

The gesture is liquid

A gesture is liquid. It IS liquid, adjective and noun.

Lately I've been thinking that a painting happens all over the fucking place.

And what if a canvas is just in the way?

Americans call it the support

But nothing is goddamn solid anymore.



Let's take the pulse:
Our brains / block the sound
Of our hearts /
From our ears /
So we don't /
Feel the gush
of our own materiality.



Some notes on liquids:

Liquids are abstract un-forms, rushing to fill space, existing not specifically here or there, but homogeneously across any expanse. They spread out, slide down, drip, seep, feel WET.

They push uncontrollably outwards, are messy and immeasurable; liquids are material that *behaves*. They can be measured through their speed, conductability, and viscosity as much as by volume. Their meaning is to *move*.

What is this *flow*?

□ “It is already getting around- at what rate? In what contexts? In spite of what resistances?”

{ Luce Irigaray, *The Sex Which is Not One*, 1985, p. 106

Luce Irigaray in her chapter ‘The “Mechanics” of Fluids’ in the book *“The Sex Which is Not One”* outlines the idea of the female as a liquid, in that

□ “women diffuse themselves according to modalities scarcely compatible with the framework of the ruling symbolics”.

Sorry what?

OF THE RULING SYMBOLICS.

Irigaray speaks of the “precedence” given to solids, and to also the potential of liquids to ‘jam’ the works of the theoretical machine, an infection or *affectation* of the surface that it finds itself walled up against.

I am talking about FORM here.
(I mean what, like specifically?) (TWITCH)

THAT

□ “... it allows itself to be easily traversed by flow by virtue of its conductivity to currents coming from other fluids or exerting pressure through the walls of a solid; THAT it mixes with bodies of a like state, sometimes dilutes itself in them in an almost homogeneous manner, which makes the distinction between the one and the other problematical; and furthermore that it is already diffuse “in itself,” which disconcerts any attempt at static identification...”
{ Ibid. p.111

The formlessness of liquids and gestures can be seen in their simultaneous plurality of forms and material...

(DEEP BREATH)

This gooey, sticky shit stuck between the gaps
Is formless (and plural itself)
Formless and excessive

Throughout my entire life I’ve been told that
□ “Pleasure” – is –to quote Irigaray one last time– the “–black-out of meaning–” (Ibid. p.114)

As in my pleasure, invalidated, because it remains in the realm of pleasure, and never goes to the realm of experience.

Paint is also a liquid, obviously, but it’s often thought of as a surface that is applied and fixed onto a *picture*.

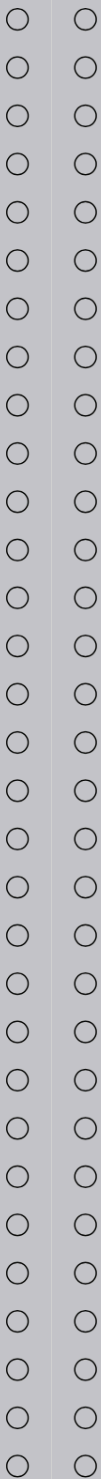
How to maintain the liquid-ness of a liquid in a painting? Is this an act of maintenance?



□ “Maintenance is a drag; it takes all the fucking time (LITERALLY!) The mind boggles and CHAFES at the *boredom*. The culture confers lousy status on maintenance jobs = minimum wages, housewives = no pay. clean your desk, wash the dishes, clean the floor, wash your clothes, wash your toes, change the baby’s diaper, finish the report, correct the typos, mend the fence, keep the customer happy, throw out the stinking garbage, watch out don’t put things in your nose, what shall I wear, I have no sox, pay your bills, don’t litter, save string, wash your hair, change the sheets, go to the store, I’m out of perfume, say it again — he doesn’t understand, seal it again—it leaks, go to work, this art is dusty, clear the table, call him again, flush the toilet, stay young.”
{ Mierle Laderman Ukeles, *Manifesto for Maintenance Art 1969!*



EVERYTHING a liquid touches is a CONTAINER.



Its form-shape is defined by what it touches, pushes up against, presses. Liquids are hot or cold, sticky or slick, and they are pushed around by objects, walls, pipes: repressed by the architecture containing it. Shored up. Harnessed, But ready to burst through at anytime.

