

Domesticity And Masculinity In 1950s British Painting

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August 2013

Abstract

This thesis examines how men experienced domesticity in the 1950s in Britain and analyses the role that artistic representations play in the expression and formulation of this masculine selfhood in this context. It considers domesticity at this historical moment as an inherently flexible concept: one that takes in the private spaces of the home as well as more public realms and aspects beyond it, and includes a variety of relationships, both familial and non-familial. At the same time, it highlights the social structures surrounding domesticity in Britain at this time – exemplified by the policies and aims of the welfare state and post-war reconstruction, and their reflection in institutions and social beliefs – particularly their assumptions about specific gender roles, particularly in relation to masculinity, in the context of the family, sexuality and work. As a result, my thesis examines how four male artists operated in this context – as individuals negotiating particular identifications of masculine selfhood within their own private and unstable conceptions of domesticity, in relation to, and sometimes at odds with, the public social structures in Britain around them. It focuses on the art of four male artists working in Britain in the immediate post-war period: John Bratby, Francis Bacon, Keith Vaughan and Victor Pasmore. By placing their work in a wide social and cultural context, including social history, sociology, psychoanalysis, literature, and the popular press, this thesis significantly expands the academic work on modern art in Britain after the Second World War. Furthermore, it begins to interrogate and expand on the relationship between art, domesticity, selfhood, and, more broadly, everyday life. By focusing on the ways in which art and life interact in the work of these artists, it argues that artistic representations, for these artists at this historical moment, serve as ways to negotiate the unstable and seemingly impossible task of selfhood, within the expansive, fluctuating realms of domesticity.

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Acknowledgements

I would not have been able to carry out this research without a studentship from the Arts And Humanities Research Council - I am extremely grateful for their support and feel very privileged to have had the opportunity to spend three years researching a subject that I am passionate about.

This thesis would not have been possible without the advice, encouragement and support of my supervisor, David Peters Corbett. I cannot thank him enough for his suggestions and guidance throughout the researching and writing of this thesis, his good humour and tolerance when I occasionally veered off track, and his help in navigating all the new and unfamiliar challenges that come with doing a PhD.

Being able to study in the school of Art History and World Art Studies at the University of East Anglia has been a tremendous privilege, and I would like to thank the staff there for their support – particularly Sarah Monks, who offered advice and encouragement throughout the process, and Beverley Youngman, whose help and complete know-how has been invaluable during my time at UEA. I have had the privilege of studying alongside a number of talented PhD students over the last three years, and I would like to thank them all for their insights and support – I would particularly like to thank Kate Aspinall, who provided advice, tea-breaks and, occasionally, whiskey.

Outside of UEA, thanks should go to Lisa Tickner at the Courtauld Institute Of Art, whose *Modernism In Britain* MA set me on the path to this PhD, and who continues to provide invaluable advice and encouragement. I'd like to thank the attendees of the British Art Discussion Group in London over the last three years for their enthusiasm and inspiration. Katie Faulkner provided help and support, as ever, all along the way – I am indebted to her sound advice and willingness to hear about the developments of this thesis, as well as my thoughts on pop culture, on lunch-breaks. I am also indebted to those who offered to read over

and copy edit my thesis in its final stages – thank you to Kate Aspinall, Louise Coles, Jen Corcoran, Katie Faulkner, Rosie Hare, and Charlie Waters.

Thanks must also go to the staff at the many libraries and archives I have visited over the last three years, including UEA Library, The British Library, Senate House Library, UCL Library, The Courtauld Library, The Tate Archive, and Aberystwyth School Of Art Museum and Gallery (particularly Neil Holland). I am grateful to Julian Hartnoll for the archival material on Bratby he allowed me to view. I am also very grateful for the opportunities to present this research at conferences at various points over the last three years – I would like to thank the conveners and attendees at those conferences for their input and enthusiasm.

Seeing as this thesis is concerned, in part, with families and personal communities, it seems appropriate to thank my community of friends in London, who have provided constant encouragement, patience and, most importantly, distraction in the moments away from libraries and archives. Thank you Andrew, Catherine, Louise, Katie, Rosie, Natalie, Anna, Dan, Jim, Sarah, Laura, Jen, Holly (x2), Matt, Will, Laurel, and particularly Charlie.

Finally, I would like to thank and dedicate this thesis to my family – for their love and encouragement over the years, for their belief in me and support at all times, and for their tolerance of my continuous student lifestyle. Thank you to my Mum, my Dad, Benedict, Victoria, and Andrew (and the dogs).

Introduction

This thesis is concerned with how men experienced domesticity – as one of the prime social structures and concepts that individuals live within – during the 1950s in Britain, and how they negotiated it in relation to masculine selfhood defined in terms of a mediation between public and private at this particular historical moment. Artworks will be considered as spheres where the public and private can overlap, allowing for the negotiation or reimagining of domesticity and masculinity. At this post-war moment, a sense of home and the domestic – a feeling of belonging, of comfort in a particular place with particular people – was crucial to individuals’ conceptions of selfhood and their place within wider social structures. Domesticity served as an anchor, allowing individuals to ground their lives in some sort of everyday experience. The negotiation of this domesticity and its connections to masculine selfhood through artworks will be the subject of this thesis. It will explore how art and representations are closely intertwined with everyday life; I argue that art flows through life, allowing individuals to conceive of themselves and their relationship to the world.¹ Each of the four following chapters explores how particular artists negotiate domesticity and selfhood on an individual basis, and engages with a number of key questions. How can we think productively about how artists engage with and reject, alter or reimagine experiences of the home, the family and the domestic? Can we begin to uncover, through art, how individuals dealt with this need to formulate a sense of everyday experience from within particular social structures? This thesis responds to these questions by focusing on four British artists working after the Second World War – John Bratby, Francis Bacon, Keith Vaughan and Victor Pasmore – and addresses how they engage with the need to define, reconsider or reflect on their experience of home and family life in their artworks.

¹ Some art historical criticism, particularly in relation to high modernism, has sought to disconnect art from domesticity. One example of this is Christopher Reed’s analysis of how the two have been continually thought of as at odds, from the Impressionist flaneur, through Le Corbusier’s unhomey modernist architecture and Wyndham Lewis’ decrying of works of art designed for “wretched vegetable home existence”, up to the Abstract Expressionist’s rejection of ‘domestic scale’ canvases. See Christopher Reed, *Not At Home: The Suppression Of Domesticity In Modernist Art And Architecture* (Thames and Hudson: London, 1996), pp. 8-11. While this is a concern elsewhere, the question of high modernism specifically and its relationship with the everyday will not be a concern of this thesis.

As I have begun to consider and define these issues, I have found it necessary to settle on a term that will allow me to conceptualise the world of the home and the family. I am using 'domesticity', a term that often refers primarily to the spatial aspects of the domestic realm - the home itself, the building, the rooms. However, domesticity is a highly flexible and expansive concept, which can encompass spaces beyond the home, but that might still be considered related to the home itself or a some kind of definition of home, as well as the relationships that assist in the formulation of a sense of home, which can be familial and non-familial. My definition of domesticity is a flexible one, then, specifically because the artists in this thesis produce representations or interpretations of domesticity that shift and vary. By its very nature, domesticity is defined, to some extent, by individual negotiation, and the works of these male artists make this process explicit. Therefore, I am interested specifically in how artists can use their art as a means of defining or exploring particular kinds of domestic life, and how their representations and lived experiences can be placed within a much broader social context. Throughout the research and writing for this thesis, grappling with the issues raised by a study like this has been a consistent challenge. With each artist, it has been necessary to redefine or reconsider what domesticity might constitute and how far it might stretch, from the limits of the familial interior for Bratby to much more open-ended definitions for Bacon, Vaughan and Pasmore. A more malleable interpretation of what constitutes domesticity for individuals has been both essential and highly productive, allowing me to approach each artist on their own terms as they try to reconcile individual need with the larger social structures in which they operate. This is a more realistic conceptualisation of what domesticity might actually mean for individuals generally, living in it day in, day out. As a result, this study reflects on, from chapter to chapter, the variety in approaches to domesticity, their development over time, and the way conceptions of and beliefs about domesticity influenced and permeated much wider social beliefs about gender, housing, reconstruction, sexuality, family life, and nationhood.

My focus on domesticity centres on a specific historical moment in Britain that is marked by both recovery and decline. Immediate post-war recovery in Britain came under the Labour government, who implemented the

recommendations of the Beveridge Report and established the welfare state. In 1951, the Conservatives were elected in favour of Labour, though they retained their welfare reforms while presiding over a period of liberal capitalism and steady economic growth. The 1950s were a period when consumerism gradually became a prominent part of British society, with prosperity assisted by the end of rationing in 1954, the lifting of hire purchase restrictions, and the introduction of commercial television in 1955. If Britain experienced a gradual strengthening of its economic position at home, its international status was in decline. The USSR and the USA became the world's dominant powers at the end of the war, while Britain found itself continually reliant on US aid. Additionally, the British Empire was in the process of disintegration and incidents such as Suez Crisis in 1956 further undermined Britain's political and military influence on an international stage.² The result was a 'turning inwards' on a national scale, towards British traditions and interests, and, more generally, towards the home, the family and the individual. The family and the individual in the home become central to the drive towards national reconstruction. This manifested itself in different ways, from the gendered roles implied in the legislation of the welfare state, to the enormous rehousing and rebuilding projects that followed the effects of the blitz and continued well into the 1950s. This inward-looking attitude also found expression in the 1951 Festival Of Britain, a nationwide celebration that centred on an exhibition at London's South Bank. The South Bank Exhibition imagined a national past built on consensus, democracy and community while also pointing to an ideal future where Britain would continue to have influence on the world stage.³ The Festival was a "family party", addressing the individual household as much as the national community, and

² On the social and political history of post-war Britain, see David Kynaston, *Austerity Britain, 1945-51* (Bloomsbury: London, 2007); David Kynaston, *Family Britain, 1951-57* (Bloomsbury: London, 2009); Peter Hennessy, *Never Again: Britain 1945-51* (Jonathan Cape: London, 1992); Dominic Sandbrook, *Never Had It So Good: A History Of Britain From Suez To The Beatles* (Little, Brown: London, 2005).

³ On the Festival Of Britain and its aims, see Becky E. Conekin, *'The Autobiography Of A Nation': 1951 Festival Of Britain* (Manchester University Press: Manchester, 2003). It is possible to see these aims in action in the Festival handbook – see Ian Cox, *The South Bank Exhibition: A Guide To The Story It Tells* (Her Majesty's Stationery Office: London, 1951).

designed to foster a mood of collectivity that would steer Britain towards continued recovery and a hopeful future.⁴

If political and social developments at this particular historical moment in Britain emphasised ideals of community, the family and the home in response to the need for reconstruction alongside Britain's changing international status, then how did individuals begin to position themselves in relation to these dominant ideas? Questions about individual selfhood are important here: how is it experienced and negotiated in terms of wider social structures that influence or help to form assumptions about how domestic life should be lived? For the four artists in this thesis, a negotiation of the masculine self is key, and the complex connections between masculinity, the self and their expression or identification within domesticity will be drawn out here. I am interested in how masculinity is engaged with or experienced by figures who may or may not fit particular masculine roles that are encouraged by society, and how domesticity – a sense of belonging, of home – is affected or challenged by this. What becomes of domesticity, already highly flexible, when male individuals begin to interrogate or elaborate on particular masculine identifications? My research explores how, from artist to artist, masculinity can offer comfortable roles and a complete lack of anxiety, as well as the opportunity for subversion and the possibility of a great deal of personal difficulty. Masculine identifications appear to be formed and affected by personal concepts of domesticity to some extent, just as personal concepts of domesticity are formed and affected by masculine identifications. The links are rarely without difficulty, and vary from individual to individual. The benefit of thinking in this way is to ask how individuals – artists specifically – negotiate masculinity within a society that may limit or marginalise them, or may, in contrast, allow them to operate with relative ease. The interest here, then, is in the range of responses to the various realities of masculinity and domesticity in post-war Britain – the seeking out of a particular domesticity, or sense of belonging, alongside the need to define particular kinds of masculinity.

⁴ The Festival was described as a “family party” by Archbishop Fisher at its closing ceremony – he is quoted in Mary Banham and Bevis Hillier, eds., *A Tonic To The Nation: The Festival Of Britain 1951* (Thames and Hudson: London, 1976), p. 26.

These questions appear to have been at the centre of cultural debates in post-war Britain. Writing at the end of *The Angry Decade*, his survey of the new literature and culture of the 1950s, Kenneth Allsop began to summarise what he deemed to be the specific consciousness of the creative individual, placing him (and it was, in the vast majority of cases, a 'him' at this point) alongside the ideal citizen of the post-war welfare state.⁵ For Allsop, the latter was a

£16-a-week steady, pipe-smoking artisan with a safe job in the local works, a New Town house with a primrose front door, an attractive wife and two 'kiddies', and a life well balanced between the TV set and the neatly-tended garden.

This vision of the male British citizen – the worker and the domesticity-focused family man – was slightly at odds with his typical 1950s “dissentient” writer’s persona, exemplified by figures like John Osborne, Colin Wilson and Kingsley Amis. While Allsop concedes that many of these writers do live in an approximation of this ideal post-war way of life, he emphasises their ability or desire to reject or deviate from it. In doing so, they step off “a warm, well-lit stage, where the convector-fire burns brightly and the ‘contemporary’ armchairs form a tight, safe circle, into the outer darkness” and become “one of those lost souls in search of his cards of identity”.⁶ It is crucial that Allsop frames this social ideal – interrogated, critiqued or rejected by writers, as he argues – as specifically domestic in nature, centred around the home and the family, but also as a stage from which you could step off, into a space where identity seems less certain. Here, domesticity involves the performance of a specific, ideal role but it is also open to deviation or negotiation, particularly through culture. It is this tension, which Allsop frames neatly in terms of the choice between the playing of

⁵ Though Allsop included a few female writers in his survey, the focus is overwhelmingly male, and he begins by dissecting the title of ‘Angry Young Men’ as a descriptor for contemporary literature. Lynne Segal has noted the lack of female voices in British literature at this time, bar a few notable exceptions, and how this affected how both genders formed their worldviews: “What was needed was a whole new way – a collective way – of looking at the problem of marriage, childbearing, sexuality and employment. But such thinking was not available to either women or men at the time...” See Lynne Segal, *Slow Motion: Changing Masculinities, Changing Men* (Virago: London, 1997), p. 25.

⁶ Kenneth Allsop, *The Angry Decade: A Survey of the Cultural Revolt of the 1950s* (John Goodchild Publishers: Wendover, 1985 (first published 1958)), p. 204.

specific roles on stage or stepping into an uncertain darkness, which my thesis will explore and complicate.

Between Comfort and Constraint: The Family In Post-War Britain

“There she go again – just listen to the poor little mite. Call yourself a father, do you, Mr Lewis?”

“I not only call myself one, Mrs Davies; I am one. At least, so my wife tells me”.

- Kingsley Amis, *That Uncertain Feeling*⁷

Jo: What time have you got to be up in the morning?

Geoff: I don't go to school tomorrow. I'll stay here and clear this place up a bit. And make you a proper meal. Now go to sleep, hey?

Jo: Geoffrey!

Geoff: What's wrong now?

Jo [laughing]: You're just like a big sister to me.

- Shelagh Delaney, *A Taste Of Honey*⁸

Domesticity and family life are the primary subjects for literature in Britain during the 1950s.⁹ Plays, novels and poems are consistently oriented around the home and its relationships, not only as means to explore the nature of the post-war domestic realm itself, but also as a way of addressing the broader issues in British culture at this time – class, gender, sexuality, politics, war. The writing from this period contains a seemingly infinite number of ruminations on domesticity, and I have chosen just two to begin to think about how this was framed in literary culture. In the first, John Lewis, the married assistant librarian in Kingsley Amis' *That Uncertain Feeling*, is scolded by his neighbour for not properly taking care of his children while his wife is out of the house for a few hours. Restless, and contemplating the possibility of an affair with another

⁷ Kingsley Amis, *That Uncertain Feeling* (The New English Library: London, 1964 (first published 1955)), p. 89.

⁸ Shelagh Delaney, *A Taste Of Honey* (Eyre Methuen: London, 1972 (first published 1959)), pp. 53-4.

⁹ This is the argument put forward by Peter J. Kalliney in *Cities of Affluence and Anger: A Literary Geography of Modern Englishness* (University of Virginia Press: London, 2006), p. 115: “Angry writers continually adapted and reworked domestic literary forms to meet their diverse aesthetic and political commitments”. You only have to take a broad sweep of the literary landscape at this time – from John Osborne, Kingsley Amis, Alan Sillitoe, John Wain, Shelagh Delaney, Phillip Larkin, and Sylvia Plath to name a few of the most prominent examples – to see how domesticity and family life was an integral part of literature at this point.

woman, he seems distinctly uncomfortable when left alone in the domestic realm to occupy the role of father. In Shelagh Delaney's *A Taste Of Honey*, meanwhile, 17-year-old Jo is pregnant at the start of the second act, left without the father of her child, who is away at sea, and her mother, who has abandoned her to marry a younger, richer lover. She finds companionship with Geoffrey, a homosexual art student who moves in and takes care of her during her pregnancy, only to be forced to leave (with Jo unaware) when her neglectful mother returns. These two snippets of dialogue demonstrate an awareness about the roles people adopt within the domestic realm, often not entirely successfully, as well as paradox of the post-war nuclear family – an unstable but enduring entity at this time. So, John begins an affair before settling back into relative domestic harmony, while Jo finds a temporary, makeshift family life with Geoffrey before her mother moves back in. The experiences and emotions of these literary characters point to an inherent flexibility and instability at the heart of post-war domesticity, built on relationships that can appear both generative and constraining, with individuals at its heart, seeking companionship, comfort and a sense of place against the backdrop of social structures that rigidly defined how domestic life was supposed to play out.

The family and the domestic world hold a particularly resonant place in British culture in the post-war period. For George Orwell, writing during the Second World War, England was a nation that could be best described as a family, with its “private language and its common memories, and at the approach of an enemy it closes its ranks. A family with the wrong members in control – that, perhaps, is as near as one can come to describing England in a phrase”.¹⁰ Orwell's sense of a divided collectivity was echoed and smoothed out ten years later by Humphrey Jennings, in his Festival of Britain film *Family Portrait*. Over an opening shot of someone flicking through a family album, taking in photographs of seaside holidays, Christmas celebrations and, tellingly, blitzed homes, the narrator frames the British nation as a family, “with all the unspoken affection and outspoken words that all families have”.¹¹ In Jennings' film, the

¹⁰ George Orwell, *The Lion and the Unicorn: Socialism and the English Genius* (Secker and Warburg: London, 1962), pp. 28-9.

¹¹ Humphrey Jennings, *Family Portrait A Film On The Theme Of The Festival Of Britain 1951*, 24 mins, Wessex Film Productions.

nation as a family is key to establishing a collective past, built on the memories of war but also long-term history, as well as looking to the future. At the end, the film returns to the family album, finishing on a shot of a blank page - the next chapter in the family story.

In fact, the family appears to have served a crucial role in cultural and social debates around the reconstruction of Britain after the Second World War. For some, it represented the preservation of British values in the face of Americanisation, while for others, in Britain and in the U.S., domesticity became a crucial sphere of safety and control in the face of Cold War anxiety.¹² As I have noted, historians and sociologists have often highlighted a general 'turning inwards' in Britain at this time, in reaction to war, the nuclear threat and a need to rebuild and recover, and this applied not only on a national level - in terms of foreign policy and the development of the family-oriented welfare state - but also on a psychological, individual level. Psychoanalysis played a specific, all-encompassing role here, from its definitions and processes for individual selfhood that were rooted in the domestic world and its familial relationships, to its increasing emphasis on the importance of that selfhood for wider social and national well-being. In effect, as Juliet Mitchell has argued, the social reconstruction of the nation was intertwined with the political reconstruction of the family, and psychoanalysis played an influential part in this. Psychoanalytic debates of the 1930s led to an increasing focus on the mother and child relationship in post-war popular psychoanalysis, heavily influenced by the work of Melanie Klein, just as social policy was looking in the same direction.¹³ Policy and theory almost seem to have supported and echoed each other, agreeing with and reiterating the other's claims. On one side there were the Kleinian psychoanalysts who wrote widely read texts on family life and broadcasted advice and guidance to British homes. These were figures like John Bowlby, who argued that good mental health was the result of "a warm, intimate and

¹² Elizabeth Wilson has argued that the idea of "a new, democratic and classless family" could contribute to consensus while also representing "the preservation of British, or sometimes English, values in the face of the vulgar and cheapening influence of the Americanisation threatened by the mass media". See Elizabeth Wilson, *Only Halfway To Paradise: Women in Post-War Britain, 1945-1968* (Tavistock: London, 1980), pp. 192-3. Beatriz Colomina has explored how domesticity became a sphere of focus during the Cold War in the U.S. in *Domesticity at War* (Actar: Barcelona, 2006), and this appears to be reflected in other Western countries.

¹³ Juliet Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* (Allen Lane: London, 1974), pp. 228-31.

continuous relationship” between mother and child and warned against deprivation, particularly by working mothers, and its links to delinquency.¹⁴ There was also D.W. Winnicott, who echoed Bowlby’s emphasis on the importance of familial relationships for satisfactory selfhood, while also, in later writings, looked further outwards, to the point where “the family leads on to all manner of groupings, groupings that get wider and wider until they reach the size of the local society and society in general”.¹⁵ For Winnicott in particular, the family was the basis for a successful democratic society – personal life, for Winnicott and his contemporaries, became connected to, as Eli Zaretsky has termed it, “social rationalisation and integration”.¹⁶ On the other side, in government policy, figures such as Richard Titmuss argued that British citizens had endured wartime bombing because social units – families and communities – had, for the most part, remained intact. This, for Titmuss, made clear the importance of family life as the basis for society: “Staying at home, keeping the family together, and pursuing many of the ordinary activities of life made adjustment easier”.¹⁷ This mantra would be carried over into British social policy after the war.

With the family and the domestic sphere at the centre of reconstruction in Britain, formed by government policy, influenced by the previous and on-going threat of war, and shaped by the ideas of psychoanalysis, certain roles and expectations were imposed on those occupying British families at this time. These were reflected in the new houses and flats built in British cities and new towns after the war, which were intended for the ideal family unit – the nuclear family. In fact, the connections between the family and the nation were

¹⁴ See John Bowlby, *Child Care and the Growth of Love*, abridged and edited by Margaret Fry (Penguin: London, 1965), p. 77.

¹⁵ Winnicott’s writings from this period are brought together in collections such as *The Child and the Outside World: Studies In Developing Relationships*, ed. Janet Hardenberg (Tavistock: London, 1957) and *Home Is Where We Start From: Essays By A Psychoanalyst*, compiled and edited by Claire Winnicott, Ray Shepherd and Madeleine Davis (Penguin: Middlesex, 1986). Winnicott’s later quote comes from ‘The Child In the Family Group’ in *Home Is Where We Start From*, pp. 128-41, p. 140.

¹⁶ Eli Zaretsky, ‘One Large Secure Solid Background’: Melanie Klein and the Origins of the British Welfare State’ in *Psychoanalysis And History*, Vol. 1, No. 2, 1999, pp. 136-54, pp. 149-50. For further discussion of the links between Kleinian psychoanalysis and the welfare state within the context of the history of psychoanalysis, see Eli Zaretsky, *Secrets Of The Soul: A Social and Cultural History of Psychoanalysis* (Alfred A Knopf: New York, 2004).

¹⁷ See Richard Titmuss, *Problems Of Social Policy* (Palgrave MacMillan: Basingstoke, 2002), p. 349-50.

emphasised even in the rhetoric surrounding post-war house building; in 1952, the then Housing Minister Harold Macmillan stated that “the home is the basis of the family, just as the family is the basis of the nation”.¹⁸ Within these homes, and after a period of war when, by necessity, families had been disrupted as women stepped into serving men’s jobs and children were evacuated from cities, it was vital that individuals occupied their traditional familial roles correctly as the nation recovered. Many women returned to the home, as men went back to work and, in the face of general anxiety about the decline in the British population, influential figures across the political spectrum pushed a ‘pronatalist’ attitude, as Denise Riley has argued.¹⁹ While a higher proportion of women than ever continued to work, British society, built from the end of the Second World War on the welfare state, largely assumed that domestic life would operate in terms of a more traditional work/home division along gendered lines – the husband as the father and breadwinner, and the wife as mother and housewife. No other possibilities appear to have even been considered. Beveridge’s welfare state, intended to eradicate the ‘Five Giant Evils’ of want, disease, ignorance, squalor and idleness and unfurled across a number of acts that established universal education and healthcare, security against unemployment, and new housing, assumed the almost universal existence of the nuclear family unit split along these gendered lines. Stephanie Spencer has highlighted how “membership of the welfare state was couched in terms of reciprocal duty between husband and wife, and between citizen and nation state” – men provided for the children that were Britain’s future, just as women raised them, and this is reflected in the way that state paid and supported family units, so that they could support the state.²⁰ The welfare state’s roles were observed in action by sociologists such as Michael Young and Peter Willmott, who studied and compared post-war life in Bethnal Green with a New Town outside of London. They identified a “new kind of

¹⁸ Macmillan is quoted in Kynaston, 2009, p. 54.

¹⁹ See Denise Riley, ‘The Free Mothers’: Pronatalism and Working Women in Industry at the End of the Last War in Britain’ in *History Workshop Journal*, 1981, Vol. 11, No. 1, pp. 59-119. For more on attitudes to children and families at this time, and their impact on women, see Denise Riley, *War In The Nursery: Theories of Child and Mother* (Virago: London, 1983).

²⁰ Stephanie Spencer, *Gender, Work and Education in Britain in the 1950s* (Palgrave MacMillan: Basingstoke, 2005), p. 30. Elizabeth Wilson has also highlighted the strict prescription of gender roles in the welfare state in the previously cited *Only Halfway To Paradise*. For a full history of the welfare state, see Nicholas Timmins, *The Five Giants: A Biography Of The Welfare State* (HarperCollins: London, 2001).

companionship between man and woman”, where the two genders worked together to share some household tasks equally.²¹ However, the extent to which this was the case for most families in the post-war period is open to debate – if commentators were inclined to see an increased blurring of gender roles and a growing equality, it is likely to have only been on a small scale in individual homes.

In light of these aspects of post-war domestic life, it seems fitting to turn to Elizabeth Wilson’s thoughts on the family, written nearly twenty-five years after the establishment of the welfare state, which emphasise its contradictory nature:

It plays what is in many ways a repressive role on behalf of the State, not only psychologically but also at the level of economic functioning, and yet at the same time offers the individual a unique opportunity for intimacy, comfort, and emotional support.²²

Writing from a feminist perspective, Wilson picks out the constraining aspects of post-war family life just as she acknowledges its joys, aspects that were implicit in the quotes that opened this section – Amis’ John contemplating fatherhood; Delaney’s pregnant Jo finding temporary comfort with Geoffrey, before her mother returns. This is the view of family life I wish to draw out of this analysis: hopeful and oriented towards the future, as well as mired in assumptions about tradition and the past; capable of producing comfort and happiness, as well as being repressive and limiting. My interest is in how individuals negotiate their individual roles within its structures. It is worth noting that so far I have leant heavily on feminist analyses of post-war family life. While these studies address gender in this period and have proved extremely helpful, they are focused on the experiences of women. My thesis will focus on masculinity, in order to ask many similar questions. How did men operate in relation to the structures of the nuclear family, and what of those individuals who found themselves excluded from or at odds with these structures? What conflicts and negotiations arise in the gap between social definitions of familial relationships and the actual

²¹ Michael Young and Peter Willmott, *Family and Kinship in East London* (Penguin: London, 2007), p. 30.

²² Elizabeth Wilson, *Women and the Welfare State* (Tavistock: London, 1977), p. 9.

relationships that make up family life? How does art translate, challenge or illuminate experience of family life, and how does it connect to or interact with society around it?

Between Ideals and 'Inverts': Masculinity

We all hate home
And having to be there:
I detest my room,
Its specially-chosen junk,
The good books, the good bed,
And my life, in perfect order...
- Philip Larkin, 'Poetry Of Departures'²³

The voice in Philip Larkin's 'Poetry Of Departures' addresses a particular dilemma that was attributed to some heterosexual men in post-war Britain. The passage above attacks the domestic sphere – its permanence, its calm, its predictability and boredom – having heard about another man who “chucked up everything/And just cleared off”. By the end of the poem, that other option has come to seem just as staid and predictable (“so artificial/Such a deliberate step back”) and Larkin's speaker is back where he started – unsatisfied, but unlikely to do anything about it. What Larkin saw as the trappings and boredom of day-to-day life and its key elements – marriage, family, work - became a recurrent subject in his poetry and in his letters to Monica Jones. Larkin's worries appear to come down to a familiar dilemma in this period – between individualism and conformity, in small terms and also in much larger ones. On May 1st 1955, he voices these concerns to Monica:

Marriage wd be a huge change, wdn't it – I fear it for that partly. Partly, again, I'm very self-centred, and I fear not being able to support the change to basic unselfishness I feel marriage entails – I don't mean I'm used to having the biggest egg and so on so much as that I've usually taken great comfort in solitude and not being bothered to consider other

²³ Phillip Larkin, 'Poetry Of Departures', *Collected Poems*, ed. Anthony Thwaite (The Marvell Press and Faber and Faber: Victoria/London, 2003), p. 64.

people... And partly I'm afraid of the bigness, the awfulness, of marriage – 'til death do us part'.²⁴

Tellingly, Larkin's only justification for marriage, which he explains later in the letter, is that he would be able to provide for Monica so that she no longer needed to work. From not getting the biggest egg to marriage's sense of finality, Larkin brings together several distinctly male concerns about domesticity and family life – the sense that everyone else was doing it, that it offered possibilities of comfort and permanence in exchange for the sacrifice of a certain amount of individuality and freedom. This is, of course, just one masculine voice from this period, though Larkin sets up many of the questions I wish to ask about the relationship between domesticity, family life and gender – how did individuals negotiate their positions within these structures? How were the limits and expectations of family lived by those who came under their heterosexual assumptions, and those who didn't?

I demonstrated in the previous section how the welfare state, influenced by psychoanalysis and other, general social assumptions, prescribed particular gender roles for its citizens, and this gave men specific ideal options: breadwinner, father, husband. As Larkin's words attest, the expectation that men would conform to these roles was something some found difficult to handle. In British literature at this time, there are countless examples of male characters acting as voices for these concerns – John Osborne's Jimmy Porter, who rails against his wife Alison, the class system, and his sense of helplessness in *Look Back In Anger*; Kingsley Amis' Jim Dixon, who struggles to conform to the demands of his job as a university lecturer in *Lucky Jim*; Alan Sillitoe's Arthur Seaton, whose drinking and infidelity represent a rejection of masculine ideals in *Saturday Night, Sunday Morning*; and, more cerebral in nature perhaps, Colin Wilson's *The Outsider*, which reflected on a male individual's sense of dislocation from society.²⁵ These representations of and meditations on masculinity in this

²⁴ Phillip Larkin, *Letters To Monica*, ed. Anthony Thwaite (Faber and Faber: London, 2010), p. 157.

²⁵ See John Osborne, *Look Back In Anger* (Faber and Faber: London, 1975 (first published 1957)); Kingsley Amis, *Lucky Jim* (Penguin: London, 1982 (first published 1954)); Alan Sillitoe, *Saturday Night, Sunday Morning* (W. H. Allen: London, 1975 (first published 1958)); Colin Wilson, *The Outsider* (Gollancz: London, 1990 (first published 1956)).

writing have been explored by a number of literary critics.²⁶ Several factors underlie these anxieties about masculinity for a number of prominent heterosexual men in British society at this time. There are male experiences of the Second World War – as soldiers, or as other figures in the war effort. The return to peacetime life led to a change in expectations for men – from sacrifice and heroism to being members of a companionate family unit, doing jobs that women had taken over during the war, and that some women continued to occupy. What's more, possibilities for further sacrifice were few and far between – the on-going Cold War suggested that the shadow of the atomic bomb had put paid to the need for individual male heroism once and for all, just as Britain's status on the world stage was beginning to decline. Additionally, just as men were being expected to conform to particular familial roles, the culture and society around them appeared to be encouraging a more general kind of conformity. The rise of mass culture and what was interpreted as an increasing 'Americanisation' of British culture caused a great deal of anxiety, both in terms of the threat to male individuality and a perceived feminisation of society in general, through the increase in consumerism.²⁷ Larkin's ambivalence – his dislike of domesticity, but also his reluctance to seek out an alternative – becomes unsurprising in this context.

However, it is worth stating that this wasn't the case for all men – some undoubtedly found themselves happy and able to fit, more or less, these prescribed notions of masculinity inside and outside family life quite easily. Others, meanwhile, did not fit this paradigm at all – homosexual men in Britain at this time were placed on the margins of society by the law and the assumptions about the correct expressions of sexuality and family life in the welfare state and

²⁶ For example, see Susan Brook, *Literature And Cultural Criticism In The 1950s: The Feeling Male Body* (Palgrave MacMillan: Basingstoke, 2007); Peter Kalliney, *Cities of Affluence and Anger: A Literary Geography of Modern Englishness* (University of Virginia Press: London, 2006); Michelene Wandor, *Look Back In Gender: Sexuality and the Family in Post-War British Drama* (Methuen: London, 1987).

²⁷ There is an extensive literature on anxieties about masculinity at this time, referring to both Britain and the U.S – see, for example, James Gilbert, *Men In The Middle: Searching For Masculinity in the 1950s* (The University Of Chicago Press: London, 2005); Michael Leja, *Reframing Abstract Expressionism: Subjectivity and Painting in the 1940s* (Yale University Press: London, 1993); as well as Lynne Segal's previously cited study. Victoria De Grazia is just one example of someone who has commented on the gendering of consumption in this context – see Victoria de Grazia and Ellen Furlough, eds., *The Sex Of Things: Gender and Consumption in Historical Perspective* (University of California Press: London, 1996), pp. 1-9.

psychoanalysis. The queer figures characterised by the popular press – the heavily made-up West End quean, and the masculine predatory queer man – were interpreted as threats to the British government’s familial, reconstructive aims and carefully gendered and prescribed notions of citizenship. These men were operating against the ideal masculine roles set out by the new welfare state, while the narratives of effeminacy and corruption that were imposed on queer experience at this time placed them at the centre of national and Empirical decline.²⁸ However, just as the turn to the family had shaped the roles, responsibilities and anxieties of heterosexuals, it was also beginning to affect the experiences of some homosexual men in other ways. A ‘respectable’ form of homosexuality emerged at this time that was focused around domesticity and private relationships.²⁹ This form of homosexuality was legitimated by the Wolfenden Report, which was the product of a committee on homosexual offences and prostitution that first met in 1954 and heard from a number of heterosexual and homosexual witnesses over a number of years. In 1957, the Report’s main conclusion was that “homosexual behaviour between consenting adults in private be no longer a criminal offence”, and this eventually (after much public debate) led to the passing of the Sexual Offences Act in 1967.³⁰ The problems of the Report’s findings have been well documented: they were tailored to the experiences of men who could afford or had access to respectable, private lodgings, further marginalising queer figures who did not operate in these spheres.³¹ What these various issues surrounding homosexuality in Britain at this time point to are a further range of anxieties surrounding masculinity – what was acceptable, and what wasn’t – as well as evidence of extensive social debate and change. Crucially, what appears to be at the heart of these debates, just as it was for heterosexual men, is domesticity and family life – what constitutes acceptable private expressions of masculinity, and to some extent

²⁸ On the marginalisation of queer figures at this time in relation to reconstruction, see Matt Houlbrook, *Queer London: Perils and Pleasures in the Sexual Metropolis, 1918-1957* (University of Chicago Press: London, 2006), pp. 141-9 and pp. 236-9 and Richard Hornsey, *The Spiv And The Architect: Unruly Life In Post-War London* (University of Minnesota Press: London, 2010), pp. 1-33.

²⁹ See Houlbrook, pp. 195-218.

³⁰ See *Report of Committee of Homosexual Offences and Prostitution* (Her Majesty’s Stationery Office: London, 1957), p. 115.

³¹ Houlbrook, p. 243.

sexuality, according to public dictates. The expression and identification of gender by men, and its mediation between public and private spheres, will be a crucial element of this thesis: how are these various forms of masculinity expressed and acted within the very specific social structures of post-war Britain?

In her influential study on masculinity in the late twentieth century, Lynne Segal begins by looking back to the 1950s. She finds mixed messages and confused experiences - heterosexual men being encouraged to become domestic partners, but the strict gendered division of labour in the home all but remaining; the continuation of national service, which trained men to be fighters, though gave them nothing to fight for; and an overwhelming social discourse that victimised women and homosexuals, as well as the “hearth and home”, as threats to individual masculinity.³² This picture gives a broad view of masculinity on the cusp of change, just as I have begun to illustrate. Men’s roles were clearly in a state of flux at this point after the war, and this generated a significant amount of anxiety and confusion. This led to a turn to a specific ideal sense of masculinity (individual, virile, heroic) in culture, held up in contrast to the ideal masculinity of the welfare state (breadwinner, husband, father) and its perceived failures, as well as those masculinities that were considered unacceptable and duly marginalised. What we are in fact dealing with here is the interaction, on both a national and individual scale, between different types of masculinities, something that has been the concern of theories of masculinities for some time. For example, R.W. Connell’s concept of hegemonic masculinity, clarified and expanded in an article written with James W. Messerschmidt, argues that one specific definition of masculinity dominates over all others in a given society. It is not normal in the statistical sense – rarely adhered to by the majority of men, it remains an ideal – though it is normative in that it sets up a particular standard of being.³³ They go on to argue that in reality a plurality and hierarchy of masculinities exist, operating relative to each other and hegemonic masculinity, as well as to types of femininities.³⁴

³² Segal, pp. 1-25.

³³ R.W. Connell and James W. Messerschmidt, ‘Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept’, *Gender and Society*, Vol. 19, No. 6, December 2005, pp. 829-59, p. 832.

³⁴ Connell and Messerschmidt, pp. 832-33.

For Connell and Messerschmidt, a relationship or challenge to hegemonic masculinity is embodied, and this builds on the idea that gender is written onto the body through culture, language and the social field and 'performed', as argued by Judith Butler.³⁵ Their emphasis on a range of masculinities operating in relation to each other also speaks to the work of literary theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and her work on historical and social definitions of homosexuality and heterosexuality and their negotiation in literature.³⁶ In terms of art history specifically, the relationship between art and masculinities is a surprisingly underexplored topic, outside a select number of studies.³⁷ Lisa Tickner has highlighted how, at the beginning of the twentieth century in Britain, "new kinds of harsh, procreative, and virile masculinities were appropriated" in response to a perceived feminisation of art and life. Besides pointing to the seemingly continuous 'crisis of masculinity' in modern life (which continues right up to the present day), Tickner's outline of the way in which gendered artistic subjects are formed is key. The gendered artistic subject is "both structured and structuring", affected by social forces as well as individual agency, with identities formed out of fiction and reality, past and present, complexly and simultaneously.³⁸ This remains a key framework for engaging with the work and identifications of male artists later in the twentieth century.

This range of academic writing demonstrates that not only was masculinity a particular focus in 1950s Britain, but that it can also be conceptualised as unstable and open to negotiation. The idea that masculinities

³⁵ See Connell and Messerschmidt, pp. 851-2 and Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (Routledge: London, 1999). For Butler, gender is something that is not preordained through biological characteristics, but produced, over time, through embodiment and influenced by social and cultural factors.

³⁶ See Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosexual Desire* (Columbia University Press: New York, 1985), and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology Of The Closet* (University Of California Press: Berkeley, 1990).

³⁷ Some examples include Leja's previously cited study on Abstract Expressionism, plus David Hopkins, *Dada's Boys: Masculinity After Duchamp* (Yale University Press: London, 2007); Gerald N. Izenberg, *Modernism And Masculinity: Mann, Wedekind, Kandinsky Through World War I* (University Of Chicago Press: Chicago, 2000); Amy Lyford, *Surrealist Masculinities: Gender Anxiety And The Aesthetics Of Post-World War I Reconstruction* (University Of California Press: London, 2007).

³⁸ Lisa Tickner, 'Men's Work? Masculinity and Modernism' in *Visual Culture: Images and Interpretations*, eds. Norman Bryson, Michael Ann Holly and Keith Moxey (Wesleyan University Press: London, 1994), pp. 42-82, p. 47 in particular. On gender and modernism more generally, see Lisa Tickner, *Modern Life And Modern Subjects: British Art In The Early Twentieth Century* (Yale University Press: London, 2000).

exist, in relation to each other, to a dominant masculinity, to femininity, to socially acceptable and unacceptable definitions of sexuality, is a crucial one for this thesis. Additionally, the idea that masculinities are explored or negotiated in relation to culture – through literature for Sedgwick, through art for Tickner – will also be key. Cultural expressions or representations become the sphere where a private sense of selfhood meet social structures and more public expectations of what constitutes masculinity in Britain at this time. The focus of this thesis will be on how individuals negotiate or interrogate particular expressions of masculinity in relation to the expectations, structures, relationships and spaces of family life and domesticity.

Between Home and Society: Domesticity

This is in many respects a good and comely life, one founded on care, affection, a sense of the small group if not of the individual. It is elaborate and disorderly and yet sober: it is not chintzy or kittenish or whimsical or 'feminized'.

- Richard Hoggart, *The Uses Of Literacy*³⁹

In his 1957 study on working class life and the changes and effects it encountered following mass literacy, Richard Hoggart paints a detailed picture of working class domesticity, built around his own memories and anecdotes, in a chapter he titles 'Landscape With Figures – A Setting'. Hoggart's text is regularly cited in studies of 1950s British culture and it adheres to many of our assumptions about domestic life at this time, focusing on the key figures of the mother ("the pivot of the home, as it is practically the whole of her world") and the father ("the 'master in his own house'").⁴⁰ He also describes the home, centred on privacy, the living room, food and familial relationships: a "cluttered and congested setting, a burrow deeply away from the outside world".⁴¹ At the same time, Hoggart places the home at the heart of its neighbourhood, since "home may be private, but the front door opens out of the living-room on to the street", which are themselves "small worlds, each as homogenous and well-

³⁹ Richard Hoggart, *The Uses Of Literacy* (Penguin: London, 1992), p. 40.

⁴⁰ Hoggart, p. 41 and p. 54.

⁴¹ Hoggart, p. 36.

defined as a village”.⁴² Hoggart’s impression of domesticity is unquestionably idealistic, a conservative approximation of reality for a certain class of British people built on half-truths and generalisations, but it amounts to a narrative that reflects what many people considered desirable. In post-war Britain, just as government policy and social expectations surrounding the family affected ideals of masculinity, so it also helped to form ideals of domesticity. Consequently, while I am interested in one sense in how male individuals negotiated particular masculine identifications within this context, I am also concerned with how individuals engaged with this prevailing notion of domesticity, so closely linked to the nuclear family unit as Hoggart demonstrates, in artistic representations and in day-to-day life. What relationships make up family life for men who adhered to acceptable forms of masculinity, and those who didn’t? Where do the boundaries and spaces of domesticity fall for these men (can it ever be as simple as opening the front door into the street)? And to what extent do attitudes to domesticity affect their individual worldviews, reaching beyond the home to the community, the city, and the nation?

Early on, I defined domesticity broadly, in terms that take in Hoggart’s ideal domestic vignette but are also open to divergences from it, seeking to keep it open to a variety of relationships and spaces, across spheres. I feel able to do this because numerous architectural historians have demonstrated the constructed nature of domesticity in recent studies. As writers like Hilde Heynen and Charles Rice have demonstrated, the domestic sphere developed in the nineteenth century as a consequence of modernity, which placed strict divisions between the worlds of work and home, and reinforced these in gendered terms – the masculine world of public life and workspaces, and the feminine world of private life, the family and the home.⁴³ The clear “complicity” between modernism and domesticity in this sense conclusively undermines the gendered, separate nature of domesticity itself, and raises the question of how we might begin to conceive of it differently; as Hilde Heynen asks, “Would a domesticity

⁴² Hoggart, pp. 58-9.

⁴³ See Hilde Heynen, ‘Modernity and Domesticity: Tensions and Contradictions’ in Hilde Heynen and Gülsüm Baydar, eds., *Negotiating Domesticity: Spatial Productions of Gender In Modern Architecture* (Routledge: London, 2005), pp. 1-29 and Charles Rice, *The Emergence of the Interior: Architecture, Modernity, Domesticity* (Routledge: London, 2007), pp. 1-35 in particular.

transformed along the lines of utopian and feminist visions still be perceived as domestic?"⁴⁴ For Heynen herself, domesticity could be viewed as a kind of appropriation – an active doing of domesticity by inhabitants that constitutes an interaction between individual, home and outside world, which would give the modern individual an interior space that reflects the unstable nature of their identity.⁴⁵ Further to this, Heynen expands on Butler's sense of gender as a "repetitive re-enactment in response to discursive forces" by arguing that space helps to create these "discursive forces". In this light, it is crucial not only to identify expressions of gender that refuse or negotiate prescribed norms, but also "spatial set-ups that refuse simply to reproduce received patterns".⁴⁶ So, just as gender and space are connected in the formation and development of the particular boundaries and limitations of domesticity, they are also at the centre of its continued expansion and change.

Other theorists and historians have drawn on and expanded on this unstable, constructed sense of domesticity. Beatriz Colomina has analysed the way in which modernist architecture defined domesticity in terms of flexible, varying relationships between interiors and exteriors.⁴⁷ Domesticity's boundaries are far from strict, then, but is its formation open to negotiation on individual terms? Gülsüm Baydar would argue that it is, to some extent. While she admits that the notion of domesticity "effortlessly resonates with family life consisting of mother, father, and children" and has been gendered as feminine by men as a means of control underscored with anxiety, she suggests looking to figures on the margins of normative domesticity as a means of expanding the concept of domesticity in general.⁴⁸ This is not only, as she puts it, a way to "speak about domesticity in 'other' terms" but also a means of considering how one could re-appropriate its spaces, seeing them and operating within them

⁴⁴ Heynen, p. 20.

⁴⁵ Heynen, pp. 20-3.

⁴⁶ Heynen, p. 24-5.

⁴⁷ See Beatriz Colomina, 'The Split Wall: Domestic Voyeurism' in Beatriz Colomina, ed., *Sexuality and Space* (Princeton Architectural Press: New York, 1992), pp. 73-128.

⁴⁸ Gülsüm Baydar, 'Figures of Wo/man in Contemporary Architectural Discourse' in Hilde Heynen and Gülsüm Baydar, eds., *Negotiating Domesticity: Spatial Productions of Gender In Modern Architecture* (Routledge: London, 2005), pp. 30-46. Baydar's essay builds in part on the work of Sue Best, who highlighted the way in which space is gendered as feminine as a means of ensuring the passivity of women, driven by heterosexual male anxiety: see Sue Best, 'Sexualising Space' in Elizabeth Grosz and Elspeth Probyn, eds. *Sexy Bodies: The Strange Carnalities of Feminism* (Routledge: London, 1995), pp. 181-194.

differently.⁴⁹ To jump crudely from twenty-first century notions of an expansive domesticity back to early twentieth century psychological formulations of the individual at home is to find that the marginal, the excluded, the unwanted have always had a place at the heart of cultural conceptions of the domestic. Freud's concept of the uncanny derives from the German term 'unheimlich', meaning 'unhomely', which, as he demonstrates, is itself closely linked, and is at times interchangeable with, its seemingly antithetical term 'heimlich', meaning 'homely'. The uncanny, or 'unheimlich', is everything that "ought to have remained secret and hidden but has come to light", or something familiar that has become strange or frightening.⁵⁰ The uncanny posits a certain amount of uncertainty at the centre of the domestic sphere – if what was once homely can become unhomely, then the very idea of what constitutes the homely is called into question – and leaves it open to disruption, from figures, objects or exterior forces: the return of something cast out. The importance for domesticity of marginal figures or ideas – both for its formation and its continued expansion or alteration – will be key in this thesis: who or what are excluded or repressed in the domestic sphere will be just as important as those people and things that occupy or reimagine it.

This outline has demonstrated two key points that will be at the heart of this thesis: firstly, that domesticity and gender are closely connected in that conceptions of one informs the other and vice versa, and secondly, that domesticity is a constructed, modern concept that, on closer inspection, betrays its flexibility and the possibility of its openness to negotiation, particularly through individuals' attitudes to definitions of space and relationships (and the interactions between the two). Domesticity, then, becomes about the definition of a gendered self in relation to wider spaces and relationships – how an individual negotiates selfhood in relation to what is private and what is public. Just as an expression of gender may be different from individual to individual, so may a definition of where the boundary between the public and private spheres may lie – both, crucially, contribute to individual definitions of domesticity. The

⁴⁹ Baydar, pp. 37-41.

⁵⁰ Sigmund Freud, 'The Uncanny' in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. XVII: An Infantile Neurosis and Other Works*, trans. by James Strachey (The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis: London, 1955), pp. 217-256, p. 225.

sense that the boundaries between the public and private are constantly in flux has been a concern of sociologists and historians for some time – Jürgen Habermas has argued that the public sphere disintegrated throughout the twentieth century, leading to an increasing “privatisation” of whole swathes of society, while Richard Sennett has highlighted the “ideology of intimacy” in the same period that has led to an intermingling of public and private life, to society’s detriment, in his opinion.⁵¹ Habermas and Sennett’s critiques point to the importance and ambiguity of the relationship between public and private spheres in twentieth century Western societies. In fact, figures like Michael Warner have built on these ideas to suggest that individual selfhood is constituted and developed across both public and private spheres, to the extent that the two become difficult to separate: “most things are private in one sense and public in another”.⁵² What this means for domesticity is complex – if selfhood is formed across public and private spheres, where does this leave a realm that is hugely informed by selfhood but traditionally considered private, separate, and self-contained? The spaces of domesticity must, by necessity, begin to be conceptualised in more open or ambiguous terms, as I have begun to argue: domesticity needs to be considered as operating between private and public, between home and society, where the individual, somewhere, places themselves, or is placed.

Art’s role in relation to domesticity, and within its formation, adds further complexity. Art is, after all, something else that reaches across the boundaries between public and private: it is often created through work done in private, often referring to private relationships, private or perhaps otherwise inexpressible thoughts, or personal ideas or concepts, though it is exhibited, reproduced and consumed in public, by an audience. As a means of expression or representation, it makes public what might otherwise remain hidden. An art that makes domesticity its subject does this explicitly, bringing a realm that may ordinarily be considered private (even if I have shown that this is not necessarily

⁵¹ See Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Enquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, translated by Thomas Burger with Frederick Lawrence (Polity Press: London, 1989) and Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* (Penguin: London, 1986/2002), pp. 259-340 in particular.

⁵² See Michael Warner, *Publics And Counterpublics* (Zone Books: New York, 2005). The quote comes from p. 54.

the case) to public view. The relationship between domesticity and art has been addressed by certain art historical studies. For example, Christopher Reed frames domesticity as something that masculine modernist artists consistently positioned themselves against, from the public bohemians of French Impressionism through to the U.S. Abstract Expressionists, though modernism and domesticity are actually closely linked, as several subsequent writers have argued.⁵³ Additionally, Reed's assertion within this argument that "it is primarily in the home that we are constructed as sexual and gendered beings" becomes problematic within the context of the theories on domesticity that I have outlined.⁵⁴ This thesis, then, will not separate art and domesticity, both in order to investigate how the two interact and also to examine and call into question the gender divisions that underline this separation. It will also open up the domestic realm to consider its formation across public and private spheres, on an individual basis, rejecting the idea that the formation of selfhood, particularly in terms of gender and sexuality, occurs primarily in the home, and asking what this might mean for a wider conception of what might constitute domesticity as a whole. My primary interest, and the methodology of this thesis, lies in viewing artworks as spheres where domesticity and masculinity can be explicitly negotiated, reimagined or transformed, particularly when viewed in their wider social context in Britain at this time. Artistic representations, by their very nature, only serve to make the blurring of the boundaries between public and private more explicit. In this sense, they are realms on their own terms – allowing the inscription of particular expressions of masculinity within particular depictions or ideas about domesticity, or domesticities, while also acting as spaces where artists may begin to explore what might be acceptably expressed and lived, in public and in private. Art sprawls across spheres while also being separate from them, and, for the four artists in this thesis, proves to be a productive space for exploring and negotiating gender, domesticity, and their fluid and complex interaction.

⁵³ Reed, p. 7-11. This has been challenged by studies such as those by Heynen and Rice, which I have previously cited.

⁵⁴ Reed, p. 16.

Thesis Outline

The aim of this thesis, then, will be to examine how a range of male artists in post-war Britain engaged with domesticity and how this relates to a gendered sense of selfhood. This will necessitate tracing how a sense of the domestic – of home, of belonging, and of particular close relationships – permeates social life beyond the narrow confines of the home at this time, both in terms of an individual's day-to-day experience and the broader aims and regulations of government policy and social assumptions. Examining the work of my four artists – John Bratby, Francis Bacon, Keith Vaughan, and Victor Pasmore – in this context brings a different, more thematic approach to British art in the immediate post-war period than has previously been adopted. Perhaps the most comprehensive examination of this period remains Margaret Garlake's *New Art New World: British Art In Post-War Society*, which does engage with British art through a series of themes in a productive and engaging way, though lacks a focus on domesticity, and wider issues of family life and gender.⁵⁵ Other thematic approaches to this period include a focus on contemporary politics and art criticism, particularly in the research of James Hyman and Juliet Steyn, as well as studies on national identity, such as in the edited collection *The Geographies Of Englishness* as well as research by Andrew Causey and Paul Overy, most of which lead up to this period though do not engage extensively with post-war art.⁵⁶ Following the effects of the Second World War, Imperial decline and the increase in immigration, national identity becomes a much more complex topic in the post-war period – some art historians, including Leon Wainwright, Simon Faulkner and Anandi Ramamurthy, and institutions, including Tate Britain, have

⁵⁵ Margaret Garlake, *New Art New World: British Art In Postwar Society* (Yale University Press: London, 1998).

