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REVIEWS

Abstraction: Politics and Possibilities

LINDA BESEMER

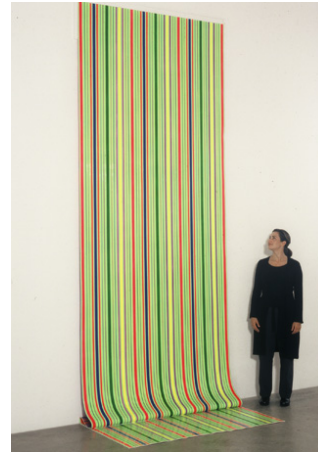
Recently, I was asked to speak at a conference entitled "Queer Locations: Race, Space and Sexuality."¹ Although the general focus of the symposium was the current state of queer theory and culture, it was truly interdisciplinary and represented a broad range of scholarly and artistic interests. I was excited to participate in this conference because, as an abstract painter, I rarely have the opportunity to speak about my work within the context of cultural or political specificity. In fact, the mere mention of abstraction as even vaguely political usually sparks tremendous resistance across the critical spectrum—resistance that ranges from condescension and skepticism to downright hostility. With some trepidation, I decided to begin my talk with a quote from a review I received, which I felt was a clear example of this deeply ensconced resistance: "Even abstract artists seemed encouraged to attach themselves to social and political rhetoric. For example, through a genuinely queer turn of phrase, Linda Besemer felt compelled to associate her mind-bending abstract relief painting with her experience as a lesbian passing in a straight world. Doesn't her brilliant formal invention speak for itself?"²

I think this quote begs an important and timely question: After forty years of feminist and poststructuralist critique, does the idea of "pure" form or aesthetic form(s) that transcend historical and social influence, remain the dominant interpretation of abstraction? In other words, does "brilliant formal invention" speak for itself?

Abstraction has a long history of social and political critique. At the turn of the previous century, abstraction was synonymous with a vision of a new world order. Russian Constructivism became the symbol of communist revolution and utopian society. European Expressionism sought to dismantle bourgeois society and the capitalist order. Futurism celebrated the industrial revolution in both benign and not so benign ways: it was an aesthetic expression of the beauty of the machine and it embraced Fascism, war and ethnic cleansing. By the mid twentieth century, the revolutionary politic of abstraction had lost its momentum under the tremendous weight of post-war capitalism, cold war politics and McCarthyism.³ This climate, combined with an ensuing wave of jingoism, paved the way for the idea of a purely American art—a purely formal, apolitical art form, even though many of the abstract expressionists still held fast to the revolutionary spirit and radical politic of the earlier abstract movements. In direct contradiction to Greenberg and the apologists of pure formalism, Barnett Newman stated that to understand his paintings would mean "...the end of state capitalism and totalitarianism".⁴ Meyer Shapiro argued that the automatic gesture of abstract expressionism stood in resistance to post-war labor practices and signified individual artistic expression, self autonomy and a form of un-alienated labor in an age of assembly lines, dehumanized labor and industrial mass production.⁵ Second-wave feminist and postmodern critiques of abstraction, largely focusing on Greenbergian "pure" formalism, attempted to expose the false universality of the formal subject by directly establishing a link between patriarchal subjectivity and modernist painting.

Thus, "social and political rhetoric," as my critic, Michael Duncan, would have it, has been intrinsically linked to abstraction throughout its varied and complicated history, but what of contemporary abstraction? It seems difficult to believe that abstraction today can have the same kind of political saliency that it did during last century. But does that mean that it has none? Is it, as Duncan suggests, "genuinely queer" to speak about politics and abstraction?

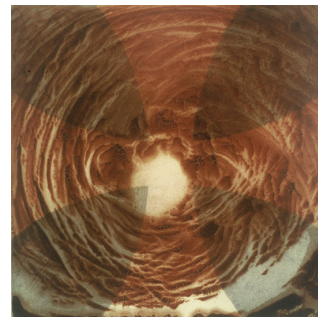
A recent exhibition, curated by the artist David Hammons entitled *Quiet As It's Kept*,⁶ seems to be asking some parallel questions. The foreword to the exhibition catalog, by the independent critic and poet Geoffrey Jacques, begins: "The question of what, if any, relationship exists between cultural particularity and abstract painting is often missing from discussions of painterly abstraction, discussions which, in their focus on formalism often leave aside the question of culture, nationality, and particularity. The presumed universality of abstraction, its trans-nationality, its trans-culturality, seems to place such questions outside the conversation..."⁷ The exhibition focused on the works of several African American painters working in abstraction who, Jacques suggests, "insist we neither ignore nor fetishize the particularity of culture, nationality, ethnicity and skin color"⁸ in



Linda Besemer, *Large Zip Fold #1*.