In this way, surfaces are also containers
Cropping and containing the on-going-ness of ongoing movement.



I’m going to diverge, and follow a new conduit. Imagine you are on a boat with me: we’re taking a right turn from the main river, but the water behind us, and in all directions, is, as it is in all the world, both a single and plural homogenous mass – existing both in the past and the future, both here and there at the same time.



Luxury Goods (A Burning Desire):

Ownership is the root of all grievance: we can see this in the first code of law, an ancient text developed solely to bring order to the exchange of goods. I come from an Italian American family, and the feeling of grievance in general falls under the much-used

term “Agita”, a word which translates bluntly as heart-burn but which also applies to a kind of general, but distinctly coming from the gut sense of agitation. So one could say “The eggplant has given me agita”, but also “Your moaning is giving me agita”. There’s also a strong sense in Italian Americans of the imagination of discomfort: so a common saying might be: “Just thinking about the situation with so-and-so gives me Agita”. Recently, I’ve been noting a certain sense of discomfort when I think about the relationship between art and luxury goods, a rising of heat and unease inside of me when I think how the notion of value has seeped like a fluid into every crack of life.

In Silicon Valley slang, you, or we all, have what’s called a burn rate, which means basically how fast you shed money, as an institution and, so I guess also, as an individual. Thinking about this on daily terms, there are things put into motion every day in order to burn: I have to feed the body with caffeine, nourishment and alcohol, and every calorie has a price. I may relax but I feel like I’m still burning, and in fact I am: consuming energy, bandwidth, paper, landfill.

In thinking about the term Burn Rate on the process-end of production in making art, I recently re-read Fredric Jameson’s “*Postmodernism* - and the rest of the title that is often forgotten: “*or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*”. Since capitalism is the fastest moving game in town, I thought I’d look back twenty five years to see the architecture of our most recent, seemingly innocent encounter with goods and culture, which might somehow frame our current moment better.

□ It’s a bucolic read, from 1991: “What has happened is that aesthetic production today has become integrated into commodity production generally: the frantic economic urgency of producing fresh waves of ever more novel-seeming goods... now assigns an increasingly essential structural function and position to aesthetic innovation and experimentation.”
{ Jameson, 1991, p. 4-5

A feeling of confusion gave me a hot sensation: was there a time when the aesthetic was autonomous from an economy?

I recalled, like a flashback, reading an essay my friend Angie sent me years ago called “*The Confidence Man*”, as I pushed my twins around the park when they were weeks old. Round and round I went, life at its very core destroyed by sleep deprivation, squinting at a tiny iPhone screen, coincidently just meters away from Edgar Allen Poe’s residence in London, whom the essay begins by giving credit to for creating the character of “*The Diddler*”, i.e., the confidence man-otherwise known as a con man.

The confidence man is an American character, a product of the geography of a new, unregulated country: he is a traveling salesman who arrives to sell what in the end turns out to be a mere fantasy.

The 1857 book “*The Confidence Man-His Masquerade*” by Herman Melville follows the character and the structure of the Diddle- in the essay

Angie sent me the author lists this fantastic group of characters from Melville's book, on a boat together:

□ "The passenger is right about this army of diddlers, except for one detail: the many scamps among the passengers- a doctor peddling herbal remedies, along with a stock trader, an employment agent, a philosopher, a man in rags, a couple of well-dressed men--- will prove in the end to be the same man, who, in his various disguises, raises wind from stem to stern, diddling passengers out of their money, their health, their dignity- and, above all, out of their trust in their own judgement."

{ Greenberg, 2015, p. 26

But the con man is not a simple thief. He does peddle a concrete good: stories. In fact, all you might get from a good con, is the feeling of being swept along in the fiction of the moment: belief in what turn out to be lies, which feel good at the time. You've lost something, but you still have the fantasy.

The con-man is a shape-shifter, he wears a disguise which will enable you to trust him most: his truth is fluid and what's on sale is belief. Gestures are a distraction towards fantasy.

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Luxury goods are items that can be thought of as unnecessary, excessive and out of reach.

In that, if we think of the postmodern as Jameson describes it, as a shape-form inhabited by capital, then Luxury Goods are the perfect conduit through which to view a current move in the cultural field from (modernist) depth, to (postmodernist) surface to (post-contemporary) distance.