⁵⁶ For contemporary politics and criticism, see James Hyman, *The Battle For Realism*. (Yale University Press: London, 2001) and Juliet Steyn, 'Realism Versus Realism in British Art of the 1950s', *Third Text*, Volume 22, No. 2, pp. 145-56. For national identity in this period, see David Peters Corbett, Ysanne Holt and Fiona Russell, eds., *The Geographies of Englishness* (Yale University Press: London, 2002); Andrew Causey, *Paul Nash* (Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1980); Paul Overy, 'Lions and Unicorns: The Britishness of Post-war British Sculpture' in *Art In America*, September, 1991, pp. 105-10, 153-5; Catherine Jolivet, *Landscape, Art and Identity in 1950s Britain* (Ashgate: Aldershot, 2009).

begun to address these issues.⁵⁷ Studies of individual artists or movements have also been produced, such as in David Mellor's work on neo-romanticism, Alastair Grieve's work on constructed abstract art, Anne Massey's work on the Independent Group, or Chris Stephens' extensive work on artists such as Peter Lanyon and Barbara Hepworth.⁵⁸ Some books meanwhile, such as Martin Harrison's *Transition: The London Art Scene in the 1950s*, focus productively on one artistic centre, though this reproduces a familiar though largely false narrative of British art moving through murky, post-war despair into the brighter consumer boom of the 1960s.⁵⁹ In their more recent collection of essays on post-war art in Britain, Lisa Tickner and David Peters Corbett highlight the continued lack of close study of British post-war art, particularly in terms that place artists and their work in the broad context of the cultural field, and present the essays in their collection as "a series of boreholes into the dense structure of the field of British art in this period".⁶⁰ This thesis, by adopting an underexplored thematic approach that focuses on artists' engagements with domesticity and masculinity, perhaps represents four more boreholes. Taken together, they build on existing scholarship by beginning to ask how art might allow a negotiation or engagement with domesticity and gender in post-war Britain.

⁵⁷ See Leon Wainwright, *Timed Out: Art and the Transnational Caribbean* (Manchester University Press: Manchester, 2011); Simon Faulkner and Anandi Ramamurthy, eds., *Visual Culture and Decolonisation in Britain* (Ashgate: Aldershot, 2009), and Lizzie Carey-Thomas, ed., *Migrations: Journeys Into British Art* (Tate: London, 2012). The experiences of émigré artists have been explored by Behr, Shulamith, and Marian Malet, eds., *Arts in Exile in Britain 1933-1945: Politics and Cultural Identity* (Rodopi: New York, 2005) and in Cheryl Buckley and Tobias Hochscherf, guest editors, 'Special Issue: Transnationalism and Visual Culture in Britain: Émigré and Migrants 1933 to 1956', *Visual Culture in Britain*, Volume 13, No. 2, July 2012, amongst others. The question of national identity and the effects of decolonisation in Britain after the Second World War is a complex one, particularly in relation to gender, family life and sexuality, is an underexplored aspect of art historical study and, while beyond the realms of this thesis, would be a productive topic of further study in which many of my ideas could be explored to a greater extent.

⁵⁸ See David Mellor, ed., *A Paradise Lost: The Neo-Romantic Imagination in Britain, 1935-55* (Lund Humphries in association with Barbican Art Gallery: London, 1987); Alastair Grieve, *Constructed Abstract Art in Britain after the Second World War: A Neglected Avant-Garde* (Yale University Press: London, 2005); Anne Massey, *The Independent Group: Modernism and Mass Culture in Britain, 1945-59* (Manchester University Press: Manchester, 1995); Chris Stephens, *Peter Lanyon: At The Edge Of Landscape* (21: London, 2000) and Chris Stephens, ed., *Barbara Hepworth: Centenary* (Tate: London, 2003).

⁵⁹ Martin Harrison, *Transition: The London Art Scene in the 1950s* (Merrell: London, 2002).

⁶⁰ Lisa Tickner and David Peters Corbett, eds., *British Art in the Cultural Field, 1939-69* (Wiley-Blackwell: Chichester, 2012), p. 12.

This thesis focuses on each artist as a separate case study, examining how each individual engaged with ideas of domesticity and gender and, together, offering a broad picture of these issues across the post-war period. In chapter one, I focus on the art of John Bratby, one of the so-called Kitchen Sink Painters who rose to prominence in 1954. His paintings – consisting of panoramas of the domestic landscape, repetitive and obsessive self-portraiture, and simultaneously moving and disturbing images of his wife Jean – present masculinity as deeply rooted in responses to domesticity and its relationships. These are problematic and difficult paintings, often coloured by undertones of domestic violence, which exist uncomfortably between private emotion and public expression. A similarly difficult relationship between public and private exists in the art of Francis Bacon, the subject of chapter two. Here, I argue that Bacon’s paintings engage with the reality of being homosexual in post-war Britain and the difficulties this brought to gaining a sense of domestic life. Drawing on Bacon’s use of literary references as well as personal memory and experience, this chapter suggests that his art attempts to define sociality while operating outside both the law and normative domestic or familial set-ups. In chapter three, I continue to examine aspects of homosexual life in post-war Britain by focusing on the art of Keith Vaughan. Vaughan’s engagement with domesticity is expansive, built on relationships and memories across several decades, from pre-war, all-male holidays, wartime experiences as a conscientious objector in the Non-Combatant Corps, and encounters with men in post-war London. This chapter suggests a sense of the domestic can be constituted across time and space, beyond more traditional or normative definitions of the home or the family. Finally, chapter four examines how a concern with an expansive and social sense of domesticity is an element of Victor Pasmore’s art, from his figurative wartime paintings of the home and the landscape, through to his abstract work and experiments in town planning. It can be argued that Pasmore’s art shares many of the concerns of post-war society and reconstruction, such as the question of whether personal, domestic experience can be transposed to and help formulate wider society as a whole.

“Someone To Paint”: John Bratby and Domesticity

Doing Domesticity and Doing Masculinity

John Bratby married Jean Cooke on 2nd April 1953, shortly after meeting while they were both students at the Royal College of Art in London. Bratby had been a student there since 1951, and had already begun painting everyday subjects and ordinary objects, ranging from dustbins to classroom skeletons, with a notoriously ferocious speed and passion. After the wedding, Bratby is said to have insisted that Jean take his name, with threatening assertion, “You belong to me”. Jean remembered that the couple were married within two weeks of meeting:

We decided to get married the day we met and did so as soon as the banns were called: then we moved into my father’s house and John went straight upstairs to paint – and didn’t come down for three weeks, not even to meet my father.

Jean’s father’s home was in Greenwich and the new couple occupied the upper part. John had a studio on the top floor, while Jean’s kiln was in the basement. Just out of art school and unable to afford a place of their own, John and Jean found themselves making the best of what they had and, particularly in Bratby’s case, they set down to work.⁶¹

Interior With Jean (Figure 1), painted by Bratby c. 1955, is an image of the home the couple fashioned for themselves in the upstairs of the house in Greenwich. Bratby takes a view from one end of the room, looking back to their main door, where various coats and jackets hang nearby. This is an image of a cramped kind of domesticity, familiar to anyone who has attempted to set up home for the first time, with furniture and belongings squeezed together in order to create some semblance of liveable space. The light-bulb hangs un-shaded in the top left corner of the canvas, while the sofa and armchair are mismatched – these are pieces of furniture that were probably found, inherited or bought

⁶¹ The circumstances surrounding the Bratbys’ marriage are recounted in Maurice Yacowar, *The Great Bratby: A Portrait of John Bratby RA*. (Middlesex University Press: London, 2008), pp. 21-4.

Figure 1: John Bratby, Interior With Jean, c. 1955

second hand, brought together out of need. Bratby's view across the room also gives an impression of the way the space is lived. At the corner in the back, the bed remains unmade with the covers heaved back in thick rolls and the pillows propped up, misshapen against the headboard, while a chair has been pulled up alongside it like a temporary bedside table. Traces of daily activity, of intimacy and of the presence of the artist himself are present in the inscription of this object on the canvas. Alongside the bed, and in front of the flowered sofa to the left and armchair just visible at the bottom of the canvas, sits Jean. She is cross-legged, wears warm clothes and leans in towards the fireplace as she reads a book. We see her as the artist sees her – from above, over the top of the armchair, with Jean caught between the pieces of furniture, absorbed in reading and huddled for warmth. In some ways, this image feels cosy and perhaps as domesticity for a young couple should be – intimate and warm, with Bratby looking down, over this wife and the home they have created. At the same time,

Interior With Jean feels ambiguous – she looks anonymous and small down there, in between the pieces of furniture that seem to contain her and also begin to impose on her. Around her, there are the more abstract brown, pink, yellow and grey forms that seem to topple from the sofa and armchair towards her, while we tower over the armchair barrier. The steep viewpoint perhaps emphasises this impression of uneasy containment, forcing Bratby to warp the objects closer to him to fit them on the canvas. Overall, *Interior With Jean* presents many of the issues of dealing with one of Bratby's domestic paintings – it goes some way to record the realities of day-to-day life for him and Jean, while also inflecting it with a sense of uneasiness or ambiguity, hinting at the possibility of emotions that lie under domestic life and their power to affect or change representations. It is significant that the image as a whole tilts towards Bratby, the artist, just as he overlooks it – it is as if we are looking at an image of a space that seems to reach back to him, just as he forms it.

Domestic scenes like this dominate Bratby's art. From 1954, when Bratby suddenly first came to the attention of the press and critics with a solo show at Helen Lessore's Beaux Arts Gallery in London, domesticity was such an integral element of his art that it meant, as John Berger famously commented,

To enter the Beaux Arts Gallery is to enter Bratby's home. This is partly because his subjects are his wife, his sister-in-law, his kitchen table, his dogs, his groceries; but far more profoundly because you are compelled to share his most intense and personal emotions...⁶²

What might initially seem surprising about much of the contemporary discussion on Bratby is the way in which his domesticity largely goes without the expected art historical comment. Domesticity in art was, and continues to be, considered highly gendered – in Britain for example, the 'domesticity' of the Arts and Crafts Movement or the Bloomsbury Group has been perceived as 'feminine' or, at least, not whole-heartedly 'masculine'.⁶³ In its aims, postures and statements, the avant-garde seemingly viewed itself as the antithesis of domesticity, as some critics have argued.⁶⁴ However, I demonstrated in my introduction that this strict

⁶² John Berger, 'John Bratby' *New Statesman and Nation*, 25th September 1954, p. 358.

⁶³ See Reed, p. 14.

⁶⁴ Reed, p. 7.

division between supposedly masculine art and feminine domesticity do not necessarily hold up in practice.⁶⁵ In Bratby's art, the interaction between these two seemingly opposing elements is key to their meaning. In this context, Berger's qualifying sentence in the quote above is crucial to get a picture of how he, as a critic and viewer, might have begun to approach this interaction – the importance of Bratby's art lay, to him, not just in his subject matter but also in the “most intense and personal emotions” contained therein. David Sylvester, another of Bratby's most prominent critics, saw his domesticity in broader terms. In his early review of the Kitchen Sink Painters, from which their name was coined, he traces artists' engagement with domesticity, or “still lifes and interiors”, through Bonnard and Vuillard, Matisse, the Cubists, the Surrealists, and Giacometti and Gruber. For Sylvester, male artists engaging with domesticity is almost a modernist tradition. According to him, the Kitchen Sink artists returned art to the kitchen: “a very ordinary kitchen, lived in by a very ordinary family. There is nothing to hint that the man about the house is an artist or anything but a very ordinary bloke”.⁶⁶ Like Berger, Sylvester is concerned with how art and the ordinariness of domesticity come together – how the “very ordinary bloke” might depict his “very ordinary family” within art history. As Bratby's paintings demonstrate, this is a complex and often problematic process.

Followers of Bratby's art during the 1950s, not always knowingly, experienced developments in his life through his paintings – his initial settling in Jean's father's house; his not overwhelmingly successful trip to Italy in which he and Jean contracted jaundice; Jean's pregnancy and the birth of his first son David in late 1955, followed by the births and childhoods of the rest of his children; his first teaching post, during which the family moved briefly to Carlisle; his affairs; his new house in Blackheath, bought after he found financial success; and throughout, the food, clothes and objects he bought for himself and his family. When his tabletops aren't overflowing with food, drink and kitchen utensils, it is Bratby and his family that become his subjects, as the occupants of the domestic space. Clearly, his domestic art is a highly personal proposition, and, as I wish to argue, can be interpreted as a sphere where the normative,

⁶⁵ As demonstrated through the work of Heynen, Baydar, Colomina, etc.

⁶⁶ David Sylvester, “The Kitchen Sink”, *Encounter*, December 1954, p. 61.

gendered familial relationships are played out, attempted, or denied. In this sense, then, Berger's pinpointing of the joint importance of Bratby's subjects and his "intense and personal emotions" about them is correct. The implied link here – between the depiction of the interior of the home and the expression of interiority itself – is crucial, and points to the key concern of Bratby's art: the multi-layered masculine self and its expression within domesticity. These two concepts operate in quite a complex way in Bratby's work, in that they overlap at times or seem fundamentally opposed at others, though they are never separate. All the while, however, the widely assumed binaries of feminine domesticity and masculine artistry are referenced and interrogated, but not necessarily strictly adhered to. Through capturing his own image and those of his family – and by extension, the relationships that they create, experience and play out – Bratby's art becomes a way of framing, briefly and from painting to painting, a fluid, domestic self. In this sense, his paintings are not only sites where the performance of gender is expressed, but also the performance of domesticity. This constant inscription of domesticity within art – the two spheres for the definition of Bratby's self, essentially – can produce striking, problematic and even uncanny images. These images are varied, self contained and oriented around the self, and, by straddling the public and private spheres of art and the home, express the constant, on-going and unstable process of its formation.

Domesticity and the family were not just primary concerns for Bratby at this time. In post-war Britain, the family had assumed a central role in society and it is within this quite specific atmosphere that Bratby's own home life, art, and sense of self come to be formed and influenced to some degree. The strong focus on the family can in part be explained by a general 'turning inwards' after the war – in the late forties and early fifties, there was certainly a pervasive desire to unite and return to basic, traditional values.⁶⁷ In Britain, one expression of this was the welfare state and what Elizabeth Wilson has referred to as "a real attempt to build consensus, to bring the whole nation within the wide circle of

⁶⁷ As Liz Heron has noted, "Giving central importance to the family was part of an effort of national reconciliation, of blurring class difference and sex antagonisms, an effort of reconciliation and consensus that was being made in many parts of Western Europe as order was imposed on the threat of chaos". Heron is quoted by Spencer, p. 7.

citizenship”.⁶⁸ Beyond the welfare state’s main aims, of eradicating the ‘Giant Evils’ of Want, Disease, Ignorance, Squalor and Idleness, lay short term aims for post-war recovery and what several historians have described as the ‘embourgeoisement’ of the poorer members of society – in many ways the ideas of consensus and citizenship were influenced by a desire for a continuation of wartime ‘pulling together’, regardless of class or gender. The family, still coloured by a pre-war conception of it as a “cellular organism within the body politic of the state and community”, was central to ideas of consensus and citizenship – it too, like the state, became a kind of ‘neutral whole’, where differences and conflicts were denied or eased.⁶⁹ Paradoxically however, the family unit was also a site where distinctions of gender inherently had to remain. Stephanie Spencer has highlighted the way in which the Beveridge Report, which became the basis for the legislation of the welfare state, incorporated expectations and recommendations surrounding gender divisions in British society. She notes the duality in the language of the report and subsequent legislation, where “membership of the welfare state was couched in terms of reciprocal duty between husband and wife and between citizen and nation state”. The husband and wife, and by extension the family, were the basis of the welfare state. For women, their role was viewed as being “to redress the decline in population and provide domestic support for men in full-time employment”. This gender divide was underlined by the state’s attitude to both working wives and mothers, whose income was viewed as ‘supplementary’ and was the first to be taxed, and single women, who weren’t fulfilling their prescribed roles.⁷⁰ The result was the emergence of a gendered ideal: “the post-war nuclear family supported by, and supportive of, the state”.⁷¹

It is perhaps important to bear in mind that these familial ideals - that were encouraged and even assumed by governmental policy, that were at least gestured or aimed towards by the majority of families in the way in which they organised themselves, and that have since become inseparable in many ways from popular interpretations of the 1950s as a specific period – originated in

⁶⁸ Wilson, 1980, p. 2.

⁶⁹ Riley, 1981, pp. 98-9.

⁷⁰ Spencer expands on these ideas, pp. 23-32.

⁷¹ Spencer, p. 46.

conceptions of the family that had been developing throughout not just the twentieth century, but also the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In many ways, the uncertainty of wartime, with its absent fathers, working mothers and evacuated children, served to bring the family into focus and to concentrate efforts of reconstruction around it.⁷² To a great extent, government policy was an underlining of assumptions that were already prevalent in British society.

However, while these strict definitions of and assumptions about gender and the family did in many ways translate into a set of boundaries observed by families and individuals, they also overlapped. An ever-increasing number of women worked, for example, largely on a part time basis and when their children were of school age.⁷³ This gave prominence to the idea of the companionate marriage or family, wherein husbands and fathers were expected to share their wives' domestic workload in order to ease their burden and, most importantly, ensure that their children weren't neglected. Elizabeth Longford, in her parenting handbook *Points For Parents* first published in 1954, looks to the future and calls on fathers to face "the true fact of the Emancipation of Women":

If women are to enjoy more freedom, men must take more responsibility. Father must come more fully into the family, now that his wife has established her right to moments of existence outside of it...

Her ideal is "the balanced mother and father of the future" in a "spiritually equal partnership" where, however, the basic divisions of labour remain.⁷⁴ Elsewhere, Michael Young and Peter Wilmott, two contemporary sociologists, turned to the companionate family, and the wider network or relations surrounding it that they referred to as 'kinship', in their influential 1957 study, *Family and Kinship in East London*. Though the main concerns of the book were linked to contemporary governmental housing policy and its perceived or predicted effect on inner city working class communities, Young and Wilmott also focus on the companionate family as the basis for these communities. They too saw the

⁷² This is reflected in Richard Titmuss' recommendations for social policy, which drew on the wartime 'pulling together' of families as a possible model for British society in the long term. See Titmuss, pp. 348-50. It is also dominant in John Bowlby's thinking on parental neglect and juvenile delinquency. See Bowlby, *Child Care and the Growth of Love*.

⁷³ See Spencer, p. 29.

⁷⁴ Elizabeth Longford, *All in the Family: Parenting the 1950s Way*. (History: Stroud, 2008 – originally published as *Points For Parents* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson: London, 1954)), pp. 235-6.

gradual erosion of the old, strict divisions between husband and wife in Bethnal Green:

In place of the old comes a new kind of companionship between man and woman, reflecting the rise in status of the young wife and children which is one of the great transformations of our time. There is now a nearer approach to equality between the sexes and, though each has a peculiar role, its boundaries are no longer so rigidly defined nor is it performed without consultation.⁷⁵

It is worth bearing in mind that in 1957 a “nearer approach to equality between the sexes” could be interpreted as “one of the great transformations of our time” – this mutual companionship in families was still emerging and was, in reality, unsteady. Even for Young and Wilmott, there were still divisions between the sexes inside and outside the home, where “marriage divides the sexes into their distinctive roles”.⁷⁶ They noted, however, how the effects of suburban life accelerated the move towards companionship, where “the ‘home’ and the family of marriage becomes the focus of a man’s life, as of his wife’s, far more completely than in the East End”. These very gradual, very tentative examples of the blurring of gender roles surrounding domesticity are about as radical as ‘normative’ voices in the 1950s seem to get. Their universalising tone, however, is worth noting – they speak in a particularly broad sense and do not address the way in which an individual can operate both within these particular definitions of gender, the family and domesticity, and apart from them. How then can a masculine individual place himself within his own family at a moment when normative definitions of family life are so prominent, so pervasive, while also, simultaneously, in a moment of transition and flux?

The Bratbys probably wouldn’t have been able to adhere too strictly to Elizabeth Longford’s *Points For Parents*, nor would they have been suitable material for Young and Wilmot’s study. They moved around a significant number of times during their early years of marriage and Bratby took a teaching contract in Carlisle in 1955 during Jean’s pregnancy. His time at Carlisle, during which he

⁷⁵ Young and Willmott, p. 30.

⁷⁶ It is telling that later on in the book, Young and Wilmot’s ideal companion for the lonely and exasperated housewife is not her husband but her own mother: “Who more obvious for her to claim than the woman with whom she has shared her previous life?”, pp. 190-1.

Figure 2: John Bratby, Courtyard With Washing, 1956

“shaved, bought a suit, trimmed his hair, and acted the responsible teacher”, was short-lived – his contract was cancelled in the following July and he, Jean and David all returned to London. Bratby had become infatuated with a student at Carlisle, Angela Heskett, and he briefly moved into a bedsit with her in Balham that summer, before returning to Jean, who had moved back in with her father in Greenwich.⁷⁷ In the early summer of 1956, at their house at 12 Norfolk Road in Carlisle, Bratby painted *Courtyard With Washing* (Figure 2). In a painting set in a courtyard shared by their neighbours, Bratby repeats his tendency to paint from a slightly exaggerated viewpoint. However, whereas in *Interior with Jean* this resulted in a work that seemed almost vertically distorted, here the effect is to compress a panorama of the courtyard onto one canvas. The effect here is that the space of the courtyard becomes imposing – on the left hand side, the coal sheds block your way, while the block of houses begins to sweep around on the right. The paving stones curve inwards from all sides, sweeping into an exaggerated dip at the centre of the painting. It is as if the eye is contained within the space by the surroundings of the looming red brick houses and curving paving slabs, each stone picked out individually by Bratby – only a tiny section of

⁷⁷ Yacowar relates the fall out from Bratby’s teaching post in Carlisle, pp. 47-50.

sky is visible above the coal sheds. It is tempting to read elements of the Bratbys' home life into the distorted structure of this scene – the male artist obsessively painting the finer details of his domestic prison, just before he makes a break for it and moves in with his student lover – but *Courtyard With Washing* appears to be a more subtle meditation on the realities and emotions of domestic life than this.

At the centre of this heavily scrutinised world are what at first appear to be two women, tending to a child in a pram. However, Bratby's notes on this painting reveal that the female figures are both Jean – he painted her twice in two different positions, alongside David in his pram, still not a year old.⁷⁸ This changes the tone of the image. Without Bratby's notes, it would be tempting to view the two figures almost in Young and Wilmot's terms – as an example of female kinship, with a neighbour chatting to Jean as she helps her hang out her washing and tend to David. The knowledge that Bratby has merely asked Jean to pose twice is more isolating. His intention in doing this is unclear – he may have needed to introduce a second figure to balance the composition. It is known that Bratby didn't plan or sketch his works before beginning to paint, and he had a particularly ambivalent attitude to Jean as a subject: he said himself that "I sometimes painted my wife Jean Cooke as a particular person, not with affection. She was someone to paint".⁷⁹ However, by depicting her twice amongst the washing and orbiting David's pram, Jean's joint role as both housewife and mother, so heavily implied and promoted by governmental policy at this time, is also suggested. At the same time, Bratby keeps his distance. The figure of Jean in the foreground is partially obscured by one of the sheets she has hung out to dry, while the other Jean is divided from Bratby by empty space. David, his newborn son, is merely a collection of thick paint marks in his pram – the slates on the coal sheds, the brickwork and bicycle baskets receive more detail and attention. While the looming surrounding walls and sweeping floor seem to enclose Bratby and the viewer, a sense of distance remains from the domestic scene, delineated

⁷⁸ One of Bratby's books of clippings contains an image of this work, with the following alongside: "Jean twice, with David in his pram, Jean's bicycle, Mrs Grant's bicycle, washing and chairs in the paved yard by the coal-holes at 12 Norfolk Road, early summer '56". I was given access to two of these books at Julian Hartnoll Gallery in London in 2009.

⁷⁹ Quoted in Yacowar, p. 139.

by the boundaries of the clothes lines, in which Jean and David are contained. Positioned in the courtyard of the home the family had left London to form, with Bratby having taken his first regular job as a teaching professional, this image seems to convey a sense of the enclosed, self-sufficient domestic world, while still maintaining a certain distance and a clear division of gendered work. Bratby paints, he works; Jean also works – but as a mother and a housewife.

You get a sense, however, that this rather arbitrary division of labour in the Bratbys' household is not just a faithful representation of the pervasive familial ideal, the supposedly 'natural' status quo. The distance that Bratby places between himself, looking out over the courtyard that curves towards him as much as it encloses him, and his family suggests a certain amount of ambivalence. When you consider that the Bratbys had uprooted and moved across the country, and that Bratby had taken on a teaching role for which he was probably unsuited and certainly under-experienced, it's not surprising to find him taking up a viewpoint at a slight remove from day-to-day domesticity. He would have been working out of the house for a proportion of the week for the first time in his new role as "the responsible teacher" and *Courtyard With Washing* certainly finds him once removed from the domesticity of his Greenwich pictures (where, due to space, he couldn't help working at its centre), but still a part of its sphere. However, the jarring combination of distance and enclosure in this image needn't be read as a strict reflection of ideal, gendered familial roles, though they do come into it, or as a painted expression of a claustrophobic domestic world from which he was attempting to escape. This distance – this detachment, almost – is also a constant fixture of Impressionist painting and comes to Bratby through the British realist tradition of the Camden Town Group, the 'London Impressionists'. Bratby is, after all, painting 'en plein air'. There are even similarities in subject matter to a work like Claude Monet's *Femmes Au Jardin* from 1866 (Figure 3) – Monet chose the garden of a property he was renting in Ville d'Avray as the setting for this monumental painting and he used Camille Doncieux, who would become his first wife, as the model for the four women. Even the flowing white drapery of Monet's figures' dresses is

Figure 3: Claude Monet, Femmes Au Jardin, 1866

echoed in the rather heavier folds of the sheets that Jean hangs out.⁸⁰ This concern with the repetition of a figure, not as a person, but as “someone to paint”, with drapery, light, and the details of the setting is not necessarily a new aspect of Bratby’s art, but you can sense that he is adopting these concerns as a way of positioning himself as ‘the artist’, the eye, the detached observer of a particular scene. He seems almost to be styling himself after his artistic fathers,

⁸⁰ In his monograph on Monet, Daniel Wildenstein actually suggests the three women in a group on the left of the painting are all based on Camille, while “for the fourth, on the right, Monet again used the woman with reddish-blond hair wearing the polka-dot dress encountered in *Luncheon on the Grass*”, see Daniel Wildenstein, *Monet, or the Triumph of Impressionism* (Taschen/Wildenstein Institute: London, 1996), p. 62. However, Ruth Butler suggested that he may have just changed Camille hair colour here (as he did occasionally, when painting her in other works) – see Ruth Butler, *Hidden in the Shadow of the Master: The Model Wives of Cezanne, Monet and Rodin* (Yale University Press: London, 2008), p. 124. Butler describes the work as a “story of love possessed” (p. 120) and an illustration of Monet and Camille’s partnership, while also highlighting its lack of narrative, and his interest in the adornment of the female body rather than the body itself (p. 123).

the Camden Town Group, and their approach that is “detailed about the urban context but vague about the individual” – to engage with his artistic tradition is, in one sense, to reinforce and legitimise his role as artist and, by extension, breadwinner.⁸¹ To adopt the detached eye is to step back from domestic life and, in doing so, make it unquestionably ‘art’.

Continuing to think in terms of a British realist tradition, you can see, in a painting like *Courtyard With Washing*, a reflection of Sickert and his contemporaries’ delight in modern, idiosyncratic subjects and their concern with slightly unlikely, specific viewpoints that reflect particular experience: Robert Bevan’s closed-off cab yards with their anonymous workers are one such example, as well as Harold Gilman’s interiors. More relevant, perhaps, are the similarities that can be drawn between the sense of detachment in Bratby’s work with that of Sickert’s paintings of theatres and music halls. The emphasis on the performer’s isolation and distance that he creates in a work like *The Oxford Music Hall*, c. 1888-9, and the sense of detached looking that this creates in the viewer finds a certain parallel in *Courtyard With Washing*.⁸² The descriptive, impersonal title and the vaguely theatrical design of the painting – the red brick house and coal shed seem slotted into place like painted scenery, while the anonymous Jean acts out in the middle of the stage – give the impression of a domesticity being performed and observed. This does in a sense reflect the day-to-day experience of domesticity for a man in the 1950s – much of the mother-child interactions in the home would play out before him like scenes from a play, familiar to the extent that they could almost be scripted. However, with Bratby’s work, you don’t get quite the same sense of distance as you do with Sickert’s detached eye as Bratby is implicated in the performance. He may have withdrawn temporarily to take up the position of artist but he remains, waiting in the wings, ready to engage once again in the performance of domesticity. Further to this, it is hard to shake off the importance of Bratby’s pivotal position at one end of this courtyard, as its paving slabs, buildings and even washing line seem to veer towards him, as

⁸¹ See David Peters, ‘Modern Themes In Camden Town Painting’ in *Modern Painters: The Camden Town Group*, Robert Upstone, ed., (Tate Publishing: London, 2008), pp. 26-37, p. 27-8.

⁸² Corbett highlights *The Oxford Music Hall* (now at the Art Gallery Of New South Wales, Sydney) as one of several works Sickert exhibited in the late 1880s that “have been persuasively described as characterised by ‘modernist strategies’ mobilised on behalf of their ambition to depict the exigencies of urban life”, p. 28.

I have noted. The suggestion here is that Bratby is not just implicated in the performance of day-to-day domesticity in this scene, but that its performance – in space, through relationships – remains inherently connected to his sense of self, even as he removes himself from it. Detachment may be an artistic position for Bratby, but so is the sense of personal connection to the family sphere. No wonder the two exist uncomfortably here – Jean standing stiffly like a model or an actress, with the space enclosing the artist and his family just as it contains them – as Bratby struggles to entirely reconcile the roles of artist and family man.

This sense of Bratby seeking a satisfactory expression of selfhood within the domestic sphere is a fixture of his art throughout the 1950s, beyond panoramic images like *Interior With Jean* or *Courtyard With Washing* that seem to tilt towards him, like depictions of space that seem to unfurl away from and fall back towards the not-pictured artist's body at the edge of the canvas. Bratby's self-portraits pick up these ideas ever more explicitly, underlining the connections between selfhood, gender and domestic space for him, as well as their uncertainty and instability. He appears to have been aware of this. In an interview with Bratby, Lawrence Thompson noted the artist's disdain for critics that pigeon hole him. Thompson stated that "what he does not dispute is the dictum that all art is neurosis, the working out in paint or words of a personal conflict".⁸³ For Bratby, that personal conflict encompasses not just the day-to-day pressures of family life, but also the possible conflicts between his domestic situation and his art – his life and his work. In fact, many men seemed to be conducting this process of negotiation in the aftermath of the war, as conceptions of masculinity came under the spotlight and were perceived to be changing. James Gilbert's broad study on attitudes towards masculinity in 1950s America finds a number of parallels in Britain, particularly a sense of anxiety about what constituted acceptable masculinity that arose out of "a real conflict between an assumed norm of masculinity and new forms of masculinity based upon notions of companionship and co-operation within the family and

⁸³ Lawrence Thompson, 'Portrait of the Artist as a Displaced Person', interview between the author and Bratby, found in a scrapbook at Julian Hartnoll Gallery.

workplace”.⁸⁴ Gilbert finds that much of this anxiety is expressed through fears of men being overshadowed or overpowered by women, as well as a broad sense that men were losing their individuality and leadership skills in a society that required them to ‘get along’. In her overview of masculinity in Britain in the same period, Lynne Segal finds similar anxieties. She highlights how men returned from war to the comforts and companionship of the home, and many cultural figures, particularly those earmarked as ‘Angry Young Men’, spoke out against “stifling domesticity”, and the positions in families and society that they were now expected to occupy.⁸⁵ This sense of male individuals at odds with assumed norms of masculinity and mass culture appears to have pervaded a great deal of intellectual and public life at this time. Kenneth Allsop made a “dissentient mood” a central aspect of the (largely male) literary culture in his survey of the 1950s, though did stop to note the discrepancy between the thinking of the younger figures in the literary sphere and the ordinary man of mass culture:

I wonder if they would understand the baffled derision they would arouse in any well paid industrial worker today, with a New Town house full of comfortable over-stuffed furniture, a telly and several strong warmly-clothed children, if they told him his life had been ‘poisoned’ by humanism and that he had ‘lost his feeling of uniqueness’?⁸⁶

What is at the heart of these debates, then, is not just one assumed norm of masculinity, but a whole range of masculinities, and a clear need for men to define their sense of self within this context.

It would appear, judging by what he wrote, said in interviews, and painted, that Bratby was aware of these debates surrounding the masculine individual.⁸⁷ His own novels make reference to them. For example, Bernard Bussey, a framemaker in Bratby’s first novel *Breakdown*, reads an article that asks very similar questions:

⁸⁴ Gilbert, p. 3.

⁸⁵ See Segal, pp. 1-20.

⁸⁶ Allsop, p. 193.

⁸⁷ Bratby was also consistently linked by critics to literature’s Angry Young Men. For example, John Golding emphatically states in an art review provocatively titled ‘Look Back In Anger’: “Mr Bratby is the leader of the look-back-in-anger painters, simultaneously condescending his subjects and revelling them for their own sake”. See *New Statesman And Nation*, December 22nd 1956.

*Are you a servile disgrace to the name of man? What will your life have meant when you lie on your deathbed and you look back at its lack of achievements? Are you a Man or a Mouse?... How many times do they call you "Sir"? How many times do you call them "Sir"? Can you feel proud of what you have done with your life, or has your life been a waste?*⁸⁸

There is also an apparent awareness of these issues when he turns to himself as a subject in his paintings. Self-portraits appear in Bratby's art from his very early works, when he turns to himself not just as a means of self-expression or psychological exploration but also because it avoided paying for or finding a model, and they recur constantly for the rest of his career. In his interview with Lawrence Thompson, Bratby discussed his tendency to regularly turn to the self-portrait:

I paint my face a lot, worrying about my problems. It shows in my face, and I'm interested in how everything shows, how changing thoughts show. Living in this house is very reassuring to a person like me. I can lean on it. I work very well in this house.⁸⁹

Again, the dual nature of Bratby's preoccupation here is significant – he suggests that his exploration of changing emotions and thoughts are grounded within a domestic space. For him, the home, and by extension the family unit within the home, is the setting in which the masculine self can be explored. Bratby's *Three Self-Portraits With A White Wall* (Figure 4), painted in 1957, is a significant example of the ideas and techniques that he refers to here. For this image, he arranged a wood-framed mirror against the backdrop of a wallpapered white wall three times in order to paint three different self-portraits. In the centre and on the right the mirror stands freely against the wall; on the left it is propped up and secured inside a cot. Through the reflections in the mirrors, it is possible to see back behind Bratby into the room – he is back in the upstairs of Jean's father's house and you can see glimpses of the bay window looking out onto the street, while the light bulb remains unshaded. No family members are visible

⁸⁸ John Bratby, *Breakdown* (Hutchinson: London, 1960), p. 69.

⁸⁹ This quote comes from the unpublished interview with Lawrence Thompson, 'Portrait of the Artist as a Displaced Person'.

Figure 4: John Bratby, Three Self-Portraits With A White Wall, 1957

directly here, though the domestic setting and the use of the cot, even just as a practical device, means they are never completely removed from the work, present in the objects and the space just as he was in *Interior With Jean*. At the same time, the intense focus on the masculine self here, to the extent that three images of the artist are presented to us so emphatically, framed in mirrors, gestures towards a temporary usurping of the family and all its responsibilities in favour of the individual. It's something of a balancing act.

Bratby actually depicts the painting of an image very similar to this one in *Breakdown*, published in 1960 but written c. 1958. In *Breakdown*, the main character is the “uncouth, fat, bespectacled, and balding... sometimes intelligent and sometimes purely animal, uncontrollably emotional” James Brady, who can be found with “a constant cigarette inserted in his lips amidst the ugliness of his piggish face”. He is a barely-disguised version of Bratby, despite the statement at the start of the novel insisting that its events and characters are entirely

fictitious (probably on advice of his publishers, who feared lawsuits from the people Bratby depicts in a less than flattering light). First of all, Bratby examines Brady in the act of painting, as closely as he examines himself in the portrait:

Brady stood in front of his painting, a big bulging figure in the midst of the agonies and emotions of creation. His eyes were alive, feverish, full and dark. Above his eyes were to be seen contracted muscles on the lower forehead, above and between the eyebrows. His forehead was corrugated with worry lines, and some distance away his ulcers hurt terribly.

Brady then moves through to the kitchen and examines himself “guardedly” in a set of three mirrors:

What he saw did not alter his mood, and his soul felt imprisoned, longing to be free, emotionally free and emotionally active. He wished he wasn't so fat. He wished he was this, he wished he was that. But he was satisfied with himself at the same time: was he not a successful painter?⁹⁰

Symbolically, his response to this self-examination, and a longing for freedom from his body and his home that he finds temporarily in his art, is to go out into the garden and smash up birdcages for firewood.

While it is tempting to impose the psychological uncertainty and creative agonies present in the text in *Breakdown on Three Self-Portraits With A White Wall*, the gap between Bratby's fiction and his art is hard to judge. If the three mirrors and the lit cigarettes provide some similarities, the painted image is more ambiguous – less overtly concerned with the processes or ‘agonies’ of creativity or day-to-day existence on its surface, and more interested in securing various representations of a figure in space. In this sense, Bratby's framing of himself three times across the canvas seems significant. Other artists may have made the decision to omit the frames of the mirrors used to create self-portraits, but Bratby takes a more literal route. He fixes himself in these carefully painted frames that, due to the reflective nature of the mirrors, create separate domestic box spaces. Against the flatness of the white wall, Bratby creates an effect that causes us to look in on him. Looking at the specific images, this becomes more

⁹⁰ See Bratby, pp. 23-7. Yacowar also discusses the similarities between the text and the work, and includes the detail that Bratby used one mirror three times, pp. 51-3.

pronounced. In the frame on the left of the painting, the cot's wooden railings contain Bratby further; on the right, his right arm and right leg are positioned so that he appears almost ready to step out of his space. As in *Courtyard With Washing*, this containment within a domestic space is not necessarily a case of feeling trapped, or Bratby painting himself as being trapped. The frames of the mirror do not quite contain him, and the domestic space and furniture feel as much like attributes of the self as they do barriers imposed upon it.

Jacques Lacan's theory of the mirror stage is relevant to consider here, as it is concerned with the formation and construction of the self in relation to both a mirrored reflection and physical space. The mirror stage occurs in childhood, but is considered by Lacan to be an ongoing process throughout an individual's life and allows the development of a relationship between the self and reality. In comprehending their own reflection, the individual assumes the image in the mirror – Lacan refers to this image as a gestalt – and this forms the basic for their conception of their self. In each individual, the self is also formed by other, outside factors – alongside the mirror stage, the assumption of an image (the imaginary), there is the continuing influence of social and cultural factors (the symbolic). The individual is formed by the influences of the imaginary and the symbolic, the self and the other.⁹¹ Furthermore, Charles Rice has suggested that Lacan's theory can be extended to suggest that individuals form conceptions of space itself in a similar way, and so selfhood and space become inherently connected.⁹² For *Three Self-Portraits With A White Wall*, Lacan's ideas can contribute to an understanding of Bratby's use of mirrors and space in this set of self-portraits. By depicting the mirrors, propped unsteadily against the wall, Bratby ensures that we come to see the process of looking as it occurred for him and become implicated in it – we stand in front of the mirrors ourselves and see his reflection before us, and the reflected space creates the illusion of his own domestic space behind us. As viewers, we're placed before an image of a man and his domestic world and made to stand in his position, so that just as the domestic sphere contained and formed Bratby, it now unfurls in front of and (through the

⁹¹ See Jacques Lacan, 'The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience' in *Ecrits*, trans. Bruce Fink (W.W. Norton and Company: London, 2006), pp. 75-81.

⁹² See Rice, pp. 37-54.

mirrored reflections) behind us. The effect is an overwhelming impression of Bratby's self and space – life literally finds reflection in art and vice versa, to the point that the boundaries between the two begin to become blurred or, perhaps more suitably for Bratby, the connections between the two, and their temporarily productive, affirmative possibilities in the face of uncertainty, become explicit in representation.

So, thinking in Lacan's terms, in painting his reflection, Bratby is painting his own self-image as he comprehends it and the space that he inhabits. He repeats elements of this self-image again and again, not just in the portraits here but in his written portrait of Brady in *Breakdown* – the furrowed brow, steady gaze and lit cigarette all recur. At the same time, elements that do not necessarily signify the individual self, but still come to assist in the formation of the self as outside factors, are present as well – the cot sits prominently in the foreground and domesticity unfurls around, behind and before him. Rather than pointing to a sense of containment or frustration in the domestic sphere, then, the repetition of a self-portrait on one canvas points to an awareness of the difficulty of capturing, defining and holding on to selfhood, and a sense that both the day-to-day experience of space and its representation in art can contribute to an understanding of this. In each self-portrait here, he appears physically different – from the jumper-wearing, pipe-smoking Bratby on the left who we see painting, to the central figure, with his untucked, half unbuttoned shirt and the only visible hand raised to his chest in the centre (the implication being that his other hand paints), to the figure on the right, shirt now tucked in and buttoned up, with no sign of his paintbrush in either hand. With the prominent depiction of cigarettes and pipes and the artist in various states of dress, it seems apparent that Bratby is presenting the creation of a persona here – a public face, or, at least, an attempt to mediate the move between private world and public sphere that art, here, necessitates. This is, inevitably, unfinished, in that it involves a certain amount of posturing (the cigarettes and pipe) alongside an awareness of its performance (the costume changes) and the nagging sense that the more mundane elements of the private sphere (the domestic objects and setting) can never be completely discarded. 'How can you be an artist?', Bratby seems to be asking, as well as, more generally, 'How can you be a man?', when both roles

seem to overlap, and appear to be defined by rules as much as they are plagued by uncertainty. No wonder Bratby finds the spheres begin to impose on each other – his private world informing his public persona, his public persona permeating and framing his private world. In *Three Self-Portraits With A White Wall*, the sense of selfhood being defined by self-image and space becomes complex to an almost irreconcilable degree. Through both the repetition of self-portraits in one image and the painting of multiple acts of looking and comprehending, Bratby suggests a masculinity and a self – or, perhaps more appropriately, ‘masculinities’ and ‘selves’ – that are constantly changing and constantly require definition or expression. The task of selfhood, Bratby seems to suggest, is uncertain and seemingly endless.

Painting Jean

A preoccupation with the definition of masculine selfhood is not only present in Bratby’s images of domestic scenes or self-portraits; it also finds expression, often in deeply problematic ways, in paintings of women. These include Jean, until their divorce in the 1970s, followed by Patti, his second wife, but also the women he had affairs with. In the 1950s however, it was nearly always Jean – an inexpensive, usually willing model (who would be coerced and threatened into complying if she wasn’t), and one who was always close at hand. Across Bratby’s paintings of Jean, it isn’t just their relationship that emerges to confront the viewer, but also the complexities and contradictions of family life in the 1950s and the roles contained within it, and the ways in which Bratby attempts to reconcile his public, artistic and private life in his art. Painting Jean becomes one way of attempting to do this. As R.W. Connell and James Messerschmidt have demonstrated, “gender is always relational, and patterns of masculinity are socially defined in contradistinction from some model (whether real or imaginary) of femininity”.⁹³ Bratby’s paintings uphold this – just as Bratby obsessively turns to his own image again and again as a means of defining and securing his own identity, so Jean is also inscribed and re-inscribed in various guises in his art, though always in relation to Bratby and his self.

⁹³ Connell and Messerschmidt, p. 848.

After their quick marriage in April 1953, the Bratbys' relationship seems to have swung violently from volatile to loving and back again at a frantic rate. He was notoriously selfish, forcing Jean to fetch and carry materials for him and making her sit as his model for long periods of time, since, in Maurice Yacowar's terms, "for Bratby, only Bratby and Bratby's work mattered".⁹⁴ Yacowar has discussed the way Bratby wrote about his own domestic violence in his novels, such as *Brake-Pedal Down*, where the main character's violence towards his wife is trivialised, joked about and even apologised for.⁹⁵ Similarly, in *Breakdown*, James Brady is tempted to stray from his devoted wife and his trapped domestic existence by a caricature of an unstable female art teacher, Esmerelda. After she threatens to blackmail him, Brady beats her and contemplates murder, but his descent into violence is pre-emptively excused: "With a somewhat mad, or shall we say unbalanced, female threatening him, it is surely more likely that he would go on breaking up, going from degradation to depravity".⁹⁶ The retrospective, autobiographical nature of Bratby's novels, in which he recycles and relives his past, almost seem like apologies or explanations for his own subsequent behaviour – his close attention to and description of James Brady's breakdown being a clear example. The violence of these characters, and the atmosphere in the Bratbys' household described by Yacowar as "marital strain", undoubtedly colours the images of Jean in some way.⁹⁷ Addressing the underlying allusions to domestic violence here is a challenge – in this section, I will frame this violence as an aspect of Bratby and Jean's relationship, and thus inevitably (and problematically) connected to Bratby's sense of selfhood, but also as a disturbing and inexcusable reality for the couple, and one that cannot go without comment now, as it may have done in the 1950s.

In *Jean at the Basin* (Figure 5), from 1955, Bratby paints his wife in the cramped bathroom of the house they were sharing with Jean's father in Greenwich. Jean stands in the centre of the work, with her hands on the sink and

⁹⁴ Yacowar, p. 24.

⁹⁵ Yacowar, p. 24-5.

⁹⁶ Bratby, p. 80.

⁹⁷ Maurice Yacowar provides a clear picture of the complexities of the Bratbys' relationship and the violence and mistreatment that came exclusively from Bratby and were directed at Jean. Her obituaries, published in 2008 after she died, also go some way towards confirming the violence that Bratby hinted at in his novels.

Figure 5: John Bratby, Jean At The Basin, 1955

her head slightly lowered so that her gaze is fixed on the floor. Jean was pregnant with the Bratbys' first child, David, in 1955 and it is probable that her rounded belly subtly alludes to this. Around her, Bratby takes delight in picking out the run down details of the bathroom, from the wallpaper peeling away above Jean's head at the top of the wall and along the ceiling, to the cracks in the white, sloping wall to her left. In contrast, the floor seems to have been painted in with quick, long marks of paint that sweep, dramatically and diagonally, towards the front of the work, where Bratby stands painting. Jean is positioned between the toilet – a favourite subject of Bratby's at this time – and the sink, forming a visual link to an observation of contemporary critic David Piper, published in 1957:

I observe he is excited by only two kinds of objects: himself and expended objects. Himself is by no means expended, but he always seems to take it out of everything else. Those women are all expended, and what's left is all debris, and the apparatus for disposing of debris, sinks, lavatories...⁹⁸

With Jean standing inactive alongside the toilet roll on top of the cistern and the Vim powder and mug that rest on the sink, it's difficult to deny her status as an expended object. This isn't an image of a woman getting ready in her bathroom – she's already fully dressed – but rather, in its intentionally posed nature, Jean is curiously aligned with the objects of the domestic bathroom.

Despite Jean's prominent position in the centre, the viewpoint of the painting follows Bratby's gaze, across the room, over the toilet and sink (into which we can see), over Jean's bowed head to the mirror above her, where he paints his own reflection. Bratby's presence, implied in the other works that depicted Jean, is painted in – he depicts himself doing so. He inserts himself in the upper part of the painting at the top of this dingy, run down bathroom with an intense focus that warps the scale of the room and the objects within it.⁹⁹ Jean's upper body is compressed to fit underneath the mirror, for example, marking her out as a secondary focus. Bratby's presence in the work and the use of a mirror is reminiscent of Velazquez's famous work, *Las Meninas*. In *Jean at the Basin*, Bratby combines Velazquez's techniques of using a mirror to reflect what cannot be depicted in the painting – for Velazquez, this is the king and the queen – and the insertion of a representation of the artist in the process of painting the work. There are subtle differences: while Velazquez lowers his brush while he pauses to look at his subjects, Bratby's hand is raised in the act of painting while he looks. Almost symbolically, the reflection of his hand meets the frame of the mirror, as if to demonstrate how he is forming the scene in front of him.

Michel Foucault's discussion of *Las Meninas* is a useful comparison for beginning to unpack what he refers to as the “network of uncertainties, exchanges, and feints” that lie at the heart of these images. Foucault views *Las*

⁹⁸ David Piper, 'The New Realism' in *Architectural Design*, April 1957, pp. 135-7.

⁹⁹ David Sylvester has noted increased Bratby's use of exaggerated, slightly warped perspective. In 'John Bratby', *New Statesman And Nation*, 21st September 1957, p. 816, most likely in reference to one of Bratby's bigger, frieze-like paintings, he describes the “complex and uneasy”, Mannerist perspectives of the works. Arguably, this is also present in this work – its “perverseness” allows Bratby to create the scene in terms of himself.

Meninas in relation to the workings and problems of representation, highlighting the “unstable superimposition” of the hidden subjects of the work – the king and queen, who occupy the space that projects out in front of the canvas – and their reflection in the mirror. Their ‘presence’ in the scene means that “the entire picture is looking out at a scene for which it is itself a scene”. This “spectacle-as-observation” is created by them, the two sovereigns, as, despite being withdrawn from the picture, they provide the centre around which it is ordered. Foucault notes that, in *Las Meninas*, the mirror should technically also reflect the viewer and the artist, but it does not; for him, the mirror functions to reflect “the gaze which has organised [the picture] and the gaze for which it is displayed”. It also demonstrates the problems of representation, as it shows how an image cannot “present in a full light both the master who is representing and the sovereign who is being represented”.¹⁰⁰ In quoting from *Las Meninas* in *Jean at the Basin*, in conflating the image of the artist at work and the depicted sovereign, Bratby is engaging with the process and the implications of representation. As both master and subject, he can exercise control over the scene – not in a hierarchical sense, but in the sense that he can construct an image of and setting for the self. As a result, Jean does not enter into the exchange of gazes – Bratby exchanges the look with himself, and thus has to be depicted looking *and* painting. At the same time, the canvas is unseen though its presence is alluded to in Bratby’s gesture in the mirror and the way the depicted floor falls away in the foreground, revealing the tilting door frame and a section of Bratby’s hallway. The result is that, once again, we can place ourselves in Bratby’s position, behind the canvas that stands on the threshold between the hallway and the bathroom, blocking the exit. This closing off of the space – without Velazquez’s visitor or window letting in light – is also significant in terms of self construction. It marks the space of the self for Bratby as the home, with the family, away from outside intrusions, in the spaces of domesticity. However, the idea of Bratby blocking the doorway with an easel and painting his wife in a confined space is a disturbing one, highlighting how his need to contain, to see, to depict and thus to define a sense of self was hardly straightforward or free of difficulty for him, and remains so for us as viewers.

¹⁰⁰ Michel Foucault, ‘Las Meninas’ in *The Order of Things* (Routledge: London, 2001), pp. 3-18.

Consequently, *Jean At The Basin* feels like a conflicted image – one imbued with a certain amount of containment of its female subject if not outright violence towards her, but also a parallel sense that this same containment is crucial for Bratby himself, as a kind of ‘trapping’ on canvas of everything that is important to his masculine self. So, he looks across the bathroom to himself, reflected in the mirror. We can look down, at Jean and the fixtures and objects of the bathroom, but his gaze remains fixed in paint, on himself. *Jean at the Basin* is only about what it claims to depict as an after thought – this is primarily Bratby on Bratby, in *his* home, with *his* wife. This concern with the self and its objects of relation recalls Van Gogh, as does the luminous yellow colouring of the interior setting – in fact, numerous contemporary critics noted similarities between the two artists.¹⁰¹ It is also Bratby’s approach to his subject matter that echoes Van Gogh, as both paint domestic objects and figures with an intensity that belies their own individual concerns. There is a sense here then that Jean serves a symbolic purpose that is deeply connected to the masculine self, one that has occurred in artistic self-representation by other modernist artists. Michael Leja has touched on this in his discussion of the Abstract Expressionist artists in America, who were active at this time. He notes how, in images of Willem and Elaine De Kooning and Jackson Pollock and Lee Krasner, the artist pairings adopt “highly clichéd postures” that reflect gender stereotypes: “man standing, woman seated; male attention outer-directed, female absorbed within; man commanding space, woman contained”.¹⁰² Certainly these oppositions are displayed in *Jean at the Basin*, with Bratby standing, his attention directed on work, commanding the space through his composition, and Jean situated at a lower position, looking to the floor and contained within the bathroom space between the sink and toilet.

¹⁰¹ A critic in *The Times* makes this comparison in a review of Bratby’s first one man show, suggesting that his paintings “make it easy to understand what it must have been like to be confronted with a Van Gogh for the first time” in ‘A Gifted Painter’, *The Times*, 17th September 1954. David Sylvester also consistently drew parallels between the two artists – in his early article on the Kitchen Sink Painters, he notes affinities between Bratby and Van Gogh immediately. Their similarities at this point, he suggests, are “less of style than of spirit: violent brushwork and strident colour are the manifestation of a desperate intensity of vision, are an act of surrender to the terrible vitality of things”, see ‘The Kitchen Sink’, *Encounter*, December 1954, p. 63. Other comparisons with Van Gogh by Sylvester occur in ‘Round The London Galleries’, *The Listener*, 29th September 1955, p. 512 and in *New Statesman and Nation*, 21st September 1957, p. 816.

¹⁰² Michael Leja, *Reframing Abstract Expressionism: Subjectivity and Painting in the 1940s* (Yale University Press: London, 1993), p.254.

