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**Painting Architecture:
Towards a Practice-Led Research Methodology**

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Abstract: The idea of architecture as spatial agency is increasingly explored by architectural practices. I argue that this approach can benefit from an alternative mode of visual representation in order to reflect architecture's contingent nature rather than the production of buildings. The research project Painting Architecture investigates how the act of painting can visually facilitate the process of spatial thinking. In this paper, I discuss the rationale and significance of the practice-led methodology through a critical reflection on the pilot study. By approaching painting as a process of confrontation, negotiation and collaboration with participants during dialogue sessions, the project explores what painting can do rather than what it is. This approach creates, however, a paradox for the analysis of the practice in which the reason for researching painting based on its medium-specificity is negated by analysing its effect. To resolve this problem, two trajectories are suggested that enable an interpretation of painting as a critical and engaged project. As such, a broader significance of painting is developed which, in turn, contributes to a new way of thinking about architecture.

Key Words: contemporary painting, architectural representation, spatial agency, practice-led methodology

Painting Architecture:
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Introduction

The painting in figure 1 is the visual documentation of a conversation about architecture. It reflects the spatial and architectural experience of F.E., a participant in the research project *Painting Architecture*. The composition consists of three parts: the horizontal lines represent the various processes in which F.E. has to intervene as urban practitioner; in contradistinction, the grey background signifies the need for an architectural space that can offer contemplation and disengagement from the city; where the lines turn vertical, they reflect F.E.'s passion for high-rises encountered during travels in the Far East. The white sketch maps more literally the specific locations of her current and past habitation in London, linking these to various associations embedded in the painting.

Figure 1. Painting Architecture session with F.E. 18.06.2012. Photograph: the author.

While this explanation of the painting provides some insight into the underlying significance, there is a problem in the analysis of such work. The tendency to interpret painting through a literal description becomes apparent, whereas the painting is more than just an illustration of spatial thinking; it traces the progress of a dialogic exchange. Hence, the question arises of how an analysis of painting can focus on its mode of operation—the facilitating of spatial negotiation—instead of its mode of representation. This paper explores the way in which the method of painting architecture and the subsequent analysis can work as part of a practice-led research methodology. It follows the definition of practice-led research as an investigation into the nature of practice, with the aim of developing new knowledge that has operational significance for that practice (Candy, 2006).

This means that the outcome is not necessarily the creation of artefacts, but the advancement of knowledge of and within a specific painting practice. In this paper, I set out the rationale for the project *Painting Architecture* and juxtapose this with a critical reflection on the pilot study of seven painting sessions through the three stages of making, reflecting and understanding. The first section explains how the methodology has been conceived in response to developments within the architectural discipline. This is followed by an analysis of the practice in section two, through a focus on one painting session from the pilot study. The final part provides a more theoretical context to understand how painting can be analysed, in order to explain its significance within a practice-led research methodology.

At the foundation of this research project is a concern with the visual modes of representation used in the architectural profession, not only because it reflects a certain way of thinking about architecture, but also because it delineates the *scope* of spatial thinking (Rattenbury, 2002). Since the invention of linear perspective, architectural representation has focused on a depiction of physical space through descriptive geometry (Pérez-Gómez & Pelletier, 2000). Subsequently, the primacy of drawing in architectural rendering has been based on the convention that a representation relates to the building, either as anticipated design or as documentation of the finished product (Hewitt, 1985). It has been argued (Evans, 1995; Panofsky, 1991) that drawing, as such, developed into a reductive and abstract visual language, which is perpetuated in computer-aided rendering techniques (Pérez-Gómez, 2002). The tendency to understand architectural drawing as a medium of thought (Hewitt, 1985) has indirectly turned the drawing into a self-conscious display of the architect's private language (Olsberg, 2013), or into a work of art separated from its initial function. While this shift from drawing as representation to projection is relevant in considering new methods of thinking about architecture, there has been little investigation into how the process of *negotiating space* can be visualised. This means that rather than representing an individual thinking process, an opportunity is created for the discussion of space between various actors, which is mediated by a visual method. Hence, the question is how (and why) a visual medium could function in supporting this process of negotiating architecture, without the tendency towards an 'aesthetisation' of the architectural image.