Delyse Thomasos, *Urban Jewels*, 1995. Acrylic on canvas, 10' x 16'



Anthony Viti, *Elegy #60 (after MH's Iron Cross)*, 1993.

their paintings.

One of the artists in the exhibition, Denyse Thomasos (born in Trinidad, grew up in Toronto and now lives in New York City) works primarily with what appear to be modernist gestural grids. Thomasos deploys large and small grid-like configurations that sometimes appear to form cubes with illusionistic depth, and sometimes appear flat. By layering and angling individual brushstroke upon brushstroke, she constructs each cube or grid. Although based on simple marks and configurations, they are formally quite complex. Her work is more often than not compared to Mondrian's famous New York City-inspired grid paintings of the late '40s. She has been included in numerous exhibitions that would most aptly be characterized as neo-modernist or within a formalist legacy, such as *Immediacies of the Hand* and *Unlocking the Grid*. Or she is included in more generalized exhibitions that recognize some cultural specificity (as in terms of gender) but this recognition is constituted as an autobiographical component separate from the work, such as *Women and Geometric Abstraction*.

In a casual conversation I had with Thomasos last year, she intimated to me that she felt like her early experiences in the art world attempted to code her as, essentially, "the black woman of formalism." Her work was consistently exhibited alongside traditional modernist paintings and she joked about being the only woman and the only person of color in many of the exhibitions. This encoding keeps Thomasos' identity and her cultural location—especially questions of racial specificity—safely separate from the universality of formalism.

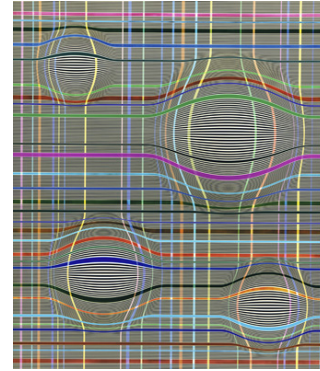
However, Thomasos is very articulate about the fact that her motivation for the creation of her work is not at all rooted in formalism. She says that she was always interested in political issues and became interested in the grid as a structural model for personal, cultural and racial location. "I link my personal history with my historical past. Slavery marks the start of my history..."⁹ From this perspective, Thomasos' abstract grids "speak" of the tools of an oppressive regime: the architectural diagrams for slave transport, the beams and riggers of detention docks, the jails and bars of incarceration, the cubicles and spaces of torture. For Thomasos, "...each stroke, a lash; each mark, [is a sign of] resilience in the fields."¹⁰ She also associates colors and patterning, again not with a formalist grid, but with a legacy of African quilts, which Jacques points out have always contained a secret language for slaves that could not be read by their oppressors.

For Thomasos, like myself, the assertion of cultural specificity is met with skepticism. One critic scoffs at the idea of racial location in Thomasos' work: "It's conceivable that '70s formalism might be reconciled with the multiculturalism-cum-identity-politics of the '90s, but these paintings are too rooted in the former to convince us that such a synthesis is truly at stake."¹¹ This critical skepticism makes Thomasos' appropriation of the grid itself seem all the more apt. Like the African quilts that inspire her paintings, what appears to be a reiteration of a dominant discourse actually contains a secret language of cultural resistance.