Leja also notes how women often acted as symbols alongside male artists, helping to confirm “the heterosexuality or ‘masculinity’ of their partners” to put forward an image of “normalised, domesticated bohemia”.¹⁰³ This is perhaps less relevant for Bratby – there is no need for Jean to be present to signal a “normalised, domesticated bohemia” because Bratby’s paintings are so clearly rooted in the domestic and normative, even if, at the same time, they bring a sense of uneasiness to that same sphere.

Jean’s presence is perhaps more closely attached to another of Leja’s thoughts on these kinds of pairings in art: “We might wonder, in passing, how the men would have presented themselves had they appeared in the women’s work areas”.¹⁰⁴ In Bratby’s case, his working area is also a woman’s work area – not just in the sense that Jean was also an artist who worked at home (when she was allowed or he wasn’t painting over her canvases) but also in the sense that Bratby’s studio, at this point in his career, is his family home. The home, during the 1950s and throughout modernity, was widely considered to be a feminine space. For Bratby to work here is to go against the popular divisions of the masculine work and feminine home spheres in the 1950s. To incorporate it as a subject in his art is to enter into what could be interpreted as a feminised genre in art history, though, as we have seen, he appears to have qualified this by emphasising the role of his own emotions, about himself and his subjects, in his paintings. In *Jean at the Basin*, Bratby is not necessarily imposing masculinity onto domesticity (though he adopts it as a sphere for the expression of masculinity), nor is he wrestling control of the home from women (though he contains and paints his wife within its spaces). By shifting the focus from Jean and the objects in the room to himself through his gaze in the mirror, he paints the construction of the self within the home – domesticity and its relationships becomes the locus for the formation of the masculine self for Bratby here.

In attempting to explain how domesticity can be the locus for Bratby’s formation of the masculine self, it is useful to consider Melanie Klein’s psychoanalytic theories of the family, which had become particularly prominent in Britain at this time. Klein argues that symbol formation occurs in infants after

¹⁰³ Leja, p. 255.

¹⁰⁴ Leja, p. 255.

a phase of anxiety brought on by sadistic tendencies towards the mother and father as a result of the Oedipus Complex. Symbol formation refers to the projection of the father and mother's genitals and organs, the subjects of attack and fear in the sadistic and anxious phases, onto other objects. According to Klein, this process forms the basis for the child's relations to the outside world, away from the family. For example, in her analysis of Dick, an autistic child, Klein noted how, for him, domestic objects such as wardrobes, chests of drawers and washbasins became associated with his mother and his mother's body.¹⁰⁵ This, for Klein, demonstrated Dick's on-going Oedipal anxieties with regard to the mother's body and his gradual, unconscious attempts to overcome them through symbol formation. For Klein, this symbol formation recurs in later life, through memory, repression, guilt and reparation, which she considered to be important drives towards creativity.¹⁰⁶

By applying a Kleinian reading to *Jean at the Basin*, it is possible to begin to see how the self can be formed by the people and objects of domesticity. Jean, the expectant mother and the artist's wife, is aligned with the washbasin, a symbol of the mother's body. Through Bratby's act of depicting them, both come to act as symbols for the successful construction of the masculine self. Jean and the wash basin form a pair in this sense – that basin becomes an object of symbol formation, a means of construction of identity, while Jean comes to stand both as a means of reparation in adulthood and a reminder of the mother left behind from infancy. All the while, Bratby gazes across this symbolic scene, to his own reflection in the mirror, captured in tact, in the act of painting. In emphasising the pairing of the female figure with a domestic object, in depicting the actual act of painting this pairing, in making his own reflection, above the scene, his focus, Bratby's painting suggests the continual expression, through symbolism, memory and reparation, of a masculine and artistic self in paint. The importance here lies in the masculine/feminine exchange that Bratby co-ordinates in this work, so that he comes to exist, to be visible, within the interior. No wonder he

¹⁰⁵ See Melanie Klein, 'The Importance of Symbol Formation in the Development of the Ego' in *Love, Guilt and Reparation and Other Works, 1921-45* (Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis: London, 1981), pp. 219-28.

¹⁰⁶ See Melanie Klein, 'Infantile Anxiety-Situations Reflected in a Work of Art and in the Creative Impulse' in *Love, Guilt and Reparation and Other Works, 1921-45* (Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis: London, 1981), p. 217-8.

gazes across the scene into the mirror, triumphantly holding the paintbrush, as if a battle of selfhood, rooted in the relationship between genders, has been, temporarily, won. A Kleinian reading of the people and objects of domesticity as necessary for the construction of the self returns us to Piper's interpretation of Jean and the domestic apparatus as "expended objects". However, as Bratby's obsession with selfhood has demonstrated, they may appear "expended" but they are in no way expendable.

Klein's psychoanalysis had a significant amount of influence in Britain in the 1950s. Juliet Mitchell suggests that her turn towards focusing on the relationship between the mother and child at the centre of the family not only influenced a number of prominent British psychoanalysts in the late forties and fifties but also chimed with government policy on the family in this period.¹⁰⁷ Klein's view of the initial relationship between the mother and child, as we have seen, is not without its difficulties – Klein's mother and child relationship is based on the constant interaction of the child's feelings of love and hate towards the mother in the early stages of life. At this point, the mother forms the basis and centre of the child's world. The child experiences feelings of love towards the mother when it receives food, gratification and comfort; when these are denied, it experiences feelings of hate. These feelings trigger phantasies in the child that are imagined to have actually occurred, so feelings of hate are accompanied by aggressive, destructive phantasies towards the mother, which are then replaced by loving phantasies of reparation, out of fear and anxiety of having done damage to a loved one. This intermingling of love and hate in the child's relationship with the mother profoundly influences the development of an individual's emotional life from then on, through the aggressive and loving phantasies of the Oedipus complex, and on to relationships with other people and their own children in later life. For Klein, then, the vital, formative relationship between the mother and child is steeped in aggression as much as love, and a particular path through these two extremes needs to be worked out.¹⁰⁸ Klein's ideas, and particularly her focus on the importance of the mother

¹⁰⁷ See Mitchell, p. 231.

¹⁰⁸ Melanie Klein and Joan Riviere, *Love, Hate And Reparation* (W.W. Norton and Company Inc/The Norton Library: New York, 1964), pp. 57-67 in particular. Also, Melanie Klein, 'Early

and child relationship for selfhood, were picked up by British figures such as D.W. Winnicott. In his 1957 essay, 'The Mother's Contribution to Society', Winnicott made the implications of Klein's work more explicit. He framed the "long and exacting task" of parenthood as providing "the only real basis for society, and the only factory for the democratic tendency in a country's social system".¹⁰⁹ Furthermore, he places the mother at the centre of this task:

every man or woman who is sane, every man or woman who has the feeling of being a person in the world, and for whom the world means something, every happy person, is in infinite debt to a woman. At the time when as an infant (male or female) this person knew nothing about dependence, there was absolute dependence.¹¹⁰

With Winnicott's viewpoints, the connections between psychoanalysis and the post-war welfare state are perhaps a little clearer, as is the manner in which Klein's theories led to an overwhelming focus on the mother-child relationship as the foundation not just for the sociality of individuals, but also for the successful continuation of democratic society.¹¹¹

Clearly, Klein's psychoanalytic theories, and their adaptation and dissemination in Britain through figures like Winnicott, offer a way to view the construction of mother-centred domesticity in Britain at this time, as well as Bratby's 1950s paintings, which are similarly preoccupied with the female centre of the household and her relation to his own self. However, this privileging of the family and the domestic sphere, focused around the mother, as the site for the construction of the new British citizen, and, by extension, the state, also makes it prone to breakdown or external threat. The incorrect negotiation of familial relationships, often with a great deal of stress on the role of the mother, become not only threats to the existence of individual families, but also national interests more broadly. It is clear then how *Jean At The Basin* can place the figure of the

Stages Of The Oedipus Conflict'. *Love, Guilt and Reparation and Other Works, 1921-45* (Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis: London, 1981), pp. 186-98.

¹⁰⁹ D.W. Winnicott, 'The Mother's Contribution To Society'. *Home Is Where We Start From: Essays By A Psychoanalyst*, compiled and edited by Claire Winnicott, Ray Shepherd and Madeline Davis (Penguin: Middlesex, 1986), p. 124.

¹¹⁰ Winnicott, 'The Mother's Contribution To Society', p. 125.

¹¹¹ Eli Zaretsky has extensively analysed the way in which figures such as D.W. Winnicott and John Bowlby adapted Kleinian psychoanalysis to suit the social interests and democratic aims of post-war Britain. See Zaretsky, 1999 and 2004.

expectant mother and wife at the centre of an image that is concerned with the construction of selfhood – she is the pivotal figure in familial and individual relationships, the figure that can aid self-formation as well as hinder it. No wonder Bratby stands in the doorway and contains her there, when so much is, so uncomfortably, at stake.

If *Jean At The Basin* makes the fraught relationship between men and women an element of self-construction in the home, then other paintings of Jean by Bratby make their difficult, violent undercurrents a little clearer and more difficult to account for. For example, in 1954's *Jean On The Sofa With A Teddy* (Figure 6), Jean sits at one end of a flowered sofa. With her back supported by one arm of the sofa, her legs stretch out across the rest of its length, out of the frame of the painting. Bratby, once again, adopts an extreme viewpoint, presumably from a standing position close but above Jean – the sofa, and by extension Jean, appears to have been backed into the corner, against the wall. With her head slightly bowed, her gaze is directed at him, and she looks up with wide eyes to where he stands. Her expression and her gaze are difficult to read; Yacowar has read these as “trepidation” in light of the violent nature of the Bratbys’ relationship, but they could just as easily suggest defiance.¹¹² This reading is backed up by the position of Jean’s hands, which are crossed and cover her pubic region. Any sexual or voyeuristic qualities are denied then, by the position of Jean’s hands, her confrontational gaze and the sickly yellows, reds and pinks that Bratby uses to pick out the contours of her body. Jean’s position on the sofa, her pose and her gaze all beg comparison with Manet’s *Olympia*, though Bratby takes these quotations from the courtesan’s bedroom and transplants them to the domestic setting. One additional element that lends the painting a further sense of ambiguity is the teddy, positioned on the edge of the sofa almost as an afterthought. Its head rests on the side of Jean’s right arm, while its arm drops to rest on her hip. The work was painted in 1954, a year before the Bratbys had any children, so the teddy is not necessarily inserted into the work as a child’s play thing that was lying around the house. Its presence could be read to suggest the possibility of children and Jean’s pose, with her arms forming a frame around her belly and breasts that are positioned in the centre of

¹¹² Yacowar, p. 26.

Figure 6: John Bratby, Jean On The Sofa With A Teddy, 1954

the canvas by Bratby, certainly emphasises her fecundity. With Jean returning Bratby's gaze – a knowing participant in this particular exchange, a partner - and Bratby focusing on the reproductive potential of her body, the painting seems to suggest familial potential alongside its threatening undercurrents.

The strange duality of Jean as potential subject of attack as well as potential mother finds parallels elsewhere in 1950s British culture, particularly in John Osborne's 1956 play *Look Back In Anger*. The play is built around the relationship between Jimmy and Alison, a married couple living together in their Midlands flat with their lodger, Cliff. Critics have often framed Jimmy and Alison's relationship in terms of class difference, but gender difference is also a

constant theme in the play, often expressed by Jimmy himself. His views on Alison, and women in general, veer from fear and scorn to complete dependency. So, early on in the play, after Alison has likened him to a child, Jimmy embarks on a rant against women where he accuses them of being violent and destructive. To Jimmy, Alison jumps on the bed “as if she were stamping on someone’s face” and draws the curtain in a “casually destructive way... like someone launching a battleship”. At their dressing table, meanwhile, women sit “dropping their weapons and banging down their bits of boxes and brushes and lipstick” so that “when you see a woman in front of her bedroom mirror, you realise what a refined sort of a butcher she is”.¹¹³ Immediately after this rant, however, Jimmy starts playing and wrestling with Cliff, knocking Alison over and scolding her with her iron in the process. She sends Jimmy out like a child while Cliff tends to her.¹¹⁴ Following a brief sulk, Jimmy apologises, and the two make up, retreating into a childish game of squirrel and bear (“You’re very beautiful. A beautiful, great-eyed squirrel”, “Well, you’re a jolly super bear, too”).¹¹⁵

If Jimmy and Alison’s relationship veers between violence and childishness, threat and dependence, then there are also moments when these two aspects overlap. At the end of act one, Jimmy (unaware that Alison is pregnant at this point) reacts to the news that her friend Helena is coming to stay with them with a particularly violent outburst. He wishes out loud for her to have a baby and for it to die, to “wake you out of your beauty sleep”, then likens himself to a baby in Alison’s womb, as a victim of her sexual passion:

She has the passion of a python. She just devours me whole every time, as if I were some over-large rabbit.
That’s me. That bulge around her navel – if you’re wondering what it is – it’s me. Me, buried alive down there, and going mad, smothered in that peaceful looking coil. Not a sound, not a flicker from her – she doesn’t even rumble a little... She’ll go on sleeping and devouring until there’s nothing left of me.¹¹⁶

¹¹³ Osborne, p. 24.

¹¹⁴ Osborne, pp. 26-34.

¹¹⁵ Osborne, pp. 33-34.

¹¹⁶ Osborne, pp. 37-38.

Jimmy's equation of himself with a child buried in Alison's womb is the point at which the various aggressive and childish strands of their relationship come together in one disturbing image of the husband as "smothered" infant in the mother's womb. This complex view of Jimmy and Alison's relationship speaks to the similarly multi-layered *Jean On The Sofa With A Teddy*. Here, Jean becomes both a figure to be attacked from the threatening viewpoint above her, but also a figure to be feared – not only does she physically conceal her genitals with her hands, but she also conceals, or could be concealing a child. Furthermore, the teddy may not only symbolise the possibility of a future family, but it may also stand for a retreat into a childlike state or a sense of dependency. Roles of mother, wife and lover, as well as father and child – femininities and masculinities – are allowed to overlap here, with their underlying aggression, anxiety and dependence prominently displayed.

At the centre of this fluid yet clearly problematic interpretation of familial roles are two figures – the mother and the masculine self. Klein's theories of the early love/hate relationship between mother and child, and the concepts of symbol formation and reparation that emerge from this have shown the connections and interactions between these two figures. In a later essay, 'The Theory Of Anxiety And Guilt', she clarifies that anxiety (so vital to the individual's development) is rooted in the death instinct. Anxiety about ultimate annihilation, for Klein, lies at the heart of the mother-child relationship, as it is a vital drive towards reparation and symbol formation after unconscious aggressive drives towards the mother's body, and continues to be present in all individuals, throughout life.¹¹⁷ It becomes clearer, then, how such contradictory images of a female figure, particularly in relation to motherhood, can arise in *Look Back In Anger* and *Jean On The Sofa With A Teddy*. The female is attacked, feared and loved at once, vital to a development of a sense of self through unconscious struggle and anxiety. Thus, in Bratby's painting, we are made to loom over Jean, to threaten her, just as she is made to return our gaze with her own ambiguous glance, somewhere between defiance and fear. Her fecundity and the possibility that her body can contain something are emphasised in her pose: just as she can

¹¹⁷ Melanie Klein, 'On The Theory Of Anxiety And Guilt' in *Envy And Gratitude and Other Works, 1946-1963* (The Hogarth Press And Institute Of Psychoanalysis: London, 1987), pp. 28-29.

contain and love a child (this possibility is gestured to by the teddy), she is also capable of devouring and smothering.

This idea of the mother as a vital and loving figure, while also someone to fear, is repeatedly addressed by D.W. Winnicott. In his view, knowledge that we were all once dependent on a mother can lead to “a vague fear of dependence”, sometimes taking the form of “a fear of WOMAN, or a fear of a woman” driven by a fear of domination.¹¹⁸ Seeking out danger helps to combat this fear of dependence and reach maturity, and men’s engagement in risk-taking, specifically going to war, is one way of doing this. Women are also able to engage in risk-taking, as Winnicott equates men undertaking war with women undertaking pregnancy and childbirth. However, with the development of the atomic bomb at the end of the Second World War, the opportunity for men to fight in a war appeared to have disappeared, with individuals essentially powerless in the face of nuclear war as the threat of destruction hung over everyone equally. So, “with no more wars, men find themselves high and dry”, while women continue in their risk-taking roles.¹¹⁹ Later, in 1963, Winnicott would suggest that one of the effects of the nuclear bomb on the psyche was to create a permanent state of adolescence. By denying men the chance to seek maturity in war, “the atom bomb affects the relationship between adult society and the adolescent tide which seems to be for ever coming in”.¹²⁰ Winnicott’s picture of men as having their possibilities of independence compromised by the atomic bomb finds a voice in one of Jimmy Porter’s most famous speeches in *Look Back In Anger*:

There aren't any good, brave causes left. If the big bang does come, and we all get killed off, it won't be in aid of the old-fashioned grand design. It'll just be for the Brave New-nothing-very-much-thank-you. About as pointless and inglorious as stepping in front of a bus. No, there's nothing left for it, me boy, but to let yourself be butchered by the women.¹²¹

¹¹⁸ Winnicott, ‘The Mother’s Contribution To Society’, p. 125.

¹¹⁹ Winnicott, ‘This Feminism’ in *Home Is Where We Start From: Essays By A Psychoanalyst*, compiled and edited by Claire Winnicott, Ray Shepherd and Madeline Davis (Penguin: Middlesex, 1986), p. 193.

¹²⁰ D.W. Winnicott, *Deprivation And Delinquency*, edited by Clare Winnicott, Ray Shepherd and Madeleine David (Tavistock: London, 1984), p. 150.

¹²¹ Osborne, pp. 84-5.

No wonder then that Osborne's character of Jimmy and Bratby's image of his wife in *Jean On The Sofa With A Teddy* both evoke images of women that are contradictory and ultimately intensely problematic. In the post-war British family, the woman, and particularly the mother, had become a central figure in the formation of individuals within the family, while also being the subject of unconscious attack within that realm. As a result, and filtered through interpretations of Melanie Klein's theories on symbol formation and anxiety, an individual (particularly a male individual) had to negotiate a state of independence while also recognising their initial and in many ways recurrent dependence on women. In *Jean On The Sofa With A Teddy*, these difficulties are written on the surface: in the look of threat, fear and defiance exchanged between Bratby and his wife; in the references to motherhood and fecundity in Jean's pose; and in the violence that brims just under the surface of this painting.

So far, I have examined how the violence of real life that permeates Bratby's paintings – in a sense of containment in *Jean At The Basin*, and in a feeling of threat in *Jean On The Sofa With A Teddy* – relates to the attempt at a definition of a masculine self. This is not to excuse it or ignore it, but to seek to understand why and how this private, shocking aspect of Bratby's relationship with Jean becomes an element of his art, written on the canvases and visible to us as viewers. In fact, Bratby frames his mistreatment of Jean within the processes or tropes of art in a way that allows it to be revealed and handled on his terms. For example, after Bratby's painting *Jean And Still Life In Front Of A Window* (Figure 7), from 1954, was awarded the Guggenheim prize in 1956, he wrote an article for *Art News And Review* that purported to explain the drawn out process behind its creation, and Jean's important, demanding role:

Jean, my wife, was that morning at the Royal College of Art, so I waited until she got in. I fixed a huge fire, got in some beer which I couldn't afford, to sustain her in her posing ordeal to come, and I resolved to take her to the pictures when she had finished posing ... Jean came in, grimaced when I told her what she had to do, and prepared to pose ... I had started that dinner time, both of us without any dinner, because my inspiration might go if I didn't exploit it immediately. Afternoon went through and the evening passed as I worked and worked. We snatched a hasty meal and worked in the late evening until past 12pm ... A horrible ache in my stomach, and a dry, searing feeling in my stomach tormented

Figure 7: John Bratby, Jean And Still Life In Front Of A Window, 1954

me, as I worked in that still lighted room. Jean understood and suppressed her weariness for the sake of the work. We went for a quick walk at 2am, got back about an hour later and worked until 9 when the house was woken into life.¹²²

In the painting itself, Jean is nude, perched on a chair alongside a table top packed with food and kitchen objects, and the strain of sitting for Bratby in these conditions (if Bratby's account is to be believed, she would have been awake for twenty-four hours by the time the picture was completed) shows visibly on her

¹²² John Bratby, 'How I Painted The Picture That Won The Guggenheim Award', *Art News and Review*, 27th October 1956, p. 9.

face. However, Bratby frames the process as being far tougher on him, ignoring his stomach aches so as to make the most of his inspiration and compensating Jean in beer and a possible trip to the cinema. What is striking here is how Bratby brings domestic life and those of its occupants to a standstill, and how this is presented as acceptable because it serves his artistic expression. A familial relationship of control and subordination (“I told her what she had to do”) becomes part of the process of artistic creation, excusable, and thus able to be made, rather triumphantly, public.

Violence or the exercising of power over a partner also become elements of Bratby’s art via references to particular art historical tropes. This occurs in *Jean In Bed*, 1954 (Figure 8). Here, Jean is in a more comfortable position, lying on her back on the mattress of the Bratbys’ bed, though this does not make the image a less difficult proposition. Her head and shoulders are visible and are turned slightly to face out of the painting. Her unkempt hair falls around and frames her head, while her wide, staring eyes make contact with the viewer and dominate her otherwise oddly expressionless, neutral face. The effect is unsettling. The rest of her body, or at least the top half of her body that would be visible in the frame of the canvas, is concealed under the rolling folds of the bed sheets. Painted thickly with a combination of creams, yellows, greens and blues, they have a heaviness that conceals Jean’s figure and seems to dominate the image, in contrast to the sharp, clean delineation of the features of her face. The pillows propped up behind her serve to complete a framing of Jean by elements of the bed – the mattress in front and under her, the sheets over her body, and the pillows behind and above her. Around the bed are an array of seemingly abstracted forms, possibly derived from the furniture and décor surrounding the bed in reality, but hard to discern; even the sheets and pillows begin to merge with these forms at the outer edges of the canvas. In effect then, Jean’s head and shoulders serve as the stable centre of the canvas, from which the unmade bed and ambiguous surroundings emanate. At this centre, it is her blank stare that both draws you in and repels you - it appears lifeless. Wrapped loosely in the folds of the sheets, her hair splayed out on all sides and with a fixed gaze, she could be the victim of a murder. Equally, these same aspects could have sexual connotations. Her seemingly lifeless stare could be a look of post-coital

Figure 8: John Bratby, *Jean In Bed*, 1954

recognition to the husband and lover that now paints her, while the bed sheets fall away loosely in the foreground of the painting to reveal mattress space that could easily have just been vacated. The chaos of bedding and objects surrounding her, depicted in a tumult of paint, lends itself to both readings and heightens the ambiguity of this painting.

The ambiguity at the heart of *Jean In Bed* – between love and hate, sex and murder – has a number of parallels in art history, and Bratby may have consciously sought to engage with them. There is, again, the British realist tradition – ambiguous images of a woman on a bed inevitably bring to mind Walter Sickert's *Camden Town Nudes* series of paintings. These paintings have been interpreted, largely via Sickert's ambiguous, inconsistent use of titles, as being concerned with the interaction between a female figure and a male figure, probably in the context of prostitution, or referring to the Camden Town Murder, which occurred as he was working on these images.¹²³ Their ambiguity has been linked to Sickert's desire to convey the "ultimate unknowability of the modern world".¹²⁴ However, the ambiguity in *Jean In Bed* seems to be more closely tied to gender. Jean's gaping eyes and splayed hair mean she recalls Caravaggio's

¹²³ On the ambiguity of Sickert's *Camden Town Nudes*, see Barnaby Wright, ed., *Walter Sickert: The Camden Town Nudes* (The Courtauld Gallery in association with Paul Holberton Publishing: London, 2007).

¹²⁴ Lisa Tickner, 'Walter Sickert and the Camden Town Murder' in Wright, p. 47.

Figure 9: Caravaggio, Medusa, 1597

depictions of Medusa (Figure 9). In Greek mythology, Medusa was both a beautiful and terrifying figure who could turn people to stone if they looked at her. While Caravaggio's famous vision of Medusa has her captured at the moment of her beheading, mouth open in shock and pain, with snakes writhing where her hair should be, Bratby's Jean looks eerily calm, subdued on the bed and staring back towards him. For Bratby to physically equate his wife with the figure of Medusa is to further imply a rather difficult relationship that links back to the myth but also strays from it. Jean's Medusa-like appearance suggests threat – the possibility that she could turn a man to stone – but Bratby paints her as if he has subdued her (through sex? through death?), and so he is able to paint the face that might initially have been dangerous to behold. Furthermore, he avoids beheading her. For Freud, the moment of beheading in the Medusa myth symbolised a fear of castration triggered by the sight of the female genitals. The male onlooker turning to stone was, for him, akin to an erection – a

compensatory response to the fear of castration.¹²⁵ In Bratby's painting then, the terror evoked by the female body is referenced but overcome in that he paints her as someone who has been subdued – by sexual means, or violent means, or both. Love and violence between the genders is allowed to exist on canvas by invoking an art historical and mythological trope: Jean is transformed into a female symbol, and one that has been heavily manipulated by the artist himself.

It seems jarring to discuss these undertones of power, mistreatment and violence in Bratby's art as phantasies of artistic selfhood – these undertones do, after all, echo, directly or indirectly, the violence of the Bratbys' own relationship, though they are also weaved into the creation and triumphant maintenance ('How I Painted The Picture That *Won* The Guggenheim Prize') of a public artistic persona. That these images were created in the context of a violent and abusive relationship cannot, however, go without comment. From our perspective in twenty-first century Britain, we do now have a very broad and more public definition of domestic violence and abuse, which can, as Mary Allen outlines, include any kind of violence (physical or sexual), as well as physical and emotional force, emotional abuse, the destruction of property, enforced isolation from friends and loved ones, threats, and control of a partner's access to belongings, food or loved ones.¹²⁶ As we have seen, many of these elements occur in images of Jean, or in the Bratbys' relationship itself. But how can we, as viewers, begin to approach or account for this violence and mistreatment, when it is written on the canvases in front of us? And how can we begin to understand why an artist would broach the question of his own violence, in an indirect but still explicit manner, in his own art?

The answer perhaps lies in the much wider social structures surround men, women and the family in Britain at this time. In Allen's analysis of the causes of domestic violence, she demonstrates that sociological explanations – such as social stress or economic factors, alcohol, and social 'learning' of violence or helplessness – have not proved entirely adequate. However, feminist analyses

¹²⁵ See Sigmund Freud, 'Medusa's Head', *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. XVIII, translated by James Strachey (Vintage/The Hogarth Press: London, 2001), pp. 273-4.

¹²⁶ See Mary Allen, *Social Work and Intimate Partner Violence* (Routledge: London, 2013), pp. 1-12.

of ingrained patriarchal structures and their effects on individuals' conceptions of gender are more relevant, and for Allen, this comes down to a key concept: "the power differential between women and men, which is understood by the latter as proprietorship and control, and experienced by the former as submission".¹²⁷ As she demonstrates, these assumptions are present in legal, religious, and cultural structures, including, crucially, the family, and, as I have demonstrated, very similar assumptions permeated British society and the development of the welfare state after the Second World War. Additionally, Jeff Hearn, in a study that draws on interviews with men who have been violent towards women, has shown how men's explanations for their violence are rooted in these patriarchal assumptions. He notes how accounts of violence are often complex, combining "denials, excuses or justifications" that mingle with references to "inner violence, social ownership, confession" and other elements. What's more, they are narratives, forms of "social talk" that take place within the context of men's power and reproduce that power: "Men's accounts of violence are themselves usually both *within* and *examples* of patriarchal domination and male domination".¹²⁸ Accounts of violence often also reveal assumptions about how individuals feel they should perform their gender.

Thinking about Bratby's paintings of Jean as being, in one sense, accounts of domestic violence may be problematic but is also, I would argue, necessary. Paintings like *Jean At The Basin*, *Jean On The Sofa With A Teddy*, *Jean and Still Life In Front Of A Window*, and *Jean In Bed* display elements that reference domestic violence as we understand it (control, containment, threat, implied violence) while also seeming to explain or excuse them. So, Bratby exerts a sense of control that comes to stand in for or contribute to a sense of personal and artistic selfhood in *Jean At The Basin* and *Jean And Still Life In Front Of A Window*. From his images and accounts of their creation, you're given a sense that he needs this woman to feel complete, to be creative, but only in the sense that it reinforces his sense of power and, by extension, self. Meanwhile, in *Jean On The Sofa With A*

¹²⁷ See Allen, pp. 13-31 on debates about the causes of domestic violence. Her quote comes from p. 20.

¹²⁸ Jeff Hearn, *The Violences of Men: How Men Talk About And How Agencies Respond to Men's Violence to Women* (Sage: London, 1998), pp. 144-5.

Teddy and Jean In Bed, Jean takes on a more disturbing symbolic meaning, threatening to contain something herself or attack, which means that Bratby feels he has no choice but to subdue her. Bratby's artistic representations of his relationship are as multi-layered and complex as Hearn's interviews – accounts or narratives in themselves that speak from his viewpoint. Furthermore, Bratby's use of art as a medium to do this is key, and adds further complexity. In his paintings, Bratby arguably seeks to explain his violence, to confess to it in some roundabout way (as he does through characters in his novels), while also transfiguring it into the realms of art, another sphere. Jean becomes a female archetype – the nude, the woman in the bathroom or the kitchen, Medusa – and real violence mingles with fiction or artifice in a way that makes it, not acceptable, but difficult to pin down, intermingled with the (patriarchal) canons of art history, and not quite completely 'real' anymore. In this way, Bratby's paintings, and perhaps in certain circumstances art itself, come to occupy a strange position – public works that depict private emotions and relationships, not quite existing comfortably in one sphere or the other. In this sense, they also leave us with moral questions – asking us to consider the extent to which public artworks offer us glimpses into private worlds and, by extension, particular social assumptions. What is reproduced, what is hidden and what is unsaid?

It is probably fitting that Jean should have the last word here. Just as Bratby repeatedly used his wife as a subject, Jean also produced images of her husband. In an early portrait (Figure 10), dated 1954, Bratby is seated alongside a tabletop, just as Jean was in several of his works. Here, however, he is fully clothed and comfortable, his legs stretched out so that you can see his sandalled feet. A dog sleeps peacefully on the floor. On the table, there isn't the furious, unstable collection of objects – just a couple of bowls and spoons, some fruit, a glass and a plant, as if the couple had just finished sharing breakfast before Jean painted the work (in sharp contrast to Bratby and Jean snatching "a hasty meal" so that his inspiration didn't desert him). In the background, a door opens to another room, allowing an element of light, space and breathing room that doesn't occur in Bratby's paintings. The contrast is stark: Jean's painting speaks of a domestic outlook and sense of selfhood that is built on companionship, calm and openness that divert from Bratby's desperate rooting of a masculine,

domestic self in images that brim with violence and uneasy tension. The effect of this contrast is to underline the sense of gendered selfhood as being an on-going, complex and unstable process, dependent on relationships, spaces, representations, and narratives that are open-ended and themselves subject to change. In 1962, Jean produced another portrait of Bratby (Figure 11). Here, he sits slouched in a comfy chair in a red dressing gown; his blue and white striped pyjama bottoms are visible and he is barefoot. He clasps his hands together and

Figure 11: Jean Cooke, John Bratby, 1962

looks down with an expression that is half contemplation and half that of a sullen child. As a representation, it seems intimate and affectionate, but also faintly ludicrous – Bratby, one of the most successful British artists of the 1950s, who built his reputation on paintings that declare an unstable and difficult masculine persona, just out of bed, hardly looking like a threat at all.

Jean's paintings underline the way in which Bratby intentionally constructs a kind of masculinity in his own paintings, framing his persona, creative process and relationships in particular ways so has to hold and represent a sense of selfhood. Even the most exemplary kind of domesticity – built around the nuclear family – requires individual negotiation. That this is often done through images of Jean that barely attempt to conceal references to domestic violence makes them difficult for twenty-first century viewers to engage with without flinching. On some level, Bratby is no doubt aware that what he is doing is wrong – the paintings are like narratives of confession as well as explorations of selfhood, rather like the passages in his novels – but he is also operating in a historical moment and a sphere ('art', representation) where these moments of violence can be inscribed alongside art historical references and other, more contemporary nods to masculinity. As a result, Bratby's paintings speak to a difficulty of domesticity-oriented selfhood that may have seemed irreparable: how to reconcile a desire for mastery or an ideal, dominant kind of masculinity, with his position in the post-war nuclear family? His repetitive self-portraits and constant, unsettling depictions of Jean are formed out of the very process of this negotiation. These images are fixed moments of selfhood, painted furiously and quickly, capturing moments of comfort alongside uneasiness, as well as love alongside violence: they are difficult and uncomfortable to look at, but represent a fluctuating, unsettling view of family life, with one individual at its centre.

Abject Intimacy: Francis Bacon and Domesticity

Public and Private: Locating Bacon's Post-War Domesticity

In Francis Bacon's *Two Figures*, 1953 (Figure 12), in a darkened room, two men are having sex. One man straddles the other – this man's back is hunched as he leans in towards the other man's face and his leg hangs over the other man's body and the edge of the bed. The other man lies under the first man, on the bed. He appears to be in movement – the position of his legs and the ambiguous delineation of his face suggest that he is in the process of turning over, either from lying on his back to lying on his side, or vice versa. He has begun to raise his arm towards his partner, though its exact position is also ambiguous. Where the two bodies meet, particularly around their torsos and heads, they almost seem to merge – skin meets skin and in the shadows and thick pink-blue paint, it becomes hard to tell exactly where one body ends and another begins. However, one feature stands out – the mouth of one man, open and with teeth bared in a cry or gasp of pain or pleasure, or both.

The two men are positioned in a room that is depicted minimally, picked out with thin white lines and little else – no windows, doors, or lightbulbs. The only piece of furniture in the room is the bed, tilted with the perspective of the room so that its end is slightly closer to the picture plane than its top. The bed sheets and pillows are depicted with thick, liquid smears of white and blue paint that spill and pool over the bed, underneath the bodies and down onto the floor. Thin washes of paint descend from the top of the canvas and curve away on either side just below the bed. The effect is almost like faint beams of light or a particularly thin curtain that falls in front of and even through the figures, warping their already ambiguous expressions and moving bodies further. The result is an image that captures not only a particular setting for intimacy between two men, but also the sensations, the movements, even, through the mouth of one man, the sounds. As a viewer, the painting's power comes from the sense that not only are you witnessing this intensely intimate moment, but that you have also entered a particularly private space – the curtain has all but been drawn back. The sense of privacy being invaded is all the more palpable with the

Figure 12: Francis Bacon, *Two Figures*, 1953

knowledge that in 1953 the witnessing of this male sexual intimacy would have resulted in the two men being arrested.

Two Figures was first exhibited in a show of Bacon's works at the Hanover Gallery in the early 1950s, where his dealer and gallery owner, Erica Brausen, hung the work in the upper part of the gallery, half hidden from visitors who would have to actively seek out the work in order to see it.¹²⁹ With homosexuality illegal, Brausen was concerned that the graphic nature of Bacon's

¹²⁹ Michael Peppiatt, *Francis Bacon in the 1950s* (Yale University Press and the Sainsbury Centre, UEA: London, 2006), p. 31.

painting would provoke a police raid. Her fears surrounding the subject matter of the work not only reflect contemporary attitudes towards homosexuality, but also speak of a strict separation between the public and private. Bacon's painting made the private public and, in half concealing the work in the Hanover Gallery, Brausen, unsurprisingly, attempted to restrict its public visibility. Since its first exhibition, *Two Figures* has continued to live a semi-public, semi-private existence, not only in the sense that it has not been publicly exhibited for forty years.¹³⁰ Critics have also closely tied the painting with Edward Muybridge – the pose and positions of the two men in the painting clearly derive from his photographs of wrestlers taken in 1887. The intensely personal nature of the use of Muybridge's photographs has not gone without comment – David Sylvester viewed it as “a conflation of autobiography and photography” and saw Bacon and Peter Lacy's features in the two men, while, years later, Bacon himself admitted, “I manipulate the Muybridge bodies into the forms of bodies I have known”.¹³¹ However, the constant reference to Bacon's use of his sources when discussing this work in effect gives it a more palatable public face. Invoking Muybridge again and again is akin to Erica Brausen moving *Two Figures* half out of sight in 1953.¹³²

It is this degree of separation between public and private – between what can and can't be seen, and what can and can't be said – that dominated discussion and scholarship on Bacon's art throughout his life and, to a great extent, continues to this day. In many respects, this has been dictated by the artist and Bacon's reticence is unsurprising and even to be expected – he claimed that he had been banished from his family home by his father as a result of his sexuality, and we know that he explored his sexuality further in interwar Paris and Berlin. He was also producing images like *Two Figures* at a time when to be found to be homosexual, even to exhibit what were interpreted by wider society

¹³⁰ Matthew Gale and Chris Stephens, eds., *Francis Bacon* (Tate: London, 2008), p. 124.

¹³¹ See David Sylvester, *Looking Back At Francis Bacon* (Thames and Hudson: London, 2000), p. 72. Bacon is quoted in David Sylvester, *Interviews With Francis Bacon* (Thames and Hudson: London, 1999), p. 116.

¹³² Brenda Marshall makes a similar point about the focus on the Muybridge sources in her essay 'Francis Bacon: Trash and Complicity' in Martin Harrison, ed., *Francis Bacon: New Studies: Centenary Essays* (Steidl: London, 2009), p. 229. Marshall views works like *Two Figures* as images of transgression and deviance that gain their power in part from the way they enter the normative spaces of museums and galleries.

as signs of homosexuality (like wearing make-up, as Bacon did) was to risk arrest. To a great extent, Bacon's early forays into homosexual subject matter, deeply coded and relatively discreet as they largely were, were brave and illustrative of the particular experiences of contemporary homosexual men. That is not to say, however, that discussions of Bacon's art should continue to engage exclusively with the public face he constructed for it.

In fact, the simple, closed-off, windowless domesticity of a painting like *Two Figures* speaks of particular kind of queer experience in post-war London of which Bacon would certainly have been aware. This experience is itself closely tied to the complex and multifaceted ways that homosexuality was conceived by queer men themselves, as well as by the popular press, the government and the public at large. Historians such as Matt Houlbrook and Richard Hornsey have noted the intense unease about homosexuality by the British establishment in the immediate post-war period. Both scholars have outlined how queer men became symbols, in various contexts, of the decline of the British Empire, the effects of feminising consumerism, and the wartime breakdown of the family unit.¹³³ At the heart of these fears was usually the figure of the West End quean – effeminate, made up and usually considered predatory, the West End quean seemingly confirmed a number of fears about homosexuality's threat to British masculinity. Alongside this unease, however, there was a counter view of homosexuality emerging that drew on contemporary sexology to argue for it as an "unfortunate medical condition" that couldn't be helped.¹³⁴ It was out of this particular discourse, and the testimonies of discreet, middle class men like Peter Wildeblood – who had been arrested for homosexual offences in 1954, served time in prison and written *Against The Law* shortly afterwards about his experiences – that the Wolfenden Report emerged in 1957. The report recommended that homosexual behaviour in private between consenting adults should no longer be considered a criminal offence. Though clearly a first step towards the wider acceptance of homosexuality, the paradoxes of the Wolfenden Report are clear. By confining homosexuality to the home, it explicitly excluded it from public life while also continuing to criminalise the many queer men who,

¹³³ See Houlbrook, pp. 237-9 in particular. See also Hornsey, pp. 6-7.

¹³⁴ Hornsey, p. 1.

for one reason or another, did not have access to the kind of privacy afforded to wealthier members of society.¹³⁵

If the law confined queer men to the home at best, then the policies and aims of reconstruction also tended to marginalise and ignore them. Hornsey has demonstrated how reconstruction aimed towards the “administration of everyday space and time” and, in doing so, excluded “disordered practices”.¹³⁶ An atmosphere of consensus and social order was also encouraged by the stifling ideals and roles of citizenship, whether in relation to class, gender, sexuality or even daily rituals. Increasingly, and particularly in reconstruction London, specific spaces became associated with specific activities – ways of navigating around and operating within buildings and whole cities were policed, which posed problems for queer men.¹³⁷ The only private space that remained, then, was the home – as Hornsey points out, domesticity’s “valorised codes of privacy and discretion left it problematically beyond the reach of the administrative gaze”.¹³⁸ To a certain extent then, domesticity becomes the default environment for homosexual socialising and intimacy. However, Houlbrook argues that the binary between public and private has to be reconsidered, particularly for queer men who made up a “fragmented and often antagonistic community of space rather than identity”.¹³⁹ Interestingly, he also highlights the fact that, in the eyes of the law, domesticity excluded queer men – domestic space, until 1967, was by definition heterosexual space, since it contained the family unit. However, despite differing definitions of domesticity from wider society, the private space of domesticity still offered men more stable opportunities that public space did not. From apartments, to, more generally, affordable furnished rooms or lodging houses – temporary, transient privacy in the city – domestic spaces provided opportunities for men to explore and define their identities.¹⁴⁰ They were also more fluid than heterosexual concepts of the home – for queer men, the domestic

¹³⁵ Houlbrook concludes with similar reflections on the implications of the Wolfenden Report. See pp. 256-61.

¹³⁶ Hornsey, pp. 10-12.

¹³⁷ Hornsey devotes a whole chapter – ‘Reconstructing Everyday Life In The Atomic Age’ – to the implications of the aims of post-war reconstruction with regard to the control of individuals within certain spaces. See pp. 39-80.

¹³⁸ Hornsey, p. 101.

¹³⁹ Houlbrook, p. 66.

¹⁴⁰ Houlbrook examines the varying types of private spaces that queer men occupied, see pp. 109-32.

space was often where the public and the private crossed over, where pick ups entered and then left, with a certain amount of discretion.

To begin to think about domesticity in terms of homosexuality in the 1950s then, is to focus on an intensely private space, but also one that held a prominent position in public consciousness. To return to *Two Figures*, the sense of privacy comes not only from the work's dark, enclosed setting but also the frank sexuality on show, its passionate brutality and the sense of closeness between the two men, as two bodies merge in movement to become almost like one entity. Concurrently, Bacon's painting is a knowingly public work, with the figures positioned on the bed almost as if on a stage, right in front of the body and eye of the viewer as they stand in front of the canvas. You can imagine stepping into the interior, into the empty space in front of the couple on the bed where the sheets are falling in a heap. *Two Figures* is at once an intrusion of an alien privacy into another sphere – be it the psychological interior of the individual viewer, or the open, public exhibition space like the Hanover Gallery. At the same time, it seems so close that you could step into it, inviting a kind of complicit voyeurism while simultaneously being unaware of any other presence. As an image – and, since its initial exhibition, as an object too – it is positioned precariously on the boundaries of private domesticity and the public sphere.¹⁴¹

This sense of surveillance, of privacy being policed but also being explored in and imposing on the public sphere, is a recurrent theme in Bacon's works of the 1950s. His paintings based on the Velazquez portrait of Pope Innocent X produced in the early part of the decade are perhaps the most famous and widely discussed example of this. Numerous historians and critics have interpreted Bacon's Popes as father figures, comments on the nature of power and within the context of existentialism – the scream in particular has been a focus point, and certainly makes the intrusion of private, psychological horrors into a public image explicit.¹⁴² However, Bacon's more intentionally and

¹⁴¹ Nicholas Chare puts forward a summary of Bacon's aims that chime with this conclusion in his essay 'Upon the Scents of Paint: Bacon and Synaesthesia' in *Visual Culture In Britain*, Vol. 10, No. 3, pp. 253-270, p. 268. He views Bacon's works as having a synaesthetic potential, which he "sometimes puts to the service of expressing an outlawed sexuality, a form of sexual practice that dare not speak its name but will be given voice to through smells, sounds and textures".

¹⁴² For example, a range of sources for the scream are considered by Peppiatt, 2006, pp. 24-6, who concludes that "Bacon's genius was to have a single image through which he could express

superficially anonymous figures from the 1950s also engage directly with the boundaries of public and private spheres. The *Man In Blue* series of canvases, all painted in 1954, offer an interesting and under-discussed parallel to his Pope series. It is known that Bacon based these figures on a man he met at the Imperial Hotel at Henley-on-Thames in the March of that year and it is widely accepted in Bacon scholarship that the paintings make a degree of reference to the illicit hotel pick-up.¹⁴³ As a series of works, they gain a certain amount of power from their strict uniformity, their quiet, unnerving tension, and their minimal but careful composition. In each work, the male figure is situated in a blue-black setting similar in claustrophobic tone to *Two Figures*. He is always positioned in close proximity to a bar or a booth – in *Man In Blue IV* (Figure 13) and *V* for example, he leans towards the viewer, clenching his hands as if in conversation, while in *Man In Blue I* (Figure 14) he folds his arms and leans over a shiny table top, looking to his right. In *Man In Blue III* or *VII* however, he is without gesture, occupying the space with an eerie stillness. In each image, you can see his black tie against the white triangle of his shirt, which itself is tightly delineated by the lapels of his dark suit – an ever-present uniform. Numerous historians have highlighted the normative, limited nature of men’s clothing in the 1950s, both in relation to Bacon’s dressed male figures and independent of his art.¹⁴⁴ In this sense then, the *Man In Blue* series draws on the need for homosexual men to adopt a particular public mask, choosing respectable, masculine suits over the make-up and drag of West End queans for example, in order to exist in a dominantly heterosexual society. The private is concealed in public, at least to the untrained eye.

In Lord Gowrie’s obituary of Francis Bacon, published in *The Guardian* shortly after his death, Bacon’s own sexuality is addressed:

the whole range of his most extreme emotions: fear disdain, hate, lust and even a fierce kind of love”; for Gilles Deleuze in *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation* (Continuum: London, 2005) the Pope’s scream can be a means of escape (p. 19) and is also connected to the invisible forces of horror (pp. 42-3). Meanwhile, Hugh Davies interprets them in terms of existentialism – see Hugh M Davies, *Francis Bacon: The Papal Portraits of 1953* (Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego and Lund Humphries: London, 2002), p. 12.

¹⁴³ Gale and Stephens, p. 122.

¹⁴⁴ In relation to Bacon, see Alistair O’Neill, ‘Available in an Array of Colours’ in *Visual Culture In Britain*, Vol. 10, No. 3, pp. 271-91, pp. 275-6; see also Hornsey, p. 110.

Figure 13: Francis Bacon, Man In Blue IV, 1954

He told me that he (Bacon) had come to the view that homosexuality was an affliction, that it had turned him, at one point in his life, into a crook. The crookishness, not the sex, was a source of shame and if he talked at all, it was his nature to tell everything. We both liked Proust and agreed that the beginning of *Cities Of The Plain* said all that needed to be said about being homosexual.¹⁴⁵

The short first half of volume four of Proust's *In Search Of Lost Time* is certainly useful for considering queer conceptions of space in relation to Bacon's work, particularly that of the ambiguous figures of his *Man In Blue* series. Proust's text

¹⁴⁵ Lord Gowrie, 'Obituary: Francis Bacon', *The Guardian*, 29 April 1992.

Figure 14: Francis Bacon, Man In Blue I, 1954

finds the unnamed narrator observing goings-on in the Guermantes' courtyard and surrounding buildings. He happens to watch a chance meeting between a tailor, Jupien, and the Baron M. De Charlus, and the description of their encounter reflects the realities of queer experience in the 1950s, transferred to a different setting and time. The narrator notes the random nature of Jupien and M. De Charlus' meeting – M. De Charlus does not normally call at this hour, so his arrival coincides with Jupien's regular time for leaving for his office. Their meeting occurs in public, in the courtyard, with Jupien, crucially poised, "on the doorstep of his shop".¹⁴⁶ Communication between the two characters progresses

¹⁴⁶ Marcel Proust, *In Search Of Lost Time: Part IV, Cities Of The Plain*, trans. S.K. Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin (Chatto and Windus: London, 1992), p. 5.

in a particularly specific manner – they adopt harmonious poses and exchange mutual glances in a “dumb show which... seemed to have been long and carefully rehearsed”.¹⁴⁷ As Jupien begins to walk out of the courtyard, M. De Charlus follows him, eventually asking him for a light, despite not having any cigars with him. Jupien then invites him inside, and the two men disappear into his shop. The narrator makes the coded nature of these actions clear (“all of that I have just said, however, I was not to understand until several minutes had elapsed...”) and decides to continue to spy on the two men.¹⁴⁸ Noticing that he can listen to what is going on through a thin partition next to the shop, he decides to make his way over to the other side of the courtyard. Echoing M. De Charlus and Jupien’s risky undermining of correct public behaviour, the narrator decides against making his way through the rooms of the building and underneath the courtyard, and instead edges across the courtyard in the open, close to the walls. On reaching the other side, he hears the two men having intercourse and describes the ambiguous nature of the sounds: “I might have thought that one person was slitting another’s throat within a few feet of me, and that subsequently the murderer and his resuscitated victim were taking a bath to wash away the traces of the crime”.¹⁴⁹ The two men eventually emerge, with M. De Charlus thrusting money into Jupien’s hand and asking about other men nearby. The narrator describes the overwhelming transformation in how he perceives M. De Charlus having witnessed what happened – “until then, because I had not understood, I had not seen”, he declares, and later, “everything that hitherto had seemed to my mind incoherent, became intelligible”.¹⁵⁰

That Bacon would consider this description of an encounter between M. De Charlus and Jupien, and Proust’s subsequent ruminations on homosexuality, to be crucial to his own conception of his sexuality is telling, and in many ways reflects the conditions of existence for queer men in the 1950s. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s influential reading of Proust, which focuses particularly on this section of *In Search Of Lost Time* before taking in the rest of the novel, is useful for context here. Sedgwick acknowledges the “sentimental and reductive” nature

¹⁴⁷ Proust, p. 5.

¹⁴⁸ Proust, p. 8.

¹⁴⁹ Proust, p. 10.

¹⁵⁰ Proust, p. 15 and pp. 16-7.

of Proust's explanation of homosexuality as linked to inversion, evinced throughout this chapter and particularly in the body and character of M. de Charlus.¹⁵¹ However, she highlights the contradictions at the heart of the text – in the fluid gendering of the characters of M. de Charlus and Jupien, the ill-fitting analogy of the orchid and the bee that Proust uses for their relationship, and the ambiguous figure of the narrator, who performs ignorance while also seeming to know what lies behind the two men's gestures and actions. Sedgwick suggests that the narrator illuminates the "spectacle of the closet" while also speaking from the "viewpoint of the closet" himself.¹⁵² While clearly playing down the urge to unmask the homosexual subject in the narrator and the author, she makes a crucial point about the closet and authorship. The presentation of a closeted figure in art highlights the importance of knowledge, so that "the very existence of expertise, to whomever it belongs, guarantees everyone who is not its designated object an empowering and exciting specular differential of knowledge that seems momentarily insulated from the edginess of "It takes one to know one"".¹⁵³ This is not to say, I think, that Proust or Bacon or any queer artist makes the closeted figure their subject as a means of deflection, of remaining in the closet themselves. Proust's narrator's observation and Bacon's suited men reflect the way in which everyone is implicated in relations of knowledge – of seeing and not seeing, of understanding and not understanding – particularly in terms of 1950s queer experience. So, Proust's narrator, behaving like a detective for his audience, focuses on deviations from normal routines or journeys, and finally appears to come to realise the nature of Jupien and M. De Charlus' relationship by listening in on what is going on behind closed doors. The two men's behaviour is observed as something which can only be understood by those in the know, full of signs, clues, wordless gestures, and glances. They themselves, in this case, remain unaware that they have been watched – though their conversation eventually turns to their own observations of other closeted men.

It is arguable, therefore, that Bacon's *Man In Blue* series is not just a reflection of the persecution of homosexuals in post-war Britain and the masks

¹⁵¹ Sedgwick, 1990, pp. 216-7.

¹⁵² Sedgwick, 1990, pp. 222-3.

¹⁵³ Sedgwick, 1990, p. 225.

that men had to adopt in public. In a sense, the paintings are also caught up in the spectacle of the closet that Sedgwick begins to unpack in Proust. Furthermore, these works are also related to a more fluid conception of domesticity, or, more precisely, privacy in public – one that operates outside the home and can be constructed and dismantled at will.¹⁵⁴ It is worth bearing in mind Bacon's own attitude to intimacy and sociability in his own life, especially considering that the 1950s was a particularly turbulent decade for him – it stretched from his studio at Cromwell Place, to rather less comfortable rented rooms in London, to bars and restaurants in Soho and temporary accommodation in South Africa, Tangiers and Monte Carlo. It also encompasses a range of figures who enter and exit Bacon's life with varying frequency, few of whom can be counted as Bacon's blood family though all help to form a domesticity that mutates and re-forms in idiosyncratic spaces. As Michael Peppiatt has noted:

when he went 'home' he was confronted by a comfortless mess in a temporary space. He might cut himself off for days, seeing no one and leaving the telephone unanswered, then reappear as the most gregarious man in London, with friends at every level of society, and often in the most surprising places.¹⁵⁵

Peppiatt's account of Bacon's extreme approach to life in London gives an impression of a life lived across spheres – if the home couldn't bring comfort and social opportunities, then these could almost certainly be found elsewhere, in the overlooked, momentary privacy of public spaces, both with friends and with strangers. Returning to the *Man In Blue* series, the temporary, broad nature of this kind of domesticity has been inscribed in the minimal, slightly ambiguous

¹⁵⁴ A number of queer theorists have argued for a more fluid conception of the private and the public, and have proved useful for thinking about Bacon in this way. In *Space, Place and Sex: Geographies of Sexualities* (Rowman and Littlefield: Lanham, 2010), Lynda Johnston and Robyn Longhurst argue for a more flexible definition of 'home'. They suggest thinking in terms of 'scales' in relation to space and sex, so that these concepts can be seen to stretch from the national or global, down to the body and the home: "Scales can exist simultaneously. They can also intersect. They are fluid and flexible" (p. 7). Additionally, Michael Warner addresses the public and the private in his previously cited collection *Publics and Counterpublics*. In 'Public and Private', Warner notes how "attempts to frame public and private as a sharp distinction or antinomy have invariably come to grief, while attempts to collapse or do without them have proven equally unsatisfying" (p. 29). With Lauren Berlant in 'Sex In Public', Warner argues for the way gay men have to learn to "construct the architecture of queer space in a homophobic environment" (p. 191).