Architecture is understood here as spatial production which encompasses a larger set of relationships, networks and processes. It is reflected in the work of alternative architectural practices which are increasingly exploring the idea of architecture as spatial agency. This indicates a shift from a focus on the architectural product to a situated and embedded praxis conscious of and working with its social, economic and political context (Awan, Schneider, & Till, 2011). Spatial agency builds upon the principle that architecture is inherently contingent because it is dependent on others throughout the whole process, thus 'from initial sketch to inhabitation' (Till, 2009, p. 45). Its methods of operation work with the idea that the best solution to an architectural problem is not always a building, a core principle in the architectural practice of Cedric Price (Awan et al., 2011, p. 31). Such a practice would benefit from a non-conventional approach to architectural representation and visualisation because, as argued by Jeremy Till, 'the reliance on the sketch as the initiator of so much architectural production inexorably leads to a fixation on form and type, as manifested in a product, as opposed to a consideration of use and time, as might be developed in a process' (2009, p. 109). Till suggests that the problem lies within the standard modes of representation, because images are part of the strategy to eliminate time from the architectural product and, consequently, to suppress architecture's contingent nature. He states that the complexity of time cannot be summoned up in a single system of representation, but that it can be inscribed in the communicative stages of architectural production. The architectural profession might be developing very potent tools, for example for the production of simulations and parametric design, but these do not necessarily contribute to the improvement of communication between numerous actors involved in spatial production. It is against this context that the project *Painting Architecture* explores how painting can facilitate the communicative stages, instead of developing painting as a new design tool.

The relationship between painting and architecture is old, ever since Filippo Brunelleschi created a painting to demonstrate the invention of linear perspective around 1420—a technique which would prove fundamental to the architectural discipline. Nevertheless, contemporary use of painting by architects is often restricted to a translation of pictorial aesthetic into built form, which can be illustrated by the work of Zaha Hadid and Will Alsop. Architecturally inspired paintings, whether by artists or architects, have either remained within the paradigm of fine art or been marginalised by the architectural profession as visualisations. Some artists, however, have used painting to reflect on architecture as part of a larger process of spatial production. For example, in the work of Julie Mehretu and Franz Ackermann architecture relies upon social, temporal and contextual contingencies, using multiple styles of representation and references. It is this merging of representational and abstract styles in contemporary painting, based on a long tradition of questioning and developing its own methods of representation, which forms the rationale for researching painting. Nevertheless, their paintings remain interpreted within the paradigm of fine art through the conventional methods of exhibiting and interpretation. They do not have an external impact, because the painting is the end product rather than the means towards some other goal. Hence, this research tackles two problems; painting's limited propositional value beyond the fine art paradigm, and the ambiguous role of visual methods in the praxis of spatial agency. The eventual aim of this research project is to design a methodology which explores how painting can reflect collaborative thinking about spatial production *and* how it can subsequently function within the architectural discipline. As such, instead of engaging with actual space or spatial transformation, I work with people in order to exchange the different perspectives on the way we inhabit and imagine space.

Making:
Painting as a
Research Method

In order to engage simultaneously and in equal measure with the discipline of art and architecture, the methodology is informed by the principles of a 'critical spatial practice' which 'works in relation to dominant ideologies yet at the same time questions them; and it explores the operations of particular disciplinary procedures—art and architecture —while also drawing attention to wider social and political problems' (Rendell, 2006, p. 4). In this research, the disciplinary procedures of, respectively, painting and spatial agency are investigated by designing a research approach where the former can relate to the latter, thereby questioning and changing its own procedures. For this purpose, I modified my painting practice by adopting certain tactics which are inherent to the operations of spatial agency. By taking this approach within the practice, my role as artist and researcher merges with that of spatial agents, through shared intentions, to raise critical questions in the discussion of spatial production. I follow here the position taken by art critic Barry Schwabsky that the artist should use any technique that is most suitable to manifest the given project, thereby becoming 'a producer of strategies rather than works, conversations rather than objects' (Schwabsky, 2010). The strategy taken here is based on the tactics set out in *Spatial Agency: Other Ways of Doing Architecture* (Awan et al., 2011, pp. 69–82). Four out of nine methods used by spatial agents are in particular relevant to this project and, to an extent, realisable: initiating a project, expanding the brief, making hidden structures visible, and sharing knowledge.

First of all, I employ the tactic of initiating, which means that one is proactive in finding a project through negotiation with others. To create the opportunity for such negotiation, a relational element has been introduced into the painting process. The paintings are produced during dialogue sessions with participants who have an interest in architecture, but are not necessarily practising or trained architects. The participants are recruited by offering a design service based on a conversation about architecture, of which the painted outcome would be given to the participant after the session. The conversation does not follow a fixed structure, but builds upon the spatial problems raised by the participant. This means that the session relies upon situated knowledge, where opportunities and problems are sought in the particular rather than the general (Till, 2009, p. 60).