Like Thomasos, Ed Clark (another artist in the *Quiet As It's Kept* exhibition) reconfigures the brushstroke and the index of performativity within the modernist mark. In a manner similar to Pollock, Clark works on the floor and his process of painting is an active performance. Instead of using a brush or a stick, however, Clark uses an industrial push broom with which, after pouring pigment directly onto the canvas, he literally sweeps the paint and colors across the surface in strange and beautiful configurations. Jacques points out that although Clark himself never discusses it, the use of "...the push broom as a symbol of the main sort of labor available to African Americans newly arriving from southern plantations to the cities in the late 19th and early 20th centuries is an inescapable association. ...That Clark uses this instrument that signifies class division, and (dare I say it?) exploitation as instrument for making such unusual abstract painting is an act of symbolism that is, as I have said, inescapable."¹² Clark himself prefers to locate his work within African American cultural production and the legacy of jazz improvisation. While "improvisation" was a key interest of the abstract expressionists, Jacques sites both Clark's cultural specificity within the larger discourse of improvisation, and relocates the "automatic" formal improvisations of the abstract expressionists within a cultural indebtedness to African American music.

With Clark's work, Jacques also brings up the complicated question of self-definition for African artists and essentially asks, what is the relationship between cultural-national-racial identification and self-authentication? Jacques quotes Olu Oguibe, who writes: "Autonomy, Self-articulation, Autobiography are contested territories in which the contemporary African artist finds herself locked in a struggle for survival against displacement by the numerous strategies of regulation and surveillance that today characterize Western attitudes towards African art. Within the scheme of their relationship with the West, it is forbidden that African artists should possess the power of self-definition, the right to authority. It is forbidden that they should enunciate outside the gaze, and be free of the interventionist powers of others."¹³

This brings up a very problematic and compelling question. What of the black artist, or the Asian, Latina or queer artist, who wants to do something that is not readily recognized to be related to race, ethnicity or sexuality? Are they free to do so, or do the forms and practices that have come to signify their cultural location prevent them? If they do choose to



Linda Besemer, *Multi Bulge Sheet No. 3*, 2004

work outside culturally recognizable forms do they lose their cultural specificity in a blur of universal subjectivity?

Anthony Viti, also from New York, like Thomasos, tries to locate his works within abstraction and cultural production that is linked to his own identity and history. Viti, a long time AIDS activist and member of Gran Fury, the AIDS political art collective, also creates beautiful (and, dare I say?) transcendent abstract paintings. Viti's *Elegies* are a series of paintings modeled around the iconographic symbol of the iron cross that he borrows from Marsden Hartley's wartime expressionist paintings. "I appropriated the iron cross to draw a relationship between the experience of AIDS and war. The psychic manifestations are very similar. There's the experience of constant loss, incessant life threat, and the whole uncertainty about the future."¹⁴

Viti uses pigment and his own blood, urine and semen that he "applies" directly with his body to the painting's surface. Like Pollock, Viti's gestural marks exist as an index of performativity of the painting's process; they also exist as a record of an actual autoerotic, and homoerotic event. The heteroerotic nature of the abstract expressionist gesture, veiled under the discursive cloak of "universal" formalism is "outed" here by Viti's re-inscription of that metaphorical eroticism with an actual homo-autoerotic act. The resulting paintings are beautiful contemplations of lust and longing, loss and memorial. In the press release for Viti's *Elegies* exhibition, Bill Arning wrote that Viti's choice of abstraction as a vehicle for describing the social and political construction of the homoerotic functions both as a marker of personal and gay cultural memory. "By choosing the specific language of abstract painting, Viti brings up explicitly what for earlier generations of gay artists had to be coded and shrouded through abstraction. In so doing he calls attention to a revolution that has occurred. By choosing to reference the work of artists from Marsden Hartley to Jasper Johns, in which gay content was, by necessity, hidden from unsympathetic viewers, he speaks of the experience of being young and gay and going to the museum and finding and deciphering those messages we felt were hidden for our delight, edification and potential liberation."¹⁵ In this sense, Viti's abstraction not only "outs" a gay subjectivity embedded within earlier generations of abstract artists' work, but also reveals the social mechanisms and operations of the early modern gay spectator—a spectator who "by necessity" must identify and recognize himself and others within his social and sexual sphere, through a "coded and shrouded" lens.