¹⁵⁵ Peppiatt, 2006, p. 33.

interiors that make up the space. Additionally, within this space, Bacon's male figures barely make an impression – only the slightest facial features and the familiar collar and tie bring them forward out of the darkness. As bodies in space, they leave barely a trace of themselves; they exist on the boundary between recognition and invisibility, easily replaced by another equally anonymous figure on another occasion. It is worth bearing in mind that the *Man In Blue* series are paintings of the kind of men Bacon liked to pick up – heterosexual men, who “could be seduced by money, or by the novelty, or by their own desire for defiance”.¹⁵⁶ These are men who are defined, at least in Bacon's experience, by their anonymity, and his paintings literally frame them within their recognisable spaces – leaning, looking, waiting.

This mutual formation of a particular figure and a particular space in one image is closely linked to Bacon's sexuality and his own conception of a fluid domesticity – a conception that is aware of the way the public and private can overlap. It reaches beyond the still crucial subject matter of the *Man In Blue* paintings, to the formulation of the works themselves. Gilles Deleuze has written extensively about the concept of the figure in space in Bacon, largely in relation to his mutual understanding with the artist about a lack of narrative in Bacon's art. However, Deleuze's understanding of the way in which Bacon forms individual figures in space can assist in thinking about how the artist constructs temporary spaces from painting to painting that relate to his post-war, queer experiences. Deleuze understands Bacon's paintings as working on a mutual relation between figure and field – the two move between each other to create a total image, what he terms the Figure.¹⁵⁷ For him, space is only an “operative field”, serving to isolate the figure and, crucially, avoid narrative.¹⁵⁸ However, the intense relationship between figure and field or setting, and the sense of isolation that stems from this, is in fact inherently linked to the narratives of post-war queer experience that I have outlined. In the *Man In Blue* series, the figure seems inseparable from the setting or the field, trapped in a particular narrative that seems impossible to deny.

¹⁵⁶ See Michael Peppiatt, *Francis Bacon: Anatomy of an Enigma* (Westview Press: Boulder, Colorado, 1998), p. 80.

¹⁵⁷ Deleuze, pp. 4, 10-11.

¹⁵⁸ Deleuze, pp. 1-2.

In many ways, Deleuze's approach reflects Bacon's wishes – in Sylvester's interviews, the artist almost seems to provide a point of reference for him:

I hate a homely atmosphere and I always feel that *malerisch* painting has too homely a background. I would like the intimacy of the image against a very stark background. I want to isolate the image and take it away from the interior and the home.¹⁵⁹

However, even as a retrospective statement that refers to Bacon's work beyond the 1950s, it seems very striking how consistently his paintings refer to the interior or the home throughout his career. You could argue that if Bacon really was attempting to remove his images from the interior and the home then he ultimately failed, though I want to suggest that his images are examples of the reorganising of the spaces and boundaries of the public and private – and by extension, domesticity itself. In this way, the relationship of figure to space is crucial to the understanding of the *Man In Blue* series. The men that Bacon's paintings depict are inscribed in loose impressions of the environment of the pick up – the anonymous décor of the hotel bar. They become almost indistinguishable from their surroundings because that's the only place that can be found; they are anonymous because anonymity is inherent to the circumstances of the images. Intimacy has to be sought with uncertainty, without names, or even faces – even facial features are distorted and disguised by space and light (or its lack) so that the paintings become records of the sensations of anonymity. Returning to Proust's text, it should be noted how the sensations and setting of M. De Charlus and Jupien's meeting are given primary importance. Their poses, facial expressions, clothing, gestures, speech and actions are closely observed, both by the narrator and the men themselves. The negotiation of the space of the courtyard and the surrounding buildings by all of those involved has to be achieved with a great deal of care and a certain amount of luck. These aspects are as vital to the creation of an impression of the sensations of an experience as the murky darkness, boxy interiors, suit and tie uniform and ambiguous expressions of Bacon's men in blue.

¹⁵⁹ Sylvester, 1999, p. 120.

The negotiation and expression of sensations of experience and the sensations of space are inherent parts of queer lives, and a number of writers have sought to express this. Sara Ahmed has suggested that sexual orientation can be considered spatially, as “a matter of residence; of how we inhabit spaces as well as “who” or “what” we inhabit spaces with”.¹⁶⁰ For Ahmed, it follows that her way of thinking about orientation also suggests that just as bodies acquire shape in the performance of sexuality, they are also formed by space, which is, predominantly, heterosexual. This can clearly be restrictive or prohibitive for homosexual bodies, but she argues that they can also be considered generative – they “create objects and worlds” that are near, close at hand, and given.¹⁶¹ Admittedly, fields or spaces are often rooted in heterosexuality – as Ahmed argues, “what puts objects near depends on histories, on how “things” arrive, and on how they gather in their very availability as things to “do things” with”.¹⁶² Queer objects are often out of reach, and queer spaces have to be formed or negotiated within the field of heterosexuality. This is usually a process that has to be completed again and again, often for fleeting moments, as Ahmed acknowledges: “inhabiting the queer slant may be a matter of everyday negotiation”.¹⁶³ In many ways, Ahmed’s ideas progress logically from Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner’s essay, ‘Sex In Public’. For Berlant and Warner too, queer domesticity sits uneasily within heteronormativity: “Making a queer world has required the development of kinds of intimacy that bear no necessary relation to domestic space, to kinship, to the couple form, to propriety, or to the nation”.¹⁶⁴ No wonder then that Bacon expresses his hatred of a homely atmosphere and emphasises that he tried to move away from it – how can he possibly feel completely at home here? However, Bacon, like everyone else, must find some sort of home somewhere, and that is why so many of his figures settle uneasily, temporarily, awkwardly, in anonymous, semi-private, semi-public interiors. Arguably, Ahmed’s and Berlant and Warner’s ideas of everyday negotiation are present in Bacon’s *Man In Blue* series and throughout his 1950s

¹⁶⁰ Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*. (Duke University Press: London, 2006), p. 1.

¹⁶¹ Ahmed, p. 87.

¹⁶² Ahmed, p. 88.

¹⁶³ Ahmed, p. 107.

¹⁶⁴ Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner in Warner, *Counterpublics*, p. 199.

work, not only in Bacon's constant inscription and re-inscription of a familiar setting – public but also private, familiar but also anonymous. It is also present in the ambiguous nature of the male figures that become his subjects distorted by the light, shifting uncomfortably in their suits, and emerging from the behind the bar as if that is their permanent residence. Their space almost absorbs or confines them and they also move barely noticed within it. It is only in the subtle hints and clues – the slightest lean forward, an upturned mouth, or the slightest glimpse of an eye – that these works reveal their true subject. As Bacon himself reflected in typically broad, blunt language, everyday looking and negotiating was, for him, part of a particularly queer experience:

Whenever I really want to know what someone looks like I always ask a queer – because homosexuals are always more ruthless and more precise about appearance. After all, they spend their whole lives watching themselves and others, then pulling the way they look to pieces.¹⁶⁵

Memory, Violence, Shame: Bacon and Abjection

Beginning to think about Francis Bacon's paintings as closely linked to the sensations of figures and places alongside a more fluid sense of domesticity proves productive, particularly when the importance of memory for his art is considered. It is widely recognised that Bacon drew on memory and the knowledge of people he knew well for portraits, preferring to use photographs as a means of triggering inspiration rather than working from life. Even Deleuze acknowledges this, though he resists using the word 'memory', but follows John Russell to compare Bacon to Proust and invoke "involuntary memory" – the coupling of a present and a past sensation in one image. This idea that sensations relating to particular people and experiences recur in Bacon's works is useful for beginning to unpick queer readings of his art.¹⁶⁶ When the traditional conception of domesticity isn't useful – when the public and private seem increasingly ill-defined – then the memory, recorded in paint, of fleeting moments of intimacy or

¹⁶⁵ Bacon is quoted in Michael Peppiatt, *Francis Bacon: Studies For A Portrait. Essays and Interviews* (Yale University Press: London, 2008), p. 181.

¹⁶⁶ Nicholas Chare has interpreted Bacon's works along these lines, with his interpretation of his paintings as having "synaesthetic potential". See p. 262.

figures that come and go, is a crucial means of making a particular type of existence tangible. I have already suggested that, for Bacon in the late 1940s and 1950s, domesticity was makeshift, unstable and, at times, comfortless. Michael Peppiatt's work on the artist during this period is incredibly insightful and crucial to an understanding of the artist at this time, though, outside of Peppiatt's own writing, there has been little attempt to expand on what he has uncovered in relation to Bacon's art. What seems clear, however, is that the instability of domesticity, the sensations of experience and the tool of memory are important elements of Bacon's post-war output.

In late 1943, Bacon moved into a new studio at 7 Cromwell Place in London with his childhood nanny, Jessie Lightfoot, who had been living with him since the early 1930s. By 1947, Bacon's then long term partner Eric Hall moved in permanently, leaving his own wife and family behind to complete the trio and form what Peppiatt calls an "odd, happy" set up, "one of the most bizarre domestic arrangements in London".¹⁶⁷ Peppiatt highlights the way in which this arrangement became like a makeshift family for Bacon, to the extent that the older Hall came to serve the roles of lover and father, while Lightfoot acted as mother. The picture painted by Peppiatt of this period of Bacon's domestic life is one of momentary stability, bohemian unconventionality (Lightfoot shoplifted during the day and slept on the kitchen table because she didn't have a bed) and lavish champagne and roulette parties. For all the friends, acquaintances and strangers he let into his studio on these occasions, gambling was still illegal, and he posted lookouts disguised as house painters around the premises to make sure they were never discovered. Peppiatt suggests that this familial, jovial atmosphere, as well as the death of his father around this time, had an effect on his work and he began painting consistently again – it is perhaps no coincidence that Bacon re-emerged as an artist with *Three Studies For Figures At The Base Of A Crucifixion* in 1944. The paintings that follow what Bacon considered to be his breakthrough work speak of the figures and aspects of his domesticity, though these elements also seem to be conflated with outside influences – memories, fears or public events, for instance.

¹⁶⁷ Peppiatt, 1998, pp. 101-3.

Figure 15: Francis Bacon, Figure In A Landscape, 1945

One prominent work from this period is *Figure In A Landscape*, 1945 (Figure 15). Here, preceding the development of Bacon's boxed or curving interiors, the setting for the composition is outdoors. Several, though not all, historians have established that this work is based on a photograph of Eric Hall dozing on a bench in Hyde Park.¹⁶⁸ Martin Hammer is one scholar who disagrees, arguing that the reference to Hall by Bacon is a "red herring" that "has been taken far too literally by numerous critics who have insisted upon reading the work as in some sense a portrait of Hall".¹⁶⁹ I am, however, going to continue to consider the photograph as Hall as important for this painting – not, as I will make clear, as a

¹⁶⁸ The image of Eric Hall dozing in Hyde Park as a source for this work is given throughout Bacon literature – see Sylvester, 2000, p. 22 or Peppiatt, 1998, p. 110 for example.

¹⁶⁹ Hammer considers *Figure In A Landscape* in the context of its possible sources, particularly in terms of Nazi photography. See Martin Hammer, *Francis Bacon and Nazi Propaganda* (Tate Publishing: London, 2012), pp. 89-99.

straightforward portrait, but to explore the complex intermingling of personal and impersonal, social and asocial, and public and private elements in this painting. Thinking in these terms, it is important to note how, despite the move from inside to outside here, the space that this painting depicts can still be considered in terms of the blurring of public/private boundaries, just like the *Man In Blue* series or *Two Figures*. Hyde Park was of course a public space used by thousands of Londoners everyday, but it could also, like Hampstead Heath, Piccadilly or the streets of Soho, serve as a space for homosociality. In a sense, the composition of Bacon's painting reflects this, with a glimpse of pale blue sky visible at the top of the canvas situating it out in the open, while the scrubbed block of bushes and flowerbeds marks out a particularly sheltered, maybe even hidden area. Apart from the section of sky and unsettling hints of red in the flowers, the colour is reduced to variations on brown and black, giving the work the superficial look of an old photograph. However, this by no means imbues the painting with nostalgic properties that may be present in a photograph – though constructed from an intimate memory (the photograph of Hall) the faded colours of this landscape are applied with a dry ferocity that gives it a bleak, rather scorched appearance.

In the centre of the work, Bacon paints the barely recognisable figure of Hall. While in the original photograph Hall may have been peacefully sleeping, here the few parts of his body that remain recognisable are slumped lifelessly and awkwardly over a park bench. You can make out one of his arms, protruding from the sleeve of his flannel suit. There is also the shape of one lapel – Bacon's eye for the simple uniform forms of masculine dress is present here, nearly ten years prior to his *men in blue*. Meanwhile, Hall's legs do not reach down from the bench to the floor but barely seem to be present at all – the trouser legs of his suit seem to hang limply, as if the legs themselves have been cut off but the clothing left in place. The rest of him – his torso, his other arm, his head – has been engulfed by a great black space that curves to suggest that, if Hall's body were visible in full, it would be slumping before us, to our right. On this right hand side of the work, towards which Hall's semi-visible body seems to fall, is another ambiguous set of forms. A curved railing, held up on legs, enters the canvas and merges with the form of the bench. Connected on top of this is what

has been identified by some critics as a microphone and by others as a machine gun – in either case, behind this is a mouth with its lips parted and teeth clenched, caught either in the act of speaking or with an expression of determined effort. Both interpretations suggest photographs as sources – Bacon could be quoting a dictator in mid speech behind a microphone here or the violent, menacing spectacle of a soldier behind a machine gun.¹⁷⁰ These two elements come together uncomfortably on the canvas – you could imagine Hall’s head, were it visible, positioned where the disembodied mouth is, but this would require further deformation of his already mangled body. Beyond the physical awkwardness of the image, however, is the disturbing conflation of a photograph of Bacon’s partner in a peaceful setting with a horrific image of war – one that would have resonated with Nazism in 1945. Not only is Bacon merging the public and private here in terms of queer experience of space, but he is also bringing together his own private life with the public events that occur alongside it – intimacy meets horror here and, on a grander scale, love meets death.

Martin Hammer and Chris Stephens have begun to unpack the sources and implications of Bacon’s paintings from the 1940s and 1950s that engage with Nazi and wartime imagery, and their research provides useful guidelines for thinking about the works from this period. They note, importantly, that Bacon’s images are unlikely to have been entirely preconceived – Bacon’s famous comments about the way *Painting* of 1946 developed from the image of a bird alighting on a field, though to be taken with a pinch of salt themselves, should be kept in mind.¹⁷¹ At the same time, Bacon’s use of photographs that reference violence and war, and particularly Nazism, does beg questions, and Hammer and Stephens suggest that he may have been attracted to these images for specific reasons, beyond “the typically liberal one of horror and guilt” or for that matter “a desire to elevate Hitler and his followers to a quasi religious status”. Instead, what they take from Bacon’s use of Nazi imagery is “an obsessive fascination with the relationship between the sacred and the profane, with the baseness of

¹⁷⁰ Sylvester recognises both intentions, but suggests the microphone as the more likely possibility – Sylvester, 2000, p. 22. Meanwhile, Gale and Stephens put forward a still of a machine gunner’s face from Sergei Eisenstein’s *October* (1927) as a possible source, pp. 60-2.

¹⁷¹ Martin Hammer and Chris Stephens, “Seeing the Story of One’s Time’: Appropriations from Nazi Photography in the Work of Francis Bacon”, *Visual Culture in Britain*, Vol. 10, No. 3, pp. 315 – 351, p. 345. Bacon discusses the process behind *Painting*, 1946, in Sylvester, 1999, p. 11.

human behaviour and the depths of human cruelty, with the phenomenon of power and its translation into ceremony and ritual and into ideas of sacrifice”.¹⁷² Furthermore, they suggest that Bacon’s interest in these photographs could be linked to a concept that John Russell, in 1964, identified with Bacon’s art: “The History Of Europe In My Lifetime”. They quote a letter written by Bacon to Sonia Orwell in December 1954 that expands on this idea:

I think a sort of life story which sees underneath of the events of the last 40 years, so that you would not know whether it was imagination or fact, is what I could do, as the photographs themselves of events could be distorted into a personal private meaning...

This, for Bacon, would result in an art “nearer to facts truer – and more exciting as though one was seeing the story of one’s time for the first time”.¹⁷³ This evidence that Bacon was using public and private events as equal inspiration or triggers for his work at this time is crucial and makes sense – the creation, distortion and fixing of private events and figures alongside more recognizable, public, and perhaps more immediately universal events would surely be an appealing tactic for a queer artist.

In light of this research, Hammer and Stephens turn to Freud and ideas of the unconscious as a way of exploring Bacon’s motivations for using Nazi and other wartime imagery.¹⁷⁴ However, I would like to turn to the writing of Jean Genet, particularly his novel *Funeral Rites*, as a means of better understanding the links between the public and private in *Figure In A Landscape*.¹⁷⁵ *Funeral Rites* is a novel of grief – Genet writes after the death of his lover, Jean Decarnin, who was killed by a collaborator in Paris in 1944. From the first pages, his grief

¹⁷² Hammer and Stephens, p. 345.

¹⁷³ See Hammer and Stephens, pp. 346-7.

¹⁷⁴ See Hammer and Stephens, p. 347.

¹⁷⁵ As far as I am aware, there has been no work on the links between Bacon and Genet, though Peppiatt has noted that there are similarities between the two artists (see Peppiatt, 1998, p. 227). Another rare instance where Bacon and Genet are compared is in Brian O’Doherty’s essay, ‘On The Strange Case Of Francis Bacon’ in *Art Journal*, Vol. 24, no. 3, Spring 1965, pp. 288-90. Doherty states: “To put Bacon into historical perspective one need not turn to painting at all. His is the first major expression in painting of a sensibility that runs from De Sade through Rimbaud to Genet, and includes such a modern semi-masterpiece as John Osborne’s “Under Plain Cover” with its neverworld of diaphragms and syringes. The best comparison is with Genet. Like him, Bacon is attached to a style of ceremonious presentation that allows him to extend the definition of life to include the underworld of rape, suicide and murder”, p. 288.

for Jean D. mingles with imagery of Nazism and the Third Reich – those responsible for Genet’s grief and Jean’s death, and the grief and death of millions of others – and Genet states his intentions:

It is not yet the moment for me to know whether the Fuhrer of the Germans is, in general, to personify death, but I shall speak of him, inspired by my love for Jean, for his soldiers, and perhaps shall learn what secret role they play in my heart.¹⁷⁶

From here on in, the novel allows the public, historical events of the end of the Second World War to intrude on the personal narrative and to coalesce into a fantasy that takes over the book. Gradually, and with increasing frequency, Genet adopts the personae of the other characters of the novel – Erik, a German soldier; Riton, a French collaborator; even Hitler himself – as a means of wresting control over grief, over death itself. The pivotal moment in these identifications comes early on, when Genet goes to watch a film in a cinema. He fixates on the figure of a French militiaman who has joined the side of the Germans in the fighting in Paris. He notes the audience’s revulsion at this figure (one woman foams at the mouth, bounces on her seat and yells at the screen) and expresses his own seemingly contradictory emotions: “My hatred of the militiaman was so intense, so beautiful, that it was equivalent to the strongest love”. He identifies this figure on the screen as Jean D.’s killer and uses him as a way to wrestle control over his grief: “The best trick I could play on that fierce gang known as destiny, which delegates a kid to do its work, and the best I could play on the kid, would be to invest him with the love I felt for his victim”. Genet writes of waves of love passing from him to the militiaman, who he calls Riton, which are equivalent to the love he feels for Jean. When he imagines Riton informing him that he has killed Jean, Genet cannot bring himself to say, “You did the right thing”, but instead answers with “I gave him to you, Riton. Love him dearly”. He comes round from this fantasy, knowing how the book will progress, saying “I’m trying to present these characters to you in such a way that you see them lit up by my love, not for their sake but for Jean’s, and particularly in such a way that

¹⁷⁶ Jean Genet, *Funeral Rites* (Faber and Faber: London, 1990), p. 8.

they reflect that love”.¹⁷⁷ This act of betrayal, of the offering of Jean D. in grief to his imagined murderer, sets the tone for the ruminations on betrayal and evil that dominate the rest of the novel.

Genet’s obsessive preoccupation with betrayal is problematic and has been the subject of debate among critics. Leo Bersani has suggested that the acts of betrayal in *Funeral Rites* are an ultimate rebellion against all sociality, allowing the subject to begin again from nothing – betrayal in Genet, for him, is “an ethical necessity”.¹⁷⁸ However, Christopher Lane has contested Bersani’s interpretation, arguing that rebellion cannot be considered a refusal to participate in any sociality whatsoever. Instead, Lane points to the constant use of fantasy in the novel as an example of the subject of the novel existing in a “state of constant vacillation” between identification with the self and with the other.¹⁷⁹ Similarly, James Creech has found a search for the homosexual self in Genet, outside the celebration of abjection that other critics have traditionally focused on in his work. He suggests that Genet constructs a persona (and in the case of *Funeral Rites*, personae) that offends bourgeois taste while also being pursued by “hantises” – symbols of the social that are “terrifying” to him in their “beauty”.¹⁸⁰ I want to propose that Bersani’s definition of betrayal as “an ethical necessity” in Genet can be considered afresh in the context of Lane and Creech’s interpretations of fantasy as crucial to the construction of the self. In *Funeral Rites*, the figures of evil and Riton, Jean D.’s imagined murderer in particular, are brought under the individual’s control – Genet’s lover was destroyed by evil and war, and so he fantasises about entering into this evil in order to control it and to express the grief that it has provoked. Betrayal becomes a choice, an act of freedom in a sense, in a moment when control seems to be out of Genet’s hands. So, fantasy takes over in the wake of Jean D.’s cruel death and Genet’s struggle to place himself properly in the processes and ceremonies of grieving – his discomfort at Jean’s funeral and amongst other mourners trigger fantasies, ways around the social processes that exclude him but with which he must remain in

¹⁷⁷ For the cinema passage of *Funeral Rites*, from which these quotes are taken, see Genet, pp. 38-42.

¹⁷⁸ Leo Bersani, ‘The Gay Outlaw’, *Diacritics*, Vol. 24, No. 2/3, pp. 4-18, p. 5 and p. 16.

¹⁷⁹ Christopher Lane, ‘The Voided Role: On Genet’, *MLN*, Vol. 112, No. 5, pp. 876-908, pp. 893-7 in particular.

¹⁸⁰ James Creech, ‘Outing Jean Genet’, *Yale French Studies*, no. 91, 1997, pp. 117-140, pp. 131-2.

contact.¹⁸¹ In *Funeral Rites*, the self exists between the realities of Jean D.'s death and transgressive fantasies. Increasingly, as the novel progresses, the fantasies overwhelm the narrative, culminating in Riton killing Erik and then being killed himself.¹⁸² However, it is worth noting that, at the end, Genet returns to the character of a bereaved maid – who is raped after she falls behind a funeral procession earlier in the novel – who “quietly, piously” lays a daisy as a symbol of remembrance on a patch of rug illuminated by a beam of moonlight.¹⁸³ Her quiet mourning brings the social back, after Genet's violent and evil fantasies of his own grief.

This uneasy relationship between the social and the asocial, the private and the public, the intimate and the violent, returns us to Bacon's *Figure In A Landscape*. Though not literally referencing personal grief, the painting does seem to mourn something, to be intended as a commemoration of sorts. We are, as in Genet, made to confront the remains of a lover conflated with references to violence and war. In his interviews with David Sylvester, Bacon talks about his process of painting, saying that he prefers to work without sitters, “totally alone. With their memory”. He suggests that through distortion he is attempting to record his subjects more truthfully and works without a sitter because “they inhibit me. They inhibit me because, if I like them, I don't want to practice before them the injury that I do to them in my work.”¹⁸⁴ This violence of memory, of seeking a particular truth, seems to me to be present in *Figure In A Landscape*, where Eric Hall is cruelly dismembered in paint. Additionally, this violence, particularly in light of the reading of *Funeral Rites*, amounts to a kind of betrayal – just as Genet imagines his betrayal in the novel, so Bacon plays his out on canvas. Certainly, the particulars of Hall and Bacon's relationship that are known through Peppiatt make relevant context for this – by 1945, Hall had been supporting Bacon financially for years and had served as a stabilising, intellectual influence on his life. At the same time, the two men did little to hide their relationship from Hall's wife and children. Peppiatt notes that, up until he met and fell in love with Bacon, Hall had led an ordinary, ‘respectable’ life.

¹⁸¹ Genet, pp. 21-3.

¹⁸² Genet, p. 186.

¹⁸³ Genet, pp. 186-7.

¹⁸⁴ Sylvester, 1999, pp. 40-1.

However, “his outwardly staid life was turned upside down by his passion for the young, charming and feckless painter” and soon his marriage had collapsed before he eventually joined Bacon and Lightfoot permanently by 1947.¹⁸⁵ Peppiatt records Bacon recalling the “havoc” of Hall’s domestic move, where his wife sent Bacon threatening messages and his father turned up at Cromwell Place to remonstrate with the artist, and there is a twinge of regret and remorse in Bacon’s own words regarding the matter: “of course when you’re young, you think much more about your own enjoyment than the harm you might be doing”.¹⁸⁶ So, underlying *Figure In A Landscape* is the very real knowledge of a kind of betrayal from orthodox ideas of the social – in embarking on a relationship with Hall, Bacon knows that, in the eyes of others, he is implicated in the breakdown of a nuclear family. Bacon’s formation of his own particular domesticity has consequences.

This is not to say, however, that betrayal manifests itself in *Figure In A Landscape* purely in a sort of shame – though shame is an unavoidable aspect here. Can the privacy of domesticity be negotiated without confronting shame in some way, particularly if you exist outside of heterosexual norms? As Creech notes in his discussion of Genet’s novels, betrayal and shame, “for anyone acquainted with shame... it is exalting to see it converted so brilliantly into glory” – in effect, what society dictates to be shameful becomes gloriously shameless in Genet’s work.¹⁸⁷ Claire Pajaczkowska and Ivan Ward have defined shame in one sense as being related to Julia Kristeva’s concept of abjection and this is perhaps where a discussion of Genet and Bacon’s *Figure In A Landscape* should turn.¹⁸⁸ For Kristeva, abjection is what is excluded, both from the I and the Other, and creates a realm where meaning collapses.¹⁸⁹ She argues that in one sense it

¹⁸⁵ Peppiatt, 1998, p. 102. Peppiatt states that Hall and his son Ivan were recorded on the electoral register of 1947 as residing at 7 Cromwell Place with Bacon and Lightfoot – Hall could may well have made the move prior to this.

¹⁸⁶ Peppiatt, 1998, pp. 101-3.

¹⁸⁷ Creech, p. 139.

¹⁸⁸ See Claire Pajaczkowska and Ivan Ward, *Shame And Sexuality: Psychoanalysis and Visual Culture* (Routledge: London, 2008). Julia Kristeva’s concept of abjection is outlined in *Powers Of Horror: An Essay On Abjection* (Columbia University Press: New York, 1982). For Pajaczkowska and Ward, shame “begins precisely where words fail us”, where boundaries between the self and the not-self, the internal and the external dissolve. Shame finds particular expression in iconic expression because this can be where “the difference between matter and meaning has not yet been securely established for the subject” – see Pajaczkowska and Ward, pp. 3-4.

¹⁸⁹ Kristeva, pp. 1-2.

forces us to confront the fact of death, disgust and horror to the extent that it engulfs us, interfering and warping what is supposed to save us from death – childhood, science, even love.¹⁹⁰ So abjection is caused by “what disturbs identity, system, order”, by “what does not respect borders, positions, rules”. Kristeva lists abject figures such as the traitor (abjection is “a hatred that smiles ... a friend who stabs you”), the killer, the criminal – in fact, crime highlights the fragility of the law, while premeditated crime heightens that fragility.¹⁹¹ She names “the one by whom abjection exists” as the deject, who “places (himself), separates (himself), situates (himself) and therefore *strays* instead of getting his bearings”. Space becomes important for the deject, to the extent that he is forced to ask “where am I?” over “who am I?” The deject’s space, Kristeva argues, is never one, but “essentially divisible, foldable and catastrophic”, to the extent that he “never stops demarcating his universe, whose fluid confines ... constantly question his solidity and impel him to start afresh”. This, in effect, turns him into a stray – “and the more he strays, the more he is saved”.¹⁹²

I have already argued for Bacon as something of a ‘stray’, in Kristeva’s terms, from the spaces of heteronormative domesticity and have suggested that he has to be concerned with the negotiation of space, both in daily life and in his art. Kristeva’s concept of abjection throws these works, and specifically *Figure In A Landscape*, into a slightly different light. In one sense, like Genet, Bacon revels in the abject glory of shame in this image, which allows him an artistic wrestling of control – Bacon himself destroys the intimate memory of Hall dozing in Hyde Park, pre-emptively in a sense and entirely in the painted image on the canvas. It is a betrayal performed in paint, a necessity in the face of being outside of mainstream definitions of sociality – in particular, family life and domesticity.¹⁹³ In effect, it is a welcoming of abjection through art – the image of the dictator or soldier enters into the work, into the body of Hall, as the most extreme, psychologically raw and shameful symbol of evil possible at the time. Just as

¹⁹⁰ Kristeva, pp. 3-4.

¹⁹¹ Kristeva, p. 4.

¹⁹² Kristeva, p. 8.

¹⁹³ Otto Werckmeister found a similar concern in Bacon’s art. For him, he “fulfils the modernist artist’s traditional task of representing the asocial or even criminal behaviour of outsiders within the legal bounds of culture”. See O.K. Werckmeister, *Citadel Culture* (University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1991), p. 83.

Genet confronts and enters in to evil because he feels he has no choice, so Bacon similarly feels impelled to conflate images of Nazism and intimacy out of marginal experience. This is not to say that Bacon is consciously referring to the difficulties of his relationship with Hall in an image like this or that he is specifically referencing a sense of shame of which he is aware, but an original image of intimacy and a kind of makeshift domesticity is transformed here in a way that gestures to the uncomfortable, the unhomely, the abject, the evil. In *Figure In A Landscape* then, Bacon makes a fantasy of betrayal out of intimate reality, merging the public and the private in the most horrific way, so that, as Kristeva argues, “nothing is familiar, not even the shadow of a memory”.¹⁹⁴ Space and identity are torn apart here just as they form, unable to both settle into something comfortable and keep the violence of the world outside.

Painting ‘Between’: Bacon, Peter Lacy and Suspense

These recurring themes of memory and of abjection are hitherto under-explored touchstones of Francis Bacon’s art throughout the late 1940s and 1950s, though Nicholas Chare has recently broached these topics in a way that will inform this discussion.¹⁹⁵ For my purposes, these themes occur specifically and extensively in the paintings that deal with Bacon’s other domestic arrangement of this period – his brutal and destructive relationship with Peter Lacy. Bacon met Lacy in 1952, in the Colony Rooms in Soho. At the time, Lacy seems to have been doing very little – he had been a fighter pilot in the Battle of Britain and had worked as a test pilot for a period after this, but, by the early 1950s, inherited money meant he no longer had to work. With his nerves shattered by his wartime experiences and a monumental drinking problem, Lacy was a troubled lover to Bacon, prone to bouts of hysteria and rage where he would beat up the artist and destroy his possessions and paintings.¹⁹⁶ Peppiatt extensively quotes reflections from Bacon on his relationship with Lacy – their time together had been “the most total

¹⁹⁴ Kristeva, p. 5.

¹⁹⁵ See Nicholas Chare, *After Francis Bacon: Synaesthesia and Sex in Paint* (Ashgate: Farnham, 2012). Chare argues that both synaesthesia and BDSM are key ways for interpreting the effects and aims of Bacon’s art, and draws on Kristeva’s work on abjection extensively.

¹⁹⁶ For an extensive picture of Bacon and Lacy’s relationship, see Peppiatt, 1998, pp. 145-7, 151-2.

disaster from the start ... like having some dreadful disease”, which became essentially “four years of continuous horror, with nothing but violent rows”.¹⁹⁷ While they were together, Lacy rented a cottage in Hurst, a village near Henley-on-Thames, near Berkshire. Though he was unable to tear himself away from London permanently, Bacon became a frequent visitor there at a time when, as I have noted, he was constantly shifting address in the wake of the devastating death of Jessie Lightfoot and the end of his relationship with Eric Hall. He recalls Lacy’s invite to give up painting and settle with him permanently:

I said, “What does living with you mean?” And he said, “Well, you could live in a corner of my cottage on straw. You could sleep and shit there”. He wanted to have me chained to the wall. Peter was very kinky in all sorts of ways. He liked to have people watching as we had sex. And then he liked to have someone bugger me, then bugger me himself right after. But he was *so* neurotic that living together would never have worked. In any case, it did so happen that I wanted to go on painting.¹⁹⁸

Bacon’s quote, revelling in the details of his private life that must have been shocking to outsiders, illustrates where exactly the power lay in this new relationship – while with Hall, Bacon seems to have been in control (Hall came to him, after all, and Bacon reserved the right to perform a betrayal in *Figure In A Landscape*), it is Lacy who appears to have the upper hand here. Bacon’s paintings of Lacy are, in many ways, a reflection on or a shifting of that power. This lack of control, in terms of his relationship with Lacy, his life and his work, is something that Bacon seems to have been acutely aware of at this time; in a letter to Erica Brausen in 1954, he complains: “I am so sick of never having a permanent place”.¹⁹⁹

I want to suggest that this lack of a permanent place – of home, privacy, and domesticity, in the conventional sense – can be considered more closely alongside Kristeva’s concept of abjection. I have already addressed the difficulties of space, of the boundaries between public and private, in connection with works such as *Two Figures* and the *Man In Blue* series, and it is no surprise

¹⁹⁷ Peppiatt, 1998, pp. 145-6.

¹⁹⁸ Peppiatt, 1998, p. 146.

¹⁹⁹ This letter, along with other correspondence between Bacon and Brausen, is held in the Tate archive. It is also reproduced in Peppiatt, 2006, p. 146.

Figure 16: Francis Bacon, *Two Figures In The Grass*, 1954

that numerous critics see the imprint of Lacy in the former's dominant sexual partner or the latter's unsettled, shifting subject.²⁰⁰ I want to propose further links between concepts of space and abjection in Francis Bacon's work by turning to 1954's *Two Figures In The Grass* (Figure 16). Painted halfway through their relationship, the two figures of this image are again recognisable as Bacon and Lacy – you can make out an approximation of Bacon's features and hairline in the figure lying on his back, while the other figure has Lacy's slicked-back hair, familiar from photographs. As with *Two Figures*, the two men are painted in the act of intercourse, and their flesh is created from smears of black, grey, blue and pink. It is Lacy's body that is most visible here – the curve of his buttocks, and his

²⁰⁰ For Lacy and Bacon as the couple in *Two Figures*, see Gale and Stephens, p. 166 and Sylvester, 2000, p. 72. For Lacy as one of the inspirations behind the *Man In Blue* series, see Peppiatt, 1998, p. 164 and Gale and Stephens, pp. 122.

right leg stretched out behind him as his left leg bends in closer to his partner. Apart from his head, shoulders and approximation of one arm, the rest of Bacon's body is not visible – hidden, seemingly, by Lacy and the grass surrounding them. This section of grass – an intermittent feature of Bacon's art of this period, inspired perhaps by the landscapes he encountered on his trips away from London – is carefully marked out. At the back of the painting, its border is lined with a thin, small white railing, behind or across which fall the familiar vertical slats of paint, creating the effect of a curtain – an ambiguous, but still enclosed, painted space. In the foreground, a horizontal, unmodulating block of black paint cuts across the canvas, bringing the grassy area to an abrupt end and giving it the impression of having been raised up, on some kind of platform. The effect is odd but specific – the plane of grass unfurls in front of our eye line and the figures are positioned to fall directly in front of our gaze. However, unlike *Two Figures*, there is no encouragement or opportunity to step into the work as a specific space; instead, these two figures are to be encountered in a space that does not correspond with a domestic interior or an outdoor setting – the work occupies a space between these areas.

The 'between' nature of *Two Figures In The Grass* manifests itself in a number of ways. In one sense, the markers or designators of space situate the painting between interior and exterior. The grass and its railing clearly point to outdoors, but the vertical slats of paint that fall around the edges suggest a curtain or a screen – something, anyway, that contains the scene, that makes it an interior in some aspect. In another sense there's the figures – sex can take place outdoors, and certainly did for a number of queer men in the 1950s, but, in conventional thinking it remains closely tied to notions of privacy and domesticity. Transferred from the bed to a patch of grass, and retaining their brazen nudity (there are no half-removed or discarded clothes in sight), the figures bring out in the open what is normally kept indoors. Pushed into our line of sight then, in a space that refuses to settle into a recognisable 'type', are an image and an act that appear to blatantly flout the boundaries between the public and the private.

In her essay, 'Francis Bacon, Trash and Complicity', Brenda Marshall picks up on Bacon's flouting of boundaries in his art in relation to his painting that

commemorated the suicide of George Dyer, *Triptych, May-June 1973*. In this work, “privacy seems invaded. We seem to look at too much here. The conventions are in turmoil”.²⁰¹ This, she suggests, is his point and his prerogative: “by not being bounded by a certain decorum, being able to move without being enervated by the necessary restrictions the law imposes, Bacon contests its limits”.²⁰² Marshall traces this contestation through Bacon’s ‘showing’ of suffering in his works, and his incorporation of the private ‘trash’ of the studio into his paintings. She concludes that this offering up of the private to the viewer makes us complicit – Bacon is, in this sense, the pervert, and his audience, the normative person, are the fascinated others.²⁰³ The two play up to each other without ever making anything explicit – Bacon is allowed to contest the status quo, the normative, the Establishment, and his audience looks on, silently. Julia Kristeva’s work is seemingly implicit in much of what Marshall discusses in her essay (“Bacon’s images disarrange our securities, our cultural sensibilities, and our protections because they belong with what we disregard and give no place to”), though she never brings Bacon’s work directly in line with the abject.²⁰⁴ However, to expand on Kristeva’s theory of abjection alongside *Two Figures In The Grass* is to examine Bacon’s flouting of particular social boundaries in greater depth and leads to the question of whether Bacon’s paintings are in fact concerned with contestation as Marshall argues, or construction, or both, or, perhaps, neither.

Space, and the borders and boundaries of space, are inherent components of abjection. Kristeva conceives it as deeply connected to maternity, namely the separation of the individual from the mother’s body into the symbolic, through language. In this respect, she identifies language as a consistent attempt at introjection in order to allow the self to develop – phobia emerges when this process fails and leads to an othering of the object through language.²⁰⁵ In abjection, however, this “revolt is completely within being. Within the being of language”; it is a revolt within the symbolic, and is productive as a result, leading

²⁰¹ Marshall, p. 210.

²⁰² Marshall, p. 212.

²⁰³ See Marshall, pp. 226-7 in particular.

²⁰⁴ Marshall, p. 213.

²⁰⁵ Kristeva, pp. 37-40.

to “the rejection and reconstruction of languages”.²⁰⁶ Kristeva develops this idea of separation (and the abject as a challenge to separation) through the metaphor of an individual as a fortified castle, where a walled-in self creates a firm division between subject and object. Abjection becomes the breakdown of this wall triggered by affect, which occupies a space on the disintegrating boundaries of language – this disintegration occurs when the condensation of signs that make up language, dependent on the successful linking of word presentation with object presentation, break down.²⁰⁷ This dismantling of separation through abjection ultimately leads to the absence of identity. Kristeva then goes on to build on Levi-Strauss’ work on how symbolisation, and the formation of societies, is built on prohibitions – of death and incest in particular – and the othering of the feminine, alongside Freud’s work on the development of the self in *Totem and Taboo*. She examines the self prior to language, formed in relation to the outside world via a projection from within, “of which the only experience we have is one of pleasure and pain”.²⁰⁸ The outside, in this sense, is an image of the inside, indistinct and pervious. The introduction of language imposes boundaries, divisions, separations, so that the advent of language in an individual heralds the constitution of the symbolic code and the formation of identity itself. Abjection implies a return to a stage prior to language, “where the subject, fluctuating between inside and outside, pleasure and pain, word and deed, would find death, along with nirvana”.²⁰⁹ The laws and rituals of society aim to prevent this return, thus filth and the body’s insides become a means of reinforcing bodily boundaries, which are mapped and trained by the maternal authority in a “writing of the real” – where a particular sociality is demarcated.²¹⁰

The idea of the abject as distinct from language and the social – as unconcerned with boundaries and normative definitions of self and being – now seems entirely relevant to a work like Bacon’s *Two Figures In The Grass*. As I have already discussed, the work seems to create and occupy a setting somewhere between the interior and the exterior, the private and the public – structures of

²⁰⁶ Kristeva, p. 45.

²⁰⁷ Kristeva, pp. 48-9.

²⁰⁸ Kristeva, pp. 58-61.

²⁰⁹ Kristeva, p. 63.

²¹⁰ Kristeva, p. 69.

separation that make up the social are visibly ignored. Furthermore, Bacon's depiction of his two figure seems similarly unconcerned with particular boundaries – the bodies of the two men are more easily discerned and separated at their heads, but elsewhere the two forms merge into a mass of moving flesh. At the same time, the coupling figures begin to sink into the grass; Bacon, in particular, seems to be disappearing into the ground, under the weight of Lacy's body. As with *Figure In A Landscape*, we're at the boundaries between sex and death here again, as Bacon and his lover seem to melt into or merge with the grass and soil, like corpses. Here, then, is an image that seems to speak to Kristeva's sense of the abject as something apart from the boundaries of the social, simultaneously inside and outside, living and dying, private and public, painful and pleasurable.

What are the implications for the abject in Francis Bacon's work in this case? Why does he produce these paintings that sit on the boundary of public and private at this particular point in his life and career? I have shown how queer experience in the 1950s consistently occupied a space somewhere between public and private, but Bacon's works seem to move beyond merely reflecting or illustrating aspects of this experience. The construction of temporary 'domestic' space does seem to play some part, as I have noted in connection with the *Man In Blue* series in particular. This seems far from ideal, however – fleeting encounters in a hotel bar or the spectacle of two men coupling in the grass hardly count as examples of an alternative domesticity. At the same time, it is also tempting to read Bacon's embrace of abject figures and space – whether it be the betrayed lover in *Figure In A Landscape* or inside/outside couple of *Two Figures In The Grass* – as a contestation, directed towards the normative and the laws and structures of the social. However, to apply these motives to Bacon's paintings seems reductive – a denial of their inherent complexity and ambiguity. Instead, it may be helpful to view domesticity, or references to domesticity, as a way for Bacon to temporarily fix an identity or particular experience in his art, over a period of time when his life, loves and living situation proved increasingly unstable. The elements of domesticity that are referenced in his paintings seem to act as means of framing or disrupting his subjects – subjects that do not belong to the domestic in the

normative sense, but nonetheless have to occupy an approximation of it in some way. So, of course he veers towards the abject in these paintings – the dismembered, mutilated Eric Hall in Hyde Park, the coupling Bacon and Lacy displayed on a bed or sinking into the soil, or the anonymous pick up in the corner of a hotel bar. All the while, the domestic is present – not as something to be constructed in a new way, or to be contested, but as an anchor, something that pins his images down, that holds these fleeting memories and moments in place. What better response to an increasingly transient, unstable personal life than the well-established permanence of domesticity, its structures and its touchstones?

However, this is far from the whole story. While elements of the domestic would certainly appeal at times of instability, they are never allowed to become completely comforting in Bacon's art. There remains in all of the works I have discussed a disruption of boundaries, whether this be through revealing aspects of his personal life or allowing larger, public events to intrude on his images. The implications of this point to Bacon's paintings being concerned with the formation of the self within the domestic and the social, and the difficulties that come with this. This has been a concern in Ernst Van Alphen's analysis of Bacon's art already, which explores how it engages with a loss of self, in its subjects but also in its effects on viewers, through its use of narrative, perception, and depictions of death, the body and gender. Van Alphen draws heavily on the theories of Leo Bersani, whose essay, 'Is The Rectum A Grave?', argues against a Freudian grounding of sex in power, emphasising instead the possibility of "powerlessness, of loss of control ... a more radical disintegration and humiliation of the self".²¹¹ Bersani argues that, drawing on homosexual experience, it is "possible to think of the sexual as, precisely, moving between a hyperbolic sense of the self and a loss of all consciousness of self".²¹² His disconnecting of sex from power and the phallogentric order in this way proves productive for Van Alphen, who views Bacon's depictions of masculine subjects as embracing this loss of self as "a means of resistance to the objectifying transformations of stereotypical discourse, especially the discourse of

²¹¹ Leo Bersani, 'Is The Rectum A Grave?', *October*, Vol. 43, *AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism* (Winter, 1987), pp. 197-222, p. 217.

²¹² Bersani, 1987, p. 218.

masculinity”.²¹³ It is tempting to align Van Alphen’s discussion about the potentiality of a loss of selfhood and powerlessness in Bacon’s art with Kristeva’s abjection, and link the refusal of selfhood with the refusal of boundaries (of space, of bodies, of self) in order to argue for homosexuality and the art of Francis Bacon as productive, even utopian, in that they signal a break with normative discourse and form something else, something other. This, however, seems too far removed both from the realities of both queer existence and Francis Bacon’s art in the 1950s.

It is apparent, in fact, that Bacon’s art does not offer easy answers – it is neither a straightforward contestation of dominant discourse, nor something that operates entirely outside of it, constructing an alternative way of being. As a queer viewer of Bacon’s works in the twenty-first century, it is difficult not to be struck by the disruptive and jarring nature of Bacon’s imagery. There are elements of sociality and relationality – coupling bodies, prospective pick-ups, portraits of lovers, snapshots of friends – that intermingle with the asocial and non-relational, such as disrupted, uncomfortable spaces, violence, and exterior factors like war. I wish to register the discrepancy that is apparent in Bacon’s works to contemporary queer viewers, looking back – noticing elements that point towards a sociality that may be more applicable to queer experience in the present moment for some people, while also recognising Bacon’s art’s inability (rather than refusal) to settle comfortably within particular boundaries. As a result, elements of the domestic do exist in Bacon’s art, within and outside of the conventional realm of the home, while occupying the same space as references to the abject, as I have shown. The question of selfhood becomes not a case of loss then, but, in his male figures and their strange, uncomfortable spaces, Bacon’s art registers the difficulty of selfhood; its dependence on space and boundaries as well as the struggle to form and define itself in terms of those boundaries. Bacon’s paintings spill over boundaries and conventions, resisting or prodding at the question of selfhood, in a way that reflects the difficulties of living as a queer subject at this time. For Bacon, the space of domesticity (and its normative

²¹³ See Ernst Van Alphen, *Francis Bacon And The Loss Of Self* (Reaktion: London, 1992). Van Alphen brings Bersani’s theories into his discussion in relation to Bacon’s coupling figures (pp. 122-28), before drawing on Bersani again in his conclusions on Bacon’s approaches to masculinity (pp. 189-90).

aspects of control, power, selfhood and stability) is impossible, though he never completely lets go of its possibility – the social remains, rather like Creech’s understanding of “hantises” in Genet. It is in these impossible spaces that the shocking becomes visible – the betrayed lover, the anonymous pickup, the violently coupling figures – because there is nowhere left for it to hide. The abject and the intimate exist, fleetingly but visibly, at once.

The sense of Bacon operating, in his artworks, between sociality and asociality, between the domestic and the abject, suggests his awareness of the instability of selfhood, particularly in relation to space and social structures. This ‘between’ quality of Bacon’s art applies not only to its sense of space or selfhood, but also more broadly to a state of being that his art allows him to contemplate and imagine, and that might have been more fleeting and difficult to grasp in reality. Bacon’s works that depict Peter Lacy seem concerned with this idea of being between the social and the asocial, partly due to the intensely violent and emotionally disruptive nature of their relationship. Bacon, in typically roundabout fashion, conceded that these works could be considered along these lines. After being asked by David Sylvester whether he was aware of the horrific unease that viewers find in his paintings of men alone in rooms, he replies:

I’m not aware of it. But most of those pictures were done of somebody who was always in a constant state of unease, and whether that has been conveyed through these pictures I don’t know. But I suppose, in attempting to trap this image, that, as this man was very neurotic and almost hysterical, this may possibly have come across in the paintings.²¹⁴

One example of these images is *Study For A Portrait of P.L., No. 2*, 1957 (Figure 17). In this painting, Lacy is seated on a dark, indeterminate object, possibly a couch or a booth. The darkness of Lacy’s seating area, his location, stretches all the way to the bottom of the canvas. Behind him, meanwhile, is a now familiar, minimally outlined boxed space. Lacy leans nonchalantly and gazes out at the viewer, his arms resting on the top of his seat and dangling down, behind. He is naked – his pink flesh is shadowed with elements of blue and black and his erect penis is visible where shadows begin to engulf the lower part of his body,

²¹⁴ Sylvester, 1999, p. 48.

Figure 17: Francis Bacon, Study For A Portrait Of P.L., No. 2, 1957

truncating his legs. His face, like so many portraits that Bacon painted at this time, is flattened and mask-like, though the faintest smile is visible on his lips. Here, then, Lacy is sexually aroused, inviting and poised, seemingly ready to welcome a partner into his space. This is important though – Lacy, with his missing legs and arms wrapped firmly around the back of his seat, seems unable

and unwilling to move. Bacon's work places the onlooker – whether it is Bacon himself, or another viewer – in a very specific position, on the cusp of Lacy's space, between inside and outside, as close as possible to the possibility of sex and (you would assume, judging by Bacon's account of their relationship) violence without becoming the frantically coupling men of *Two Figures In The Grass*. The work hinges on this possibility – the idea that some kind of consent, some kind of submission is required at this particular moment of viewing. As viewers, we are placed in Bacon's position – our viewpoint, in relation to the figure and the space around him, suggest that we could imagine ourselves about to step up to him. We come to occupy the role of the submissive partner that Bacon would have been familiar with, and to recognise its power, where any kind of physical contact with the immobile Lacy is completely dependent on our agreement. While I do not wish to suggest that this image can be viewed as a reflection of the power relations in Bacon's relationship with Lacy, nor a shifting of those power relations, it is important to note that Bacon's art allows the representation of a particular state, and that this state has specific implications for domesticity and selfhood more generally.

The kind of relationality that Bacon sets up in his image of Lacy seems to be linked to masochism. We know that Bacon indulged in sadomasochistic practices – Peppiatt and Chare have both suggested that in one sense Bacon's paintings are recreations of sexual excitement.²¹⁵ Bersani bases his idea of a productive powerlessness in the notion that all sex can be considered essentially masochistic, though it may be more useful here to turn to Deleuze's work on the same subject. Deleuze argues against the unity of sadomasochism, suggesting that sadism and masochism cannot be considered two halves of one whole concept.²¹⁶ His exploration of masochism focuses heavily on the literature of Leopold von Sacher-Masoch and brings forward two important aspects that are relevant to Bacon's art and *Study For A Portrait Of P.L., No. 2* in particular. Firstly, he points to the use of contracts in masochistic practices, where the masochist has to persuade someone else to be his torturer and "everything must be stated,

²¹⁵ Peppiatt, 1998, p. 58. Chare, 2012, p. 35.

²¹⁶ Gilles Deleuze, 'Coldness and Cruelty' in *Masochism* (Zone Books: New York, 1991), p. 13,

promised, announced and carefully described before being accomplished”.²¹⁷ For Deleuze, through the contract the masochist “appears to be held by real chains, but in fact he is bound by his word alone”.²¹⁸ There is, then, an element of control – of choice or submission – within the contract of masochism and, from this choice, an agreed law is formed that undermines the severity of institutional law. Through the contract, the masochist takes the pain and punishment of the law, and then experiences the pleasure that the punishment was supposed to deny.²¹⁹ Secondly, Deleuze emphasises the importance of disavowal of the real in masochism, which leads to suspension – in this way, an ideal is created through masochism that is removed from the real.²²⁰ He finds evidence for this in the masochist’s preference for suspended images, with a complete lack of movement, a “frozen quality”.²²¹ He points particularly to Masoch’s settings – their “cluttered intimacy” where “the only thing that emerges are suspended gestures and suspended suffering”.²²² He views suspensions as “a profound state of waiting” – for the masochist in the state of waiting, pleasure is awaited and pain is expected, and thus the ideal and the real are absorbed in one sense, though kept very separate in another.²²³

These key elements of masochism for Deleuze – a sense of control and equilibrium on the one hand, and the idea of suspension, keeping the ideal and the real both together and apart, on the other – speak to Bacon’s art in specific and more general ways. In terms of *Study For A Portrait Of P.L., No. 2*, these elements of control and suspension manifest themselves in the way Lacy is depicted as a body that invites a sexual partner while being seemingly unable to move. Here, Bacon depicts a moment of perhaps shared erotic tension, of equilibrium, which may only be a very fleeting sensation in reality, prior to sexual release and, more than likely, prior to the resumption of one of Lacy’s violent moods. Thinking in broader terms, these elements of control and suspension can speak beyond masochism, to Bacon’s post-war paintings as a

²¹⁷ Deleuze, 1991, p. 18.

²¹⁸ Deleuze, 1991, p. 75.

²¹⁹ See Deleuze, pp. 75-7 and p. 88.

²²⁰ Deleuze, 1991, p. 31.

²²¹ Deleuze, 1991, p. 69.

²²² Deleuze, 1991, p. 34.