Initiating a project is closely related to the concept of the expanded brief. Conventionally, the brief is a set of instructions that is drafted by a client for the architect. Expanding the brief implies working with and beyond the stated boundaries of the project in order to move away from fixed ideas and solutions. In the sessions, the conversation shifts from discussing spatial issues to understanding the context in which these have arisen. However, each conversation takes its own course and might, for example, become a discussion of the held concept of architecture or of the participant's experience of cities. The painting takes place at the same time as the conversation and traces what is said while, as anticipated, transforming the conversation in return. There are no predetermined criteria for the creative process to enable a flexible interaction between materials, concepts and the relationship with the participant. The participant is invited to paint and to make formal decisions in order to open up space for a reciprocal exchange of ideas. As such, the intended outcome of the session is neither a building nor a painting, rather it is the transformative process enabled by the collaborative effort of painting.
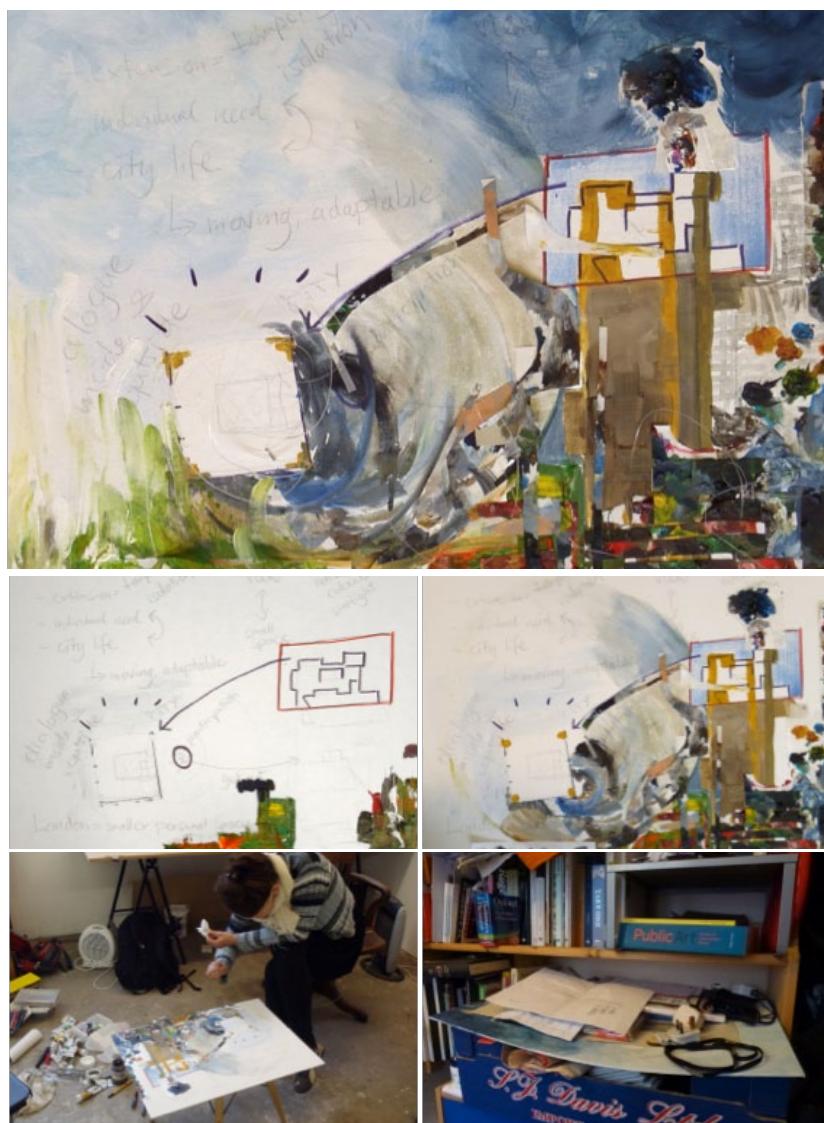
Figure 2. Painting Architecture session with V.K., representing the various stages of the painting process. 09.04.2012. Photograph: the author.