I should also point out here that almost all of the criticism surrounding Viti's work distinguishes itself from previous examples I have cited, in that it is largely willing to acknowledge the potential for abstraction to express some aspect of the socio-politics of homosexual culture. I think this can be accounted for in several ways. Although Viti's paintings are abstract they are never fully divested of representation. The iconographical cross or partial though recognizable body part imprinted on the painting's surface are elements that flirt with narration and invite literary analysis. Yet, perhaps more importantly, body fluids always leave a trace of an actual—not represented—body. This connection to performance and body art, which makes the authorial subject visible, places Viti's own body as the subject and object of formalist painting. Viti's paintings are, after all, both paintings and performances.¹⁶

Whatever accounts for the cultural reading in many of Viti's reviews, never say die to the indomitable spirit of formalism that we see reiterated in Roberta Smith's flat reference to Viti's work as "...vaporous abstractions whose fluid shapes are more smeared than painted and whose pale colors suggest the bodily fluids that they in fact are. They're beautiful, but they're also a fairly generic update of '70s lyrical abstraction."¹⁷ Smith acknowledges that Viti's paintings are "in fact" made of body fluids, however she denies that fact and that form any real significance, preferring only to read the paintings in terms of "quality" and within the penultimate moment of modernism: "'70s lyrical abstraction."

Like Thomasos, Clark, and Viti, my own work also came out of an interest in the gesture and abstraction. During the '80s when painting was "dead," I was very torn between my art practice as an abstract painter, my politics as a feminist, and my sexual-cultural identification as a lesbian. After some discussion that would determine that I was semi-articulate about feminism, curators would ask to visit my studio, presumably to see my "lesbian-feminist" work. Almost immediately upon arriving they would remark with disappointment—"these aren't feminist"—and make a quick dash for the door. Or they would politely suggest that my ideas and politics might be more suitable for another medium, such as photo, video or installation. One curator, with whom I had become somewhat friendly, even suggested that since I could be very funny, perhaps I should do comedic performances.

This prompted me to investigate why abstract painting was so vilified by feminists. For feminist artists, art historians and critics, the modernist gesture and specifically Pollock's "drip off his stick" were seen as symbols of women's oppression throughout western art. Feminist art historian Carol Duncan attacked the early modernist notion of the gesture as an expression of aesthetic or political freedom and argued that it links art and male sexuality through "...the drastic reduction of women to objects of specialized male interests..."¹⁸ Mary Kelly, in her now infamous article "Reviewing Modernist Criticism" stated, "It is above all the artistic gesture

which constitute[d], at least metaphorically, the imaginary signifier of 'Modern Art.'" ¹⁹ Unlike Carol Duncan, Kelly avoided directly associating male sexuality and the gesture, but linked them circuitously through a discussion of the signifying mechanisms of modernism, modernist criticism and subjectivity. Both Duncan and Kelly's critiques seemed to me to be dependent upon an analysis of the fundamentally hierarchical structure of abstract painting which situated the gesture/canvas or figure/ground binary as analogous to a series of corresponding significations: active/passive, subject/object, and masculine/feminine, etc...

I questioned whether the signification of the gesture, and by extension abstract painting, could be shifted or re-constructed as a new form instead of "deconstructed" into its end--it was, after all, just paint. So I thought I might be able to affirm something about painting and express something about my cultural location by eliminating or reconfiguring the figure/ground binary. Combined with a tongue and cheek parody of Lacan's promise of the detachability of the signifier, I hoped a gesture detached from its hierarchical binary could re-inscribe the signification of masculinity embedded within it. So I literally "detached" the brushstroke from the canvas. By painting acrylic paint on a glass or polyethylene substrata, I detached the brushstroke from its original ground and re-attached it to different grounds or supports. The virile brushstroke (as metaphorical penis) formerly fixed to a particular body or ground can now be attached and reattached to different bodies and grounds. In other words, instead of a penis as brushstroke, I tried to create something like a dildo as brushstroke. Like Viti, I tried to shift the heterosexual economy of the virile gesture to a homosexual economy, but in my case a specifically butch-lesbian or trans-gendered one.

Although my work has taken other forms (folds, slabs, sheets, zip folds) my fundamental interest in the detachability of signification as a way to re-construct form and desire continues to be an underlying motivation in my work.