²²³ Deleuze, 1991, pp. 70-3.

whole and a sense of being that operates between spaces and spheres, and between a sense of selfhood. In one sense, the control offered by artistic representation – particularly artistic representation that wilfully confronts the violent and the destructive, alongside the intimate and relational – allows an individual to momentarily describe what must normally remain indescribable. It seems like one of the only viable responses to living, day-to-day, as someone on the margins of the law or social structures: a direct taking-on and setting-down of the contradictory nature of queer existence in post-war Britain. This is also where suspension comes in – Bacon’s paintings, from his coupling figures, through his isolated men in rooms, to, perhaps more complexly, a work like *Figure In A Landscape*, seem intent on capturing particular moments of sensation, drive or emotion that quickly slips away or might ordinarily go unrecorded. These images, then, are suspended between more concrete moments, gripped by an uncertainty that is written into the figures, and by extension relationships, on canvas. This is representation as suspension then – a brief, temporary depiction of the messy and unbounded processes of selfhood and relationality in post-war spaces for a queer figure. In Bacon, the violent and the erotic, as well as guilt and love, or distance and intimacy, exist together. His paintings become not purely embraces of the abject or the asocial, or attempts at constructing a new or other sense of sociality, but problematic and often ambiguous expressions of the very real, though difficult to grasp from moment to moment, intermingling of the two.

Suspense, inevitably, is always temporary. Like abjection, it shifts an individual away from the realities of the social briefly, but return is inevitable. In this way, Francis Bacon’s paintings engage with the experiences of queer men in post-war Britain that I highlighted early in this chapter – feelings of abjection, of marginality; the negotiation of space and its relation to selfhood; fleeting moments of intimacy as well as more permanent examples of relationality, with partners and with communities. These elements do not by any means sit comfortably or without difficulty (for him or us) on Bacon’s canvases, and I have attempted to reflect this in my reading of his work, avoiding an entirely pessimistic analysis of the struggles apparent in his paintings, while also resisting completely utopian conclusions at the same time. To approach the

themes of domesticity and selfhood in Bacon's works, then, is to be confronted with how unsatisfactory normative definitions of these two concepts were for him, but also to notice how approximations of them remain – in references to relationships or boxed interiors – stretched almost to breaking point across spheres. In many ways, Bacon's attitude to domesticity, to his very process and way of living, reflects his attitude to his relationships, the centre of his domestic life: "I've always thought of friendship as where two people really tear one another apart and perhaps in that way learn from one another".²²⁴ This ambivalence permeates the surfaces of Bacon's paintings from the late 1940s and 1950s, where he seems to tear domesticity apart just as it continually rips into him and his sense of self.

²²⁴ Sylvester, 1999, p. 67.

“We Set Up Our Own World”: Keith Vaughan and Domesticity

On The Beach and At War: Vaughan’s Sociality

As for so many people of his generation, the outbreak of the Second World War was a deep rupture in Keith Vaughan’s life, shifting his path irrecoverably and colouring his life and his art until his death in 1977. In many ways, the war made Vaughan into an artist – not only in the sense that it brought him into contact with people who would stimulate and encourage him, even giving him his first exhibitions as the war drew to a close, but also because Vaughan’s wartime experiences appear to have helped him focus on the subjects and aims that would occupy him for the rest of his life. Vaughan’s war, and his subsequent decades, are recorded in his journals – 62 volumes span from the first entry on 25th August 1939, when war already appeared inevitable, up until his very last moments, where he calmly records that he has taken an overdose of capsules with whiskey and his words become illegible as he dies on 4th November 1977, nearly forty years later. Vaughan’s dedication to his journal, right up until the very end, belies its importance to him as a regular ritual of reflection and self-examination and, by extension, its importance to those looking to understand the developments and inspirations of his art.

The journals, in their full form (they were published in edited versions during his lifetime and after his death, and are still available in this form today), are usually made up of lengthy entries that veer between, for example, reflections on his artistic practice and that of others, thoughts on the books he’d read and other cultural activities, reflections and opinions on war in the early volumes, candid insights into his personal and erotic life with other men, and intensely negative, depressive passages on his own failures in life and in art.²²⁵ From their beginnings, driven by Vaughan’s typically pessimistic assertion that he was unlikely to survive the war, the journals become vital, often painfully

²²⁵ All 62 volumes of Keith Vaughan’s journals are now kept in the Tate archive. The edited version of the journals has recently been reprinted – from here on in, I will be referring to published extracts from this edition: Keith Vaughan, *Journals, 1939-1977* (Faber And Faber: London, 2010). All other references to Vaughan’s journals will come from the copies in the Tate archive or earlier additions, where stated.

honest records of Vaughan's experiences not just as an artist, but also as a conscientious objector during wartime and a homosexual over decades of social change. Early on, in an entry on 2nd August 1940, he acknowledges his openness:

I am not concerned with the moral values of the things I have done. I am not concerned with your approval or disapproval. I am concerned only with setting them down for you truthfully, that you may see how one man met his trials and disasters.²²⁶

Vaughan's honesty, in one of the few realms where he could risk it in the 1940s and 1950s in particular, helps to bring his often detached, studied paintings a little closer.²²⁷

Keith Vaughan's works of the 1950s may, on the surface, appear to be as unconcerned with war as it is possible to be. A painting like *Assembly of Figures I*, 1952 (Figure 18) seems to bask in peaceful harmony. The group of four nude figures and the minimal aspects of the landscape – a few rocks, some trees, a cloudless sky – share the same golden yellow and dark green shades. With nothing to disturb them, the four figures stand around empty-handed, seemingly without any particular aim other than to be together and to be seen to be together. In the foreground on the left, one figure stoops slightly and we catch the muscular definition of his arm, legs and buttocks. On the right, another figure is captured posing nonchalantly, with one leg perched on a rock and an arm raised and resting on the top of his head, rather like a model for a classical statue caught off guard. In the centre, another stands with his arms folded and one foot slightly in front of the other, as if he is idly chatting or waiting. Despite Vaughan's decision to conceal the figures' genitals behind shadows or even pouches, as well as his technique of smoothing out their facial features with simplified forms and broad patches of colour until they border on androgyny, the group remains unmistakably male. Brought out into the open and carefully arranged, while

²²⁶ Keith Vaughan, Journal 3, 2nd August 1940, Tate Archive, TGA 200817/1/3.

²²⁷ Philip Vann notes that Vaughan's journals would still have been a risk – if they'd been read by his fellow non-combatants or discovered by police, the consequences, prior to 1967, would have been "drastic". However, as the years progressed, and attitudes to homosexuality became more liberal, he began "to envisage posthumous readers of his journals". See Philip Vann and Gerard Hastings, *Keith Vaughan* (Lund Humphries in association with Osborne Samuel: Farnham, 2012), p. 41.

Figure 18: Keith Vaughan, Assembly Of Figures I, 1952

retaining a distinctly casual atmosphere, the painting offers little by way of explanation - its subject seems, on first glance, purely to be the grouping of nude male figures. Vaughan would go on to make the *Assembly of Figures* a recurring subject, producing nine variations on this theme before his death.

One reason for these assemblies of nude male figures becoming a central focus of Vaughan's art is suggested by his recollections of pre-war events in his wartime journals. One long entry on February 6th 1940 begins to lapse into pessimistic feelings about the chances of Britain winning the war and Vaughan coming out of it alive: "I know I shall not live at home again. I know I shall not work at Lintas again ... there is no future. Unless a miracle happens. But it

won't".²²⁸ Gradually, in the same passage, he retreats from negativity into nostalgia, particularly for his trips to Pagham, between Selsey and Bognor Regis on the south coast of England, in 1937 and 1938. Harold Colebrook, one of his lovers, had taken him there for the first time - Vaughan had met him at the ballet and Colebrook's aunt owned a converted railway carriage on a deserted part of the beach there. Malcolm Yorke suggests that, before long, both men were taking other people – such as mutual friends or working class youths they had picked up in London – there regularly. Pagham became, for Vaughan, “one of the magic places in his life, an unsullied paradise against which all other places failed to measure up”.²²⁹ In Vaughan's despairing journal entry, the memory of Pagham returns like a reassuring vision:

I like to think now of the days last summer when I wandered naked with H over the hot shingle at Pagham. It came as a shock at first... the purely sexual excitement of hot sun. Later it became quite a ritual. We would walk out, lightly clad, till we had left people behind and the beach was deserted... There we took off our clothes and lay naked on the ground and offered up our bodies to the sky... They were pagan, sensual days.²³⁰

The influence of Pagham and the photographs that he kept of his trips there on Vaughan's art is often taken for granted by critics and historians.²³¹ Some of the photographs tend towards the erotic – a selection of these were reproduced in the edition of his journals and drawings published before his death and show

²²⁸ Keith Vaughan, Journal 2, 6th February 1940, Tate Archive, TGA 200817/1/2.

²²⁹ Malcolm Yorke gives detailed background information on how Vaughan came to start visiting Pagham. See Malcolm Yorke, *Keith Vaughan: His Life And Work* (Constable: London, 1990), pp. 47-8.

²³⁰ Keith Vaughan, Journal 2, 6th February 1940, Tate Archive, TGA 200817/1/2.

²³¹ Vaughan himself indicated he was not consciously aware of the influence of the Pagham photographs until it was suggested to him by Bryan Robertson in 1962: “Confronted with this proposition it seemed to me obviously true, though at the time I was painting I had no conscious recollection of the situations and certainly never referred to the photographs. To me they existed only in connection with the technical possibilities of photography in which I had been interested at that time”. See Keith Vaughan, *Journals and Drawings, 1939-1965* (Alan Ross: London, 1966), p. 8. Nicholas Goodison frames the Pagham photos in a similar way in his conversation with John Ball on Vaughan's art: “When I quizzed him about them in the 1970s, he confirmed that the Pagham photographs were a source of many poses and gestures of the figures in his paintings, along with the ballet photographs. He added that he hadn't looked at any of the photographs for years, but they were lodged in his subconscious and “just emerged when called””. See Abigail Grater, ed., *Keith Vaughan: Paintings And Drawings* (Osborne Samuel: London, 2007), p. 12.

Figure 19: Photograph of man draped in fabric, originally from Dick's Book Of Photos, c. 1941

groups of naked men in empty landscapes, much like his paintings. In some, the figures cover their faces and parts of their bodies with a thin, pale material (Figure 19), which has the effect of smoothing out and obscuring their features, as in *Assembly Of Figures I*.

However, the connection between the photographs at Pagham and Vaughan's paintings – many of which were produced decades after the summer of 1938 – is more than that of a superficial visual source. In a retrospective note added by Vaughan after the partial reproduction of the February 1940 entry in his 1966 *Journal And Drawings*, he clarifies the situation at Pagham in the late 1930s:

People who know Pagham as the large holiday camp of today may find the above description too romantic. But in fact it is not so... To the west of us was nothing but deserted banks of shingle which formed round the

Figure 20: Photograph of Keith Vaughan's brother Dick with nude male figures at Pagham, originally from Dick's Book Of Photos, c. 1941

entrance to old Pagham harbour. Nobody ever came to that part of the beach except ourselves and so there was no need for us to observe what are considered the normal decencies of public bathing.²³²

This double re-contextualisation of Pagham by Vaughan – firstly, in 1940, as a mourned, idyllic, pre-war state of being, and secondly, in 1965, as a homosocial space, a retreat, where normal rules did not apply – is crucial to a more complex understanding of the role it plays in his art. In fact, many of his paintings, particularly in the 1950s, could be considered as attempts at re-contextualising and re-experiencing the fleeting freedoms of Pagham, several years down the line.

While some of Vaughan's pre-war photographs focus on the nude male body, it is not necessarily their primary concern. It is tempting to highlight these

²³² See Keith Vaughan, 1966, p. 18.

images in particular, making it easy to argue for a close and relatively straightforward homoerotic connection between the photographed male nudes and the development of Vaughan's painting in the 1950s. However, in amongst the nude figures on the beach in the Pagham photographs is Vaughan's brother Dick, in a pair of shorts (Figure 20) – his presence shifts the tone of the images slightly, from a homoerotic spectacle of escape to a homosocial environment that allows companionship not just in terms of sex but also brotherhood. For re-thinking the relationship between pre-war experiences and Vaughan's paintings, this broad collection of photographs from before the war is particularly important – it is made up of images taken by Vaughan, at Pagham and elsewhere, and arranged in a large ring binder. He called this album of images 'Dick's Book of Photos', after his brother who was killed in action with the RAF in May 1940. It is now kept in the Vaughan collection in Aberystwyth. What is striking is the range of photographic subjects in the book – the images range from portraits of younger and older men (including Vaughan himself, and probably Harold Colebrook), children, and even some women. There are still lifes, often made up of pieces of rope, shells, or other beach debris, and some ballet photographs mixed in as well. There are a few landscapes, some atmospheric images of architecture, and even a handful of historic photographs of figures from other cultures. Collected in a binder and dedicated, in the title, to his deceased brother, the photographs appear to have been combined as a kind of memorial. Memory undoubtedly plays a significant role in the resonance of these images for Vaughan – I've demonstrated how he was drawn back to reminiscing about Pagham as the war broke out, and Dick's death, who can be seen playfully climbing a telegraph pole and then leaping with a joyful expression on his face in the album, would have made real the impression that the images of Pagham belonged to the past.

It is the presence of Dick in these photographs, alongside that of children, friends and almost certainly some lovers, which suggests that they can be considered as representations of a multi-faceted life, a kind of ever-changing, flexible domesticity that Vaughan considered to be idyllic. Sexuality is a part of this – one photograph is of a young man in a pair of trunks, sprawled out on the shingle in a manner that recalls Vaughan's reflection on Pagham as "pagan,

sensual days” (Figure 21). The focus is on his body, particularly his stretched out torso, and his hands cover his eyes with the effect of giving the figure some of the anonymity that Vaughan’s painted figures share. Suggestively, a pair of discarded shorts lay on the stones behind him. Elsewhere, however, the homoerotic and the everyday combine – another photograph depicts two men, one muscled figure wears only a pouch over his genitals while the other has a towel wrapped around his waist (Figure 22). The two men aren’t posing for the camera, however – one drinks from a bottle of milk, the other casually holds a newspaper, talking to someone out of shot. Any sexual overtones, any sense of a homoerotic ideal, are tempered by these everyday aspects, which lend the images less of a sense of voyeurism or eroticism (though these continue to be present) and more of the impression that this is merely a snapshot of something distinctly ordinary. This photograph was not taken at Pagham, but in fact depicts two men at Highgate Ponds, c. 1933 – another area of sociality for queer men at this time.²³³ This further underlines the idea of the album as a collection of figures, locations and memories across an expanse of time, brought together, perhaps more solidly, as a collection of photographs in a folder.

In fact, throughout ‘Dick’s Books Of Photos’, the range of figures photographed – a man with a child, a boy fishing, an older man sunbathing with a cup of tea, for example – suggest that we are witnessing occasions with a revolving cast, the coming together of people in a kind of makeshift family. The recurring juxtaposition of highly sensual imagery with photographs that would not look out of place in any family album of holiday snaps makes this clear. Sometimes, this juxtaposition occurs in one image – the album contains two photographs of a group of young men on the high diving boards over an outdoor swimming pool (Figure 23). In the first, Vaughan captures one man about to dive, in a handstand position, with his hands gripping the edge of the board and his legs extended and pointed out into the air. Another man looks on beside him, while, underneath, a younger boy gazes tentatively over the edge of the board below. In the next photograph, Vaughan has shifted his position slightly, to

²³³ The location and date of this photograph is recorded in Vann and Hastings, p. 46.

Figure 21: Photograph of male figure lying on the shingle at Pagham, from Dick's Book Of Photos, c. 1941

Figure 22: Photograph of two men at Highgate Ponds, c. 1933, from Dick's Book Of Photos, c. 1941

Figure 23: Two photographs of figures on a diving platform, from Dick's Book Of Photos, c. 1941

follow the body of the diving man as he falls into the water. While the photographs are clearly focused on the body of the diver – the tension of his muscles and the way he moves – they also capture the body’s surroundings, and the atmosphere of slightly childlike play and ‘showing off’ that probably led to the images being taken. In the broad combination of photographs in ‘Dick’s Book Of Photos’, this is a tension that Vaughan does not seem particularly interested in resolving – perhaps, for him, there is no tension, and so the photographs give an impression of a family life or sense of community outside of the realms of domesticity that encompasses a range of individuals and needs.

Between Vaughan’s holidays in Pagham and his post-war paintings, however, is the Second World War. Vaughan’s war experience is well documented in his journals and allows for a specific glimpse into one way that wartime life was negotiated. In fact, his journals, and the artistic works that he produced alongside them during the war years, suggest that Vaughan’s conception of wartime life was, in many ways, very similar in tone and outlook to his pre-war photographs. As war approached, he had already come to the decision that he was against it and spent the first year of the conflict assisting with the St John’s Ambulance service. In May 1940, only a few days after Vaughan saw him off at Trafalgar Square, Dick was killed in action with the RAF; shortly afterwards, he made the necessary arrangements to register as a conscientious objector – a decision he did not take lightly – and was eventually called up on 2nd January 1941. After initially dreading the prospect of army life and finding the day-to-day labour gruelling, he quickly began to settle in and enjoy his existence in the exclusively male camps. A journal entry for 3rd January 1941 already registers the benefits Vaughan found in army life: “Perhaps the biggest surprise is the absence of the human problem. Everyone is accessible, no effort is demanded”.²³⁴ Coming from the relative isolation of his everyday pre-war life with his job at Lintas and home life with his mother, he found the necessary, easy comradeship of the army a revelation. By March, Vaughan finds time to jot down that “I am not writing much now because I am too busy living to write. Living or almost living – the closest I have got to living for a long time”.²³⁵

²³⁴ Keith Vaughan, Journal 5, 3rd January 1941, Tate Archive, TGA 200817/1/5.

²³⁵ Keith Vaughan, Journal 5, March 1941, Tate Archive, TGA 200817/1/5.

Throughout the war, while forming a number of close intellectual and social bonds with his fellow recruits, he also grew to know the transience of army life, as he found his companies broken up, shifted about and moved on every few months. For example, he spent the summer of 1941 helping with harvesting and haymaking in Codford, while, by summer 1943 he'd been moved north to Eden Camp at Malton. Even when Vaughan remained in one place, others were coming and going – while he accepts this as a reality, he clearly found the constant flux difficult, commenting that “sudden changes of surroundings are whole uprootings. The loss of a companion an intimate and complete loss”.²³⁶ Vaughan was acutely aware of the multifaceted nature of wartime life, as he demonstrates in a journal entry on September 24th 1941 where he contrasts the daily life of the residents of Codford with that of the members of the Non Combatant Corps who are based there:

We set up our own world of crude, grubby complexity; mass cooking, mass eating, mass sleeping. In the evening we infest the peaceful village like wolves, crying for food, comfort, diversions, affection. Each one of us has his home, his roots, his life somewhere, but not here.²³⁷

Alongside his journals, and perhaps as a result of the peaceful, simple, temporary intimacy that he found in the army, Vaughan drew and painted aspects of his wartime life as best he could, fixing the scenes of makeshift male domesticity around him in his own mind. So, only weeks after the entry in his journal on life in Codford, he produces a sketch like *Camp Construction*, which is dated October 1941 (Figure 24). Dominating the image is the curving shell of what will become the barracks. Vaughan's words – “we set up our own world” – are reflected by the male figures distributed across the image. In the foreground, one figure carries a piece of metal or wood across his shoulder, while another crouches behind him, presumably working on another piece of the barracks. In the background, one man helps another climb up the shell of the building, while others work around them on the ground. Crucially, however, no one figure is

²³⁶ Vaughan, 2010, p. 52.

²³⁷ Keith Vaughan, Journal 7, September 24th, 1941, Tate Archive, TGA 200817/1/7.

Figure 24: Keith Vaughan, Camp Construction, 1941

Figure 25: Keith Vaughan, Breakfast In The Marquee, 1942

Figure 26: Keith Vaughan, Potato Peeling, 1942

Figure 27: Keith Vaughan, Winter Woollies, 1941

depicted in isolation – in every instance, the men work in groups of two or more, sharing the workload as they construct their own home. Vaughan's fondness for assemblies of figures for the rest of his life could be said to originate in images like this – images inspired by wartime life.

Vaughan's sketches from this period do not just address the actual construction of intimacy, but record the way it's lived, on a day-to-day basis, in a manner that is coloured by his own feelings and experiences. Many address the mundane realities of army life – for example, *Breakfast In The Marquee*, 1942 (Figure 25) takes as its subject the mass morning feed, with a line of barely-differentiated recruits lining up to receive their breakfast from two other soldiers behind a table. To the left, you can just see one figure carrying his food over to another longer table in the background. It's interesting to note Vaughan's focus on the serving of food here – while the communal consumption of a meal is referenced, it is the serving of food by one man to another that is the focus of this image in a manner that causes the boundaries between domesticity and comradeship to blur. A similar effect is achieved in a work like *Potato Peeling*, 1942 (Figure 26), where three men, arranged in a harmonious pyramid composition, sit facing each other, peeling potatoes and deep in conversation. Simple companionship in domestic work seem to have been a subject to which Vaughan was drawn.

Vaughan also produced images of wartime life that hint at eroticism, while also retaining references to domesticity and army companionship. *Winter Woollies*, 1941 (Figure 27) focuses on a group of men settling down for the night in a tent. While two of the men are depicted sitting in their sleeping bags to the right, Vaughan also draws the other two men heaving on the woollen undergarments that will keep them warm. The subtle distortion of the bodies of the two men in the act of dressing is particularly important here – on the figure on the far left, the head is particularly small, while the muscles of his right arm and the curves and angles of his leg and buttocks are all emphasised and slightly enlarged. Meanwhile, as the figure in the centre pulls his top over his head – and in the process adopts a pose that could have been pulled directly from a contemporary male bodybuilding magazine – his trousers fall down slightly at the front, revealing an area of pubic hair. To his side, one of the seated figures

looks up in a startled, slightly inquisitive manner. The effect is that the image hints at eroticism, though in a comical, rather down-to-earth manner, as if it has been glimpsed in something mundane and then recorded. It was probably also not lost on Vaughan that the appearance of the bodies in the woollen material was not dissimilar to his photographs of nude male figures wrapped in thin pale material at Pagham – pre-war memories return here, wrapped around different bodies. *Winter Woollies*, like *Potato Peeling*, *Breakfast in the Marquee* and *Camp Construction*, rests on Vaughan picking out the specifics and eccentricities of army life – how people behave, both as individuals and within groups.

Group living was something that Vaughan continually reflected on in his journals. On January 12th, 1942, he describes army life in the evenings, after the day's work is completed – a time he particularly relished:

Suddenly, from being separate individual units, writing, reading, working, each in his bed, we become inseparable, intermixed in a warm, argumentative, contented, cosy sermon, borrowing, lending, giving, taking of each other... I like this sort of living better than any other at such moments. I like its rich confused vitality.²³⁸

The army as a community of individuals who are able to act as individuals while also living harmoniously in a group setting was a great source of comfort and inspiration to Vaughan. With the war machine rumbling on in continental Europe, his way of life must have seemed like an idyllic alternative. At the same time, it seems clear that he was under no illusions as to the temporary, constrained nature of his existence. Still, it led him to reflect on the conditions that army life created:

We are a mixed and weirdly assorted lot with no common bonds or interests, except an unwillingness to kill strangers to order. Our community is formed simply by military law. We have no choice in it... Since nobody is seen as part of their social environment, their class, their profession or their job, and since the environment is equally anonymous and hostile to each one, personalities burn with a particularly individual brightness which is both more intense and more unreal than in a freely formed society.²³⁹

²³⁸ Keith Vaughan, Journal 8, 12th January 1942, Tate Archive, TGA 200817/1/8.

²³⁹ Vaughan, 2010, p. 31.

Other men who served in the NCC appear to have expressed equally positive, though slightly less idealised views of wartime life. Despite being on the receiving end of mistreatment from officers for disobeying orders, Arthur McMillan reflected on the “happy and contented” atmosphere among the men in his company.²⁴⁰ Meanwhile, Ronald Pinford – a CO who had volunteered for the NCC – remembered the enforced, makeshift domesticity, amongst banter and arguments: “We slept on the floor on a palliasse stuffed with straw and had blankets and what have you, and we more or less made our life together”.²⁴¹ Another recruit, Welshman Raymond Williams, dedicates his wartime diary in retrospect to the men he served with in the NCC:

I dedicate the book to the finest set of people I have met in my inhibited and lonely life, and with whom I had a deep affinity with. It's never been my lot to associate, before or since, with such friends.²⁴²

Clearly the NCC created deep, lasting bonds between the men that made up the companies. In contrast to the horrors of war raging elsewhere or the relative boredom and loneliness of civilian life before the war then, Vaughan can see the benefits of the boundary-free, all male society he has found himself in, alongside its difficulties and restraints. From the images and journal entries he produced as he lived there, it's clear that he took comfort in the domestic tasks and rituals of the NCC camps, while also finding immense joy in the relationships that were rooted in this makeshift domesticity, but in many ways transcend it. Vaughan continually emphasises the interaction between men in his images and accounts – interactions made possible by wartime comradeship, but ultimately signifying something more personal and potentially influential.

The contradictions inherent in comradeship and male companionship have been explored extensively by a number of historians and literary scholars, and these may help to pinpoint the roots of Vaughan's conception of his wartime experiences in his art and his journals. In reference to the First World War,

²⁴⁰ Arthur is quoted by his wife, Muriel McMillan, in an interview held by the Imperial War Museum. Muriel 'Babs' McMillan, interview, 10th March 1981, Imperial War Museum Collections, Cat No. 4829.

²⁴¹ Ronald Pinfield, interview, 18th April 1988, Imperial War Museum Collections, Cat No. 10236.

²⁴² Raymond Garfield Williams, introduction to diary no. 1, Private Papers of RG Williams, Imperial War Museums Collections, Cat No. 3567 85/13/1.

Joanna Bourke has argued that comradeship emerged as a necessity, not as “an inevitable, organic sentiment of war” but because “it was in the interests of military authorities to foster in servicemen a sense of group solidarity, a merging of the individual’s identity with that of the battalion”.²⁴³ Bourke also finds comradeship flourishing, “unhindered”, partly due to the absence of women – gender roles took on greater fluidity as men had to adopt ‘women’s work’ like cooking, cleaning, mending and so on, while also shouldering some of the emotional support that mothers or lovers may have ordinarily provided.²⁴⁴ Of course, the very experience of war also demands comradeship, though Bourke suggests that it undermined it at the same time – how is it possible to feel comradeship with your own side while being asked to kill another set of comrades on the opposing side, for instance? Can comradeship even be sustained in wartime, in the face of the constant shifting of men from battalion to battalion and the threat of annihilation? As Bourke concludes, “if the bureaucracy of war did not part men, death did”.²⁴⁵ Kathy J. Phillips has also highlighted the problems of comradeship outside of its possibilities for consolation – camaraderie arguably keeps fighting going, encouraging vengeance for fallen friends or even imitative suffering.²⁴⁶ Phillips’ analysis stretches across the major wars of the twentieth century and she notes a shift in tone between the First World War and the Second in terms of male camaraderie from a generally open and enthusiastic tendency to glorify male friendship in the former to a more muted, anxious attitude in the latter.²⁴⁷ She puts this down to an increased policing of sexuality by the mid-century, though admits that there were still possibilities for heterosexual and homosexual male bonding to overlap.²⁴⁸ Vaughan’s art certainly seems to demonstrate an awareness of these contradictions, as well as knowledge of the assumptions and traditions surrounding male comradeship, despite his non-combatant status.

²⁴³ Joanna Bourke, *Dismembering The Male: Men’s Bodies, Britain and the Great War* (Reaktion Books: London, 1996), p. 128.

²⁴⁴ Bourke, pp. 133-5.

²⁴⁵ Bourke, p. 150.

²⁴⁶ Kathy J. Phillips, *Manipulating Masculinity: War And Gender In Modern British And American Literature* (Palgrave Macmillan: Basingstoke, 2006), pp. 73-4.

²⁴⁷ Phillips, pp. 99.

²⁴⁸ Phillips, p. 183.

In *Modernism, Male Friendship and the First World War*, Sarah Cole presents the problematic nature of comradeship most clearly. She suggests a distinction between ‘friendship’ (voluntary relations between individuals) and ‘comradeship’ (compulsory relations within groups) – this is certainly useful for highlighting the complex nature of wartime relationships, but leaves space for these distinctions to overlap (as they certainly seem to do in Vaughan’s mind).²⁴⁹ Cole’s book covers a period where a utopian, ideal notion of male friendship rooted in the late Victorian era met its destructive match in modernity in the First World War. She finds a number of writers to be concerned with “the organisation of intimacy” between men, though this turns out to be an impossible goal due to a combination of the internal contradictions of friendship and the external constraints of war, “which together set in motion a cycle of failure or disappointment”.²⁵⁰ Cole’s story becomes that of the failure of comradeship in the face of war, something that Vaughan would have recognised, even though his wartime situation is removed from the frontline. As a Conscientious Objector, he would have experienced a peculiar kind of comradeship, removed from civilian life but without the threat of combat at the same time. While COs were not imprisoned and publicly criticised as they had been in the First World War (unless they refused to engage in non-combatant duties), the decision does seem to have been a difficult, alienating one for many individuals. Felicity Goodall records the reflections of one CO, Edward Blishen:

You had to declare yourself in the local post office and everybody was declaring themselves at a certain counter, and there was this forelorn counter over there in order to declare that you were not going to join in. I actually felt terrible about it because it felt as though you were separating yourself from the rest of the world really.²⁵¹

As a CO, then, you were joining a group of individuals who would not fight, a minority amongst the masses of men who were joining up. Blishen’s sense of separation seems to have been a common one – in his journals, Vaughan

²⁴⁹ Sarah Cole, *Modernism, Male Friendship and The First World War* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2003), p. 144.

²⁵⁰ Cole, pp. 4-6.

²⁵¹ Blishen is quoted in Felicity Goodall, *A Question Of Conscience: Conscientious Objection In The Two World Wars* (Sutton: Stroud, 1997), p. 88.

expresses similar sentiments: “I do not want anymore to be superior and isolated... I would rather be foolish with the herd, just this once, just to accept the comradeship and tenderness they offer”.²⁵² However, that’s not to say that there wasn’t a sense of comradeship to be found with other COs, as Ken Shaw, who served in the same unit as Vaughan, reflects:

That NCC unit was really my university, because I met people I’d be never have met... The thing that kept me going was partly that we were all together in one group and we did reinforce each other although we all had widely differing views.²⁵³

COs, particularly at the start of the war, were often employed in relatively dull manual labour, and Shaw’s picture of the men keeping each other going with conversation is certainly reflected in Vaughan’s journals, as we have seen. However, Vaughan has also demonstrated the fragility of the intimacy of comradeship as a CO, as men are moved on or transferred constantly. This does appear to have been a common fear – Raymond Williams, another CO in the NCC, constantly records the changes and moves in his diary: “I am afraid I get cat-like attachments to places. Don’t relish the ‘move’ tomorrow”.²⁵⁴ In her study, Cole highlights one relatively simple strategy for combating this fragility – privileging “the transcendent moment of intimacy rather than long-lasting bonds and commitments... the best way to protect personalised intimacy is to proclaim an ironic longevity in fleeting encounters and momentary bursts of emotion”.²⁵⁵ In his entries in his journals, Vaughan arguably engages in this emphasis on transcendent, fleeting moments of heightened intimacy:

I have returned home, not left home... Oh all the intolerable weight of misery lifts at once in here with Ken’s high-spirited quips and Stuart’s inscrutable calm smiling with his row of baby teeth. Freddy was sleeping. “Hallo my son”, I pressed my cheek against Harry’s cool washed face. What does it matter if I make a fool of myself.²⁵⁶

²⁵² Keith Vaughan, Journal 3, April 4th 1940, Tate Gallery Archive, TGA 200817/1/3.

²⁵³ Ken Shaw, Interview, May 1992, Imperial War Museum Collections, Cat No. 13197.

²⁵⁴ Raymond Garfield Williams, February 20th 1942, Private Papers of RG Williams, Imperial War Museums Collections, Cat No. 3567 85/13/1.

²⁵⁵ Cole, pp. 152-3.

²⁵⁶ Keith Vaughan, Journal 12, July 19th 1942, Tate Gallery Archive, 200817/1/12.

Perhaps not coincidentally, Cole's words also echo the description of the circumstances of a homosexual pick-up – it's not difficult to imagine that Vaughan may well have been used to a particularly fleeting kind of intimacy with other men anyway, even if it did not make his partings any easier to negotiate.

In my chapter on Francis Bacon, I outlined how homosexuality existed between public and private spaces, how queer men had to negotiate a particular kind of domesticity away from the public gaze in order to build their own forms of intimacy. Vaughan was clearly conscious of his position outside of a normative domestic set up, both in and outside the army – he consistently stresses how unhappy he was living with his mother before the war in the journals.²⁵⁷ As the war progresses, his thoughts turn increasingly to a return to civilian life:

Here in the army, navy, air force, here or elsewhere, men live conscious all the time of their hearts, their roots elsewhere, in some other life... No matter how great the distance that circumstances imposes between them and their true lives, they keep in touch with it, in their hearts, and so keep in touch with themselves and their own integrity... They have a core of reality... In my case the situation is rather different. I have no intact existence to which I belong other than the circumstances in which I find myself... Leave is not a return to harbour, to the walled garden of security, but a continuation of the uncertain present in a different reality and a different setting.²⁵⁸

From what he expresses in his journals, it would seem that the camaraderie and makeshift life that Vaughan finds in the army – incorporating elements of domesticity but ultimately focused around relationships between men – is preferable and perhaps more structured to life elsewhere, even at its most fragile and fluctuating. Without the means to recreate or refer to a contented kind of domesticity, his focus becomes the experience of relationships themselves.

Vaughan frames his encounters with men on leave in similar terms to his army existence – if he takes comfort in the brief, daily intimacies of army life, he also learns to retain the same knowledge of the fleeting nature of intimacy in his

²⁵⁷ For example, Vaughan considers his home life with his mother to be “a life in which I felt myself no longer to have any place” (Keith Vaughan, Journal 3, June 24th 1940, Tate Gallery Archive, TGA 200817/1/3). Later on, he frets that leaving the army at the end of the war “will be leaving one sort of imprisonment to return to an old and even more devastating one” (Keith Vaughan, Journal 10, May 1st 1942, Tate Gallery Archive, TGA 200817/1/10).

²⁵⁸ Keith Vaughan, Journal 19, March 7th 1944, Tate Gallery Archive, TGA 200817/1/19.

relationships. His journals include an account of his time spent with 'Judah', a young Jewish man who he picks up in London's darkened streets in September 1944.²⁵⁹ The account is interesting for a variety of reasons. Firstly, Vaughan gives a rather honest account of the procedure involved in picking someone up – from standing around in the dark, to making idle, loaded conversation with someone ("They don't give us much light in spite of the new regulations, do they?"), taking them for coffee and, only then, in the lights of a café, being able to clearly see the person you'd met. Additionally, it gives a picture of how queer men negotiated the city – 'Judah' has a family waiting for him at home so can't go home with Vaughan or take Vaughan with him. Instead, they walk along the Strand and over the Embankment, where they hold hands and kiss in the dark ("I felt a great satisfaction to be doing something which thousands of others were doing elsewhere..."). They then walk past Charing Cross, up Northumberland Avenue and down The Mall before ducking into St James' Park, where they head into a darkened spot and start kissing again. They are quickly disturbed, however:

Some footsteps were approaching along the path and a torch flickered across so we broke off and got up to find somewhere more secluded, but it was difficult to distinguish the path and we came to some barbed wire and then a torch was shone full in our faces and a policeman asked us for identity cards which he scanned with suspicion and finally handed back rather reluctantly... I felt angry and humiliated by it all.

They walk out of St James Park, up Piccadilly, through Berkley Square and back onto Piccadilly Circus, where they leave each other, planning to meet again the next day at Vaughan's house. This is an account of intimacy on the move, interrupted by a policeman and delayed until they could meet again. The two men do end up spending a few hours together and having sex the following day, and Vaughan reflects on their time together:

I realised this was not false, but simply a thing of the moment, without past in sequence – a way of affecting a relationship during an afternoon. Yet I could not avoid the faint stirring of an affection which looked to the

²⁵⁹ All of the quotes on 'Judah' from here onwards come from a single entry one of the journals – Keith Vaughan, Journal 23, September 25th 1944, Tate Gallery Archive, TGA 200817/1/23.

Figure 28: Keith Vaughan, Drawing of two male figures from his journal, c. May 1944

future; and I knew he could not fit into my life, and he knew it too, but without regret.

Vaughan's account parallels the difficulties of comradeship in the army – in picking up another man, there's the same uncertainty, a similar knowledge that things won't last, and a desire to savour the fleeting moments of intimacy for that reason. Elsewhere in his journals, he recounts a night he spent with an American soldier, Johnny – the focus is again on the short time they spent together and the things about their lives that they shared with each other ("his love for Curtis; his hopes for settling down with him after the war and making our impossible substitute for marriage").²⁶⁰ At the centre of Vaughan's entry on Johnny is his description of the two of them in an embrace – "we stood pressed together, our mouths together, our bodies together" – for him, "the most perfect form of

²⁶⁰ Keith Vaughan, Journal 20, April 3rd 1944, Tate Gallery Archive, TGA 200817/1/20.

human contact imaginable”.²⁶¹ Here, Vaughan is again relishing a brief moment of contact, of total intimacy – in fact, the memory of Johnny seems to have stayed with him for some time. Months down the line, he includes a sketch in his journals of two figures in a similar embrace, their arms around each other and faces and bodies pressed together (Figure 28).

In Groups and At Home: Locating Vaughan’s Post-War Domesticity

These moments of intimacy, unstable and ever-changing, are arguably something that deeply concerns Vaughan throughout his life, not just in his time in the NCC and on leave during the war. There’s Pagham too – a constantly recurring memory of an idyllic pre-war past that shifts in significance for Vaughan as his distance from it increases – but there’s also Vaughan’s post-war life, which undergoes a period of reconstruction heavily influenced by his wartime experiences, much like the whole of Britain itself. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, Vaughan begins to paint increasingly pastoral scenes that focus on groups, pairs or single figures in outdoor settings. These figures vary in type, from fishermen, to bathers, to farm labourers, or even just nudes, though most seem to be preoccupied with a similar combination of work and leisure – these figures can be seen fixing boats, harvesting crops, digging holes while others stand idly by, bathing, talking, resting. One example from this series of works is *Fishermen and Bathers*, 1951 (Figure 29). This painting focuses on a group of male figures situated within a sheltered cove on a beach – the dark ocean is visible behind them, stretching out to meet a rather murky sky. The work consists of five figures – one is nude, while the other four are gathered around a boat that has been dragged up onto the beach, and appear to be in the process of working on it. One of the four is whittling away at the rim of the boat with a tool, while the others carry objects – a box, or pieces of wood – in assistance. Despite the separation of nude and fishermen, the two groups seem almost interchangeable, as if the bather will dress himself and rejoin the group, only for others to step away from the group and bathe. The pastoral subject and gentle,

²⁶¹ See Keith Vaughan Journal 20, April 1st and April 3rd 1944, Tate Gallery Archive, TGA 200817/1/20.

Figure 29: Keith Vaughan, Fishermen And Bathers, 1951

idyllic tone of Vaughan's paintings of this period recall Emile Bernard and Paul Gauguin's images of peasants in Brittany and particularly the bathers of Paul Cezanne and Henri Matisse. It is known that Vaughan had reproductions of some of Cezanne's paintings of bathers, as well as *The Moroccans*, painted by Matisse c. 1915-6, at the height of the First World War. Matisse produced a work similar in style to *The Moroccans* at a similar time that takes bathers as its subject. *Bathers By A River* was originally begun in 1909, reworked in 1913, and finally completed in 1916, undergoing numerous changes and revisions over these years. According to Catherine Bock-Weiss, Matisse originally intended the painting to represent a scene of "active contentment" – sérénité – but, by the time of its completion, the work had taken a certain "gravitas", resonant with "sobriety and solemnity", its female figures treated "without exoticism or eroticism". This move from "abundant life to stark and frozen sterility", Bock-Weiss suggests, was profoundly affected by the First World War.²⁶² For Vaughan, the subject matter of bathers would also be profoundly affected by wartime experiences, and pivot on a similar tension between serenity and melancholy.

The theme of bathing – and the setting of a secluded seaside cove – recalls Pagham, and *Fishermen And Bathers* can certainly be considered as imbued with

²⁶² See Catherine Bock-Weiss, *Henri Matisse: Modernist Against The Grain* (Pennsylvania State University Press: Pennsylvania, 2009), p. 70.

Vaughan's pre-war memories on some level.²⁶³ During the war, bathing and the seeking out of a secluded outdoor area for a temporary kind of privacy also appears to be something that he took comfort in. In an entry on May 7th 1944, he finds time to sunbathe alone:

Today I went down to the river and the sun... No one was in sight. I lay back and stretched my body into the brilliant warmth. Years have passed since I last did this. Perhaps I am the last person in Europe who can still live like this now...²⁶⁴

There are clear echoes of Pagham, though also a sense of shelter and protection from the present. A few months later, he records:

Each afternoon after work, if there is any sun, I race up to the river on my bike and strip off my clothes and dip into the cold cloudy water and then lie on the bank with my body naked to the sun ... The touch of the sun's heat lying on my body is only one degree less delicious than another body; and the sun is always there.²⁶⁵

Bathing and sunbathing become sensual, solitary pursuits, connected with the end of a day's work. In war literature, male bathing is a common theme – not only did many men have to bathe communally if they were conscripted into the army, but it also provides a poignant contrast or detour from the horrors of war. In war poetry, for example, bathing is addressed on several occasions. In a poem entitled 'Mersa' – based on his experiences serving with the British army in Egypt during the Second World War – Keith Douglas describes how “the cherry skinned soldiers stroll down/to undress to idle on the white beach” (10-11).²⁶⁶ Death and the broken, desolate landscape of war surround them – bathing becomes the natural, basic need of foreign soldiers where homes and communities have been broken, and life disrupted utterly (“A dead tank alone/leans where gossips stood” (19-20)). Unlike Vaughan, however, Douglas

²⁶³ This reading is implied in Vann and Hastings, pp. 44-5.

²⁶⁴ Keith Vaughan, Journal 20, May 7th 1944, Tate Gallery Archive, TGA 200817/1/20.

²⁶⁵ Keith Vaughan, Journal 23, August 2nd 1944, Tate Gallery Archive, TGA 200817/1/23.

²⁶⁶ Keith Douglas, 'Mersa', in *Keith Douglas: The Complete Poems*, ed. Desmond Graham (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1998), p. 99.

can barely bring himself to look at the bathers, never mind find comfort in the act of bathing itself:

I see my feet like stones
underwater. The logical little fish
converge and nip the flesh
imagining I am one of the dead. (21-24)

War wrenches intimacy away – there’s no sense of heroism, sensuality or comfort in witnessing and joining in bathing for Douglas here, only necessity.

Wartime bathing has also been addressed by writers reflecting on war retrospectively. In the third part of her *Regeneration* trilogy, *The Ghost Road*, Pat Barker frames bathing as a moment of respite for the soldiers of the First World War. Having wandered around the market stalls of a French town, looking at the souvenirs on sale (“Souvenirs, my God. When the mind will happily wipe itself clean in the effort to forget”), Prior meets Owen and Potts.²⁶⁷ They wander through a desolate landscape, not unlike Douglas’, through a “labyrinth of green pathways... over broken walls or through splintered fences” and stumble upon Hallett, who is about to bathe in a small pond. They watch him for a while, noting the way the war had written itself on his body (“thin, pale... Sharp collar bones, bluish shadows underneath”) as he lowers himself lazily and blissfully into the water. The other men join him eventually, sitting alongside the water and drinking wine. Barker frames the scene as a brief moment of peace for these “men who have no control over their fate” – as Prior reflects, “somewhere, outside the range of human hearing, and yet heard by all of them, a clock had begun to tick”.²⁶⁸ Barker’s novel as a whole, and her use of bathing here, relies heavily on hindsight – for her, bathing becomes the briefest moment of intimacy before her characters are slaughtered. At a more contemporary point, wartime bathing is framed as a similar moment of respite – of love and companionship between comrades – in John Singer Sargent’s watercolour *Tommies Bathing*, 1918. Here, two nude male soldiers lie in the reeds and foliage alongside a lake, with their uniforms and the reality of war momentarily forgotten.

²⁶⁷ Pat Barker, *The Ghost Road* (Penguin: London, 2008), p. 145.

²⁶⁸ Barker, pp. 145-7.

An alternative Second World War poem that draws on bathing as subject in a manner that seems a little closer to Vaughan is F.T. Prince's 'Soldiers Bathing' – though Vaughan may not have identified with the spiritual tone that Prince gradually feeds into the poem, the two share an awareness of the contradictions of wartime bathing. In Prince's poem, he watches "the freedom of a band/Of soldiers who belong to me" (2-3) as they bathe together on a beach in the evening.²⁶⁹ He writes about bathing both as a means of forgetting (the horrific present, the war) and as a means of remembering (the past, innocence, freedom) in a way that has clear parallels with Vaughan's wistful recollections of Pagham in his wartime journals and his sensual descriptions of his own bathing. It revives the work- and war-ravaged bodies of the soldiers, allowing them to bask in a moment of cleanliness, safety and naked simplicity:

... 'Poor bare forked animal',
Conscious of his desires and needs and flesh that rise and fall,
Stands in the soft air, tasting after toil
The sweetness of his nakedness. (11-14)

In this moment of escape through bathing, Prince's soldier "forgets/His hatred of the war [and] finds that he/Remembers his old freedom in a game/Mocking himself, and comically mimics fear and shame" (15-16, 18-20). By the end of the poem, the soldiers are shaking off the temporary forgetfulness:

...These dry themselves and dress,
Combing their hair, forget the fear and shame of nakedness.
Because to love is frightening we prefer
The freedom of our crimes. (60-63)

Prince's presentation of bathing as a moment of forgetting and remembering, of being a part of war but also rooted outside of it at the same time, is also key to understanding Vaughan's depictions of bathing in his paintings. Returning to *Fishermen And Bathers*, we are presented with an image that, in its coastal setting, group of male figures and reference to bathing, could easily have multiple resonances for Vaughan – from Pagham, to wartime service in the NCC

²⁶⁹ F.T. Prince, 'Soldiers Bathing' in *Poetry of the Second World War: An International Anthology*, ed. Desmond Graham (Chatto and Windus: London, 1995), pp. 32-4.

and also his travels in the late 1940s and early 1950s to Brittany in France, from which the subject of this work would have immediately originated. There are layers of memory here, triggered by the Brittany-based subject but stretching back into Vaughan's past. This is not to say that *Fishermen And Bathers* acts as a kind of memorial – instead, it is one example of Vaughan constantly re-imagining the past as a way of going forward. How else are moments of fleeting intimacy and unstable domesticity to be negotiated when, by necessity, they have to be left behind? By focusing on a subject from his present that has deep resonances of intimate past moments, Vaughan not only makes what has been temporary permanent in his art, but also acknowledges the possibility that it can be found again, somewhere in the future. Bathing becomes an embodiment of this – it is 'domestic' in its origins, rooted in the home but can also be performed outside. It can be communal, and had been an opportunity for intimacy for Vaughan at Pagham and in the NCC. It is also, in war literature and Vaughan's paintings, a means of escape from the present, into memory. However, while for Douglas, Barker and Prince it is a temporary distraction from the horrors of war, bathing for Vaughan has to at least take on the possibility of permanence – it needs to retain the same resonance in war and out, in the past and in the present, because it is only by repetition and the constant recurrence of memory that Vaughan can envision any kind of permanence. Prince's regretful line, as the soldiers dress after bathing, is particularly relevant here - "Because to love is frightening/We prefer the freedom of our crimes" (62-3) – Vaughan's work, and his whole art, represents a complete refusal to return to the 'freedom' that Prince ironically references. The struggle for Prince's "love" is more pressing. As a result, bathing recurs in Vaughan's art throughout his career and particularly in the 1940s and 1950s, from gouaches produced while still in the NCC, such as *Soldier Taking A Shower*, 1945, to paintings like *Bathers By A Grey Sea*, 1947, and the more stylised and mature *Ochre Bather*, 1951. As Vaughan himself states in his journal in July 1943, "it is senseless to cling to the past, to wish to go back. Senseless too to try and forget the past, to cut adrift from it" – instead, the past must be made to help build the future.²⁷⁰

²⁷⁰ Keith Vaughan, Journal 16, July 11th 1943, Tate Gallery Archive, TGA 200817/1/16.

It is fitting, then, that one of Vaughan's earliest known paintings bears the title *Two Figures By A Boat – The Wanderings of Odysseus* (Figure 30). It dates from 1937 – around the time that he was visiting Pagham in the lead up to the war – and contains two figures, one seated with the other lying on the beach, resting their head on their partner's lap: a pose that echoes several of the images from 'Dick's Book Of Photos'. While the image does not directly address bathing, the two nude figures by the shore could certainly be considered forerunners of Vaughan's preoccupation with bathers after the war. The boat moored behind the two figures suggests that the 'wanderings' of the title have been briefly interrupted by an idyllic scene of companionship. Crucially, however, there is no sense of resolution here – the boat waits in the background to be boarded again – and the allusion to the Greek myth appears to be a reference to a journey to a home, somewhere. *Two Figures By A Boat – The Wanderings of Odysseus* is an early representation of the idyllic intimacy Vaughan enjoyed at Pagham, as well as an acknowledgement of its fleeting nature. The image sits ambiguously between the search for a particular place and the experience of a moment of

Figure 30: Keith Vaughan, *Two Figures By A Boat – The Wanderings of Odysseus*, 1937

intimacy that interrupts and may ultimately transcend that search.

If Vaughan was aware of a particular state of 'homelessness' throughout his artistic career and if he, as I have suggested, dwells on and emphasises particular fleeting moments of intimacy in his journals and in his art, continually revising and re-contextualising them, then what are the implications of this, beyond the expression of a lack of a permanent 'place'? How and why are the photographs and memories of Pagham and the reflections of his journals remembered, negotiated and revised in his art? We know that Vaughan never purposefully used his pre-war photographs as sources, though undoubtedly they are influences – at times as memories, at others less consciously so. As a result, it is difficult to trace the development of Vaughan's paintings, from 'source' to 'finished product' as Whitney Davis does for Thomas Eakins' *The Swimming Hole*, 1883-5, in his essay 'Erotic Revisions In Thomas Eakins' Narratives Of Male Nudity'. Davis uses Freud's understanding of wishes – either discharged into the world or delayed, temporarily or permanently – as being open to revision.²⁷¹ Suggesting that one means of the discharge of wishes is in representation, Davis argues that "no one's representation seem to him or her to be completely self-sufficient: our representation is always revision".²⁷² Davis in fact suggests that wishes can be traced "in reverse", moving from the latest examples of discharge, backwards. By identifying the psychoanalytically understood discharges and wishes alongside their historical probability or improbability – and the way in which these two factors co-exist and interact with each other – then it is possible to uncover the Freudian *Nachträglichkeit* or 'delayed activation'.²⁷³ In his discussion of the numerous revisions and sources that make up Eakins' single painting, Davis finds complex layers of meaning and possible intention – as he states, "revision itself has no beginning and no ending, and constructs its meanings in transit".²⁷⁴

I have demonstrated that Keith Vaughan's paintings of the post-war period are clearly built on revision in some way, and it is Davis' notion of

²⁷¹ Whitney Davis, 'Erotic Revision In Thomas Eakins' Narratives Of Male Nudity' in *Art History*, Vol 17, September 1994, pp. 301-41, p. 301.

²⁷² Davis, p. 302.

²⁷³ Davis, pp. 303-5.

²⁷⁴ Davis, p. 319.

revision – as having no beginning or ending, and helping to construct meaning – that is most relevant to thinking about Vaughan’s art. In fact, Vaughan’s use of revision – the constant return to and re-invocation of the past in his paintings, as a way of progressing and going forward – also finds reflection in the work of several queer theorists. For example, Carla Freccero has argued for ‘queer spectrality’ as a way of reconfiguring normative time (built on heteronormativity and governed by the nuclear family and procreation) for queer experience.²⁷⁵ For Freccero, spectrality is derived from Derrida and understood as “a non-living present in the living present” – a return from the past, rather like the uncanny, that makes itself known but cannot be concretely grasped or described.²⁷⁶ She suggests that queer spectrality can be a way not only of doing history as a queer subject – combining a mourning of lost figures with genuine hope, identification and a sense of the ethical – as well as being applied to historical subjects.²⁷⁷ Its benefits, particularly in the case of Vaughan, are that it does not consider history in the generative sense, ignoring the question of seeking a particular origin, while also emphasising the lack of stability of historical subjects. To pin a queer figure like Vaughan down to a particular identity or way of life would be, in a sense, a kind of flattening and a denial of his, as we have seen, multi-faceted and complex experiences and artworks. Freccero’s concept of queer spectrality, then, speaks to the way Vaughan’s art appears to be indebted to memory and the constant return of the past.

Freccero’s queer spectrality partly forms the basis for José Esteban Muñoz’s recent study on the concept of queer utopia – an idea in direct contrast to the anti-relational theories of Leo Bersani and Lee Edelman.²⁷⁸ Muñoz defines queerness as “not yet here... an ideality that can be distilled from the past and

²⁷⁵ See Carla Freccero, *Queer/Early/Modern* (Duke University Press: Durham and London, 2006), particularly her chapter ‘Queer Spectrality’, pp. 69-104.

²⁷⁶ Freccero, pp. 69-71.

²⁷⁷ Freccero, pp. 76-80.