□ To quote Jameson: “But there are ... significant differences between the high modernist and the postmodernist moment, ... The first ... is the emergence of a new kind of flatness or depthlessness, a new kind of superficiality in the most literal sense ...”

{ Jameson, 1991, p. 9

Now, 25 years later, I would say there has been a move from flatness to distance: the flat surfaces around us are out of reach, or project in their blue light an out-of-reach-ness. The distance between a burning desire and unattainable goods or ideas point to the creation of all aspects of our lives into luxury goods, even the most basic needs like homes, sleep, food, politics: we have machines of insatiability, with endless scroll, that are never satisfied inputting into our burning bodies. A few years ago a very wealthy woman confided in me that everyone she knew was struggling, no matter how rich they were. And weirdly, I don't think she was bullshitting. What you take in is never as much as you burn.



SIGH. SIP.

My body is a furnace for oxygen and organic material. I am also an ocean, in that systems of liquids are forced around the container of my limbs and skin. Its barely held together. I am pushing out of myself at all moments. Gravity plays a part in my function.

In *“Formless: A User’s Guide”* Yve Alain Bois states:

□ “Even if one no longer speaks of painting as a “window opened onto the world”. The modernist picture is still conceived as a vertical section that presupposes the viewer’s having forgotten that his or her feet are in the dirt. Art, according to this view, is a sublimatory activity that separates the perceiver from his or her body.”
{ Bois, 1997, p. 25

What if you’re stuck in the mud, eh?



My interest in enacting liquidity is to upset the hierarchy of gestures that might be considered ‘above all that’ daily shit.

□ “Just having a body is a daily comedy. From the control tower of the head, one gazes downward, always downward, upon this ‘loose baggy monster’ that we find ourselves in, this laughable casement that is the body below, as

ankles swell, farts are emitted, rolls of fat jut out, the penis does its own thing. Shit happens and then you die”
{ Amy Sillman *“Shit Happens”*, 2015

Sillman often speaks about her paintings as being filmic, having within them a series of film stills, decisions and moves. This embodies for me the most exciting aspect of liquidity: that the liquid movement between states is where a gesture lies in painting.

□ “The gesture is the exhibition of a mediality: it is the process of making a means visible as such. It allows the emergence of the being-in-a-medium of human beings...”
{ Agamben, 1992, p.58

In the essay *“Notes on Gesture”* the theorist Giorgio Agamben tells us that □ “Cinema leads images back to the homeland of gesture”. (Ibid. p.56)

What is a gesture? asks Agamben. It is something which is ‘inscribed’ into the sphere of action, but is neither acting or making; it is neither production or performance. Not the mark neither the act that makes the mark.

So in reading Agamben, I began to understand gesture as the flickering of firelight animating a cave painting of jumping animals, or the stills of film juddering together to make movement. I am understanding gesture as the imaginative jump in our heads which believes in the action that created the physical trace of the event.

□ “ ... It is as if a silent invocation calling for the liberation of the image into gesture arose from the entire history of art. This is what in ancient Greece was expressed by the legends in which statues break the ties holding them and begin to move”
 { Ibid.

How then, can gesture ever be simply material? Or a material good?



The highest price ever paid for a work by a living female artist is currently 9.8 million dollars for *Bluewald* by Cady Noland, sold in May 2015.

Noland has written very powerfully about the Con Man, in her 1990 essay “*Towards a Meta-Language of Evil*” (1992).

“The game is a machine composed of interconnected mechanistic devices... A con or a snow job is the site at which X preys upon the hopes, fears, and anxieties of Y for ulterior motives and/or personal gain... These machinations exist a priori of X or Y as an indifferent set of tools and could conceivably be picked up by anyone and used against anyone else”
 { Noland, 1992

In November, 2011, the night before a Sotheby’s auction, Noland disavowed ownership of her work *Cowboys Milking* (put on auction just after her record auction sale months previous), thus effectively erasing millions of dollars from the world. There is no trace of the erasure, though, because it was completely imaginary. Those, say 6 million dollars never existed, and they never will exist. It is perhaps one of the biggest cons in art history.



All these funny bodily movements of cash:

Burn Rate
 Hot Money
 Fat Chance
 Capital Flows
 Absorption Rate
 Animal Spirits
 Back End Load
 Bear Straddle

All moving towards accrual or depletion. Quantity,
 No spacial awareness.