Expanding the boundaries of a project implies, moreover, that complex frameworks in which spatial production takes place are revealed and understood. A key aim of spatial agency is 'the uncovering and making visible of hidden structures, be they political, social or economic' (Awan et al., 2011, p. 76). This aspect is specifically explored in this project through the concurrent approach of communicating and visualising. The question is to what extend painting enables one to visualise relationships between various factors and actors. There are a number of approaches to visualising information, such as diagramming and mapping, which could be used in painting. This is enabled by medium-specific qualities, for example the vast scope of colours, the possibility to create layers, and the levels of opacity of applied paint. Most significant, however, is the correlation between the kind of dialogue and the style of visualisation. To analyse this link, each session is documented through audio recording and photography of the painting at several stages of its production. The audio recordings are transcribed in order to extract the main themes of the conversations. These themes are juxtaposed with the compositional elements in the painting in order to understand to what extent and in which way they are reflected visually.

Finally, the sessions are based on the concept of sharing knowledge, in which knowledge is understood as 'a product of participative spatial encounters that cross disciplinary boundaries' (Awan et al., 2011, p. 78). Within architecture, this implies that the architect takes on the role of facilitator or enabler, and accepts other forms of expertise brought into the process. It entails a sense-making approach instead of problem-solving, which is 'a matter of altering, respecting, acknowledging, and shaping people's lived worlds' through an interactive, interpretive and practical conversation (Forester, 1985, p. 17). In regards to sharing knowledge, the operations of spatial agency also extend beyond the project itself. It is based on the idea that production of space continues by others through their inhabitation and use of space. To reflect this concept, the participant can decide whether to keep the painting after each session. Instead of isolating the painting in a gallery space, it becomes exposed to an unpredictable context similar to the building becoming occupied, while also functioning within a larger context. It is part of the process to understand how the painting functions after the session. Therefore, the participant is asked to take a photograph of the painting in its new location and to describe its purpose. Additionally, the participants are asked for feedback on the sessions through a questionnaire which enquires about the extent to which the painting and dialogue met their expectations, and what the participants got out of being involved in the project. This feedback, in combination with my own reflection on the session, is considered in the analysis of the practice.

**Reflecting:
On Painting as a Process**

The pilot study of seven sessions was conducted in order to define and develop the methods, and to think about possible ways of analysing the results. The method of reflection-on-action (Schön, 1983) was employed in two stages; directly following the session and after working through the various forms of documentation. For the purpose of this paper, I focus on the session with F.E. introduced at the beginning (fig. 1). Through juxtaposition with other sessions, and in parallel with the previously outlined tactics, three areas for analysis have come to the fore: how the negotiation of space took place in regards to the kind of engagement with architecture, how the painting was produced and used in material and relational terms, and what the level of collaboration was in light of the participant's expectations. As the methodology takes a phenomenological approach, each session is reflected upon as a unique event. The goal is to emphasise the depth of the sessions through a qualitative instead of a quantitative approach in which the specificity might be obscured. Furthermore, this research acknowledges that phenomenological research is subjective and indicative of the researcher's intentions. Thus, each painting depends on the relationship with the participant, which is (re)defined in the meeting. It is contingent on the participant's expectations, contribution, experience and knowledge, but also on the intentionality and attitude in my ambiguous role of researcher, artist and potentially spatial agent.