²⁷⁸ Early on in his study, Muñoz sets his idea of queer utopia up as something different to the anti-relational theories of Bersani and Edelman, which can, particularly in the case of Bersani, be viewed in the context of their production (i.e. immediately after the AIDS crisis of the 1980s). He refers in particular to Bersani’s *Homos* (Harvard University Press: London, 1996) and Edelman’s *No Future: Queer Theory And The Death Drive* (Duke University Press: Durham and London, 2004). See José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then And There Of Queer Futurity* (New York University Press: New York and London, 2009), p. 11.

used to imagine a future”.²⁷⁹ Drawing on the theories of Ernst Bloch, Muñoz argues that queerness involves the imagining of not the possibility but the potentiality of another world, a utopia – one that is anticipatory, separate from the here and now, eminent but also, crucially, open to disappointment.²⁸⁰ Unlike Bersani or Edelman, Muñoz does not argue for the complete rejection of or removal from the social, but does suggest that his concept of queer utopia draws on the idea of ‘queer time’ as something other than heteronormative time – for him, “past pleasures stave off the affective perils of the present while they enable a desire that is queer futurity’s core”.²⁸¹ This constant imagining of the “not-yet-conscious” is done from within the social, from within “straight time”, while ultimately aiming for a space “outside of heteronormativity”.²⁸² Muñoz’s repositing of the idea of the utopia as central to queer experience resonates with the way in which Vaughan’s paintings after the Second World War seem to have drawn on memory and past experience in order to imagine a future.

In order to outline more specifically how the theories of Freccero and Muñoz can be considered in relation to Vaughan’s art, I would like to return to *Assembly Of Figures I*, 1952 – a painting that I discussed briefly at the start of this chapter as an introduction to the kind of work that he was producing in the 1950s. Previously, I noted the way the carefully arranged group of male figures in this painting seem far removed from the wartime experiences that so affected Vaughan. In fact, many critics and observers have found an idyllic tone in the groups of figures that he repeatedly painted at this time – I followed my outline of this painting by moving on to discuss Vaughan’s memories of Pagham, and clearly *Assembly Of Figures I* does make reference to the idyllic peace of his pre-war experiences. However, drawing on Freccero and Muñoz, I would like to propose a more complex reading of this work.

To find a sense of the idyllic in *Assembly Of Figures I* is to recognise its subject matter – a group of nude figures, isolated in a landscape – and the connotations this has elsewhere in the history of art. You immediately want to align Vaughan’s work with the tradition of classical nudes and bathers that had

²⁷⁹ Muñoz, p. 1.

²⁸⁰ Muñoz sets out his reasoning for using the philosophy of Ernst Bloch, p. 3.

²⁸¹ See Muñoz, pp. 11-4, p. 26.

²⁸² See Muñoz, p. 25 and p. 35.

been subverted, but continued, by artists like Picasso, Renoir, Manet, Matisse and Cezanne in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. It is also tempting to place Vaughan's work in a lineage of homoerotic nudes, from ancient Greece, through Michelangelo and even up to a contemporary like Francis Bacon.²⁸³ Both of these viewpoints have been brought to Vaughan's art, often simultaneously, and they are, undeniably, key elements of a painting like *Assembly Of Figures I*. However, a close examination of the painting reveals elements that also undermine this view. The four figures combine successfully as a group in some senses – they stand in a kind of semi-circle, while the slightly stooped figure leans to 'touch' the two figures at the rear. However, while 'touching' them, he almost completely obscures one of them. At the same time, all four figures retain a sense of 'separateness' that makes them difficult to reconcile completely as a group – on the right, one figure appears slightly removed, while the stopping figure disrupts the sense of unity. The 'assembly' aspect of Vaughan's title seems particularly apt here. Vaughan would speak in retrospect in his journals about painting assemblies and the desire to bring figures together, in contrast to painting a crowd:

In the past artists have usually dealt with the problem of crowds by turning them into assemblies. Assemblies are orderly rhythmic groups of individuals, which act and are acted upon by mutual consent.²⁸⁴

While he certainly appears to have desired a kind of order with his assemblies, this does not necessarily make for order in the finished painting; these four figures feel as if they've been brought together from separate studies. The modelling and shadow on their bodies – which contradicts the broad sunlight that radiates from the background – also back this up; the poses and varying positions of the shadows on the three completely visible bodies would suggest they originate from separate sketches. This is not to say, however, that these figures would have been sketched particularly with this painting in mind – they

²⁸³ Simon Oldfield has drawn comparisons between the work of Keith Vaughan and Francis Bacon, placing both in the context of queer experience in the 1950s. See Simon Oldfield, 'Comparative Strangers' in Matthew Gale and Chris Stephens, eds., *Francis Bacon* (Tate: London, 2008), pp. 64-73.

²⁸⁴ Vaughan, 2010, p. 142.

may have been painted elsewhere or drawn years previously, only to be returned to again for this image. This sense of separateness, of not quite being together in the landscape, is underlined by the pose of the figure on the right, with his left leg resting on a prop that doesn't even appear to be there.²⁸⁵ Other features of the landscape also prove slightly troubling – there's the section of foliage to the right (the tones of which are reflected in the shadows on the bodies of the figures), which suggests that the figures may have emerged from cover, or are about to return to it. There's also a similar area of dark green paint at the bottom of the canvas – a piece of dark undercoat left visible where Vaughan hasn't quite allowed the gold, sandy coloured paint to cover the whole of the ground. The four figures gather round this strange rupture – it even seems that the stooping figure on the left leans in to peer into it.²⁸⁶

So, the initially idyllic atmosphere of *Assembly Of Figures I*, suggested by the work's subject matter, is undermined by the arrangement of the figures, their poses and the unsettling elements of the landscape. However, the disjointed nature of a work like this is probably unsurprising – just as we're looking at four figures brought together from four separate situations, we're also looking at an image that draws on resonances, memories, "specters" from a range of different situations. Made visible in this painting, to us at least, are the outdoor nude or semi-nude figures of Pagham from 'Dick's Book Of Photos'; the thrown-together recruits to the NCC in the Second World War; the individual male figures Vaughan must have known well enough to sketch or recall for each figure that makes up the assembly; even the queer art historical spectres of Greek classicism and Michelangelo. It is no wonder, then, that *Assembly Of Figures I* refuses to resolve into an idyllic unity – it draws upon a range of pasts for one image, pasts which can be glimpsed or guessed at but which never solidify into one particular vision of memory. In this painting, it is possible to find one interpretation of

²⁸⁵ Malcolm Yorke, in his discussion on the *Assembly Of Figures* paintings, notices something along these lines too, though imbues his observation with the idealism that has recurred in discussions of Vaughan's works: "In this setting one could hardly expect to find man standing confidently alone. But in huddled groups, separate forms hardly distinguishable, merged together they create a certain steady glow of humanness. Or else as lovers, locked in each other, a single bipolar entity, oblivious to the outside, reaffirming each his existence in each other. And the threat of parting never far away". See Yorke, p. 97.

²⁸⁶ Philip Vann has noted that although Vaughan aimed for "serene delight, vigorous harmony... [and] 'compassionate understanding'", the Assemblies were "not sometimes without underlying tensions and explosive contradictions". See Vann and Hastings, pp. 36-7.

Freccero's 'queer spectrality' in action, as it seems haunted by the past while striving for something more (the very act of assembling figures on a canvas suggests that Vaughan is seeking to create something beyond individual components) but never being able to solidify into something stable, as it doesn't yet exist. Similarly, Muñoz's queer utopia would appear to be a relevant concept to evoke here too – if Freccero's 'queer spectrality' points to one way of interpreting how Vaughan approaches his past in his art, then Muñoz's idea of queerness as imagining a future, something that is yet to arrive, can also play a part. Vaughan does approach the idyllic here, does attempt to imagine another world, another possibility, but also paints in the struggle, the difficulty of imagining and creating. So, in one sense there's the coming together of a group of figures in a secluded, outdoor space – there's even visible sociality, as the middle figure can be seen gazing at the figure to our right, who clearly poses (one leg raised, another arm flexed) with the knowledge that he is being seen. However, there's also the section of foliage that looms in the background like something to return to, and the dark rupture in the ground that threatens to break open while still, as it is, remaining as something to which your eye can't help but be drawn, away from the figures themselves. This re-contextualising and reconfiguring of the past by Vaughan in *Assembly Of Figures I* bears its difficulties on the surface – however, Muñoz, drawing on Bloch, would suggest that “utopian feelings can and regularly will be disappointed. They are nonetheless indispensable to the act of imaging transformation”.²⁸⁷ Vaughan certainly seeks to transform the past here (and would return to the subject of assemblies throughout his career to do so again and again) and, in doing so, paints the potentiality of a future while also, from his position as a homosexual in the early 1950s prior to legalisation, acknowledging its difficulties.

This need to imagine a certain kind of transformation through the past in works such as the *Assembly Of Figures* series can be put into context alongside some of Vaughan's other works from the early 1950s – particularly a number of paintings of interiors. These works are slight oddities in Vaughan's oeuvre – as we have seen, he preferred, much of the time, to focus on the figure in the landscape – though they are perhaps the most psychologically interesting and

²⁸⁷ Muñoz, p. 9.

problematic of his paintings. Produced mainly between 1948 and 1952, these paintings depict single figures, pairs or small groups in dark, bare interiors, which are often furnished only with chairs, a table and a few objects, such as fruit, a jug, cutlery or a candle. Critics and historians have previously noted the oppressive atmosphere of these works: Malcolm Yorke describes the ominous, psychological tension of the “cell-like” rooms, while the catalogue for the exhibition *Keith Vaughan: Images of Man – Figurative Paintings 1946-1980* at the Geffrye Museum in London in 1981 constantly refers to the “implicit drama”, “tension and unease” and “menace” of the interior paintings.²⁸⁸ While Vaughan’s outdoor figures may be striving towards a certain possibility of harmony while also displaying the difficulties inherent in this as I have argued, his interiors appear sinister and claustrophobic – as if the same figures that populate his landscapes have returned to a far-from-comforting home.

It is tempting, when looking at Vaughan’s interiors, to turn to his biography in order to find some kind of clue to the dense, dark atmospheres of these paintings. While it would be simplistic and unhelpful to draw direct comparisons between the two, these works do appear to have been painted during a particularly turbulent, if under-documented, period of his life. 1946 had brought a bittersweet end to his army career – he was now free to do as he liked, to get on with his art, but he was leaving behind a group of comrades that he was unlikely to encounter again – and the entry in his journal for 15th March of that year, in the lead up to demobilization, speaks volumes:

Rapid disintegration of personality. Integrity melting like ice in the sun. All poise, stature crumbling away... Furious grappling to retrieve the fragments of lost personality. Despair as the roots are slowly drawn after five years in the warm earth.²⁸⁹

Days later, at Cuddington, as his army life is coming to an end, he records:

I am older and the longing for roots, security, a settled existence increases with the years. Yet my prospects of achieving this decline as my

²⁸⁸ Yorke, p. 146; John Nicholas Ball, *Keith Vaughan: Images Of Man – Figurative Paintings 1946-1980* (Geffrye Museum: London, 1981), pp. 22, 27 and 36.

²⁸⁹ Vaughan, Journal 31, March 15th 1946, Tate Gallery Archive, TGA 200817/1/31.

understanding bars me from one after another of the old substitute solutions.²⁹⁰

Soon after, however, Vaughan found somewhere to settle, at least temporarily – John Minton, who had been living with Robert Colquhoun and Robert MacBryde, took a lease on two floors of a house at 37 Hamilton Terrace in Maida Vale in 1946, and offered the lower part to Vaughan.²⁹¹ Despite his friendship with Milton cooling somewhat by early 1949, owing very much to their differing personalities and lifestyles, he would remain here until 1952 when he took a lease on a bigger flat at 9 Belsize Park in North London.²⁹² Several figures emerge as prominent fixtures of Vaughan’s personal life over this time – there was John McGuinness, a 17-year old youth that he met, appropriately, on a return trip to Pagham in 1948 and “adopted”. McGuinness became, according to Yorke, “a substitute younger brother or son, except that their relationship had a strong sexual dimension”; Philip Vann records that Vaughan gave him his late brother Dick’s clothes to wear.²⁹³ There was also Ramsay McClure, a man he met in 1948 and who turned up on Vaughan’s doorstep in early 1949 with all his possessions in two taxis, after having an argument with another older man. McClure would remain a part of his life until his death and, in Yorke’s words, became “his life-long companion and the provider of the love and domestic stability Vaughan had craved for throughout his lonely years”, while still consistently driving the artist to “homicidal distraction”.²⁹⁴ McClure appears to have become dependent on Vaughan and occupied a little room in his Belsize Park flat. This was a domestic situation that seems to have brought stability (it covers a number of years of successful, productive painting) and deep affection as well as frustration – one

²⁹⁰ Vaughan, Journal 31, March 25th 1946, Tate Gallery Archive, TGA 200817/1/31.

²⁹¹ Yorke, p. 129.

²⁹² See Yorke, p. 154. In his journal, Vaughan reflects on the differences between him and Minton: “My resistance to his way of living of which I disapprove takes the form of exaggerating its opposite, becoming morose and peevish. Impossible to live just naturally differently when his live intrudes so much and makes mine at times impossible”, Journal 31, October 31st 1948, Tate Gallery Archive, TGA 200817/1/31.

²⁹³ Yorke, pp. 132-3 and Vann and Hastings, p. 75. In his journals, Vaughan comments that “my relationship with him is entirely one-sided. He costs me anxiety, worry, endless patience and loss of time, much money, much heartache and uncomfortable boredom... What binds me to him is this helplessness and unhappiness... His complete dispossessedness – no parents, no home, no friends, no age, no proof of his existence at all”, Journal 31, September 18th 1948, Tate Gallery Archive, TGA 200817/1/31.

²⁹⁴ Yorke, pp. 133-7.

constant partner seems to have been something that Vaughan had to get used to, reflecting that “being loved, in practice, seems only to awake in me over again the distressing sensations of being mothered”.²⁹⁵ A return home, a return to a more settled domestic situation after the war, may well, from time to time, have reawakened feelings of being trapped from the 1930s – perhaps there is an element of Vaughan not being able to find a satisfactory comfort in his paintings of interiors.

The extent to which Vaughan was conscious of his domestic situation and, in particular, whether he considered the men in his life to make up a kind of ‘family’ is difficult to say. It’s clear, from Vaughan’s journals from this period, that he left the army craving a sense of independence and stability, and it is evident, from the lack of entries in his journal between mid-1946 and 1948 and what we know about his relatively quick success as a painter at this point, that he found this, for a time. However, it’s also apparent that this newfound stability brought its own constraints and difficulties, particularly in his relationships with Milton, McGuinness and McClure. To suggest that Vaughan found a particular kind of domesticity, even a specific family life, in this situation is difficult – he clearly operated outside the post-war norm of a nuclear family unit, but he did operate somehow, in a network of artistic friends and contacts, lovers and pick-ups. In more recent times, queer theorists have addressed what it means to be queer and have a family. For example, Kath Weston’s study *Families We Choose: Lesbians, Gays, Kinship* argues against the separation of a queer identity and kinship, positing “families we choose”, created by gay and lesbian people out of a wide network of people across generations, as a different kind of kinship – a system of self-determination outside of the constraints of heteronormativity.²⁹⁶ However, “families we choose”, as several critics have shown, rely on a certain amount of choice and privilege, particularly in the context of post-war, pre-Wolfenden Britain.²⁹⁷ More recently, Matt Cook has contextualised Weston’s

²⁹⁵ Yorke, p. 136.

²⁹⁶ Kath Weston, *Families We Choose: Lesbians, Gays, Kinship* (Columbia University Press: New York, 1991) – “for those who had constructed them, gay families could evoke utopian visions of self-determination in the absence of social constraint”, p. 40.

²⁹⁷ For example, Elizabeth Freeman has argued that the ‘chosen family’ is a particularly queer-unfriendly model, as it “presumes a range of privileges and ignores bodily dependence and renewal”. See Elizabeth Freeman, ‘Queer Belongings: Kinship Theory And Queer Theory’ in

“families we choose” in this way, as a post-nuclear family formulation since the 1950s, while also suggesting that this concept can be re-thought, for domestic situations earlier in the twentieth century:

... the stark post-Second World War understanding in which ‘straight to gay’ came (in Kath Weston’s words) to be as ‘family is to non family’ has often blinkered our vision of what might have constituted family before that time, and so also hindered our examinations of intimate lives in the past.²⁹⁸

Cook argues, and demonstrates through a case study of George Ives, that the rhetoric of the universal, timeless nuclear family has obscured the “historical complexity” of family life, while ignoring how queer men created their own families and domesticities prior to this, when they may have “used the language of family to conceptualise and name emotional bonds ‘beyond blood’”.²⁹⁹ While Vaughan never explicitly used familial terms to describe those close to him, he does adopt a particular kind of domesticity and does draw on a network of individuals in his day-to-day life. So, alongside the recurring, dependent but also often infuriating figures of Minton, McGuinness and McClure at this time, his journals also contain extended, panoramic descriptions of evenings spent in Leicester Square and near Charing Cross, amongst prostitutes, drunks and homosexuals. Some figures are anonymous but recognised, others are merely glimpsed before they move on, while occasionally, as with Roger, a youth with whom Vaughan has a brief relationship, a few tentative words on the street lead to something more.³⁰⁰ As a result, it should be no surprise that Vaughan’s journals and art do not reflect a tangible, concrete kind of domesticity – he is living outside of the heterosexual norms while also trying to establish a life after five years in the army and six years of war. To what extent then is domesticity a useful concept for Vaughan? How can he – or we – reconcile his almost purely

George E. Haggerty and Molly McGarry, eds., *A Companion To Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Studies* (Blackwell: London, 2007), pp. 295-314, p. 304.

²⁹⁸ Matt Cook, ‘Families of Choice? George Ives, Queer Lives and the Family in Early Twentieth Century Britain’, *Gender & History*, Vol. 22 No.1 April 2010, pp. 1-20, p. 2.

²⁹⁹ Cook, p. 5.

³⁰⁰ This description comes within a sprawling entry on Vaughan’s journal on Roger and the general goings-on in and around Leicester Square on a series of evenings. See Vaughan, Journal 26, August 15th 1945, Tate Gallery Archive, TGA 200817/1/26.

Figure 31: Keith Vaughan, Interior With Nude Figures, 1949

relational wartime existence with his return to London after demobilisation?

It is this context that I would like to bring to Vaughan's paintings of interiors – their dark, unsettling, ambiguous nature hint at domesticity while stripping it of comfort or stability. One work that can be considered in this way is *Interior With Nude Figures*, 1949 (Figure 31). This painting takes a domestic scene as its subject, with two nude figures (one seated, one standing) positioned alongside a table, on which there is a jug and an unlit candle. Behind them, on the wall, a simple window lets in a little light. Despite the domesticity of the scene, there is very little sense of comfort or homeliness – the dominant tone is grey on the walls, table, objects and chair. Where light from the window does fall it is coloured a pale white. The bodies of the two figures are depicted in a flat orange/pink tone, their faces visible but clearly simplified. Their positioning heightens the ambiguity of the painting too – while one figure sits with his hand on the table and his other, with his elbow bent, at his side, the other upright figure stands behind. The two are close enough that you could sense a kind of intimacy between them, but this closeness is also unsettling – the standing figure emerges out of the shadows, his face half grey and the black outline that so

forcefully delineates his body stopping between his left shoulder and neck. They don't touch, either – the standing figure merely places one arm across the back of the seated figure's chair in a way that could signal protection as much as it could threaten. This tension between intimacy and menace never seems to resolve – on the one hand, there is the nudity of the figures and quietness of the image, but there is also a sense of waiting, of discomfort and fear.

It has been suggested that Vaughan's interior works, such as *Interior With Nude Figures*, relate, rather like *Fishermen And Bathers*, to his trips to France in the years following the Second World War: while the bathers works are influenced by what he saw and experienced in the open air, the interiors relate to a different element of these trips. An account of "sentimental debauch" in France is included in Vaughan's journals from 1948, in which he focuses particularly on the memory of a night with a man called Karlo:

... his debonair grace, his laughter, his easy availability. His fantastic sordid little room in the roof of the Delrieu. Stairs, naked lamps, labyrinth of corridors, pitch black, holding his hand like Ariadne stumbling after Theseus. Bugs on the walls. The stupefying heat of Paris which loosened my last hold on any sense of reality. But the triumphant walk home to St. Lazare at 4am. Sense of adventure sought and found. A pure experience.³⁰¹

Rather like life in the NCC camps or his wartime pick-ups, this is a temporary kind of intimacy, held in the memory. Details like the tiny room, the darkness and the feelings of excitement and exhilaration are recalled and give the account a greater sense of permanence, though Vaughan will have been aware of the fleeting nature of experiences like this – he casts himself as Ariadne, who eloped with Theseus only to be abandoned for her sister. Indeed, the temporary nature of this kind of intimacy may well have been something he accepted.

There is a sense, then, that a painting like *Interior With Nude Figures* can be considered in similar terms to a work like Francis Bacon's *Two Figures* in my previous chapter – both relate to private spaces where public pick ups are temporarily concealed. However, if in Bacon's work there was a sense of public intrusion on private release, then there is a greater element of tension and

³⁰¹ Vaughan, Journal 31, August 14th 1948, Tate Gallery Archive, TGA 200817/1/31.

restraint in Vaughan's work – an intermingling, perhaps, of queer existence in modern interiors, and the difficulties of psychological interiority and selfhood. What I have tried to demonstrate by outlining aspects of Vaughan's life from the period in which he painted these interiors – his turbulent relationship with John Minton; the entry of figures like John McGuinness and Ramsay McClure into this life, the latter for a particularly extended period of time; his further, more casual relationships, formed in the public spaces in London or on trips to France – is not that we can find elements of or feelings about his life in these paintings. Vaughan did write in his journals of wanting to include figures like McGuinness and McClure in his works and his descriptions of his trips to France suggest that these informed his paintings, but poses or settings could just have easily come from photographs in magazines or literature. In fact, a work like *Interior With Nude Figures* foregoes specifics, as Vaughan consistently does, in favour of an image of domesticity that could take in any of his experiences of intimacy, inside and outside his own home, without doing so completely satisfactorily. But how could it? A stable domestic existence couldn't, and didn't, provide the necessary network of relationships for Vaughan – by necessity intimacy, for him, had to extend beyond the confines of his home, beyond domesticity itself. No wonder, then, that the two nude figures in Vaughan's painting cannot be properly reconciled, that their relationship remains ambiguous, that the setting seems neither completely comfortable nor completely inhospitable.

If Vaughan's interiors present a negative, or at best ambiguous, image of domesticity – not necessarily drawn specifically from his own experiences, but certainly suggesting that he struggled to 'imagine' the interior as entirely unproblematic – then they serve as vital counterpoints to his better-known figure-and-landscape paintings. Vaughan's works of the late 1940s, into the 1950s, move between the interior and exterior, rarely explicitly blurring the physical boundaries between the two, unlike Francis Bacon. However, if Vaughan seems unwilling to pull his settings apart, his figures – anonymous and generalised – are consistently willing to traverse them, doing and performing relationships within pairs and groups. While these relationships are never completely harmonious and without difficulty, as I have demonstrated with respect to *Assembly Of Figures I* and *Interior With Nude Figures* in particular, it is

this seeking out of relationships and a certain type of sociality across spheres that suggests that Vaughan's art can be considered to be concerned not so much with domesticity as with a broader conception of intimacy that relies as much on memory, anonymity, the impermanent, and the exterior as it does the ever-present, known, permanent and interior.

The Minotaure, Lazarus and the Possibilities of Kinship

If domesticity appears to be unsuitable for Vaughan, what other term can help conceptualise the concerns of his art? Judith Butler has consistently framed the term 'kinship' as 'doing' – an idea derived from the work of anthropologist David Schneider – and this concept allows us to focus more clearly on what was so important for Vaughan – the relationships around which he constructed his everyday life – while also taking us beyond the constraints of domesticity that clearly were not workable for him.³⁰² In *Antigone's Claim: Kinship Between Life And Death*, Butler seeks to rethink the concept of kinship, away from the figure of Oedipus, who comes to define how human beings are socialised through Freud and Levi-Strauss in particular, by turning to the story of Antigone, the daughter of Oedipus and his mother, Jocasta. In Sophocles' version of Antigone, her two brothers, Eteocles and Polynices, are killed in battle – while Eteocles' body is buried, Creon declares that Polynices body be left to rot, outside the city. Antigone, convinced that her brother must be given a proper burial, buries him herself. This is discovered by Creon, who imprisons her for knowing the law but breaking it – shortly afterwards, she hangs herself. Through an analysis of how Antigone has been represented by writers such as Hegel and Lacan (for the former, she represents "the unconscious of the law"; for the latter, she "counters the symbolic and hence, counters life" – in both cases, she is an ignored element, outside of the social) Butler suggests that Antigone can be re-thought as "a way of re-writing liveability".³⁰³ Importantly, Antigone is not necessarily operating

³⁰² See David Schneider, *A Critique Of The Study Of Kinship* (University of Michigan Press: Michigan, 1984), p. 131.

³⁰³ Judith Butler, *Antigone's Claim: Kinship Between Life And Death* (Columbia University Press: New York, 2000). For Butler on Hegel see p. 39 in particular, and for Lacan and the potentiality of Antigone, pp. 53-5.

outside of kinship, she is merely “caught in a web of relations that produce no coherent position within [it]” – she disobeys Creon, the law, the symbolic father, and acts on love and loyalty to her brother.³⁰⁴ Butler emphasises how Antigone asserts kinship through action, performing an act of culture in the burial of her brother and speaking to assert her action rather than obeying the dictates of the law.³⁰⁵ In refusing to complete the script of the Oedipal drama, she brings to the surface the way in which the incest taboo necessitates certain social, heterosexual bonds.³⁰⁶ As result, Antigone becomes a figure within kinship, but operating differently – between the “fundamental notions of sexual difference” in Lacanian psychoanalysis and radical queer perspectives that reject the social altogether.³⁰⁷ In a more concrete, contemporary context, Butler takes up these ideas in her essay ‘Is Kinship Always Heterosexual?’, which addresses twenty-first century debates around gay marriage. Again, she argues for kinship as “a kind of doing” restated over time rather than tied to genealogy – kinship thus becomes separate from heterosexuality and opened up “to a set of community ties that are irreducible to family”.³⁰⁸ Similarly, Elizabeth Freeman has argued for a type of queer kinship – “queer belongings” in her words – that is separate from Levi-Straussian notions of kinship. “Queer belonging”, for Freeman, is built on dependency (it is “resolutely corporeal” and built on the vulnerability and relationship of bodies) and renewal (it is also temporal, built on the ‘doing’ of relationships over and over again, so that it may endure outside of genealogy).³⁰⁹ Queer kinship, then, can be “embodied but not procreative” and continually acted – for Freeman, the idea of kinship as actions comes not from Schneider but from Bourdieu, whose concept of ‘habitus’ offers an alternative replicative system.³¹⁰ Crucially, for both Butler and Freeman, queer kinship behaves differently to heterosexual kinship and is built on relations and the continual acting out and renewal of these relations: ‘family’, understood in the sense that it is built on heterosexual reproduction, is not necessarily the building block.

³⁰⁴ Butler, p. 57.

³⁰⁵ See Butler, pp. 57-8: “Kinship is what she repeats through her action”.

³⁰⁶ Butler, p. 67.

³⁰⁷ Butler, p. 75.

³⁰⁸ Judith Butler, ‘Is Kinship Always Already Heterosexual?’ in *Undoing Gender* (Routledge: New York and London, 2004), pp. 126-7.

³⁰⁹ Freeman, pp. 298-9.

³¹⁰ Freeman, pp. 303-5.

In Butler's and Freeman's terms, then, it becomes possible to begin to consider Vaughan's paintings as expressions of a particular kind of broad-ranging kinship – relations from the past, taking in impermanent instances of intimacy from Paghham and the war, are re-imagined and re-stated towards an unstable but hopeful future in a work like *Assembly Of Figures I*, while *Interior With Nude Figures* dwells on the difficulties of domestic intimacy, as if to seek something more. The two explorations of figures in spaces – the slightly awkward coming together of figures outdoors in the former, the unsettling presence of a couple in a dark interior in the latter – relate in that neither result seems entirely satisfactory. Both works draw on a range of experiences and sources, re-inscribing real or imagined relationships beyond their end. Both works are just single paintings in separate series, and as Vaughan repeats his subjects they take on a greater sense of permanence than their sources may have done. To clarify these ideas, I would like to focus on a further painting by Vaughan, entitled *Theseus and the Minotaure* (Figure 32). Dating from 1950, it was included in the *60 Paintings For '51* exhibition as part of the Festival Of

Figure 32: Keith Vaughan, *Theseus and the Minotaure*, 1950

Britain (which Vaughan also contributed to on a larger scale with a related mural in the Dome Of Discovery) and can also be viewed as a late work in the series of interior paintings. While *Interior With Nude Figures* hints at intimacy while also remaining unsettling and anonymous, *Theseus And The Minotaure* recasts myth as a drama of kinship. While Yorke has stated that the painting has “no narrative connection with the Greek myth”, Vaughan actually clarified some confusion about the work a few weeks before his death, in a letter to the organiser of *25 From '51: 25 Paintings From The Festival Of Britain*, held at Sheffield Art Gallery in 1978.³¹¹ After correcting the title (Vaughan had mistakenly titled it *Interior At Minos*, under the impression that Minos was an island instead of the name of a king), he states that the painting was inspired by Andre Gide’s short 1946 novel *Thésée*, “in which the Minotaure is depicted not as the horned master of classical anthropology but as a misunderstood youth who spends his time in the Labyrinth eating pomegranates and picking the petals off flowers”. Vaughan clarifies that he saw the contrast between Theseus and the Minotaure as “one of volupté” and identifies the figure on the left of the work as Ariadne, “seated with her back turned to the whole affair”.³¹²

By the early 1950s, Vaughan had been engaged with the literature of Andre Gide for quite some time – Gide’s journals partly inspired Vaughan to pursue his own and, in late 1945, he mentions reading Gide in his journals, expressing his admiration for the writer (“Unhappiness is not a failure to Gide”).³¹³ Vaughan’s reading of Gide (encouraged, quite possibly, by influential figures he met in the NCC) finds him slightly ahead of the intellectual curve in Britain at this time – though there are some translations of Gide’s novels available prior to 1946 (those of Dorothy Bussey, published in limited editions), it is only around this time that interest in Gide in British intellectual publications appears to have begun to slowly pick up. He was championed by queer figures, such as Bussey, who was bisexual, and E.M. Forster, and there is evidence that his work was reaching an intellectual, queer audience in the immediate post-war

³¹¹ *25 From '51: 25 Paintings From The Festival Of Britain*, exhibition catalogue, Sheffield Art Gallery, 1978, p. 18.

³¹² *25 From '51: 25 Paintings From The Festival Of Britain*, p. 18. I have adopted Vaughan’s use of the French spelling of ‘Minotaure’ as a result of this explanation.

³¹³ Vaughan, Journal 29, December 31st 1945, Tate Gallery Archive, TGA 200817/1/29.

period, while public discussion of his homosexuality became more prominent after his death.³¹⁴ So, Vaughan's engagement with Gide occurs at a particularly significant time in the development of the writer's reception.

In this context, it is worth noting how, in *Theseus And The Minotaure*, Vaughan has focused in on and altered a particular moment in Gide's retelling of the Theseus myth. In the original myth, after defeating the Athenians, King Minos of Crete demands that, every nine years, seven Athenian boys and seven Athenian girls are to be sent to Crete to enter the Labyrinth, built by Daedalus, and battle the Minotaur. On the third of these trips, Theseus volunteers to go and slay the Minotaur, promising his father that, if successful, he will return flying a white sail from his ship. Upon arrival at Crete, Ariadne, one of Minos' daughters, becomes infatuated with Theseus and decides to help him defeat the Minotaur, giving him a ball of thread on the advice of Daedalus, with which he can find his way out of the maze. Inside the Labyrinth, Theseus slays the Minotaur with a hidden sword, escapes, and flees Crete with Ariadne and her sister, Phaedra. On the return journey to Athens, he abandons Ariadne on the island of Naxos but forgets to change his sail from black to white, causing his father to mistakenly believe he has failed and throw himself into the sea. In Gide's retelling of the story, the myth of Theseus is recast as a parable of a victory of self-mastery and masculinity over desire and femininity.³¹⁵ Theseus has to overcome several temptations – the tempting aspects of the pederastic, decadent society at Crete and the infatuated Ariadne, who assists him in escaping the Labyrinth by tying the end of the ball of thread to herself. Most importantly, he must overcome the narcotic perfumes that Daedalus has diffused throughout the Labyrinth and, unexpectedly, the temptations of the Minotaur himself, who he finds at the centre of the maze, in "brilliant sunshine":

Facing me, and stretched at length upon a flowery bed of buttercups,
pansies, jonquils, tulips and carnations, I saw the minotaur... The monster

³¹⁴ For examples of contemporary views on Gide's literature, reception and sexuality, see E.M. Forster, 'Andre Gide: A Personal Tribute', *Listener*, March 1st 1951, p. 343; John Russell, 'Andre Gide: 1869-1951', *Listener*, March 1st 1951, p. 348; Herbert Read, 'Inscribed In The Flesh', *Listener*, October 9th 1952, p. 597.

³¹⁵ This reading has been put forward by, amongst others, Winifred Woodhull. See Winifred Woodhull, 'Out of the Maze: A Reading of Gide's *Thésée*' in *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (Spring, 1988), pp. 1-14.

was beautiful... there was in his person a harmonious blending of human and animal elements. On top of this, he was young, and his youthfulness gave an indefinable bloom to his good looks; and I am more vulnerable to such things than to any show of strength.³¹⁶

Gide has Theseus struggle to steel himself against the beauty of the Minotaur and accomplish what he needs to do:

What I did next, and what happened, I cannot exactly recall. Tightly as I had been gagged, my mind had doubtless been benumbed by the gases in the first room; they affected my memory, and if, in spite of this, I vanquished the Minotaure, my recollection of the victory is confused, though on the whole, somewhat voluptuous.³¹⁷

With the help of Ariadne's thread, Theseus returns from the maze and decides to return to Athens. Ariadne vows to go with him, though his feelings towards her cool and he smuggles her sister, Phaedra, on board their ship, disguised as her brother. As in the original myth, Ariadne is abandoned at Naxos and Theseus' father commits suicide upon his return. The closing section of Gide's novel is concerned with Theseus' reign as king ("where I had sought to conquer, I now sought to rule") where he quells unrest by redistributing wealth and initiating a new hierarchy based on intellect.³¹⁸ In overcoming the temptations at Crete and achieving mastery over women, Gide's Theseus becomes an individualistic though homosocial post-war figure.

It is important to note, then, that Vaughan chooses to focus on the pivotal and most ambiguous scene of Gide's novel – the encounter between Theseus and the Minotaure. It is also crucial that he has strayed from Gide's text in certain ways – the setting has been transferred from the sunlight and flowers of the centre of the Labyrinth to a typically grey interior. Ariadne is present too – she sits on a chair to the left side of the canvas, a bulky impassive figure who stares out into the distance. The part-human, part-animal Minotaure has become a muscled male figure, slumped provocatively on a couch, one arm dangling

³¹⁶ Andre Gide, *Theseus*, trans. by John Russell (Horizon: London, 1948), p.35.

³¹⁷ Gide, pp. 35-6.

³¹⁸ Gide, p. 44.

languidly over the edge and genitals exposed.³¹⁹ On the floor by him there's fruit – a pomegranate and a lemon – in a bowl. Standing close by and watching over him is the bearded figure of Theseus – positioned here, he appears to be somewhere between retreating into the darkness (a door can be made out behind him) and succumbing completely to the Minotaure. Vaughan illustrates the very moment of Theseus' confusion and (implied in Gide but made explicit here) lust. Rather like Judith Butler's *Antigone*, Vaughan's Theseus becomes a figure who can stray from the heterosexual script – in this painting, Theseus' encounter with the Minotaure is transformed, via Gide, from a battle of strength to a drama of choice that openly displays its homosexual potentiality. The statuesque figure of Ariadne, removed to one side, comes to represent what Theseus would return to, should he resist the Minotaure – but she has been brought inside, to play some sort of role here. It is the potentiality, however, of the relationship between Theseus and the Minotaure that most concerns Vaughan here and arguably allows him to point towards a kinship – and, potentially, a society – built on relationality and “volupté”. Returning to Jose Esteban Muñoz's conception of a queer utopia, he states that “queerness is essentially about the rejection of a here and now and an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world” – in Vaughan's version of *Theseus And The Minotaure*, that other world is on the cusp of being realised, paused on a moment of half-remembered (by Gide's Theseus and by Vaughan, in his accounts in his own journals, as we have seen) sensuality, in this ambiguous interior.³²⁰ Myth meets the ordinary in this painting to highlight the sheer potentiality of action and the possibilities that could result from this moment – as Theseus gazes down at the Minotaure's body, the scene is overwhelmed with the potentiality of homoerotic sensuality, as Ariadne sits to one side. This moment of intimacy is opened up here to the possibility that it can be something other than it would ordinarily be – just as we have seen across Vaughan's art, in the photographs from Pagham, where an idyllic escape is made permanent; or in

³¹⁹ Malcolm Yorke has noted the connection between this reclining figure and *Reclining Nude*, a painting also completed by Vaughan around this time, and based on a model from the life drawing classes at Central School of Art, where he was teaching. See Yorke, p. 146. *Reclining Nude* was one of what the artist called 'Vaughan's Vaughans' – he kept it for himself and displayed it above his mantelpiece.

³²⁰ Muñoz, p. 2.

the sketches and gouaches produced in the army, when daily life was makeshift and temporary, built around all-male relationships; or his accounts of picking up partners in London, where sex and relationships are negotiated publicly; or his bathers and assemblies of figures, where a variety of figures and memories are brought together, often awkwardly. By necessity, Vaughan has to find intimacy and comfort outside of the 'normative' possibilities – domesticity, for him, is too narrow, too constraining, and he has to seek out something much larger, flexible, impermanent and ambiguous. It is here that kinship plays its part – the focus on the 'doing' of relationships in the past and the present and their constant 're-doing' in his art allows Vaughan to operate, momentarily, outside of social constraints. Relationships from the past are re-formed, 'done' all over again, becoming at once more permanent (they are set down on canvas) and fluid (they intermingle with other figures, relationships, sources). Their potential – even if never properly, satisfactorily realised – remains.

Vaughan's particular interpretation of the Theseus myth seems to have been a great source of inspiration around 1950 and 1951 – he produces a number of studies and smaller works that take the action outdoors, and these relate to the large scale mural that he ended up producing for the Dome of Discovery at the Festival of Britain, fifty feet in width and entitled *At The Beginning Of Time*. The mural, reproduced in a 1951 edition of *Architectural Review*, depicted young male nudes gathered in a landscape setting (much like a more elaborate version of *Fishermen And Bathers*, complete with boat in the background), with a mastodon skull close by.³²¹ Malcolm Yorke states that one critic described Vaughan's mural as "outlandishly inappropriate... [a] batch of lads striking poses beside a mastodon skull", which suggests that the artist may have misjudged his audience by turning to a vision of homoerotic pre-history as a way of decorating a distinctly modern building that aimed to showcase

³²¹ In *Architectural Review*, the mural is captioned as *Discovery*. It comes within a summary of the artworks on display at the Festival Of Britain – the artworks are discussed, unsurprisingly given the context, as very much afterthoughts alongside the architecture of the Festival itself. Vaughan's mural is called an "effective decorative gesture", and the writer reflects that, on the whole, "the painters and sculptors have not risen to the occasion in the way the architects have". See Anon., 'Exhibitions', *Architectural Review*, Volume 110, Number 656, August 1951, pp. 142-44.

Britain's continued future-thinking in design and science.³²² However, references to pre- or distant history in the context of the forward-looking aims of the Festival were also incorporated in other commissioned murals by other artists such as Graham Sutherland and William Crosbie, not to mention the similar concerns in the sculpture of Barbara Hepworth and Henry Moore.³²³ Considering the context of the mural and the intellectual debates surrounding reconstruction in Britain at this time, of which he would most certainly have been aware, it is tempting to argue that Vaughan may well have interpreted the Theseus myth as offering the potential for a new way of life. Certainly, by moving from a moment of sensual potentiality in the interior of *Theseus And The Minotaure* to outdoor visions of homosociality, Vaughan mimics Gide's development of the myth (Theseus coming out of the Labyrinth and returning to Athens to develop a new society) while also straying from the heterosexual narrative.³²⁴ Margaret Garlake sees something similar in Vaughan's mural, suggesting it was informed by "Vaughan's dream of a Golden Age to emerge from the ashes of war" and became, in its prominent display at the Festival, "a poignant public statement of private distress".³²⁵ As I have demonstrated throughout my discussion of Vaughan's paintings, private distress was certainly an element of his works at this time, but so were private joy, intimacy, comfort and companionship. While it is tempting to view Vaughan, particularly from his post-war, pre-Wolfenden position, as being concerned with the public expression of his private sexuality in his art (this certainly plays a part), my analysis suggests that the separate, closed-off private sphere was either not a legitimate option for living (as in the war years) or unsatisfactory (increasingly so in the post-war years in his journals, though tolerated). For Vaughan, the private – what, in a normative sense might be termed 'the domestic' – extended beyond the immediate confines of the home

³²² Yorke, p. 151.

³²³ Catherine Jolivet has highlighted the intermingling of British past and future in Crosbie and Sutherland's murals. See Catherine Jolivet, 'Science, Art and Landscape In The Nuclear Age' in *Art History*, Volume 35, No. 2, April 2012, pp. 252-69, pp. 255-57.

³²⁴ Gide's myth was also interpreted in terms of a universal kind of humanism by others – E.M. Forster's *Listener* article, which compares Gide with Stefan George, argues for Gide as a democratic humanist in the face of Nazism, and chimes with much of Forster's thoughts on humanism at this time, which Vaughan is likely to have read. While Vaughan clearly shares, on some level, these humanist ideas, the intense sensuality of his painted version of the myth implies a slightly different concern.

³²⁵ Garlake, p. 184.

out of necessity. It becomes, in his drawings, gouaches and paintings throughout this period, less a matter of the delineation of space and more to do with the very act of forming and doing relationships, and revising, remembering and re-inscribing these relationships in works of art. Vaughan's treatment of the Theseus myth in the early 1950s highlights the flexibility of this, as well as its potentiality and what he considered to be the implications of this potentiality for wider society as a whole, even if this was ultimately misunderstood or ignored at the time. In Vaughan's works, the strict definitions of domesticity are traversed and ignored in pursuit of a more reachable, tangible kinship – non-normative experience (war and homosexuality) and memory guide him towards the necessity of locating a potential way of living.

It is fitting, then, that Vaughan would go on to work on another recurring subject later on in the 1950s – from 1956, he produced a number of single figure male nudes, to all of which he gave the title *Lazarus*. The first work in the series depicts a nude male figure emerging from an ambiguous landscape (Figure 33). The colours are largely cool and restrained – there are the familiar green/brown tones, along with greys and blues – though there are also elements of yellow and gold. These tones are distributed across the figure's body in geometric, rectangular patches and show the way in which Vaughan had begun to assimilate the style and techniques of Nicolas De Stael into his art as the 1950s progressed – they give the impression of a body being gradually built up, out of tones and brushstrokes, taking shape over time.³²⁶ Malcolm Yorke records that the *Lazarus* works had “no real narrative or religious content” and that the title only came to Vaughan after the first work (originally an attempt to depict a man turning from dark to light) had been completed and “the warm yellows in the cool greys of the torso began to suggest the return of life to a corpse”.³²⁷ I have turned to the *Lazarus* series at the end of this discussion as these works demonstrate a continuation of Vaughan's preoccupation with memory, revision and potentiality, distilled into a single figure. The paintings may well refer, in

³²⁶ Vaughan visited an exhibition of De Stael's work at the Matthieson Gallery on London's Bond Street in February 1952. Malcolm Yorke suggests that, for Vaughan, “De Stael gave a clear demonstration that most of the serious painter's concerns existed on both sides of the figuration and abstraction frontier”. See Yorke, p. 159.

³²⁷ Yorke, pp. 179-80.

Figure 33: Keith Vaughan, Lazarus, 1956

part, to the figure of Johnny Walsh, a youth who Vaughan met at the start of 1956 and who would go on to dominate, enliven and disrupt his life for the next few years. Just after meeting him, Vaughan describes Walsh in his journals as “l’archange of Jean Genet” with the “captivating face of a young boxer”. He finds out that Walsh had been certified as schizophrenic during his adolescence, had spent time in prison, and was currently sleeping rough or at the homes of the

men who picked him up (and who he usually robbed).³²⁸ Vaughan tore out long passages that relate to their relationship from his journals, fearing, every time Walsh had a run in with the police, that they would be examined as evidence, though enough remains to suggest that he was as infatuated with Walsh as he was driven to distraction. Walsh enters and leaves Vaughan's life consistently over the late 1950s, though Vaughan does not describe their relationship in sexual terms: "He has a real attachment to me (not sexual at all – nor I to him for that matter – amorous, but not sexual really). A sort of ideal father-son relationship".³²⁹ While in one sense, Walsh becomes, for Vaughan, "the embodiment of all my longings", he is also a figure to be helped and saved: "If there is the slightest chance I can help him to straighten out and live a respectable life I must take it".³³⁰

It is tempting to tie the *Lazarus* works to the figure of Johnny Walsh - Vaughan clearly loves and obsesses over him, repeatedly resolving to help him settle down, and the connotations of rebirth and new life in the title of *Lazarus* would certainly allow for a reading like this. At the same time, the single nude male figure could conceivably refer to the resurrection of memories – specifically the nude figures on the beach at Pagham, twenty years prior to these works. There's also the possible allusion to Vaughan's brother Dick – present in Pagham and killed in action in the war. A single male figure, then, comes to stand for a number of lost intimacies and relationships – the idyllic Pagham, a deceased brother, and the juvenile delinquent whose life consistently looked to be falling apart. At the same time, the Lazarus figure comes to embody several relations of kinship – the lover, the brother, the father and son. It is the male body that holds these multiple aspects together, or at least provides some kind of constant focus – the body is where relationality happens and can take in Vaughan's non-linear treatment of memory (*Lazarus* is twenty years ago as well as the present), while also promising a new way of life. In this way, it is significant that Lazarus' body is built up out of these abstract blocks of colour, like pieces of a life or fragments of memory brought together – *revived* – to create something whole. If the home, heterosexual kinship and traditional, precisely-defined domesticity cannot

³²⁸ Vaughan, Journal 35, January 8th 1956, Tate Gallery Archive, TGA 200817/1/35.

³²⁹ Vaughan, Journal 36, December 17th 1956, Tate Gallery Archive, TGA 200817/1/36.

³³⁰ Vaughan, Journal 37, July 29th 1957, Tate Gallery Archive, TGA 200817/1/37.

satisfy (it's too normative, too restrictive, too permanent) then the act of forming, doing and remembering relations, with the body as the focus, becomes productive. It not only allows an expression of a more suitable and relevant intimacy, but also enables fleeting moments from the past to recur and point to a future potentiality – another way of being, other than what is on offer in the present – through a kinship built on both memory and immediacy. Vaughan's post-war paintings embody the ideals and successes of this, as well as its difficulties and failures, and become ambiguous and poignant depictions of the necessity of waiting and living between worlds.

'Designing From The Inside': Victor Pasmore and Domesticity

Inside Out: Pasmore, Domesticity, War and the Self

In Victor Pasmore's *Lamplight*, 1941 (Figure 34), two figures are seated at a table in an interior. On the right of the canvas, Wendy Blood, Pasmore's wife, is sitting with her head bowed, immersed in an activity of some sort. It may be reading, as there are books positioned on other areas of the table, or it may be sowing, though her exact activity is unclear.³³¹ On the left of the canvas, Pasmore depicts himself leaning back, away from the table, one arm raised towards his mouth as if he is holding a pipe, and the other resting on his knee. The exact actions of both figures are difficult to make out as the work is painted in a way that doesn't quite reach towards abstraction, but does focus intensely on the effects of colour and tone to the point that forms begin to dissolve into one another – the effect is a kin to that in Sickert's Camden Town paintings, or the works of Bonnard and Vuillard.³³² This preoccupation with colour and tone allows Pasmore to convey not necessarily the specifics of the interior scene, but its atmosphere. Propped up on the table, the lamplight of the title creates an almost-white silhouette at the centre of the image, while casting deep shadows on the wall behind, illuminating the glass vase at the front of the table and pooling in the broad facial features of the two figures. The green of the wall at the back, modulated by the lamplight, is echoed in other aspects of the image – Pasmore's jacket, Wendy's shawl or dress, the vase, the stalks and leaves of the flowers – creating a tonal uniformity that brings a kind of all-pervasive unity, a sense of self-containment and self-sufficiency to the image. With the two figures of husband and wife depicted at ease around the table, this seems to be an image of domesticity as you might expect, ideally, to find it – warm, contented, comfortable, cosy, and private.

³³¹ Pasmore had completed a 'paraphrase' of Vermeer's *The Lacemaker* in 1939 for a Euston Road School exhibition with Wendy taking the place of the original sitter, and her pose here is slightly reminiscent of that work. See Bruce Laughton, *The Euston Road School: A Study In Objective Painting* (Scolar Press: London, 1986), p. 217.

³³² Laughton, p. 218.

Figure 34: Victor Pasmore, Lamplight, 1941

In fact, *Lamplight* depicts a kind of domesticity that was a treasured reality for Pasmore at this time while also being subject to continual disruption. Victor and Wendy appear to have settled into a happy situation quickly, marrying in June 1940 and having two children soon after. Pasmore's family, particularly Wendy, quickly became important subjects for his art. At the same time, the Second World War was putting restrictions on how Pasmore's family life could play out. Most pressingly, there was the immediate threat on their safety from being in London at this point, as the Blitz began in September 1940 – Pasmore opens a letter to Kenneth Clark at this time by expressing the stresses of being under attack:

Perhaps you can sleep through all the noise, I wish I could. But having no suitable air raid shelter in my house, it is difficult to take one's mind off the proceedings.³³³

³³³ Victor Pasmore, Letter to Kenneth Clark, 13th July 1940, Tate Archive, TGA 8812/1/1/6.

Pasmore mentions that a land mine fell “uncomfortably close” to his studio in a March 1941 letter to Graham Bell (“The whole of the glass roof and plaster of the ceiling fell in while we were sitting by the fire”), while he writes to Clark in April of further destruction (“One section of Ebury Street, unfortunately our section, is practically a shambles and seems to have been specially selected”) but states that he is consoling himself “by painting a view of the remains”.³³⁴ Pasmore’s domestic, first-hand experience of the blitz was not necessarily unusual, as several historians have demonstrated. Mark Donnelly records that relatively few people used the mass public shelters, images of which have been made iconic by Henry Moore’s wartime drawings, so, for the majority, the blitz was a “personal experience” within individual households.³³⁵ In fact, the blitz quickly became liveable, domesticated, and newly normal, woven increasingly smoothly into daily routines, as Tom Harrisson, drawing on Mass Observation documents, has shown. He describes the blitz as a “baptism by fire”, but one that served “as an initiation into a new code of living”, the beginning of an assimilation.³³⁶ The reality of living through the blitz, for Harrisson, was built on a “process of personal and family adjustment”, evidenced in accounts of people stoically incorporating the routines and demands of the blitz into their home life, or transferring the basic elements of home – families, food, blankets – to the communal shelters used by some people.³³⁷ The home was still undoubtedly under threat – Harrisson quotes one woman who watches a hearse containing a family killed together in an air raid, who, shaken by the lack of definite protection, echoes Pasmore’s letter to Clark: “They got killed in their Anderson. It’s happening all round. Look up there – smoke. Look down there – glass. It’s everywhere the same, there’s no escape”.³³⁸ Home still provided the basic focus for life during the blitz, to the extent that Harrisson notes “a remarkable degree of detachment” from the bigger, outside events of the war particularly at this

³³⁴ For Pasmore’s letter to Bell, see Alastair Grieve, *Victor Pasmore: Writings and Interviews* (Tate Publishing: London, 2010), p. 26. For Pasmore’s letter to Clark, see letter from Victor Pasmore to Kenneth Clark, 24th April 1941, Tate Archive, TGA 8812/1/1/6.

³³⁵ Mark Donnelly, *Britain in the Second World War* (Routledge: London, 1999), p. 37. Tom Harrisson also suggests that the government, even in 1939, had “long since decided that there must be no ‘shelter mentality’”, so mass sheltering was discouraged in favour of Anderson shelters – see Tom Harrisson, *Living Through The Blitz* (Penguin: Harmondsworth, 1978), p. 37.

³³⁶ Harrisson, p. 59.

³³⁷ Harrisson, p. 68.

³³⁸ Harrisson, p. 67.

time, as people turned to issues on a “nearer, more personal level”.³³⁹ Public wartime events and disruption were being experienced and processed in the private sphere.

Alongside the physical threat to a home life that had become vital for Pasmore and many other ordinary families in the face of the blitz, there was also the possibility that conscription would separate Pasmore and his family. His position in relation to this at the outbreak of the war is difficult to pin down. Bruce Laughton records that he was a conscientious objector, suggesting he “wrote and rewrote” his reasons for being one at this time, while a letter to Bell reveals that he initially struggled to convince a tribunal of these reasons in March 1941.³⁴⁰ Generally, he appears disconnected from politics and deeply concerned with only two things – life and art:

All these things like Nazism, Fascism, Communism, Democracy, Empires and other organisations mean very little to me; they seem to have very little to do with real life. However, other people seem to think they do and it is very difficult to know what to do.³⁴¹

By July, Pasmore’s attempts at exemption as a conscientious objector had failed, as he again recounts to Bell:

I do not feel that going to prison to prove my point is very constructive, so I shall probably accept what comes to me now. Wendy is shortly to be a mother and prison is not a helpful place for a father to be!³⁴²

Pasmore was finally conscripted in October. Initially, he was sent to Redford Barracks in Edinburgh, where he seems to have done well, and was then sent for Guards Officer Cadet Training at Sandhurst. At this point, he appears to have had a change of heart – several biographers report that he was sent back to Edinburgh before absconding while on leave in London in the summer of 1942. He was quickly arrested and sentenced to three to six months in prison. While in prison, Pasmore appears to have mounted several appeals, arguing that he had

³³⁹ Harrison, p. 282.