Dear Eva,

what do you think, shall we begin our discussion on Female Genius with the idea of Vitality? The vital signs, vitality, and vitriol of Female Genius, hmm? What happens when a Female Genius gets a migraine?

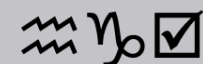
Funny enough I sat down this morning with my second coffee and a blank Microsoft word document, and to my right on top of the stack of books lay the yellow *“Painting Beyond Itself”*, which you recommended to me just as we were about to go to print with my catalogue which we named after your similiarly titled essay *“Painting Behind Itself”*: I think your title is funnier in terms of dealing David Joselit’s essay *Painting Besides Itself*, but still.

And- look at this- Isabelle Graw’s essay in her *Painting Beyond Itself* is titled *“The Value of Liveliness”*, and it’s all about vitality, here’s a quote:

- “This view that painting has a life of its own and can therefore “think” or “speak” is prevalent among many French historians... I would argue that we are dealing with vitalist projections here... Painting is able to trigger such vitalist assumptions because of its specific language, or more precisely because of its specific indexicality.. [and] once [indexical signs] appear in the context of painting they forcefully point to the absent author who seems to be somewhat physically present in them.”
{ Graw, 2016, p.80

So what do you think of this- that the valuation of art focused on embodying the liveliness of – life, the world, nature, etc. *by* the artist and this segued naturally in Modernism into the valuation of the work of art itself, through and of the author, to be vital, or to *store* the vitality of life itself?

Makes you think of the holy grail, right, or some myth of the fountain of youth? What about Joan of Arc, was she a genius? I heard they burned her just enough for her clothes to come off and to show everyone that she was ‘just’ a woman. Though this seems overly perverse, even for the English.



- “A mark in paint registers the passage of force through matter. Such trajectories evade mimetic representation...”
{ David Joselit, *Reassembling Painting, Painting 2.0*.

This quote always makes me think of Pygmalion, as in this sense, the idea of liveliness in art is also a sexual force.

In Christine Battersby’s book *Gender and Genius*:

- “For the patrilineal Romans, genius was ‘a simile for the male seed, which from the father begets the son and from the son goes

on to continue the race'. This seed was not simply mundane (physical) sperm; it was a seed that was ripened in the bodies of heroic male ancestors, and in the soil that had been cleared and planted by generations of males, Genius was a sort of genetic coding that entitled a male to property, lands, rights and power over women and slaves."

{ Battersby, 1989, p. 57

So genius is a fluid, what? So embarrassing, right? I think our conversation about Female Genius began in talking with you Eva about your research into the etymology of the word "embarrassment."

Genius comes from 'Geni'; is linked to a Jinn, as in a genie in a bottle, a trickster; it's also linked to 'gene' or genealogy, of course, to the term 'genial' and, my favourite: a bad temper. In my family they say our bad temper has been passed down through our Sicilian blood, like a feeling of heat and boiling: a flashpoint.

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It makes me think of your question, who gets to be abstract?

Who does get to be abstract? As in who gets to be off-point, random, bad-tempered, who gets to be not-giving-a-fuck, lying, you-don't-have-a-clue anyway, I was just joking, until I'm not, then its not funny at all duh?

□ "15. In French the word embarrass meant first of all a blockade or obstruction...In 1726, the play *L'Embarrass de Richesse* by the Abbe d'Allainval made known the phrase in French whereby an "embarrassment of" something meant superabundance or excess, of choice, of riches, etc. This use entered English and is still commonly used. For Example, 'Suddenly, however, we were facing an embarrass de richesses.' Thatcher, Margaret, *The Downing Street Years*, 1993. Simon Schama, in his book *The Embarrassment of Riches: An Interpretation of Dutch Culture in the Golden Age*, uses the phrase as a way of understanding a certain discomfort in the Dutch temperament with unprecedented material superabundance, resulting from colonial exploration."

{ Eva Kenny, *The 32 Things You Need to Know About Embarrassment*, PERSONA

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To "embarrass" the gesture.
To block or obstruct the movement of something on the move.

But what is this "FORCE" right?
When pressure, stress, weight, and velocity come into play.
Metabolism of images / material? Squeezed ::: out

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