My critical interests have also shifted to what may be more aptly characterized as Deleuzian feminist or Deleuzian queer and this is not without complication. Feminism and queer theory's dependence on psychoanalytic theory, despite its many configurations of identity, is stymied by its insistence on a singular subject and a fundamental hierarchical binary of "self and other." Deleuze rejects the theory of a single subject or ego or of achieving any state of "being"; rather, he conceives of a theory of subjectivity based on the intensity between subjects, that of "becoming." ²⁰ This has significant implications for feminism. It potentially means the dismantling of phallogentrism, as a multi-sexed subject replaces the patriarchal subject by offering the promise of a sexuality beyond the constraints of gender, beyond the binary structures of self and other, subject and object, etc.

However, feminists are deeply divided over the viability of Deleuzian "becomings." How can women abandon subjectivity if they never had it? And how does feminism establish agency without the historical subject "Woman"? Luce Irigaray, one of the most vehement critics of Deleuze, expresses these concerns. Deleuze himself is enigmatic in regards to the feminist subject. While acknowledging that it is essential for women to "win back...their own subjectivity..." he also warns "it is dangerous to confine oneself to such a subject." ²¹ Rosi Braidotti, a Deleuzian feminist, views Deleuze's acknowledgement as a positive contradiction in Deleuze's thinking--one which reminds us of Foucault's warning that it is difficult to be Deleuzian all the time--and in this case, Braidotti cleverly puns, even for Deleuze. Braidotti believes in a nomadic subjectivity as the solution to the feminist quandary over the Deleuzian becoming-subject. She asserts, "Feminist theory is not only a movement of critical opposition to the false universality of the subject, it is also the positive affirmation of women's desire to affirm and enact different forms of subjectivity." ²² Braidotti argues that with Deleuze's idea of nomadism a feminist de-essentialized subject can be generated from the multiplication, replication and affirmation of feminist constructed subjects. Braidotti suggests that we, as feminists, not yet abandon the historical notion of "Woman" but rather develop in tandem nomadic appropriations of multi-sexed models from within feminism. Braidotti cites Irigaray's multi-sexed mythology of *The Sex Which is Not One* (despite Irigaray's objections to Deleuze), along with Donna Haraway's Cyborg, as "a powerful intervention on the level of political subjectivity in that it proposes a realignment of differences of race, gender, class, age and so on... It promotes a multifaceted location for feminist agency... and it also announces a world beyond gender." ²³ In this way, feminism, and by extension queer theory, can escape the binary dependence implicit in psychoanalysis with a more fluid, nomadic, multi-sex-race-class subjectivity and attain the agency of an embodied subject. There is a further insight to glean from Deleuze, one that concerns "form." As there is no static or singular subject with Deleuze, there is also no essential or pure form. Deleuze and Guattari define abstraction, in direct relation to Pollock's line, not as a self-referential mark or essential form, but as "...a line that delimits nothing, that describes no contour, that no longer goes from one point to another but instead passes between points, that is always declining from the horizontal and the vertical and deviating from the diagonal, that is constantly changing directions, a mutant line of this kind that is without outside or inside, form or background--such a line is truly an abstract line..." ²⁴ John Rajchman, a critic and philosopher of art and architecture, suggests Pollock's lines represent for Deleuze "... a turn from the centered framed, figure/ground organization that European

classicism took to be universal to another uncentered, unlimited, informal, multiple sort of distribution in space and space of distribution." 25 This changes the definition of form from something absolute to something that is ungrounded, formless and uncentered. Rajchman goes on to summarize that Greenbergian formalism's reductive theory of purifying form is embedded within a linear historical trajectory in which all form begins in Platonic ideal form and ends in the modernist monochrome (a historical trajectory that both formalism and its feminist critics subscribe to). So to be "truly" abstract, for Deleuze, not only must the definition of form change from a singular absolute to multiple potentialities, but also, we must understand that within the classical-monochrome trajectory, other forms and other histories exist before and after, intersecting with and passing through that "History." From this perspective, abstraction is not locked in an historical dead end, nor do all the forms it produces "collapse" back into a pseudo universal subjectivity. Rather, multiple even conflicting forms and histories cross over and through one another, "mutating" into unexpected and paradoxical forms and subjects.

