthetic one to replace the organic one which gave him so much pain. Bourgeois’ bodies without organs, the Cells, re-visit her pain as an energy.

Bourgeois’ re-visitation of hysterical fragmentation, re-articulated through aggression into a feminist enquiry, allowed her to take the aesthetic space she needed to create a new stand-in for the body. Using the mirrors called psyche, she not only fragmented its form, but kaleidoscoped it into a multiplying vision of and into the room. This doubling of the historically

gendered domestic space with a woman’s inner life places this body in time. These rooms, or cells, become perforated, wounded bodies that only partially clothe their vulnerable inner treasures, and set up a difficult viewer engagement that heightens our awareness of our looking, our guilt in wanting to look. The flow of this sensed engagement between viewer and work is one the artist mediated on in her own ritualised drawing of spirals, a form that both expands outwards from a centre, and curls inward, a movement the artist compared to our connection with the world.

You can expand outwards, because the present is unbearable […] But if you go outward and there is no limit […] you can go crazy […] If you go inward, you will wind tighter, like the spring of a watch. This is dangerous because you can get twisted, strangled by your emotions […] you can snap, or you can throw up!

With the Cells, the tightening and unravelling of spiralling becomes the invisible flows of viewer attraction and repulsion, and their thinking through the various times of the Cells. Mirrors and hidden parts move us to a voyeuristic experience of looking, difficult symbolic and aesthetic tensions confuse calm reading, and the viewing experience is nudged towards a mirroring of the fragmentation and dissolution we thought we were only going to look at. If we are prepared to engage with Bourgeois’ ‘game’ then a spiralling sense of immersion makes these more than ‘still lives.’ Bourgeois was clearly haunted by her past, and situated her work within an emotively drawn autobiography, but this mycelium is not the narrative of the work itself. She used her past as a tool of practice, as her ghosts retained the capacity to agitate her, to bring to a state of ‘furor’ all through her life. Within the spiralling returns of analysis and a daily studio practice, she ‘turned’ the energy of this from a passively held weight into an active creative force.

The image inserted here in the printed thesis is not available in the digital thesis.
The Cells function as crypts for a layered past marked by the dirt of age, but these sites of mourning over a personal history we can never know, also contain new, unknown forms, strange glass and rubber evacuations. The tension of these material combinations provokes us to awareness of our own desire to touch, our awareness of others touching, of our own skins from the inside and out, realised through desire tinged with aggression. As our own ghosts mingle into the work, a dance begins to happen. The ghosts of a woman’s life, re-directed through the artwork and its perforated ‘skin’ merge with our own scarred and marked interior histories. Recognition, at a level past cool analysis, turns harsh experiences into agents of possible change, and the idiocy of Agamben’s individual bios is transformed into the potential of shared space within the zoè of the public.

Jean-François Jaussaud, Louise Bourgeois’ Chelsea apartment. Source: hyperallergic.com, see link 36 for the full address. Archived 23.03.2019