³⁴⁰ Laughton, p. 222. Pasmore’s letter to Bell is quoted in Grieve, 2010, p. 26.

³⁴¹ Grieve, 2010, p. 26.

³⁴² Pasmore’s letter to Bell is quoted in Grieve, 2010, p. 29.

initially attempted to meet the requirements of the army without violating his conscience, but after a certain amount of time realised this was not possible. He was backed by letters of support from Augustus John, Clive Bell and most notably Kenneth Clark, who had been a financial supporter of Pasmore before his conscription and calls him one of the six best artists in the country at the time, whose “first duty to society is to paint”. These appeals, bolstered by the words of support from Pasmore’s influential connections, were successful in September 1942, when he was given complete exemption from further military service.³⁴³ This remarkable series of events underlines not only Pasmore’s commitment to painting above all else, but also his contradictory nature – in an interview, Andrew Forge even suggests that Pasmore had served in the OTC while at school at Harrow, and that his embrace of the conscientious objector status was exaggerated in order to work without the disruption of military service.³⁴⁴ Nevertheless, the family unit was now reunited in London, where private duties had, on the surface of it, taken precedence over public military service. However, Clark’s letter to the tribunal is worth bearing in mind in this situation – Pasmore’s exemption from military service was granted on the grounds that he would serve a public role in a different manner, through art.

So while these threats to his only recently established domestic and artistic life were having a very real affect, Pasmore appears to have found a certain amount of comfort in painting his family and his home. As well as painting the bomb damage of his ruined studio, Wendy – as a subject in her own right and a companion – seems to have been vital. In another letter to Graham Bell, he comments that she “is magnificent during all this. I could never continue painting were it not for her”.³⁴⁵ Returning to *Lamplight* in this context, the fraught, uncertain nature of the Pasmores’ domestic life in 1941 lends the work a certain poignancy as well as providing perhaps a new way for thinking about its

³⁴³ Details of Pasmore’s conscription, military service and tribunals are outlined in Laughton, pp. 225-6 and Grieve, 2010, pp. 31-2. There was also an outline of the tribunal published in the *News Chronicle*; see ‘Artist Wants To Leave Army As C.O.’, *News Chronicle*, 1st October 1942, p. 3.

³⁴⁴ Andrew Forge talks about Pasmore in a series of interviews conducted with Cathy Courtney in 1995. Forge suggests Pasmore enjoyed a successful spell in the army before absconding in London, when Kenneth Clark persuades him to declare himself a CO, “which he wasn’t at all, he was all for fighting the Germans, it was just he had some pressing business in his studio and hadn’t got time for it”. British Library Sound Archive, C4 66/36/10.

³⁴⁵ Pasmore’s letter to Bell is quoted in Grieve, 2010, p. 28.

indeterminacy. In the image, the figures of husband and wife seem to both appear and disappear, like apparitions within the domestic interior. Though clearly seated at the table to a degree, their exact poses and activities are unclear – Pasmore’s left leg disappears suddenly and unrealistically under the table and the right side of his torso merges with the wall, while the lower half of Wendy’s body is subsumed by indeterminate brown tones. The details of both of their faces remain unreadable. In the context of the threat of physical destruction in the blitz or physical separation through Pasmore’s conscription, the couple’s ghostly occupancy conveys an uncertainty and sense of transience. At the same time, the domestic space surrounding them closes in upon them with a tonal unity that seems to almost engulf and contain them, like an interior, perhaps ideally, should. This unsettling contrast is underlined by the knowledge that *Lamplight* was in the process of being painted when the first bomb hit close to his studio in March 1941 – it bears its own physical scars of the war on its reverse, where it was patched up on the back after being damaged by flying glass.³⁴⁶ The lamplight of the title certainly references a moment of respite from the blackout and its presence simultaneously gestures to the encompassing comfort of domesticity, its quite possibly temporary, threatened nature, and the necessity of the continuation of domestic life during the blitz. The central pairing of objects provides an echo of this, with the temporary light of the oil lamp ready to be extinguished and the flowers, which could also reference transience. However, there are also possible gestures towards permanence – these same flowers may have been some ‘everlasting’, dried flowers that Pasmore continually painted at this time.³⁴⁷ The figures of Pasmore and his wife bear a similar kind of duality that must have been familiar within wartime domesticity – there and not there, permanent and transient.

Considering Pasmore’s art of this period, from the Second World War and beyond, in terms of domesticity is in many ways against the grain of scholarship and viewpoints on the concerns of his art. Bruce Laughton has thought about domesticity as a concern for Pasmore in these images – he suggests that

³⁴⁶ Chris Stephens, catalogue entry for *Lamplight* by Victor Pasmore, *Tate*, February 1998, <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/pasmore-lamplight-n05253/text-catalogue-entry> [accessed 21st July 2013]

³⁴⁷ Laughton discusses Pasmore’s use of ‘everlasting’ flowers as subjects, pp. 221-2.

Pasmore's portraits of his wife "could be described as a celebration of intimate domesticity, produced under the most adverse conditions of wartime" and that *Interior with Reclining Women*, a larger, slightly later canvas, was the "culmination" of his celebration of domesticity, "an assertion of its total encompassing truth in the midst of world war".³⁴⁸ Elsewhere, however, Laughton places the development of Pasmore's art and his treatment of his subject matter – in terms of style in particular – in the context of the artist's development from the ideas of the Euston Road School. This is true also of Alasdair Grieve's study of Pasmore's interviews and writings, which traces the development of the artist's career at this point (and for the rest of his life) through his often quite technical public statements and art-focused explorations. This is true to how Pasmore worked, as he was concerned with solving problems through the process of creating artworks. It also chimes with the way he considered the ideas of the Euston Road School to be "a positive attempt to 'start again'" by returning to an objective approach to subject matter.³⁴⁹ Though the Euston Road School closed with the outbreak of war, he continued to work and develop the ideas he had begun to explore there – of returning to nature and of objectivity - in his art in the early 1940s. However, it seems significant that he initially focused so heavily on domestic subject matter in order to do this at this particular time, before moving on to new subjects. Thinking about Pasmore's domestic subject matter allows us to consider what role that concept played in the development of his art and self at a time when it was comprised by war. As we have seen with *Lamplight*, perhaps Pasmore's domestic paintings were less about a straightforward celebration of domesticity, or even an objective rendering of it in paint, and more concerned with its uncertainty and the other uncertainties around him. Specifically, these uncertainties included the problem of defining your role as an artist during wartime, painting the private domestic sphere just as public wartime events were constraining and affecting it.

Pasmore's *Nude*, 1941 (Figure 35) was completed over the summer of 1941, as the artist awaited notice on his conscription, and would appear to be

³⁴⁸ See Laughton, p. 222 and p. 225.

³⁴⁹ Pasmore wrote this reflection in 1977 and included it in a letter to Bruce Laughton dated 11th April 1978. See Laughton, p. 220.

Figure 35: Victor Pasmore, *Nude*, 1941

concerned with these domestic uncertainties. *Nude* depicts Pasmore's wife Wendy sitting up in bed. We know from the artist's letters that she is pregnant – it is possible to see her slightly rounded belly from the side as her right arm rests over it, out of sight. Wendy's whole body is turned slightly away from us, to one side, though she does turn back to look round towards us. In fact, her head almost seems to have been painted in movement (a technique possibly picked up from Sickert or Bonnard) – its blurred, slightly indeterminate qualities contrasts with the linear, sharply outlined contours of her body. Her expression, as a result, is difficult to read, as while Wendy's eyes gaze out to meet the artist/viewer with a calm though tired look, her mouth is painted with a rough

ambiguity that seems almost expressionless – perhaps this is where some of the uncertainty of *Lamplight* recurs. Around her, however, the fluidly, thickly-painted bed sheets and pillows suggest a kind of safety and possibility of comfort in this particular moment – Wendy is far from the uncomfortable, tense wife of Bratby’s portraits, for example.

Nude is intended, in part, as a response to Renoir. In his diary, Lawrence Gowing records a comment from Pasmore:

You know that nude of K’s [Kenneth Clark] by Renoir? Well, I thought I’d do the subject, but without the sloppy sentiment. I thought I’d do someone in the family way, just sitting up on a bed – a smack at Renoir. I can’t bear that Renoir of K’s.³⁵⁰

Pasmore’s *Nude* certainly avoids the saccharine eroticism of the Renoir, thought to be his second version of *La Baigneuse Blonde*, 1882 (Figure 36), now in the Agnelli Collection in Turin, where the female figure turns towards us to display her idealized facial features and breasts, though never quite meeting our gaze.³⁵¹ Though *Nude* is carefully composed and structured, it moves stubbornly away from idealism towards an understated naturalism, the pillows and bedding a necessity for comfort (rather than the thin drapery across the model’s leg in Renoir), and Wendy’s slightly fatigued expression hardly a surprise given her pregnancy. In other works that take Wendy as a subject, Pasmore would also consistently make explicit or implicit references to old masters – Vermeer, as we have seen (*The Lacemaker, After Vermeer*, 1938-9 and *Girl With A Curtain (Wendy Pasmore)*, 1943); Matisse (*Girl Combing Her Hair*, c. 1940); and Ingres (*The Studio Of Ingres*, 1945-7). In a way, the referencing of old masters is a Euston Road School technique and corresponds with his desire to return to the objectivity of nature at this point in his career. However, it is worth bearing in mind the specifics of the transformation from *La Baigneuse Blonde* to *Nude* here: the move from idealism and eroticism to a kind of domestic naturalism, and the

³⁵⁰ Quoted in Lawrence Gowing, ‘Victor Pasmore’ in Malcolm Cormack, *Victor Pasmore* (Yale Centre For British Art: New Haven, 1988), pp. 5-14, p. 8.

³⁵¹ Grieve guesses that this is the case – see Grieve, 2010, p. p. 145, n. 34. *La Baigneuse Blonde* is illustrated in Françoise Daulte, *Auguste Renoir: Catalogue Raisonné de l’Oeuvre Peint – I. Figures 1860-90* (Éditions Durand-Ruel: Lausanne, 1971), no. 393 and states that it was once owned by Kenneth Clark in its provenance.

Figure 36: Auguste Renoir, La Baigneuse Blonde, 1882

rejection of a depiction of universal femininity for an image of a wife and expectant mother in a bomb-threatened studio. She does not display her body but keeps it mostly from our gaze, shielded with an arm and surrounded by bedding. Her ambiguous look back to her husband – eye contact with a sense of tiredness, perhaps uncertainty – certainly seems reflective of their circumstances, with Pasmore awaiting conscription to the army, while also suggesting a direct relationship between artist and sitter, in contrast to the rather passive model painted by Renoir. This passivity seems to have been something Renoir encouraged in his models – his son has recorded that he was concerned to capture the eternal rather than the transient, the universal rather

than the everyday.³⁵² However, Pasmore, as I have shown, was experiencing a domestic life that would have seemed transient and under threat at this point. So, like *Lamplight*, *Nude* seems to be more than a simple reflection of the couple's circumstances, and more a broader reflection on the uncertainties of domesticity – the concerns for the threatened interior space of the home are echoed in the shielding of the interior of the female body. And Wendy's look, back to her husband just as her body is turned away, suggests a complicity and deep relationship that is at once fundamental and subject to uncertainty. Reflecting on images like *Nude* and *Lamplight*, Alan Bowness commented that they have “a quietness, an inner stillness that contrasts most strongly with the events of the outside world” – while this is true to an extent, they also have unsettling undercurrents, in style, pose and gesture, which means they feel far from simple retreats into domesticity in the face of threat, but are affected by a knowledge of outer events that constrain or undermine the possibility of private, homely, familial comfort.³⁵³ In reacting to a Renoir nude that sought to depict the universal and unproblematic, Pasmore turned to the specific and the uncertain, painting his pregnant wife in a way that gestures to the traditions of the art historical nude while also having her embody the real concerns of a family under threat, unable to find complete shelter or protection from the outside within the home.

This uncertainty is a specific fixture of Pasmore's paintings at this particular point (1941-2), reflecting as they do on domesticity as a multi-faceted concept – subject to war-related difficulties and threats while also containing joys and the possibility (which may well have seemed out of reach) of permanence. The context of their creation also suggests that they are bound up in debates about the artist's role in society, particularly during wartime. Pasmore navigates challenging public events – the blitz and conscription – to continue painting his private, domestic world, while continuing to reflect the effects that these outside difficulties create. His approach, between private expression and

³⁵² Jean Renoir, *Renoir: My Father*, translated by Randolph and Dorothy Weaver (Collins: London, 1962), pp. 347-8.

³⁵³ Alan Bowness, 'Introduction' in Alan Bowness and Luigi Lambertini, *Victor Pasmore: With A Catalogue Raisonné of the Paintings, Constructions and Graphics 1926-1979* (Thames and Hudson: London, 1980), p. 10.

wider social engagement, reflects the debates surrounding the role of the artist in the post-war period. One example of this is Malcolm Bradbury, writing, in his *The Social Context Of Modern English Literature*. Though he was writing thirty years after Pasmore was painting these wartime works, Bradbury is clearly concerned with the wider history of the role of the artist in liberal society, and interested in how this might be negotiated in contemporary Britain. Bradbury sketches out the development of conceptions of the writer (though this can be seen to hold for visual artists), from older, humanist interpretations of the artist writing for and engaging with a wider society, to the modern view of the artist as an individualist, interested in personal experience and exploration of the self.³⁵⁴ In the post-war period, Bradbury sees the need for the artist to continue to mediate these two conceptions, while also playing into a new, more vocational, egalitarian role that acknowledges the artist's increasing status as the ordinary man, communicating one kind of experience to an audience.³⁵⁵ You can see something like this debate being played out in Pasmore's art and the circumstances surrounding it – between a desire to represent a private world, while also pointing to the wider social developments that affect it. The question of whether the depiction of personal experience is socially 'enough' here still remains – I placed Pasmore's paintings in the wider context of the domestic experience of the blitz, but to hold them up as specific and intentional expressions of life during wartime that would chime with the experiences of others across the country may be going too far. What is clear, however, is that the debate about art and the artist's role, between public and private, has begun for Pasmore here.

Following Pasmore's return to his family in 1942 and exemption from military service, he continues to use domestic subject matter in his art, but his approach and conception of it seems to shift slightly. This is, in part, to do with the continual development of Pasmore's artistic concerns but it is also worthwhile considering the manner in which this progression causes him to depict domesticity itself, and reflects his continuing engagement with notions of public and private. One major work following his return to his family is *Interior*

³⁵⁴ Malcolm Bradbury, *The Social Context of Modern English Literature* (Basil Blackwell: Oxford, 1971), pp. 115-6.

³⁵⁵ Bradbury, pp. 125-7.

Figure 37: Victor Pasmore, Interior With Reclining Women, c. 1944-46

With Reclining Women (Figure 37) – the 113 x 284cm canvas remains unfinished, has been known under several other titles including *The Red Boudoir* and *The Abode of Love*, and, despite being officially dated 1944-46, may have been worked on from the early 1940s.³⁵⁶ It is a painting that has undergone a long period of design and work then, and on a much larger scale than Pasmore was used to working. In a letter to William Coldstream written in late 1944 that mentions this work, thoughts of style, design and composition mingle with a more emotive response to its subject matter:

I am painting myself as much as I can: landscapes, heads, figure subjects, including a canvas 10 ft by 4 ft representing an assembly of young ladies and children playing. Purpose: decorative. Do not start at this confession! It is not my intention to throw overboard the principles handed down by the old masters... I am painting much from memory. In this way one's work is more true, more vivid. For the memory, if allowed to follow its natural course and not forced, retains only the essential, that is what is evoked in the imagination, what goes to the heart.³⁵⁷

This multi-faceted rumination on his approach and concerns with this work sets up *Interior with Reclining Women* as a complex exploration of a number of themes that clearly became interlinked for Pasmore - selfhood, domestic subjects, design, and private memory.

Though it remains unfinished, it is possible to pick out most of the details that Pasmore had begun painting or sketched in for *Interior with Reclining*

³⁵⁶ See Laughton, pp. 224-5, particularly n. 21.

³⁵⁷ Letter from Victor Pasmore to William Coldstream, 16th December 1944, Tate Archive, TGA 8892/4/471.

Women. The most finished parts of the canvas are on the right hand side, where a woman, seated in an armchair and with one arm propped behind her head, reads as her dress unfurls gracefully in front of her. Behind her, leaning on the back of the armchair, is another woman in a pose that suggests listening or reflection. At the seated woman's feet, a child pours over a book. On the more unfinished left side of the canvas, the scene moves inwards in a similar way. Two women are seated on chairs at this side – though they can only be made out as drawings, it is possible to tell that one combs her hair while the other sits with a child at her feet. Alongside them, and painted in approximately, there is another seated woman, head bowed in conversation with another child that sits in front of her. There is a similar kind of tonal unity to the interior scene in *Lamplight* – here, the walls are depicted in warm reds that immediately recall Matisse's interiors. Slightly darker red shapes approximate hanging pictures or possibly a doorway, while you can also make out the shapes of furniture – tables, chairs and another lamp.

There is a subtle shift in *Interior with Reclining Women* from the interior scenes of two or three years previously – while *Lamplight* and *Nude* pivot on a sense of indeterminacy that chimes with their wartime conception, this larger canvas has progressed from ruminations on the threats to domestic life to a sense of how domestic life can begin to mirror perhaps a more stable kind of selfhood in art. It is worth noting several shifts that occurred in Pasmore's circumstances between 1941-2 and 1944, when this work begins. His young family expanded – his daughter Mary was born two years after his son John – and they moved to a house first in Chiswick in late 1941 and then Hammersmith by 1943. This was the year Pasmore was also appointed to a teaching role at Camberwell School of Art. After initially attempting to re-establish the principles of Euston Road here, he soon found himself drifting further away from the aims of absolute objectivity that had seemed so crucial in the late 1930s. Retrospectively, he attributed this development to the publication of a translation of Cezanne's letters in Britain in 1941, suggesting that they "revealed a theory which gave a new dimension to visual representation by uniting

subjective and objective factors in a dialectical relationship”.³⁵⁸ It is also known that Pasmore read further writing by the Impressionists at this time, including Van Gogh and Gauguin, while staying with a well-read friend in Hampshire after their home in London had received further bomb damage.³⁵⁹ In an interview in 1970, he recalls being struck by the way in which the ideas of the Impressionists seemed “in advance” of their painted work.³⁶⁰ It appears to have been Cezanne’s letters that had a particular influence at this time. The letters, particularly those to younger friends and followers from 1904 onwards, express ideas that chime with Pasmore’s own statement on *Interior with Reclining Women* to Coldstream, as well as his wider aims. Cezanne puts forward his dual focus to Louis Aurenche in early 1904, arguing that while nature “is the necessary basis for all conception of art”, so “the knowledge of the means of expressing our emotion”, gained through experience, is just as essential.³⁶¹ Similarly, in a letter to Emile Bernard in the same year, Cezanne describes the important expressive possibilities unique to painting, arguing that it “gives concrete shape to sensations and perceptions” by means of drawing and colour.³⁶² It is clear how these words, expressing a balance between subjectivity and objectivity in painting, could have been so useful and thought provoking for Pasmore.

Pasmore would have known someone who was similarly impressed and inspired by Cezanne’s letters – namely Adrian Stokes, who had studied at the Euston Road School before the war and who Pasmore had been in contact with during the 1940s.³⁶³ Stokes’ *Colour and Form*, published before the war in 1937, was read by Pasmore in 1945 (he writes to Stokes that he finished it “not without the aid of a large dictionary”) and references Cezanne extensively while also providing a number of ideas that appear to have been influential for

³⁵⁸ Pasmore discusses his move away from Euston Road and the influence of Cezanne in a statement to Bruce Laughton, dated 20th April 1982. See Laughton, pp. 229-30.

³⁵⁹ Pasmore writes to Kenneth Clark from Hampshire, mentioning leaving London due to bomb damage and that he has been reading the writings of the Impressionists. See letter from Victor Pasmore to Kenneth Clark, 22nd August 1944, Tate Archive, TGA 8812/1/1/57.

³⁶⁰ Transcript of Victor Pasmore in conversation with Denis Duerden, transmission date 4th March 1970, Tate Archive, TGA 8121/11/2, pp. 9-10.

³⁶¹ Paul Cezanne, letter to Louis Aurenche, 25th January 1904 in *Paul Cezanne: Letters*, ed. John Rewald (Bruno Cassirer: London, 1941), p. 232.

³⁶² Paul Cezanne, letter to Emile Bernard, 26th May 1904 in Rewald, p. 237.

³⁶³ See Grieve, 2010, p. 145, n. 46.

Pasmore at this time.³⁶⁴ *Colour and Form* begins as a critique of Clive Bell and Roger Fry's Significant Form, arguing that it pays too little attention to the interaction between colour and form, focusing on the latter alone.³⁶⁵ Stokes' theory of colour is rooted in his own experiences with Kleinian psychoanalysis. At the start of the book he emphasizes that "the relationships between reality and fantasy are endless" and views art as representing these relationships, as "the mirror of life", allowing "the identification of inner states with the organization of the outside world".³⁶⁶ For Stokes, colour is an element in this relationship between interior and exterior in art, emanating as it does from within, from our own field of vision, while also serving to emphasise "the outward and simultaneous otherness of space" - colour makes things exist.³⁶⁷ It is also inherently bound up in the psyche of the individual. Stokes divides the application and representation of colour as he does the making of sculpture - along modelling or carving lines. While modelling of colour is a process that involves the incomplete projection of inner feelings onto outer objects (late in the book, he refers to it as magnifying the "bi-polar reference of touch"), carving of colour expresses a balance between interior and exterior, a development or growth between the individual forms of a work, creating a unity-in-difference on the canvas that demonstrates a "wished-for stabilizing" of the psyche.³⁶⁸ Overall, the carving conception of colour "would transpose the mental flux into one sensation of colour-forms unalterable in space" - the correct application of colour, then, brings a sense of unity, of balance to the self through representation in art.³⁶⁹

While Pasmore does not comment on the psychoanalytic aspects of Stokes' text, he does seem sympathetic to his ideas, writing in a letter to the author that "what happens in nature must happen in art - a synthesis of form and colour, so that every painter worthy of the name must be a colourist of

³⁶⁴ See letter from Victor Pasmore to Adrian Stokes, 15th March 1945, Tate Archive, TGA 8816/240.

³⁶⁵ Adrian Stokes, 'Colour and Form' in *The Critical Writings Of Adrian Stokes, Volume II 1937-1958* (Thames and Hudson: London, 1978), p. 9.

³⁶⁶ Stokes, pp. 12-3.

³⁶⁷ Stokes, pp. 14-7.

³⁶⁸ On the definitions of modelling and carving colour, see Stokes, p. 20 and pp. 22-3. On unity-in-difference, see Stokes, p. 33.

³⁶⁹ Stokes, p. 65.

sorts... to the colourist, form is colour".³⁷⁰ Returning to *Interior with Reclining Women* in the light of Stokes' theories on colour, it is possible to begin to open up ideas about Pasmore's use of colour within this work and what it might mean for his depiction of a domestic scene at this point. I initially attempted to read this work in terms of its specific subject matter, highlighting how the women and children are arranged across the canvas, within the beginnings of a domestic interior. With the knowledge of Stokes' ideas, and bearing in mind that this is a work produced by Pasmore on the cusp of moving into abstraction, it seems appropriate to adopt Stokes' colour-focused formalism for a moment. Red dominates this painting, spread across the walls of the interior and parts of the floor, echoed in the dress of one of the children and softened into the red of Wendy's hair on two of the figures. Its complement, green, is present in the sweeping dress of the seated woman to the right. This gives the work a sense of tonal unity – with red, its variants and its complements all present, distributed decoratively, carefully across the canvas – of which Stokes would surely have approved ("a conception of form, in turn based upon the family character of colour, should lead him instinctively to create a design thus integrated").³⁷¹ This unity of colour and form would, for Stokes, imply a carving conception of colour and a clear, balanced sense of self on Pasmore's part, with the exterior imbued with a sense of "interior life", "warmth", and "flesh and blood".³⁷² It is worth recalling Pasmore's words on *Interior with Reclining Women* to Coldstream – his assertion that he was using memory to produce a more true and vivid image of his subject. This sense of a truth achieved through art, where interior and exterior relate, where the past and present coagulate, would have appealed to Stokes.

However, for all this talk of unity and selfhood, it is worth emphasizing that *Interior with Reclining Women* is an unfinished representation. Large parts of the canvas remain unpainted, with two female figures and parts of the interior sketched in approximately – clearly, Pasmore decided to go no further with this work in 1946. In fact, it shares a sense of incompleteness with other works

³⁷⁰ See letter from Victor Pasmore to Adrian Stokes, 15th March 1945, Tate Archive, TGA 8816/240.

³⁷¹ Stokes, p. 33.

³⁷² Stokes, p. 36.

produced at this time, such as *Roses In A Jar*, 1947; the two also share a careful sense of decorative design as well as the use of tonal variations on reds and greens. You get the sense then that Pasmore was operating in a particular artistic space at this point, quite possibly highly influenced by Cezanne and Stokes – one that seeks a sense of unity between space, form, colour and subject matter while gesturing to a similar unity of selfhood before faltering, unfinished. We're left with an image that seeks to construct a remembered vision of domesticity, with the wife and mother and children distributed across the canvas, without reaching a satisfactory conclusion. Bearing in mind Pasmore's earlier wartime struggles, it is possible to see why the ideas of figures like Stokes may have appealed in some way – the sense of an inner selfhood seeking a sense of harmony with the exterior world speaks to the debates surrounding the public and the private, and Pasmore's role within them, which seem to form elements of works like *Lamplight* and *Nude*. That he hesitated here, with an image of decorative, composed domesticity, suggests not that the sphere of domesticity had ceased to be useful to him as a mode of expression, either in his art or his life, but that his concerns surrounding the public and the private had become too big for this specific world. As Pasmore's tentative engagement with Stokes suggests, the relationship between interior and exterior, private and public, and a sense of intimacy alongside a sense of wider well-being, was beginning to drive his art forward.

Outside In: Pasmore, the Thames and the Domestic Landscape

Historians and critics of Pasmore would suggest that he dropped domestic, partly representational subject matter as he moved towards abstraction – they were casualties of the development of his style perhaps. However, this seems like a simplistic conclusion to make, and I would like to compare Pasmore's domestic subjects with his 1940s landscape works that have been interpreted as gradually incubating a move into abstraction, not to separate them but to draw out links and similarities in order to think about the motivations behind his art that have not been as frequently discussed, and which appear to run through a range of his subjects – in particular, the relationship between the private and public spheres,

and the position of the artist between them. Bruce Laughton views the landscape works produced by Pasmore at this point as “a perfectly logical development, only occasionally forced, from objective observation to abstract configuration”.³⁷³ For Laughton, works like *The Bird Garden: Winter Morning*, 1944-6 are dominated by an increased focus on the curving branches of its trees, evidence that “Pasmore’s design instinct was beginning to dominate over his view of the object seen”.³⁷⁴ Views of Chiswick, such as *The Evening Star: Effect of Mist*, 1945-7, operate “between the poles of representational and abstract art”, retaining atmospheres or subjects drawn from the scene, but also increasingly open to invention and design.³⁷⁵ This approach continues, more successfully and more drastically, Laughton argues, in his series of works of the gardens of Hammersmith.³⁷⁶ Similarly, Grieve frames this period as one of transition for Pasmore, just prior to the move to abstract art, and draws on the public and private reactions of critics to the artist’s developments at this time.

However, these works also seem significant as particular reactions to the London landscape around Pasmore. Produced over a period when he lived nearby these subjects – the Thames, Chiswick, Hammersmith, parks – so that he could observe, sketch and paint from life, they also continued to be subjects he pursued in his studio, and even after he and his family moved to Blackheath in September 1947. So, as in works like *Interior with Reclining Women*, memory plays a role – the experiences of landscape are expressed and transformed on canvas. As Pasmore stated, in reference to *The Park* from 1947, “I would like to produce Impressionist pictures painted, like the old masters, in the studio” - so, river scenes bear features that were observed in their locations while also containing passages that are improvised and designed.³⁷⁷ For example, in *The Evening Star: Effect of Mist*, 1945-7 (Figure 38), Pasmore presents us with what is still recognizably a river scene – in the broad foreground, it is possible to discern a figure walking a dog, two other people on bicycles and a final figure leaning against some railings, looking out over the River Thames. However, more

³⁷³ Laughton, p. 287.

³⁷⁴ Laughton, p. 288.

³⁷⁵ Laughton, p. 292.

³⁷⁶ Laughton, pp. 292-5.

³⁷⁷ See letter from Victor Pasmore to Kenneth Clark, 29th June 1948, Tate Archive, TGA 8812/1/2/5093.

Figure 38: Victor Pasmore, *The Evening Star: Effect Of Mist*, 1945-7

abstract forms have crept into the image – the railings are only partly represented as such, and instead form a semi-abstract pattern at the painting's centre that recalls Mondrian. Across the surface of the work, signposts and other scenery become geometric shapes – squares, triangles and circles – distributed across the canvas. These forms are echoed by pale, geometric patches of colour – pinks, greens, blues, yellows – arranged carefully at the shore of the river. Even the figures themselves approach abstraction, with their bodies made out of boxy blocks of colour. Further to this, the application of colour in this way begins to disrupt the linear sense of space slightly – divisions, particularly between bank, shoreline and river appear almost to dissolve, as the figures walk on a ground made up of the same washes and blocks of colour as the sky or the water.

Pasmore's careful distribution and interlinking of colour and form in river scenes like *The Evening Star* suggest parallels and similarities of intention and process with more domestic scenes like *Interior with Reclining Women*. They also continue to speak to the ideas of Adrian Stokes, who it is worth returning to here, not just for his theories on colour and form, but also for his broader conceptions

of the individual, the self and the landscape. In *Inside Out*, published in 1947 as Pasmore was producing many of these landscape works, Stokes gives extended descriptions of two landscapes that he considered to have had a personal effect on him, influenced by his continued exploration of his own sense of self through Kleinian psychoanalysis – these are London’s Hyde Park and the Mediterranean landscape of Italy. In both, he focuses on the relationships between inside and outside, in terms of what is inside and outside the landscapes, but also in terms of his inner reactions to and projections onto the exterior space. In Hyde Park, inside and outside are in conflict – he describes some of the various dangers he believed to be present there as a child, such as the tramps, who he calls ‘parkees’, dogs, swans, and rumours of suicides in the Serpentine.³⁷⁸ In contrast, the landscape of Italy, through which he initially travels by train, provides a definite balance: “I had the sensation of passing through the inside as well as along the outside of the houses: never before had I been so much at home”.³⁷⁹ For Stokes, a sense of selfhood comes from this balance between interior and exterior, a sense of being at home within a landscape. This is achieved, he goes on to explain, through fantasy, where “the process of man’s existence is outward, giving shape, precise contour to the few things that lie deepest” – all people, he argues, “impute themselves to their surroundings”.³⁸⁰ If then, as he suggests, “every contemplation of the world outside must have a context, must entail a projection from inside”, then art becomes the primary way of expressing the possibilities of this projection and its fantasy.³⁸¹ Art, he argues, “gives full imaginative value to the otherness of the outside world” and allows for “the exquisite arrangement of space”, without neuroses or the demands of the ego.³⁸² Art is reparation – painting is “metaphorically to take things to pieces in the outside world and put them together again: a re-enactment of an early state, since the child is bent upon just such a putting together of what in fantasy life he had destroyed, bitten or torn to shreds”.³⁸³ Stokes’ essay, published just after the end of the Second

³⁷⁸ Adrian Stokes, ‘Inside Out’ in *The Critical Writings Of Adrian Stokes, Volume II 1937-1958* (Thames and Hudson: London, 1978), pp. 142-7.

³⁷⁹ Stokes, p. 157.

³⁸⁰ Stokes, p. 158.

³⁸¹ Stokes, p. 160.

³⁸² Stokes, pp. 160-2.

³⁸³ Stokes, p. 166.

World War, bears traces of the effects of war, with its focus on trauma and selfhood and their relation to experiences of environment, as well as its closing plea to scientists to undergo psychoanalysis in the wake of the development of the atom bomb. What is crucial to Stokes' ideas, however, is the sense of home, of place, within a landscape, in a way that echoes the ideal occupation of a domestic interior. How far, he seems to be asking, can the pleasures and comforts of domesticity be found simultaneously in the wider world?

The relationship between the landscape, the interior and the self that Stokes outlines in *Inside Out* is echoed in art and literature, though in varied and multi-faceted ways. Specifically, there is evidence that the Thames and the wider landscape of the city of London held these resonances for writers and artists around the post-war period. In Joyce Carey's *The Horse's Mouth*, published in 1944, the artist and narrator Gulley Jimson consistently references the riverscape alongside his studio as the novel unfolds. The landscape becomes a source of inspiration, containing allusions to a painting he has been working on – he sees an “old serpent, symbol of nature and love” in the oily, tidal waters of the river, which offers a parallel to the painting of the fall of Adam and Eve in his studio. It also becomes something that absorbs his being, offering a unity between self and landscape as he basks in his new freedom from prison:

They say a chap just out of prison runs into the nearest cover; into some dark little room, like a rabbit put up by a stoat. The sky feels too big for him. But I liked it. I swam in it. I couldn't take my eyes off the clouds, the water, the mud.³⁸⁴

Later, after a visiting preacher to his studio is unimpressed with his painting, Jimson goes outside, “to get room for my grief”. He watches the movement of the water on the river (“its skin was pulled into wrinkles like silk dragged over the floor”) and it again acts as a reflection of his state of mind: “Ruffling under my grief like ice and hot daggers. I should have liked to take myself in both hands and pull myself apart”.³⁸⁵

³⁸⁴ Joyce Carey, *The Horse's Mouth* (Penguin: Harmondsworth, 1982), p. 5.

³⁸⁵ Carey, p. 56.

If the Thames and the areas around it could be called upon as both reflections and anchors of selfhood, they also had a deep symbolic resonance that became significant during the Second World War. During the blitz, as numerous historians have demonstrated, the Thames became a real and symbolic target for attack from Nazi bombers. Its initial attack in September 1940, where warehouses were bombed and vital goods set alight, is described vividly by Peter Ackroyd as turning it into “a river of fire, and a river of blood; it became the river of the inferno, darker and more dangerous than the Styx or Acheron”.³⁸⁶ Jonathan Schneer also describes the “hurricane of fire” that engulfed the Thames during these attacks.³⁸⁷ Both writers suggest that the Thames was targeted not just for practical reasons – Ackroyd states that “it may have been surmised that to destroy the Thames was, essentially, to destroy England”.³⁸⁸ Schneer, meanwhile, echoes these words, arguing that

the fate of the nation and the fate of the river... were more inextricably intertwined during this period than ever before, so that, especially during September 1940 at the height of the Blitz, many, when they thought of England, thought of the Thames.³⁸⁹

Schneer goes on to highlight how the Thames, as well as being a site of horrific destruction, would also become the site where preparations for D-Day, and the moves towards a victory, took place.³⁹⁰

That Pasmore turned increasingly to landscape subjects during wartime – specifically river scenes, and usually the Thames – has largely gone without comment in literature on the artist, perhaps because he never explicitly made this connection himself. However, Pasmore appears to have had a connection to the river during the war – he took on river patrol work before he was conscripted, working with A.P. Herbert who served on the river throughout the blitz.³⁹¹ Elsewhere Wendy, replying to an offer of help from Kenneth Clark

³⁸⁶ Peter Ackroyd, *Thames: Sacred River* (Vintage Books: London, 2008), p. 211.

³⁸⁷ Jonathan Schneer, *The Thames: England's River* (Little, Brown: London, 2005), p. 200.

³⁸⁸ Ackroyd, p. 212.

³⁸⁹ Schneer, p. 197.

³⁹⁰ See Schneer, pp. 211-2.

³⁹¹ Jenny Pery mentions that Pasmore undertook River Patrol duty early in the war in 1939 – see Jenny Pery, *The Affectionate Eye: The Life Of Claude Rogers* (Sansom & Company: Bristol, 1995), p. 108. Schneer recounts the heroic experiences of A.P. Herbert on the Thames during the blitz,

(whether it is financial or domestic in nature is unclear) c. 1942-3 from their home on Chiswick Mall, comments that, at this time of hardship, "Victor is finding consolation in the pleasant view from his window".³⁹² Despite his clear interest in the river, to suggest (as Stokes may have been inclined to do) that Pasmore's landscapes represent a reparation of the London river landscape by the artist, in the years after the Blitz and while it was still under threat, is too simplistic. However, it seems pertinent to dwell on reasons why he may have turned to the threatened riverscape as a subject, immediately after working on paintings of the threatened domestic interior – as I have shown, the riverscape could offer a similar sense of selfhood as the home did, while also coming under wartime threat. If direct experience of the blitz, alongside the threat of conscription, could concentrate Pasmore's attention on the domestic sphere, then perhaps the wider threat to a landscape so rich in symbolic meaning and history could find him looking outwards, from the home. However, it is worth noting how little of the threat of the blitz Pasmore's river landscapes explicitly register – they seem more threatened by atmospheric weather conditions than any immediate violence, and imbued with an indeterminacy and melancholy that sees them begin to disintegrate just as they form.

This is largely at odds with the wartime reality for the scenes he was depicting – during the Second World War, Hammersmith and Chiswick were, like much of London, subject to Nazi bombing raids. Though this particular area in West London escaped the brunt of the attacks (by the end of the first wave of the Blitz in 1941, only 4% of houses were classed as destroyed, demolished or damaged, compared to 38% in the City and 26% in Stepney), the London County Council bomb damage maps record that they were affected.³⁹³ By 1945, Hammersmith in particular had suffered several V1 hits – they are recorded as having landed to the south and the west of the town hall and riverside gardens, completely destroying sections of surrounding buildings. Along Hammersmith Broadway, further major destruction is recorded. Down at Hammersmith

including his sailing up the blazing river on 7th September 1940: "He loved the river's every twist and turn; its injuries pained him; he wrote almost as if he thought of it as a living thing". See Schneer, pp. 204-5.

³⁹² Letter from Wendy Pasmore to Kenneth Clark, Tate archive, TGA 8812/1/1/32.

³⁹³ See Ann Saunders, ed., *The London County Council Bomb Damage Maps 1939-1945* (London Topographical Society and London Metropolitan Archives: London, 2005), p. 22.

Terrace, the location of the second house that Pasmore took in the area and where he would have been living during this second wave of attacks, they appear to have managed to escape any damage. However, at the end of the terrace, and along Chiswick Mall where Pasmore had previously lived, there is general blast damage recorded, along with some, isolated, very serious destruction of entire buildings.³⁹⁴ While these incidents of bomb damage pale in comparison to parts of central and East London (where whole swathes of the map are wiped out) and the area around the Docklands, they nevertheless demonstrate that bombs fell not just on Pasmore's doorstep, but around the subjects that he was painting at this time.

It is significant then that Pasmore's landscape paintings of the 1940s do not reference this bomb damage. One painting appears to hint at it – in *Riverside Gardens, Hammersmith*, 1944 (Figure 39), the gardens of the title are divided from the viewer by a long, large wall. Only the tops of the trees and distant buildings emerge over the top in an image that seems particularly bleak. For the

Figure 39: Victor Pasmore, Riverside Gardens, Hammersmith, 1944

³⁹⁴ See Saunders, map no. 85.

most part, however, Pasmore's landscapes of this period involve him physically turning away from the bomb-scarred scenery of London to paint an area of the Thames and the scenery along its shoreline that was largely unaffected by wartime attack. This turning away from the city and the physical effects of war are, in a way, consistent with Pasmore's evasive attitude to politics, as was noted earlier in this chapter – however, I want to suggest that turning to paint the river did not necessarily mean the works become unaffected by or unconnected with the war.

It seems relevant to pick up on Adrian Stokes' ideas of selfhood, the external environment and art once again to extend this. In *Smooth and Rough*, a collection of essays ultimately concerned with architecture, Stokes begins with a series of short, partly-autobiographical pieces of writing which focus on different kinds of landscape – as he explains in the preface, “landscape is employed to mirror mood”. In the second of these, ‘The Sense of Loss’, Stokes turns to the landscape of London. The essay begins with Stokes recalling his feelings in London after the Munich agreement in 1938 that the city was under threat: “over against Hitler London was, to my mind, a volatile bedraggled bird, sprawling in a snare, punch-drunk, indifferent”.³⁹⁵ What seems particularly important to draw out of this essay is two instances of ‘turning away’ that echo Pasmore's paintings. One occurs at the end, after Stokes has described the confusing, busy movement of traffic in London:

We look to the sky, to the spire attended by trees, to the sky which the tremendous passage of a bus has failed to empurple. We turn to emptiness and perhaps to ancient grief.³⁹⁶

Turning away, here, means looking up, beyond the city, towards a sky that comes to represent emptiness and grief – Stokes' dislocation and struggle to situate himself properly in his surroundings makes him turn to something unaffected by

³⁹⁵ Adrian Stokes, ‘Smooth and Rough’ in *The Critical Writings Of Adrian Stokes, Volume II 1937-1958* (Thames and Hudson: London, 1978), pp. 213-56, p. 226. Stokes also records a psychological unease in London, in amongst the Victorian buildings and “awful measurelessness”; there's even a sense of relief at possible attack, as he suggests that “it has not only been a vast shock but also for many a psychological relief to discover dramatically that there is a decided limit to our national wealth”. Only a text published in 1951 could welcome the destruction of London with the knowledge of the possibilities of reconstruction.

³⁹⁶ Stokes, p. 230.

modernity, something ancient. Earlier in the essay comes another instance of turning away, from the buildings surrounding his home on the Embankment, to the Thames:

Water lies, flows, boats are recumbent, driftwood is cradled by the tide. They reflect the other half of life, the world of sleep and of the incorporated figures that rock within us, the overlapping, the underlapping, the outside-in. It is peaceful to turn to the vast river, away from staccato outward arrangement, to eye sodden wood among ripples. The soul floats more narrowly.³⁹⁷

Stokes' turning away in this instance, from a psychologically troubling cityscape to the relative peace of the river, which comes to symbolise a more satisfactory inner state, more balanced with the exterior world though perhaps not without its own threats, seems significant and chimes with Pasmore's paintings of the Thames. Both men utilise memory and the landscape in threatening situations, both men turn away from the problematic cityscape to the unaffected, historic river, mysterious but ever-present.

In his letter to Clark from Hampshire in 1944, Pasmore would describe the ambiguities of a landscape in a way that echoes Stokes:

We have, up to the present, had wonderful weather. The sun smiles on the harvest, all has the semblance of peace. Yet one knows there is unhappiness lurking here. Nature demands sympathy from us, but what of her? The snow clads the landscape with its mantle of white, silently and mysteriously. Fairy-land is before us, but woe to the traveller who loses his way. The sea laps dreamily on the western shore, but is there sympathy in those gentle ripples? Only the shipwrecked marine knows.³⁹⁸

Pasmore's use of the phrase "fairy-land is before us" echoes a passage from James McNeill Whistler's Ten O'Clock lecture, delivered in London in 1885, which is concerned with distinguishing the eye of the artist from the eye of the masses:

³⁹⁷ Stokes, p. 229.

³⁹⁸ Letter from Victor Pasmore to Kenneth Clark, 22nd August 1944, Tate Archive, TGA 8812/1/1/57.

And when the evening mist clothes the riverside with poetry, as with a veil... and the whole city hangs in the heavens, and fairy-land is before us – then the wayfarer hastens home ... and Nature, who, for once, has sung in tune, sings her exquisite song to the artist alone, her son and her master...³⁹⁹

In this light, Pasmore's letter becomes a written complement to Whistler's work, just as paintings like *The Evening Star* serve as something like visual complements to his Nocturnes. However, Pasmore's text suggests that the "exquisite song" he hears from nature can be ambiguous – the lost traveller or the shipwrecked marine stand as testaments to the landscape's cruel power, as well as its passive beauty.

The ambiguities of the landscape, and specifically the riverscape, are arguably present in *The Evening Star*. As I have noted, divisions between water, sky and shoreline begin to disintegrate in the pale washes of blue and pink, so that large areas of space become vague and hard to grasp firmly with your eye. This broad, uncertain rendering of a riverscape that had taken on such symbolic importance during the war years – as an anchor for selfhood, but more broadly as a symbol of city and nation under attack – seems significant; Pasmore almost seems to struggle to capture, or does not mean to capture, the specifics of a city still recovering from wartime bombing. Elsewhere, figures and features of the landscape provide more concrete areas of focus – the two men on bikes, the dog walker or the figure looking out across the river are arranged alongside more geometric forms, derived from signposts or railings, that begin to approximate Mondrian or Klee-esque abstract arrangements. That Pasmore uses these existing, remembered elements of the riverscape to begin to build and compose particular forms is significant – he is taking elements of what is already there to build something new, on canvas. This method again echoes Whistler, who follows the passage Pasmore references in his letter above with the argument that an artist should look at nature "with the light of the one who sees in her choice selection of brilliant tones and delicate tints, suggestions of future harmonies".⁴⁰⁰ The figures and forms that Pasmore draws out of this uncertain

³⁹⁹ James McNeill Whistler, *The Gentle Art Of Making Enemies* (William Heinemann: London, 1994), p. 144.

⁴⁰⁰ Whistler, p. 144.

landscape, derived from nature but conceived and elaborated independently by him, seem to gesture towards Whistler's "future harmonies", and the possibility that art could assist in the reconstruction and transformation of the river, the city and the nation that would concern both Pasmore and other artistic figures in the 1950s.

If Pasmore's paintings of the 1940s demonstrate, very broadly, a consistent set of concerns – namely the environment as both aiding the definition of self while also being threatened by exterior forces – how are we to conceive of his engagement with domesticity over this period? It would seem that particular aspects of the domestic – the comfort and 'homeliness' of the figure in space, an explicit movement between interior and exterior, relationships to others, and community – continue to be concerns for Pasmore not just in these landscape and riverscape works, but also across the rest of his work in the 1950s. Further to this, not only does domesticity extend into the riverscape and the cityscape for Pasmore, but other artists and writers draw on similar, flexible definitions of the spaces of domesticity in relation to the landscape. I would like to draw on two writers to demonstrate this in different ways – namely T.S. Eliot, whose *Four Quartets*, written during the Second World War, bear a poetic sense of the relationship between interior and landscape, and Geoffrey S. Fletcher, who focuses on the physical experience of the city landscape in *The London Nobody Knows*, a book about London, published in 1962 but imbued with a sense of the post-war landscape that would have been familiar to Pasmore.

At this point, I would like to focus on just one passage in Eliot's *Four Quartets* to draw out the parallels with Pasmore. The first section of the book's third poem, *The Dry Salvages*, addresses a river off the north east coast of Cape Ann in Massachusetts. To Eliot, this river is a "strong brown god – sullen, untamed and intractable", a frontier made useful and crossable by the people who live around it, to the extent that it is "almost forgotten/By the dwellers in cities". It remains, however, as a symbol of the processes and ravages of nature, a

“reminder/Of what men choose to forget”.⁴⁰¹ Significantly, Eliot then locates echoes of the river in the domestic sphere:

His rhythm was present in the nursery bedroom,
In the rank ailanthus of the April dooryard,
In the smell of grapes on the autumn table,
And the evening circle in the winter gaslight (11-14)

The river comes inside, to the home, and even comes to be “within us” – the changes, processes, rhythms of the natural forces of the river find reflection, for Eliot, in home life, in everyday existence. While this poem is addressed to a river landscape outside of Britain and is built on a spirituality that is quite specific to Eliot, the parallels and implications for Pasmore are clear. The outer fluctuations of the river can be aligned within an inner sense of being, in a way that echoes Stokes’ confluences of the psychological and physical worlds.

Alongside Eliot, Fletcher’s *The London Nobody Knows* moves from the inner, psychological experience of the landscape, and specifically the river, to a broader, more physical experience of the city as a whole. Fletcher’s book aims to guide a particular kind of viewer around London – someone with a “mania for exploration”, a “connoisseur”, who is open to “the romance of familiar things”.⁴⁰² Fletcher’s London is one of gas lamps, run-down houses with makeshift shop fronts, gothic revival architecture, jellied eels, second hand clothes shops, and street markets. He is interested in the “curious and original”, and sketches particular architectural or ornamental features that he likes and includes them in the book.⁴⁰³ It is a London of historical fragments, which remain in the early 1960s, ready to be discovered, and Fletcher ends the book by recording his sadness that many of these features appeared to be disappearing, in place of new, modern developments:

I hope... this book will be a stimulus to explore the undervalued parts of London before it is too late, before it vanishes as if it had never been. The

⁴⁰¹ For this, and the subsequent quote in this paragraph, see T.S. Eliot, ‘The Dry Salvages’ in *Four Quartets* (Faber and Faber: London, 1979), p. 31.

⁴⁰² Geoffrey S. Fletcher, *The London Nobody Knows* (Hutchinson of London: London, 1962), pp. 10-11.

⁴⁰³ Fletcher, p. 103.

old London was essentially a domestic city – never a grandiose or bombastic one. Its architecture was therefore scaled to human proportions.⁴⁰⁴

Fletcher's unknown and disappearing London is one on a domestic scale (at odds with the large-scale redevelopments of modern planners), imbued with history, a sense of community and unique detail. In his terms, as long as a city maintains its smaller, human elements – accessible and able to be encountered by the wandering individual – then it can be considered as, in some way, 'domestic'. In many ways, Fletcher's presentation of the individual in the 'domestic' city echoes Benjamin's framing of the flaneur as discovering a kind of domestic comfort in the street and feeling "as much at home among the facades of houses as a citizen is in his four walls".⁴⁰⁵ Pasmore's London is not necessarily the London of Fletcher – he is less concerned with the exploration and celebration of small hidden details, though arguably he has a similar sense of the city's historic roots. However, it is Fletcher's conflation of the city and the domestic here that seems important – while he locates this in the individual's experience of the city on a smaller scale, Pasmore moves from the interior outwards, painting and reforming the landscape on his own, inner terms, and finding the possibilities of selfhood, and their hindrances, both at home and in the city's landscape.

From a broader point of view, the sense of being able to locate elements of the domestic in the landscape, the river or the city as a whole represents an overlapping of the public and private spheres in the mind of not just Pasmore, but other contemporary artists and writers. This intermingling of the public and the private has been analysed and critiqued by a number of writers as a feature of modernity. For example, Jürgen Habermas traced the transformation of the relationship between the public and private spheres across several hundred years, up to the twentieth century. He demonstrated how the public and the private changed from existing as separate, though mutually reinforcing and somewhat permeable spheres in the eighteenth century, to a more contemporary situation where the two have begun to overlap and seem inseparable. He put this down to a number of factors, including the sanctification of the conjugal family,

⁴⁰⁴ Fletcher, pp. 122-3.

⁴⁰⁵ Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, trans. by Harry Zohn (New Left Books: London, 1973), p. 37.

the increase in state intervention, and the rise of mass culture and consumerism, which help to create and reinforce a sense of pseudo-privacy, mediated and encouraged by public bodies.⁴⁰⁶ It could be argued that the experiences of the Second World War also heightened a move towards the overlapping of public and private, with the domestic experience of the blitz and increased government intervention and advice. Elsewhere, Richard Sennett traced a similar development from the careful mediation of public and private to their increased intermingling. He argued that an “ideology of intimacy” emerged in modern society that emphasises closeness and warmth over cooler, functional social relationships – the dislocation produced by capitalism and increased secularism, he suggested, drove people to retreat and cherish private home life.⁴⁰⁷ The result of this is a boundary-less self without limits, where private relationships and attitudes come to dominate the public sphere, to society’s detriment.⁴⁰⁸ It is possible to find echoes of Habermas’ increasingly indistinguishable public and private spheres and Sennett’s boundary-less self in Pasmore’s riverscape paintings and the broader artistic responses to the landscape and the self. While Sennett would argue that the creation and continuation of a separate public sphere, away from the values of the private sphere, is crucial to the correct formation of individuals and a sense of selfhood, it is also worthwhile considering why an artist like Pasmore would draw on personal experience, memory, imagination and domestic experience to create images of the landscape around him at a particularly uncertain time – the sense of being ‘at home’ must appeal during the war and its aftermath. To suggest that the blurring of public and private, in Pasmore’s works and across society, could be considered to be both a search for a selfhood on an individual level while also, to the sociologist or historian perhaps, being the very conditions under which this selfhood could not be wholly achieved is not necessarily a contradiction, but instead underlines the difficulties that an artist like Pasmore had to negotiate in situating himself and

⁴⁰⁶ For an overview of the transformation of the public sphere in the twentieth century, see Habermas, pp. 141-80.

⁴⁰⁷ See Sennett, pp. 259-61.

⁴⁰⁸ Sennett, p. 262. Earlier, Sennett explains how the creation of a public geography has “a great deal to do with imagination as a social phenomenon... The creation of a sense of public space is the adult social parallel to [the mirror stage] in infancy, with parallel results”, p. 41.

his work in relation to society, somewhere between the private sphere and the wider public world.

Considered alongside the specific ideas of Eliot, Fletcher and even Stokes then, Pasmore's worldview seems to coalesce into one that appears to be concerned with being at home, either in the domestic interior or outside, in relation to the landscape. Furthermore, his paintings are as concerned with that landscape's history as they are with its future fate. So, as the bombing of London during the war comes to an end and thoughts turn towards the future, *The Evening Star* seems to sit between representation of something seen, remembered and known, and construction of something imagined. Pasmore would retrospectively see this "confusion and indeterminacy" as markers of these works' failure - in 1970, he commented that "it became more and more clear that one couldn't finish one's work, it was impossible to make a final statement", while in 1982 he'd reflect that "I felt that I had reached the end of the road in visual representation and was seized by a violent urge to start again on a completely new basis".⁴⁰⁹ However, perhaps we can also consider their indeterminacy as reflective of a sense of selfhood in wartime (and, more widely, throughout modernity in general), dependent on but also called into question by environments - from the home to the landscape, from the private to the public - that were, for a time, under threat, seemingly increasingly interlinked, and subsequently required reconstruction. In his diary, on 2nd February 1947, William Townsend records Pasmore being concerned about the validity of his working methods in his landscape paintings, worrying that his use of memory and invention in the studio takes him away from realism, seeking assurance that "a mental concept is as real, and in the same way, as physical actuality, so that he can paint from this concept and still be a realist".⁴¹⁰ Clearly, Pasmore was concerned, and to an extent dissatisfied, with how memory and reality, subjectivity and objectivity, and the private and the public, could intermingle in his works and be sufficiently expressed.