If we apply this insight about form in combination with Braidotti's notion of nomadic subjects to the critical interpretation of the works of Thomasos, Clark, Viti and myself, the conundrum of the abstract and socio-political can be examined with a renewed intensity. For example, Thomasos' paintings and wall drawings can not only be read as within the platonic historical trajectory of abstraction, but also of the histories of African quilts and colonial slavery and Thomasos' personal history and the sexual, racial, ethnic, national and geopolitical histories that herstory engenders. Thus generating an intensification of all those differences within ever branching "rhizomatic" multiplications, utilizing a theoretical paradigm that replaces the negative theology of the binary (woman is not man, black is not white, abstraction is not political) with what Rajchman calls a Deleuzian "stammering of 'ands' ...and...and...and." 26

Within this model, we can even begin to re-think the "difficult" proposition that Jacques points to in Clark's work--that of self-authentication within historical forms. Jacques suggests that the difficulty "...with looking at Clark's paintings is that we are forced to cope in an environment of total freedom[,] in a world that seeks to totalize the black experience and rob it of its self-defining properties..." 27 Can we embrace the possibility that artists of color and queer artists may be able to work in forms previously understood to be the result of singular histories, and still express cultural or political specificity without those works being re-appropriated by dominant subjectivity? Here, a Deleuzian nomadic/rhizomatic construct of history intersects and affirms similar questions within postcolonial ideas of hybridity. 28 Although complicated, perhaps even fraught, both allow for the possibility that the forms of singular histories can become "contaminated" with multiple and conflicting histories of individual and collective cultural or political specificity and in turn "mutate" into new forms and new signification of forms.

I admit I am not without my own skepticism. I have no naive illusions that the ideology of pure formalism can easily be overcome. Formalism, and its postmodern and feminist critiques, have both ended in the same historical dead end, because neither a transcendental model of pure form nor a dialectical model of deconstruction has resulted in an escape from the classical-monochrome trajectory of abstraction. From this perspective we can say, "Yes, despite forty years of feminist and poststructuralist critique, the idea of pure formalism is still alive and kicking--bolstered both by those who still believe in the modernist myth and by those who wish for its end."

Despite this critical purgatory, Deleuze does offer very exciting critical possibilities for abstraction. The possibility of an enunciation beyond polarizing theoretical feuds over form vs. concept, aesthetics vs. language, pleasure vs. criticism, etc., must be constituted within a critical paradigm that rigorously examines and recognizes the complex interplay of the limitations and possibilities of all signifying forms and practices, including their varied histories and their imagined futures. As Braidotti suggests, "This is no call for easy pluralism...but rather a passionate plea for the recognition of the need to respect the multiplicity and find forms of action that reflect the complexity--without drowning in it." 29

What does this mean for abstract painting? As I stated earlier, I don't believe abstraction has the ability to become the kind of political agent it was in the early half of the twentieth century. But I do think that the artists who I have mentioned here are wrestling with re-imagining the abstract and the political. I am hopeful of this potential, instead of discouraged by its limits. And, although I have only begun to scratch the surface, I am pretty convinced of Deleuzian constructions. I am also all too aware of Foucault's (and Braidotti's) warning, that it is very difficult to be Deleuzian.

Linda Besemer is an artist who lives and works in Los Angeles. She is a professor of painting and drawing at Occidental College where she also teaches critical studies courses in Women's Studies/Gender studies.

FOOTNOTES

1. "Queer Locations: Race, Space and Sexuality," organized by the Queer Locations Collective, The Humanities Research Institute, University of California, Irvine, May 11-12, 2004.
2. Michael Duncan, "Blinded By Buzzwords" Art In America, Summer 2000, p. 40. This is not really a review of my work or of any artists' works that

were in the exhibition. It's actually a critique of the CD ROM artist statements and interviews that accompanied the exhibition. In all fairness to Mr. Duncan, I have no idea what portion (whole or edited) of my statement he actually heard. The original interview for the CD was over an hour and the CD had many options: the viewer could listen to one minute, five minutes or the whole interview. It should also be noted that Mr. Duncan has been a very strong supporter of my work in curatorial and other critical contexts, for which I am most grateful.