⁴⁰⁹ Pasmore is quoted from a letter he wrote to Bruce Laughton, dated April 20th 1982. See Laughton, pp. 294-5.

⁴¹⁰ William Townsend, *The Townsend Journals: An Artist's Record of His Times, 1928-51*, edited by Andrew Forge (Tate Gallery: London, 1976), p. 73.

Pasmore Beyond Domesticity: Landscape, Abstraction and Reconstruction

So far, I have argued that Pasmore's paintings of the 1940s have a complex and at times elastic relationship to the concept of domesticity, influenced by his engagement with his role or position, both as an artist and an individual, within the public and private spheres. These works are heavily affected by being produced during the Second World War and its immediate aftermath – images of Pasmore and his wife at home speak of aspects of living in London during the blitz, while his landscape paintings of the Thames and its surrounding areas are concerned, in part, with personal responses to living in a city under threat. In the years following the war, two changes occur that affect how we can continue to think about Pasmore's art. Firstly, his change in style – he moves into abstraction, composing canvases built around collage or geometric shapes. Secondly, and more widely, London and Britain as a whole move from existing as locations under threat to areas caught up in and altered by post-war reconstruction. Pasmore's abstract works consistently engage with the aims, difficulties and realities of post-war reconstruction and, as a result, they seem to be driven by less of an interest in the domestic and the personal and more by bigger, broader issues and aims – particularly the landscape, renewal and the built environment. In doing so, they continue to engage, with increasing scope, with the artist's role within the public and private spheres. So, while there may be elements of these abstract works that gesture back to Pasmore's 1940s preoccupation with domesticity, it seems relevant to embrace their much broader aims. As a result, this section will examine a series of instances in Pasmore's ever-evolving output during the 1950s to explore how an artist might take on the task of responding to the spirit of reconstruction, while also examining the results, difficulties and failures involved in attempting to produce an art that speaks in some way to social change in the public sphere on city- and nation-wide scales.

Pasmore's early experiments with complete abstraction can be seen in *Square Motif: Green and Lilac*, 1948 (Figure 40), a work exhibited at the Redfern Gallery that year along with other examples of his new style. Here, a deep, green colour field dominates the canvas, occupying much of the space of its right hand

side. On the left, a grid-like pattern of forms has been imposed on the green ground. The squares of the title are repeated, altered and developed – you can trace where larger squares have been divided up into smaller squares, rectangles and triangles, individually distinguished with different shades of green, as well as lilac, red, yellow, white, brown, black and pink. This multitude of colours and shapes lends the painting a sense of movement or development – from a solid block of forms running vertically down the left hand side of the canvas, they progress to the right, dividing, rotating and splintering until, at about a third of the way across the canvas, the green colour field becomes more prominent, occupying the gaps between the developing forms. By halfway, these geometric forms have been reduced to just single shapes, progressing vertically in a diagonal into the green colour field; from a rectangle, to a triangle, to another rectangle and a final triangle, pointing upwards to the top of the canvas, its base highlighted with a smear of red paint. In reading the canvas in this way, from left to right, you can begin to imagine that the forms were composed with a particular sense of movement in mind – from an initial flurry of coloured forms on one side that gradually decline to a quiet flick or flourish of individual shapes at the other. The development of these blocky forms into a kind of uneven curve

Figure 40: Victor Pasmore, Square Motif: Green And Lilac, 1948

becomes the dominant aspect of the image, and the canvas's initially lopsided nature becomes inherent to its meaning, or at least its effect on the viewer. The constructed, invented groups of geometric forms, first seen as minor elements in riverscape paintings like *The Evening Star*, have become Pasmore's primary subject.

Pasmore's move into abstraction after the Second World War was influenced in part by the letters and writings of Impressionist artists like Cezanne, Van Gogh and Whistler that had preoccupied him as he worked on his riverscapes, though there were other artists that pushed him away from representation. In interviews, he consistently stated that the Victoria and Albert Museum's Picasso exhibition in 1946 "torpedoed" what he referred to as "Renaissance ideas" about space and representation, though he was reluctant to embrace the influence of Picasso directly, or a specifically expressionist kind of abstraction.⁴¹¹ He found further inspiration in the more classical abstraction of continental European artists working between the wars – he admired Mondrian's approach to form, though rejected his idealism, and found in Klee an example of abstract, geometric forms being used as an objective visual language, which he liked.⁴¹² The importance of an objective element in art was key to Pasmore – if he was moving away from the objective approach to subject matter that he had developed from Euston Road, then he required an alternative, "an objective language, created by the artist" as he put it, which he could use and compose like music, but which would trigger visual sensations or subjective responses in individual viewers.⁴¹³ In 1948, Pasmore stated his newfound belief that contemporary artists

must find fresh pictorial forms sufficiently potent to strike the imagination. The use of geometric forms, which are universally

⁴¹¹ Pasmore makes this statement in an interview with Andrew Lambrith, conducted on 23rd November 1988 and held at the British Library Sound Archive, C1378/14. He uses similar terms in his interview with Mel Gooding and Peter Townsend, 13th April 1991 (British Library Sound Archive, F2671) and in his 1970 interview with Denis Duerden. See 'Transcript of Victor Pasmore in conversation with Denis Duerden, transmission date 4th March 1970', Tate Archive, TGA 8121/11/2, p. 10.

⁴¹² See Grieve, 2010, p. 48 and Alastair Grieve, *Constructed Abstract Art In England After The Second World War: A Neglected Avant Garde* (Yale University Press: New Haven, 2005), p. 59.

⁴¹³ Pasmore explains this in his interview with Mel Gooding and Peter Townsend, British Library Sound Archive, F2671.

recognised, both for their beauty and their implication, together with other forms of a symbolic nature, can serve his needs in this respect.⁴¹⁴

This use of objective, but also imaginative and symbolic forms, was the drive behind his embrace of geometric shapes, arranged and composed on the canvas. In this light, the curved, idiosyncratic movement of the forms in *Square Motif: Green and Lilac* becomes a direct result of Pasmore's search for a new objective language. Employing basic shapes to "strike the imagination", both of the artist during the production of the work and of the viewer afterwards, drives the dual purpose of a work like this – as a means of exploration and development for the artist, and as a means of communication, in a new, culturally appropriate way, with the viewer. Private, personal expression and public communication are both at the heart of this abstract language's intentions.

However, whether this new language was an effective means of communication for anyone beyond Pasmore and those familiar with the development and aims of his art is unclear – it would certainly appear that many critics and viewers struggled to comprehend or engage with his embrace of abstraction. What bear consideration at this point are the specific implications of Pasmore's new language – how might it relate to the spirit of reconstruction, and what, generally, were spectators intended to find in it? Pasmore's statements on the aims of his new abstract works were generally vague, both out of necessity (you get the impression that this was a process of discovery for him, as well as his audience) and intentionally (he clearly intended viewers to respond in a subjective way). So, a statement in 1949 finds him comparing abstract painting to music in that it is "suggestive and evocative", with its space, tones and colours able to "find an echo in the deepest recesses of the mind".⁴¹⁵ Later on, in a published statement in *Art News and Review*, Pasmore described his process of painting in this way as "a method of construction emanating from within", echoing the processes of nature while not referring directly to physical nature in any specific, representational way: "Painting, like music, is not an imitation of nature; it is a concrete object which operates and infects the spectator like

⁴¹⁴ Victor Pasmore, 'A Note On Abstract Painting' in *Victor Pasmore* (Redfern Gallery: London, 1948).

⁴¹⁵ Victor Pasmore in *Recent Paintings* (Redfern Gallery: London, 1949).

nature”.⁴¹⁶ Meanwhile, aside from abstraction as a mode of discovery and creation for the artist and a means of communicating with a spectator, Pasmore explicitly linked his new language of painting to reconstruction, in a letter to the *Listener* in 1951:

Today the whole world is shaken by the spirit of reconstruction. In the realm of the arts, those that belong to the visual senses have been affected in outward form. In painting and sculpture, as also in architecture, an entirely new language has been formed bearing no resemblance at all to traditional forms.⁴¹⁷

Statements like these are typical of Pasmore at this time – he relates abstraction to the spirit of optimism, modernisation and renewal encapsulated in post-war reconstruction, while also highlighting its potential to affect and communicate with spectators. Clearly, on some level, these paintings represent his engagement with the complex process of wider public reconstruction at this time.

Plans for reconstruction in Britain after the war were being formulated as early as 1940. Early on, these were highly influenced by the arguments and proposals of town planners, who had been active and vocal during the 1930s, though had previously lacked the resources or opportunities to implement their ideas in any concrete way.⁴¹⁸ Their calls for the redevelopment of urban areas through dispersal and the careful organisation of space became more attractive and viable as the war went on, both to establishment figures looking towards a post-war future, and to a public now used to wartime government intervention.⁴¹⁹ It would seem, however, that this emerging reconstructive spirit remained just that for some time. There was little knowledge as to exactly how town planning ideas could be implemented on a wide scale, and, by the time of Abercrombie’s *County Of London Plan* and *Greater London Plan* of 1943 and 1944 respectively, the town planners’ calls for the complete overhaul of urban spaces had become “conditioned yet comprehensive planning”, where the old structures

⁴¹⁶ Victor Pasmore, ‘The Artist Speaks’, *Art News and Review*, February 24th 1951, no. 2, p. 3.

⁴¹⁷ Victor Pasmore, ‘Abstract Painting In England’, *Listener*, September 13th 1951, p. 427.

⁴¹⁸ For background on the development of town planning during the 1930s, see Gordon E. Cherry, *Cities and Plans: The Shaping of Urban Britain in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Edward Arnold: London, 1988), pp. 109-12.

⁴¹⁹ See Cherry, p. 117: “Town planning was more than ever seen as a standard bearer for recovery, and the determination to rebuild pervaded the planning literature of the day”.

of urban centres were generally to be retained and made to work under modern conditions.⁴²⁰ In London, for example, existing neighbourhood units would remain to be redeveloped, with roads improved to ease congestion. The general aim seems to have been fairly traditional – borrowing ideas in part from the successful garden cities of the early twentieth century, as well as some elements of modernism, in order to humanise the urban environment.⁴²¹ As the post-war years progressed, however, planning often gave way to sheer need – there was a significant housing shortage in Britain after the Second World War that was slow to be addressed by successive governments, partly as a result of the shortage and expense of building materials. By the 1950s, new towns finally began to be developed on the outskirts of major cities and around industrial centres, while modernist tower blocks, distrusted by town planners early on, began to win out, out of sheer necessity. This brief overview of reconstruction during and after the Second World War reveals its fluctuating aims – from an idealist hope that towns and cities could be rebuilt on a human, careful scale, to a sense of compromise brought about by the realities of the urban landscape and post-war Britain’s economic situation. You can see tradition alongside modernism, optimism coming up against reality and need in these debates, as well as an ideal sense (not necessarily realised) that working from the individual human outwards could help reconstruct and improve public life and space.

How, specifically, Pasmore’s paintings were supposed to engage with this spirit of reconstruction, and what they were supposed to evoke, is unclear. In a way, we shouldn’t expect Pasmore to be able to express this, as he has emphasised the exploratory nature of the process of painting his abstract works. However, it is possible to begin to wonder what may have been invoked for informed viewers by Pasmore’s early abstract paintings by examining the implications of their form and movement. In *Square Motif: Green and Lilac*, in one sense, the movement of the forms takes us from a strictly delineated grid on the far left of the canvas, to an increasingly open, improvisatory, though no less

⁴²⁰ See Cherry, pp. 123-4.

⁴²¹ Paul Addison makes this point, particularly about the reconstructive aims of the mid-1940s planners, arguing that their schemes were “architecturally modest and socially humane. There were few intimations of the high-rise housing estate or the ‘new brutalism’ in architecture. The tone was suburban and even traditional”. See Paul Addison, *Now The War Is Over: A Social History of Britain* (BBC/Jonathan Cape: London, 1985), pp. 72-4.

carefully composed series of shapes further to the right. Rosalind Krauss highlighted the contradictory power of the grid for modern art, noting how “it makes us able to think we are dealing with materialism (or sometimes science, or logic) while at the same time it provides us with a release into belief (or illusion, or fiction)”.⁴²² Pasmore, as we have seen, rejected the idealism of the grids of Mondrian, though clearly the dual allure of the grid as both an objective system and a frame for creative possibility chimes with his statements on his move into abstraction. But here, the grid breaks down. Through a series of movements, transformations and divisions, the forms open up, break apart and modulate, as I have noted. It is known that this movement derived partly from Pasmore’s interest in theories of geometric proportion and development, particularly the modular use of the Golden Section.⁴²³ What is also at play here is a certain amount of artistic improvisation, the arrangement of forms by Pasmore as the work is painted. You can witness the combination of these two aspects in the steady, curving decline of the shapes to the centre, with the final flick of individual forms on the right hand side. The tracing of movement, along a particular path or line, has been explored by Tim Ingold. Ingold argues that it is through movement that all living things inhabit the earth – travel or journeying, like a wayfarer, is a means of engaging in the world’s continual coming-into-being, and of gaining knowledge.⁴²⁴ It is interesting, in this light, that Pasmore’s abstract painting in *Square Motif: Green and Lilac* should present itself like a record of movement and its creative potential – we see, as spectators, how the artist has travelled across the canvas and produced this image with his new language of forms. This creation and habitation of space, through movement, speaks broadly to reconstructive ideals – the hope that space could be arranged in a more ‘human’ way, around how individuals actually lived and experienced space. Without the limits of space or economics on canvas, it might even be possible to think of Pasmore’s abstract paintings as fantasies of reconstruction,

⁴²² Rosalind Krauss, ‘Grids’ in *October*, Volume 9, Summer 1979, pp. 50-64, p. 54.

⁴²³ Grieve records Pasmore’s interest in using the Golden Section as a compositional tool – see Grieve, 2005, p. 59.

⁴²⁴ See Tim Ingold, *Lines: A Brief History* (Routledge: London, 2007), p. 81: “Wayfaring, I believe, is the most fundamental mode by which living beings, both human and non-human, inhabit the earth... The inhabitant... is one who participates from within in the very process of the world’s continual coming into being and who, in laying a trail of life, contributes to its weave and texture”.

works that allow an expression of actual construction in space, embodying, in one sense, the spirit of their time.

If *Square Motif: Green and Lilac* stands in part as a record of movement, its forms themselves and their particular arrangement, it also retains evocations of place (even if Pasmore would continually insist that paintings like this did not refer to specific aspects of nature). For Ingold, movement is in fact closely tied to ideas of place – for him, wayfaring, or journeying or travelling, “is neither placeless nor place-bound but place-making”.⁴²⁵ Places, broadly speaking, are collections or entanglements – “meshworks”, as he calls them – of individual pathways.⁴²⁶ Of course, Pasmore’s painting represents only one particular pathway and does not aspire to Ingold’s broad conception of place. But traces or elements of place remain here – in the rich green of the background, which evokes the landscape even if Pasmore did not derive it from there, and in the progression of geometric forms, which recall paintings like Paul Klee’s *Sun and Town*, 1928, a work that depicts structures of buildings. It is this tension that is at the heart of many of Pasmore’s early abstracts - between the fact that he intentionally chose these geometric forms because they could stand on their own as basic shapes unconnected with reality on the one hand and, on the other, the way that, as he combined and composed them on canvas, they would consistently evoke landscape forms. For example, beyond *Square Motif: Green and Lilac*, works like *Square Motif in Red, Blue, Green and Orange*, 1950, and *Abstract in Blue, Gold, Pink and Crimson: The Eclipse*, 1950, evoke views of the land and sky, complete with horizon line. Whether Pasmore intended these allusions initially or not, the very fact that these images, built from a new, objective abstract language, evoke landscape forms at a time when the British landscape was slowly beginning to be reconstructed after the war seems significant. This is suggested not only by Pasmore’s explicit linking of abstraction with the spirit of reconstruction in the *Listener*, but also in the actual surface of the painting. Blocks of colour are layered and built on top of the green ground,

⁴²⁵ Ingold, p. 101.

⁴²⁶ See Ingold, p. 103: “For inhabitants... the environment does not consist of the surroundings of a bounded place but of a zone in which their several pathways are thoroughly entangled. In this zone of entanglement – this meshwork of interwoven lines – there are no insides or outside, only openings and ways through”.

and their forms are delineated with lines inscribed onto the canvas. In the individual shapes further to the right, the artist has scratched and scraped away at the surface to distinguish them from the green background, rather than applying paint. The effect is of a work created not only out of a particular movement of forms, but also out of both construction on top of its surface, and penetration into it. But this construction is far from certain, or entirely idealistic. The very marks Pasmore makes on or into the surface of the canvas, the movement they convey, and the sense of possible place inherent in their appearance, speak to a contemporary uncertainty. The possibility of renewal and reconstruction of a landscape certainly seems present here, but it sits alongside an uncertainty about what form this renewal could take. Basic geometric shapes become a new language for this uncertainty, moving out across the canvas in approximate reconstructive arrangements, conveying a tentative sense of ambiguous progression and the possibility of place-making.

Whether viewers and critics of Pasmore's early abstract paintings recognised traces of the reconstructive spirit in them in this way is difficult to say – however, with Pasmore publicly linking the two, it seems appropriate to speculate on how this might have been observed. However, this cannot take away a clear difficulty of thinking about Pasmore's art in this way – the problem of meaning. These early abstract paintings occupy an ambiguous position, between pure abstraction and the possibility of landscape; between the traditions associated with that landscape and modernist renewal; even (at a push) between the possibilities of a post-war collective life and individual subjectivity. This makes Pasmore's paintings at this point difficult to read – just as they appear to gesture towards post-war reconstruction, and even embody some of its difficulties (how to renew while holding on to history, tradition, and the realities of the present), they also slip out of this context as paintings that are also concerned with personal expression and movement by an individual artist. An element that underpins this uncertainty – of meaning, reconstruction and place-making – is once again the relationship between the public and the private. In a sense, Pasmore is working between or across these spheres here in a way that is very similar to his wartime riverscape paintings – he is producing an art that originates from a private, interior process unique to the individual artist but

that also seeks to engage with, and even transform, the exterior, public environment. The difference here is that while, with the riverscapes, this led to impressionistic, semi-abstract canvases built around memory and improvisation, here, in the abstract works, the artistic process is intended to create new forms, which engage with viewers and speak to a wider spirit of public reconstruction. However, just as this brought elements of indeterminacy and confusion to the riverscapes, so the intermingling of the public and private in the abstract paintings results in an uncertain, hopeful, though perhaps unsatisfactory, compromise, between personal expression and public engagement. As I have demonstrated, this blurring of the public and private in Pasmore's abstract paintings finds echoes in the wider aims of reconstruction in Britain, particularly the desire that towns and cities could be rebuilt on a more intimate, personal scale, as well as wider notions of place-making on individual, human terms. Richard Sennett's argument that a merging of public and private existence is an unsatisfactory basis for an individual's life, never mind that of a whole city or society, remains relevant here, and the struggles of Pasmore's abstractions seem understandable, both in terms of the context in which he was working, and the view from the present, in retrospect. What is important, then, about Pasmore's abstractions is the struggle, faced by both him and us, to define them in terms of their private meaning and public role at the same time. Their position, between personal expressions of a particular abstract language and gestures towards the public spirit of reconstruction, remains difficult, hard to reconcile, and perhaps an inherent part of their meaning as both private- and public-spirited artworks produced in Britain after the Second World War.

A certain kind of engagement with the post-war reconstructive spirit, alongside a more individualistic and personal sense of artistic expression, is an aspect of Pasmore's ever-evolving art for much of the 1950s. Increasingly, through his reliefs (first produced in 1952, and continued through much of the next decade) and collaborative installations like the *An Exhibit* (Figure 41) and *An Exhibit II* (produced alongside Richard Hamilton and Lawrence Alloway in 1957 and 1959), Pasmore sought to achieve a more dynamic relationship with viewers and space, while continuing to allow them to be driven by his own imagination. He attempted to produce works that altered and affected their

Figure 41: Victor Pasmore, Richard Hamilton, and Lawrence Alloway, An Exhibit, 1957

environment, which they could “handle, feel, move around and get into” in order to participate in a more direct experience.⁴²⁷ While it is open to debate as to how successful these works were in achieving and communicating these aims, they were important in helping Pasmore to think about an artist’s role in a post-war society. The intention that the reliefs and *Exhibits* might allow increased engagement by viewers – that, in the latter, they might literally step into and complete the works themselves – suggests that Pasmore was intent on making explicit what had previously been implicit in his paintings: the sense of an overlapping of private expression and public activity.

⁴²⁷ Victor Pasmore, ‘What Is Abstract Art?’, *The Sunday Times*, February 5th 1961, p. 21.

The ideas he was exploring in these post-war works were clearly in his mind when he accepted an offer to design the layout of the south-west area of Peterlee, a new town being constructed in the north east of England. Retrospectively, in an interview in the late 1980s, Pasmore described how Peterlee had been intended, with all the good will of the post-war reconstructive spirit, as “the greatest city on earth for miners”.⁴²⁸ A.V. Williams, the town’s general manager, had seen the original architect, Polish modernist Berthold Lubetkin, resign after his plans for tower blocks proved unbuildable due to subsidence from nearby coal mines, and was increasingly frustrated with other, more conservative proposals for the area. He attended a retrospective exhibition of Pasmore’s work in early 1956 and called the artist up late one evening, before visiting him and asking him to get involved in the design of the town. Pasmore insisted on visiting the site before agreeing to anything and, having been unimpressed with other new town developments that he had seen, was moved to accept:

About a quarter of the town had already been built. Although, round Durham, it looks flat there are a lot of great gorges full of trees. And I saw this whacking great council estate swarming all over the countryside like measles, with no stop to it ... I thought to myself this is a challenge I can’t refuse if I’m supposed to be an artist.⁴²⁹

After getting Williams to agree to let him start from scratch with the help of a whole team of architects, planning began.

Having been recruited specifically because he was an artist rather than a planner or an architect, Pasmore’s method was specific, unique and tied to his own individual artistic explorations. He seems to have worked with two concepts in mind, which inevitably intermingled – the landscape and the physical experience of the environment. He described how the rectangular plan of the whole of the south-west area was conceived to “make an architectural impact against the landscape” and spoke of his role as, very broadly, an “aesthete”.⁴³⁰

⁴²⁸ Victor Pasmore, ‘The Case For Modern Art: Interview with Peter Fuller’, *Modern Painters*, Vol. 1, No. 4, 1988/89, pp. 22-31, p. 29.

⁴²⁹ Pasmore, ‘The Case For Modern Art: Interview with Peter Fuller’, p. 29.

⁴³⁰ See Victor Pasmore, Roy Gazzard and Peter Daniel, ‘Housing Experiment at Peterlee’, *AAJ*, June 19th 1961, pp. 6-26, and Pasmore, ‘The Case For Modern Art: Interview with Peter Fuller’, p. 30.

Having determined that the housing units would begin as basic, flat-roofed cubes, Pasmore and his architects began to plot their arrangement. This was done, first of all, through on-site visits – Pasmore and his team would move around the space and discuss possibilities, which he would then work up into a sketch or a layout, thinking all the time of the effect of moving about in the space of the town:

It's a kinetic process. As you walk there, turn here, through a little passage there, out into an open space here, meet a tall building there, a gable-end here, a group of houses there and so forth.⁴³¹

And still, this process had a landscape element. For Pasmore, “landscape is environment”, so that just as painters develop a “sense of form and space as a mobile experience” so do architects and designers, with the only difference being scale and form. The process remains essentially the same, only that “in landscape painting you create an imaginary environment; in urban design you make a real one”.⁴³² Further to this, Pasmore saw this method as linking back to previous artistic concerns that he may, superficially, have appeared to let go. He described it as a process of “designing from the inside”, without the use of a model – his reasoning for this was that “urban space is interior like the interior of a house, but on a huge scale”.⁴³³ So, Pasmore’s individual process of town planning harks back to the questions that were concerning him with his landscape paintings, even his domestic interiors – the relationship between the individual and space, and the private and the public, and how these can be thought of as merging and intermingling through the belief in the essentially ‘domestic’ qualities of the landscape. As Pasmore noted, “the landscape painting, the relief and architecture, they all tie up”.⁴³⁴

The physical form of the south-west area of Peterlee was clearly influenced by Pasmore’s method of designing it like a landscape painting from inside (Figure 42). The rough plans for the area, seen from above, demonstrate

⁴³¹ See J.M. Richards, A.V. Williams, A.T.W. Marsden and Victor Pasmore, ‘Peterlee: A Symposium’ in Bowness and Lambertini, pp. 255-263, p. 261.

⁴³² Pasmore in ‘Peterlee: A Symposium’ in Bowness and Lambertini, p. 259.

⁴³³ Pasmore in ‘Peterlee: A Symposium’ in Bowness and Lambertini, p. 261.

⁴³⁴ See Pasmore in conversation with Denis Duerden, Tate Archive, TGA 8121/11/2, p. 20.

Figure 42: Victor Pasmore, Plan for the South-West area of Peterlee, c. 1962

the way in which the cubic houses were arranged in clusters around curving roads and cul-de-sacs, with an intentional balance between blocked forms and curving lines. In the February 1961 issue of *Architectural Review*, an article examined the first fruits of Pasmore and his team's plan, including a series of photographs of the new houses in their particular settings. These were intended to indicate not only the "balance of unity and variety" in the buildings themselves, but also their "intricate but systematic grouping", which "contrasts sharply with the green landscape and has a positive visual relationship to it".⁴³⁵ The photos themselves focused on particular views down streets, with houses and flats framed by the surrounding landscape, or demonstrations of the multi-leveled pedestrian areas and the scattered, unique arrangements of the buildings themselves. One drawn diagram illustrated how the houses were separated from the road or "service street" by off-street parking, and pointed to face into the specially-preserved open spaces or untouched surrounding countryside.⁴³⁶ This was a town conceived with a sense of the relationship between an imagined individual and their environment, with homes clustered together to allow people to walk around on foot safely while enjoying the space in which they lived. The images do try to give this impression, and include empty prams (Figure 43) or children playing on modernist sculptures (Figure 44) to suggest that people – and particularly families – were already beginning to find a home here.

⁴³⁵ Peter Daniel, Frank Dixon and Victor Pasmore, 'Housing at Peterlee', *Architectural Review*, Vol. 129, No. 768, February 1961, pp. 88-97, p. 88.

⁴³⁶ Daniel, Dixon and Pasmore, p. 92.

Figure 43: Photograph of a pram outside a two-storey detached house in Peterlee, from *Architectural Review*, February 1961

Figure 44: Photograph of children playing on a modernist 'play sculpture' designed by Peter Daniel in a courtyard off Avon Road in Peterlee, from *Architectural Review*, February 1961

Pasmore's method of "designing from inside" in order to achieve this particular plan does not just emerge out of his own work – it also finds echoes in architectural debates in the 1950s that are connected to reconstructive ideals. The concept of 'townscape' emerged in *Architectural Review* after the Second World War, and provides several parallels to Pasmore's process. I. De Wolfe developed the term in December 1949, where he traced a specifically English tradition of architecture and design that was rooted in the picturesque. For de Wolfe, this English style rejected classicist Modernism (Le Corbusier) and romanticism (Frank Lloyd Wright) in favour of a focus on "the embodied, the differentiated, the phenomenal world", as exemplified by traditions such as the picturesque. He includes a plea for designers to focus on townscape – town planning as a visual art – in a way that reflects how ordinary people organize their homes, full of disparate, varied objects, brought together but allowed to exist as individual objects at the same time.⁴³⁷ By 1953, George Cullen, when faced with defining the concept of townscape, suggested that "as soon as two buildings are juxtaposed the art of Townscape is released", as relationships between buildings, space and the wider environment suddenly come into play.⁴³⁸ Clearly, a phenomenological approach to planning and design, built on the individual's needs and experiences on the ground, in the world, had become influential in attempts in Britain to think about how space could be planned and organized after the war. By 1956, Nikolaus Pevsner was describing "the informal" (the irregular, the picturesque) as "the practical and the English", and the perfect philosophical basis for the rebuilding of damaged cities and the planning of new towns.⁴³⁹ Even earlier than this, J.M. Richards had argued for the suburb as the ideal idiom for domestic architecture in his 1946 book, *The Castles On The Ground*. Richards contrasted the English suburb with high modernist architecture, emphasizing its personal nature and elements of variety, which

⁴³⁷ I. De Wolfe, 'Townscape', *Architectural Review*, Vol. 106, No. 636, December 1949, pp. 355-62. The article is followed by Gordon Cullen's 'Townscape Casebook', which to demonstrate how townscape ideas might be put into practice in individual circumstances. Two years later, the *Architectural Review* framed the South Bank Exhibition for the Festival of Britain as "the first modern townscape" - see *Architectural Review*, Vol. 110, No. 656, August 1951, p. 71.

⁴³⁸ Gordon Cullen, 'Prairie Planning in the New Towns', *Architectural Review*, Vol. 114, No. 679, July 1953, pp. 33-36, p. 33.

⁴³⁹ Nikolaus Pevsner, *The Englishness of English Art* (The Architectural Press: London, 1956), pp. 177-80.

again recalled, for him, the picturesque tradition. What's more, this was architecture that had to be experienced from within "the dense suburban jungle" by the individual – Richards called the chapter that reflects on the experience of living in the suburb 'A Landscape From Within'.⁴⁴⁰

These various parallels with Pasmore – the emphasis on individual experience of planned space, and elements of variation and accident that contribute to and enhance this experience – are certainly striking, and suggest that the concepts and processes he had been pursuing in his abstract artworks and putting into practice in Peterlee were not entirely removed from wider intellectual debate. Before Pasmore was approached to work at Peterlee, the *Architectural Review* had already featured an article by Andrew Hammer, which considered the innovative importance of the painter's eye-view in the creation of townscape.⁴⁴¹ Further to this, the middle-ground (explicitly framed as 'British' or 'English' by figures like de Wolfe and Pevsner) between modernism and a landscape tradition in townscape and the reassessment of the suburb that was being explored in this context speaks to Pasmore's own implicit engagement with a combination of the two idioms. I have demonstrated that as far back as his riverscape paintings Pasmore was engaging with elements of history and renewal, and this continues to be a concern as he moves into abstract work. At Peterlee, meanwhile, modernist cubic housing units are arranged with a particular eye on their relation to the wider historic Durham landscape and each other. In this light, Pasmore's statement on the challenges he faced at the new town, that the "problem of a new Peterlee lay not in pioneering new forms of urban habitation or new building techniques, but simply in injecting new life into an established system", chimes with the tentative, reconstructive proposals of figures like J.M. Richards and even Abercrombie.⁴⁴²

In moving from canvas or relief-based abstract works to the creation of a total environment then, Pasmore brought the uncertainty of those earlier works,

⁴⁴⁰ J.M. Richards, *The Castles On The Ground: The Anatomy of Suburbia* (The Architectural Press: London, 1946), p. 26.

⁴⁴¹ Andrew Hammer, 'Townscape: Painter's-Eye View', *Architectural Review*, Vol. 114, No. 679, p. 53.

⁴⁴² Victor Pasmore, 'Peterlee: The South West Area. Urban Design as a Problem of Multi-Dimensions', a typescript written by Pasmore at Blackheath c. 1971, and quoted in Grieve, 2010, p. 94.

and their fantasies of place-making through abstract language, into concrete practice – in a way, his designs for Peterlee play off this exploratory uncertainty, helping to temper modernist development with picturesque improvisation. How successful this mediation between art and planning was is open to debate. On the one hand, A.V. Williams, speaking in the late 1960s, considered the project a success, describing Pasmore’s south-west area of Peterlee as “an architecture within an urban landscape related essentially to human use. In my view it is a great tribute to an artist with a grip on the practicality of things”.⁴⁴³ For Williams, Pasmore had helped to achieve the aims behind the development of Peterlee. The establishment of a new town in this area was first conceived by C.W. Clark, surveyor to the local council, in the mid-1930s – by the end of the Second World War, he had developed a complete scheme for a new town. An article in *Picture Post* from late 1948, ‘Peterlee: A Miners’ Town To End Squalor’, reflects the sense that the new town was to be “a new centre of life and hope”, removed from the poor conditions of the pits. The aim was to provide recreational facilities for men and women alike, and to encourage communities to form, grow and remain in one place. Named after Peter Lee, the first Labour Chairman of a County Council in England, it was intended to embody his spirit of justice for the local mining community, with its expansive green spaces and vastly improved living conditions, and reflect “what miners think of themselves”.⁴⁴⁴

What actually appears to have occurred at Peterlee at this point, during the 1950s and into the 1960s, as Pasmore’s designs for the south-west area became a reality, wasn’t always quite as successful as its planners may have hoped. There seems to have been initial hostility to the development of the new town as a whole amongst residents of the surrounding villages – the local newspaper included an article that covered events at the annual meeting of the Durham County Association of Parish Councils, where one attendee passionately argued that the local village communities were being “wiped off the face of the earth – bulldozed to the ground... It’s all wrong”.⁴⁴⁵ Later in the year, an

⁴⁴³ A.V. Williams in ‘Peterlee: A Symposium’ in Bowness and Lambertini, p. 256.

⁴⁴⁴ David Mitchell, ‘Peterlee: A Miners’ Town to End Squalor’, *Picture Post*, December 14th 1948, pp. 26-9.

⁴⁴⁵ Anon., ‘Village Life Is Threatened: Parish Councils Raise Their Voices In Protest’, *Durham and Chester-le-Street Chronicle*, June 29th 1956, p. 1.

anonymous 'Aged Villager' sent a poem to the letters page of the *Durham and Chester-le-Street Chronicle* that mourns the loss of village community life:

Ye villagers of Durham, oh, do assert yourselves,
Before these planning officers wipe out our country 'elves',
And all our country customs, and country ways of life,
And plant us all in dismal towns, 'mong stress and strain and strife...⁴⁴⁶

The planners appear to have been aware of the need to establish a sense of community in Peterlee – the new town's tenants handbook included instructions on how to best tend to the interior and exterior decoration of its homes, extended guidelines on how to make the most of the gardens, and details on local doctors and churches.⁴⁴⁷ Some residents did begin to settle, as James Jackson, a local police officer, asserted:

Slowly but surely a real community spirit is developing and although the town has its critics, none can deny it is a much more delightful place to live in than many of our derelict colliery villages.⁴⁴⁸

The difference in standard of living to the colliery villages was certainly appreciated by Peterlee's residents – in contrast to the cramped terraces of Easington or Monk Hesleden, where homes were owned by the collieries and workers were continually threatened with eviction, the modernist buildings were a huge step up (Mr P. Rogerston, interviewed by the *Northern Echo*, agreed: "It's a different atmosphere altogether from the colliery").⁴⁴⁹ While the new buildings were not to everyone's tastes – a local reporter records some local residents comparing them to "rabbit hutches" and "boxes with windows" – one housewife described being in Sunny Blunts in south-west Peterlee as "ideal living", while another was particularly taken with her home's up-to-date facilities

⁴⁴⁶ Anon., 'Voice of the Villagers', *Durham and Chester-le-Street Chronicle*, September 28th 1956, p. 8.

⁴⁴⁷ Peterlee Development Corporation, *Peterlee New Town: Tenants Handbook* (The British Publishing Company: Gloucester, 1960).

⁴⁴⁸ Anon., 'Peterlee Delightful Town to Live In, says Resident', *Durham, Chester-le-Street and Seaham Chronicle*, May 27th 1960, p. 4.

⁴⁴⁹ Anon., 'People Like Living in County Durham's New Towns', *Northern Echo*, May 26th 1960, p. 9.

(“every woman’s dream”).⁴⁵⁰ The problems of community do seem to have remained in Peterlee, however – by the mid-1970s, the performance artist Stuart Brisley had begun a project with the local residents, which attempted to create a social history of the new town in order to develop a greater sense of local community, built on photographs and interviews. A *Guardian* article written at the time echoes this need for a sense of identity in Peterlee:

Shared experience, rich memories and humour born of tough times, and a sense of continuity with the past are some of the key things that kept those villages together. Peterlee is not alone among the new towns in its problem, since it is in the nature of new places that they have no history.⁴⁵¹

While Pasmore’s method of “designing from the inside” in the south-west area of Peterlee certainly appears to have produced a pleasant visual environment to live in, filled with modernist homes scattered picturesquely and carefully across the landscape, it did not solve the town’s problems of community. In a way, this isn’t something that could be asked of an artist brought in to design one section of a new town, and planners all over the country repeated Pasmore’s failures on much wider scales at this time. As has been noted retrospectively, the relative failure of new towns to create hoped-for communities was a result of the gap between the utopian aspirations of their planners and the reality of life for their inhabitants – few could have predicted how technology (particularly television and cars) and consumerism would quickly change how people lived their lives on a daily basis, while, in Peterlee in particular, no new industries moved into the area to unite the community and support it quite like mining had before the Second World War.⁴⁵² In this light, one artist’s attempts to design an environment around the individual’s experience of space, influenced by a kind of modernist re-imagining of the

⁴⁵⁰ See ‘Peterlee Delightful Town to Live In, says Resident’; also, Anon., ‘John North Visits Peterlee’, *Northern Echo*, May 26th 1960, p. 9.

⁴⁵¹ Caroline Tisdall, ‘Caroline Tisdall describes how the people of Peterlee, a 30-year-old ‘new town’, are creating their own archive’, *Guardian*, 1977 (exact date unknown) – photocopy uploaded to Stuart Brisley’s archive as ‘Guardian Article on the Peterlee Project by Caroline Tisdale, 1977’ at http://www.stuartbrisley.com/pages/29/70s/Text/Guardian_article_on_the_Peterlee_Project_by_Caroline_Tisdale/page:22 [accessed 21st July 2013]

⁴⁵² See Anthony Alexander, *Britain’s New Towns: Garden Cities To Sustainable Communities* (Routledge: London, 2009), pp. 127-8.

picturesque, could do little, as pleasant environments are ineffective against severe, sustained economic decline. This again brings up issues of meaning and intention that muddy the aims of Pasmore's abstract canvases – how much can viewers, or residents, engage with a particular set of forms, without the guiding hand of the artist? How much should we ask of an abstract art like Pasmore's when it claims to engage with reconstructive aims, either directly or indirectly? Is it enough that canvases, or built town plans, or works of art, gesture towards a sense of community, giving the framework, like one of Pasmore's reliefs or *Exhibits*, while asking that viewers or individuals get inside them, inhabit them, and turn them into something?

Here, again, what seems to be underlining these issues surrounding the correct planning of an area of a town and the need to establish an ideal, productive sense of living, both in terms of individual households and whole communities, is the separation or interaction between the public and private spheres. By designing and building the south-west area of Peterlee with the kinetic existence of the inhabitant in mind, Pasmore effectively aimed to build a community from the individual outwards. His method of “designing from the inside” by definition implies a sense of designing within space but also a sense of working outwards from the individual artistic imagination. While communities can certainly emerge from within, from the imagination or impetus of one person, this sense of a community as dependent upon individual experience and private life also has its difficulties. Returning to Richard Sennett again, he argues that the fantasy of communities built on an imagined sense of collective personality – the idea that all members live and feel the same way – emerged during the nineteenth century and came to dominate twentieth century conceptions of wider public life. However, this sense of public community is built on private beliefs and assumptions and leads to a narrowing of group life – from conceiving of communities on a wide, inclusive scale to much smaller, exclusive conceptions.⁴⁵³ As an example, Sennett highlights town planning's turn to focus on smaller communities – the ideals of the family, the village, the neighbourhood – over broader, city-wide initiatives.⁴⁵⁴ He sees these narrower attempts at

⁴⁵³ Sennett, pp. 262-3.

⁴⁵⁴ Sennett, p. 294.

community as “attempts to make psychological values into social relations” – in the search for community, private life is allowed to become the model for public life, a merging that Sennett suggests has negatively replaced an older division between public and private spheres.⁴⁵⁵ It is not difficult to see parallels with Pasmore’s “designing from the inside” method of town planning – and, by extension, community-building – in Sennett’s overview. Pasmore embodies the aims of post-war community-building just as he also embodies its failures, and these projects operate across the spheres of public and private, hopeful that one can help form the other, while struggling, as a result, to maintain a satisfactory division between the two.

It helps to consider the fate of Pasmore’s *Apollo Pavilion* in this light – built in 1970 around a lake in Sunny Blunts, it is a massive concrete construction, not unlike his reliefs in appearance. It is “sculpture on an architectural scale”, designed to be walked through as well as looked at, and intended as a central visual emphasis for the community, a bit like a cathedral.⁴⁵⁶ By the end of the 1970s, the Pavilion had fallen into disrepair, covered in graffiti and considered an eyesore and public nuisance by many of the local residents, due to the groups of teenagers and drug addicts that would populate it. It has only recently been saved from demolition and restored to its original condition, although debates about its presence in the local area continue.⁴⁵⁷ Originally intended as the visual and emotional focus of the area – a designated public space - the *Apollo Pavilion* became a space where local people expressed their frustrations and alienation, either through vandalism or repeated attempts to have it torn down. Pasmore’s deeply personal abstract art, his new visual language for reconstruction Britain, had produced a public statement that attracted, for the most part, controversy and disdain from those who lived alongside it.

⁴⁵⁵ Sennett, pp. 298-301.

⁴⁵⁶ Grieve, 2010, pp. 98-100.

⁴⁵⁷ See Marjorie McIntyre, ‘Controversial Sculpture To Get £336,000 Facelift’, *Northern Echo*, 2nd July 2008, http://www.thenorthernecho.co.uk/news/2374730.Controversial_sculpture_to_get__336_000_facelift/ [accessed July 21st 2013]. Prior to the *Apollo Pavilion*’s re-unveiling, a leader article in the same newspaper accepted the work’s faults, but argued for its “uniqueness and vision” – see ‘A Splendoured Pavilion’, *Northern Echo*, 26th May 2009, http://www.thenorthernecho.co.uk/features/leader/4395417.A_splendoured_Pavilion/ [accessed July 21st 2013]

Figure 45: Victor Pasmore, The Apollo Pavilion, c. 1970

Figure 46: Victor Pasmore's Apollo Pavilion after it had fallen into disrepair, c. 1980s

The struggle of the *Apollo Pavilion* to find its public on its intended terms crystallises the debates with which Pasmore's art continually engaged. In one sense, Pasmore's art repeatedly turns to the relationship between individual and environment and how this can be negotiated, expressed or improved through art - whether it be in his works that depicted himself and his family at home during the blitz, or the River Thames at the end of the Second World War, through to his abstract ruminations that gesture to reconstruction and his town planning. Alongside this, Pasmore's concern with environment ultimately means he ends up traversing the boundaries between public and private, reflecting on their divisions to an extent, but more often than not investigating how one informs the other. As a result, Pasmore comes to focus on or explore the role of art and the artist in society. He does this in contradictory ways - is the artist to stay at home and paint alongside his family, avoiding the call up to serve in the war? Is the artist to come out of his ivory tower and make an art that the public can engage with? Is the artist to reject representation and speak in a new visual language for a new age, and can this visual language be understood? Is the artist to design the towns of the future, and can he provide everything the inhabitants require? In asking these questions of himself and traversing the boundaries between private artistic expression and, increasingly in the 1950s, public artistic statement towards an expression of wider community, Pasmore produces an open-ended, questioning, and constantly-evolving art, one that attempts to imagine and struggles to precisely locate the artist and his subject between spheres.

In a broader sense, Pasmore's art doesn't just traverse the boundaries between the public and private spheres, but also inherently highlights their lack of separation and distinction in modern society, and how this affected not only the worldviews of individuals, but also whole communities and the British nation in the post-war period. Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, the interior - either the physical interior of the home or the psychological interior - is affected and shaped by exterior forces, events or environments in Pasmore's artworks, just as, at the same time, he begins to explore how the emotions, values and drives of the these interiors can shape and alter the exterior world. Pasmore's increasing engagement with the public sphere, as the 1950s progressed, is not, then, a shaking off of domesticity and its subject matter, but an exploration of how

aspects of domesticity bleed into and formulate public life. If the other artists in this thesis can be thought of as engaging with domesticity as a means of grasping a sense of selfhood and being in relation to the world around them, then Pasmore's art can be considered, through the context of war, psychoanalysis and post-war reconstruction, as a continuous meditation on the individual's place and role within specific spaces – the home, the city, the community, the nation. As a result, Pasmore's art is as deeply affected by public events and the exterior environment as it is by interior forces and the individual. That Pasmore's works and designs struggle to reconcile their interior beginnings with their exterior social aims is part of their significance as individual engagements with wider post-war debates about reconstruction and, on a smaller scale, as attempts at negotiating a sense of individual placehood in relation to wider communities and spaces at a particular historical moment. Pasmore can be seen to gesture to a sense of wider social possibility as well as an uncertainty about how that possibility might come to fruition, and ultimately finds himself drawn back to the individual, in a state of continual negotiation with the world around them, constructing a relationship to it from one moment to the next.

Conclusion

Although Gilbert & George's *Dirty Words* series was first exhibited in 1977 it speaks to the concerns with selfhood, masculinity and an expansive sense of the domestic that have been the focus of this thesis. These are large, gridded works made up of photographs, designed to be confrontational when seen by viewers in galleries, and at the top of each one is a graffitied word that the artists encountered around their home on Fournier Street in E1: 'cunt', 'fuck', 'queer', 'angry' (Figure 46). Aside from a few sections that are highlighted in red, the photographs are presented largely in black and white, giving an initial appearance of flatness or uniformity. In fact, the images in these works depict a range of subject matter, including views of the London skyline, cars weaving their way down roads, groups of Muslim men outside the local mosque, tramps, rent boys, black men, toy soldiers, broken windows, puddles on the pavement, more crude graffiti, and Gilbert & George themselves, sitting or standing in their studio and their home, or with close-ups of their faces heavily cropped. Through these grids, the artists are able to bring together a range of images from inside and outside the home that speak to the contradictory experiences of living in and experiencing a particular part of London in the late 1970s; this is a quietly expansive worldview, rooted in one small area but taking in an enormous range of unfiltered and uncensored images.⁴⁵⁸

At the centre of this world, there is always Gilbert & George - they are posed sometimes in reflection, sometimes to look straight out to the viewer, always in their respectable, suited uniform. That the artists choose to place themselves in amongst this range of images, and particularly alongside photographs of other, more marginal male figures - the rent boy, the immigrant, the tramp - is significant, and speaks to particular, uncomfortable questions about masculine selfhood. To what extent do the boundaries or definitions of selfhood - taking in notions of respectability and appearances, alongside spaces of selfhood, such as the home and the city - reflect everyday experience? For

⁴⁵⁸ This is reflected in Marco Livingstone's observation: "within this apparently severely restricted geography they have somehow addressed themselves to the whole world". See Marco Livingstone, 'From The Heart' in *Gilbert And George* (Tate: London, 2007), pp. 12-25, p. 19.

Figure 47: Gilbert & George, *Angry*, 1977

Gilbert & George, inevitably, there are no easy answers, or, perhaps, selfhood is rarely easily compartmentalised and defined: in their worldview, the obscene and the ordinary exist uncomfortably together. This ordinary, everyday but unrestrained encounter of the individual and their environment – their home and community – is key: for Ben Borthwick, Gilbert & George’s work is always “located in lived experience; the border of the self and everyday life becomes the surface of their art”.⁴⁵⁹ It is perhaps no coincidence that the artists thought of

⁴⁵⁹ Ben Borthwick, ‘Manifestos For A Modern World: The Early Art of Gilbert & George’ in *Gilbert And George* (Tate: London, 2007), pp. 186-89, p. 187.

each of these works as arranged rather like a door – “a door of hell”.⁴⁶⁰ The surfaces of the *Dirty Word* series certainly exploit their position on the border between selfhood and everyday life – and furthermore domesticity and the city, the private and the public – asking not where one might begin and the other end, but forming, in pictures, an account of the difficulty of their intertwined nature, their jarring and shocking co-existence.

Gilbert & George develop, twenty years later, the concerns of the artists in this thesis, and can be conceived as indebted to their earlier explorations of domesticity and selfhood in the context of post-war Britain. John Bratby continually plays with the idea of respectability – what can and cannot be admitted into images of masculine selfhood that are rooted in familial domesticity and its defined roles – and presents us with complex, unsteady paintings that show us everyday domestic living and relationships, while stinging with undertones of violence or constraint. Francis Bacon’s paintings also display an inability to settle in one space or time – the difficulties of everyday domestic life and selfhood for a queer figure in post-war Britain are written in their surfaces, where relationality and moments of intimacy are conflated with the violent and the abject, suspended together in order to register an uncertainty of being. A similar difficulty is apparent in Keith Vaughan’s post-war paintings, where the male figure or assemblies of male figures come to embody a variety of memories – pre-war sociality, wartime comradeship, fleeting intimacy in the city – that may otherwise slip out of reach. Vaughan’s art, like Bacon’s, speaks of a desire for selfhood within queer experience – a seeking out of an expression of permanence in art when the everyday realities or constraints of domesticity prove insufficient or unsatisfactory. Victor Pasmore, meanwhile, develops the ideals and preoccupations of domesticity in an art that increasingly seeks to contain and affect its viewer and engage with the reconstructive aims of the post-war governments. Here, art is not about grasping the contradictions or difficulties of selfhood and domesticity, as it was for Bratby, Bacon and Vaughan, but proceeds on the grounds that it could, by working from the individual outwards, begin to ease these contradictions altogether. In specific ways, all of

⁴⁶⁰ Carter Ratcliff, *Gilbert & George: The Complete Pictures, 1971-1985* (Thames and Hudson: London, 1986), p. xxvii.

these artists engage with issues of sociality – how everyday life might be lived and where its boundaries, of public and private life, might be placed – during a period of reconstruction immediately after the Second World War. Around these artists, the state reforms, homes are rebuilt, a new future begins, and you can witness them attempting to find their place within these shifting developments. Gilbert & George pick up on these themes further down the line, making the contradictions of everyday sociality their prime subject in the *Dirty Words* series. Two decades later, the task, for them, is no longer about the negotiation of the boundaries of selfhood and everyday life, but to present them unmediated, sprawling explicitly across spheres, to shock individuals out of their ordinary routines and, possibly, to elicit some kind of personal or social change. In contrast, Bratby, Bacon, Vaughan and Pasmore, while concerned with the contradictory elements of everyday experience, seem to gesture in a more tentative direction at a time of post-war uncertainty – towards liveable moments, captured or suspended in art despite real life contradictions and difficulties, and their possibilities and uncertainties.

It is this dual sense of potentiality and uncertainty that I wish to highlight in the work of all of my four artists: the sense of a re-imagining or suspension of everyday life – a holding, a momentary sense of clarity about its disorder and its possibilities – alongside a sense of its continued fluctuation (rather than a failure to build something more). In this way, these artistic representations become instances where the concepts of domesticity and selfhood may be grasped and negotiated most explicitly, where the contradictions inherent in the experiences of everyday life, no longer ignored or denied, come to the surface and can begin to be confronted. As a result, it's hard to argue that these works point explicitly towards new possibilities of living: they do in one sense, in that they make visible the difficulties and dissatisfactions of living at particular moments, but, in another, their preoccupations seem to be momentary, concerned with consolidation, the experience of living and the formation of selfhood from one moment to the next, in spaces, through relationships, and within larger social structures. Keith Vaughan's *Lazarus* epitomises this. In one sense, it points towards potentiality: the revived male body emerging from the shadows, gesturing to an existence built on a variety of known relationships across time

and spheres, creating something out of memories of figures who are no longer present – lovers, his brother, maybe even his father. At the same time, it also points towards the failure of that potentiality: this is a figure imagined in art because it doesn't satisfactorily exist in real life, literally formed out of blocks of colour, from an ideal gold to the cold blue of lifeless flesh, just as it is formed out of fragments of memories – of bodies, relationships, particular moments.

It is clear, then, how the contradictions of everyday experience can quietly be written into a work like this for Vaughan and negotiated, momentarily grasped, just as it is for the other artists in this thesis. *Lazarus* encompasses individuals who are alive and individuals who are dead; sexual relationships as well as familial ones; the varied locations of these relationships, from London to Pagham, France and the NCC. Most of all, it transplants the relationships and spaces of an expansive, shifting sense of domesticity into a single body – one that has to be revived, and re-visited and re-painted, to momentarily achieve a sense of permanence ideally found in domesticity. Vaughan, like all of these artists, is concerned with the continual definition and negotiation of domesticity through artworks, and its relationship to selfhood. This preoccupation with domesticity across the works of all of these artists could be considered as a retreat – from external events, from politics, from society more broadly. However, all four artists have clearly demonstrated the productivity of domesticity as a subject in relation to selfhood – while it certainly presents challenges for male figures who couldn't live comfortably within its preordained structures, it also presents a workable realm close to hand in which to navigate everyday existence. At a time of national and global uncertainty at the end of the Second World War, perhaps the negotiation of male selfhood was more easily done on these terms, in the spaces and in terms of the relationships immediately around the individual. Politics and exterior events do, inevitably, puncture and help to form these worlds, but on individual terms, and in different ways from individual to individual. This is the strength of these works: their engagement with everyday experience and sociality on their surfaces, in their making. This is, as we have seen, open to failure or produces images that are uncomfortable or problematic, but they bare witness to a process, externally, through artworks, that individuals might only encounter internally, or never completely or explicitly comprehend.

Art becomes, here, a kind of pause in the flux of everyday life: a momentary holding of selfhood within a personal, domestic sphere, in all its contradictory nature, as it continually forms, before everything falls back into flux again.

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