3. For a compelling (and widely overlooked) account of the artistic intentions of the New York School painters, within the context of left-wing political discussions of the '40s and '50s see David Craven, *Abstract Expressionism, As Cultural Critique: dissent during the McCarthy Period*, (Boston: Cambridge University Press, 1999).
4. Barnett Newman, "An Interview with Emile de Antonio" (1969), in Barnett Newman: *Selected Writings and Interviews*, edited by Franklin Rosemont and introduced by Richard Shiff (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990) pp. 307-08.
5. Shapiro, Meyer, "The Liberating Quality of the Avant-Garde Art" *Modern Art: 19th and 20th Centuries Selected Papers*, p. 213.
6. *Quiet As It's Kept*, Curated by David Hammons, Christine König Galerie, Vienna, Austria, May 16-August 3, 2002.
7. Geoffrey Jacques, David Hammons, *Quiet As It's Kept*, Exhibition Catalog (Vienna: Christine König Galerie, 2002) p. 29.
8. Jacques, *Ibid*, p. 30.
9. Jonathan Goodman, "Denyse Thomasos at Lennon Weinberg", *Art in America*, February 1998.
10. Goodman, *Ibid*.
11. Tom Moody, *Artforum*, November 1997.
12. Jacques, *Ibid* p. 35.
13. Olu Oguibe, *NKA: Journal of Contemporary African Art*, Spring 2002 p. 20; quoted by Geoffrey Jacques in *Quiet As It's Kept* exhibition catalog, p. 36.
14. Anthony Viti, Quoted in "Body Work" by Laurie Fitzpatrick, *Art and Understanding*, Issue 17, October 1995.
15. Bill Arning, Press Release, "Elegies" Tibor De Nagy Gallery, New York, NY, October 1993.
16. I would also suggest that all the artists here make paintings that qualify, to some extent, as both paintings and performances; however, Viti's work and his intentions seem distinctly embedded in a synthesis of the two. Furthermore, the extent which "bodies" in performance art problematize subjectivity is a contested area of debate among feminists. However, Amelia Jones makes a convincing argument in favor of bodies and performance art. Particularly relevant to my discussion here is her account of Keith Boadwee's anal expulsive body performance/painting /videos, in *Body Art/Performing the Subject* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998) pp. 99-102.
17. Roberta Smith, "Anthony Viti," *The New York Times*, Galleries: Soho, E38, September 19, 1997.
18. Carol Duncan, "Virility and Domination in Early Twentieth Century Vanguard Painting," in *Feminism and Art History: Questioning the Litany*, edited by Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard (New York: Harper and Row, 1982) p. 311.
19. Mary Kelly, "Reviewing Modernist Criticism" in *Art After Modernism*, edited by Brian Wallis (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1984) p. 89.
20. Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, translated by Brian Massumi, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987) p. 230.
21. *Ibid*, Deleuze and Guattari, p. 276.
22. Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994) p. 158.
23. *Ibid*, Braidotti, p. 170.
24. Deleuze, Guattari, pp. 498-99.
25. Rajchman, John, *Constructions*, Forward by Paul Virilio, (Boston: MIT Press, 1997) pp. 67-68. Many thanks to the architect, Rachel Allen, who first suggested I read Rajchman's work.
26. *Ibid*, Rajchman, p. 71.
27. Jacques, p. 36.
28. Homi Bhabha has articulated, complicated and defined theories of hybridity that are intricately linked with these questions of cultural production, agency and self-authentication. His work, building on Bakhtin, is the foundation of much contemporary "postcolonial" or diasporic art practice. Allan deSouza, in a close, insightful and welcome reading of this article, underscored Bhabha's foundational complication of hybridity by positing the difficulty of the postcolonial subject/author and the art world's adaptation of postcolonial theory, "Hybridity is not easy to espouse, because while the minor voice is hybridizing the colonial voice, the colonial voice is busy appropriating the minor voice and claiming its own hybridity. And following Foucault, that power is never absolute, but always carries within it the seeds of its own destruction/infiltration." This is the nested series of complications that my reading of a queer, racial and gendered deployment of abstraction seeks to infiltrate and question. These radiating complexities of hybridity are a point of departure that I can only begin to build on in the scope of this article. For some primary sources see specifically Homi K. Bhabha "How newness enters the world: Postmodern space, postcolonial times and the trials of cultural translation" and "The postcolonial and the postmodern: The question of agency," in *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge Press, 1994).
29. Braidotti, p. 171.