The conversation with F.E. revealed an active engagement in spatial production beyond the personal space. Working with a group, she creates temporary spatial interventions in the city. Therefore, F.E. has a higher level of awareness of spatial production, even though she is not trained as an architect. We discussed her three types of spatial experience: the home as a place to recede, the work directly intervening in urban spaces, and the travelling to engage with other cities. F.E. arrived without any expectations for the session, and there was no indication of a project to think through together. This is in contrast to several other sessions in which the participant came with a design-based project. For example, V.K. (fig. 2) wanted to design a thinking space, and as a result the session was more focused on discussing how such a space would be shaped. As the idea for the project was initiated by V.K., there was less scope for moving beyond its boundaries, although we expanded the discussion to that of use and location. Without any ground for discussing a specific issue with F.E., the conversation became more of a mapping of the participant's relationship to the city. In order to grasp the main points of discussion, the painting's first stage consisted of writing down key words: salience, context, love cities, material processes, intention/manipulation as skill, layers. This first stage proved helpful in all sessions, in order to extract themes visually. The next stage consisted of visualising these themes. In this case, I started with the layers that reflected the many procedures F.E. has to deal with to realise her work projects. More difficult was the visualisation of the concept of salience, which had to be addressed through a more abstract language. Similarly in the other sessions, difficulties were encountered in visualising abstract concepts such as sustainability, diversity and responsibility. Also very specific points of discussion, such as particular architectural styles, proved impossible to represent without visual examples. These difficulties indicate the limits of painting as purely visual medium, and also my own abilities as a painter.
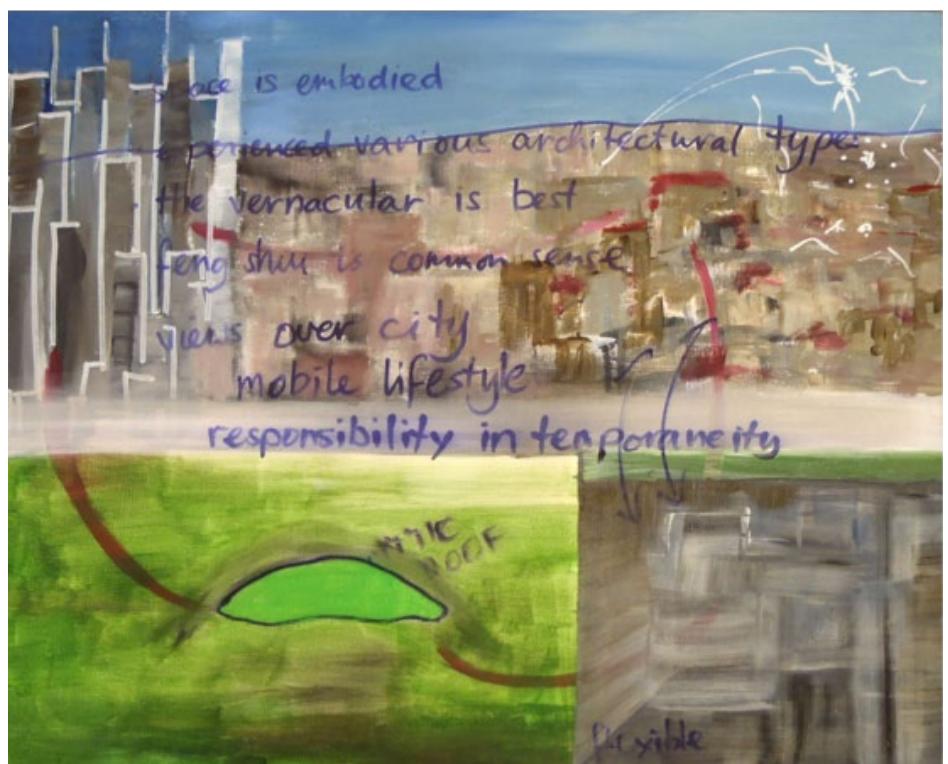

Figure 3. Painting Architecture session with J.C. 07.06.2012. Photograph: the author.

Although there was some experimentation with materials, the choices were constrained by practical considerations. Acrylic paint, for example, was preferred above oil paint to allow

the paintings to dry at the end of the session. In a number of conversations, obstacles in rendering abstract ideas were overcome through creative solutions. With V.K., we decided to loosely attach a transparent fishing cord to indicate her commute to the space, and a collage was made from a used palette to show the density of the city which provides inspiration for her work. The paintings were created in a horizontal position, which proved most practical to 'mediate' between two people rather than acting as a vertical wall hindering the interaction. However, it was often rotated and moved between different grounds. The size of the canvas board was chosen with the participant, but the short time-span of the sessions restricted the scope of the painting. The session with F.E. lasted one and a half hours, which became an average length for the sessions, after which the conversation was often exhausted. However, this is a very short period for the production of a painting. The fast pace of painting required quick formal decisions to be made, turning aesthetic considerations into a more intuitive translation of ideas into forms. The initially-felt pressure to make a 'good' painting was exacerbated by this limited time; hence this underlying ambition had to be revaluated and finally rejected. Instead, my attitude changed into a more critical distance towards each painting, where my judgement of the work was replaced by questioning the process from which it emerged.

The act of painting enabled us to see the relationships between the various topics that were discussed. I disagreed with F.E. on the manner in which urban regeneration takes place, in particular how this affects citizens. From the debate arose the question of whether it is possible to merge a critical position with urban progress. The vertical line in the painting served to explain such a position by distancing itself from the horizontal systems, while connecting to the progress of the vertical metropolis. At this point, the image became a negotiation of ideas about spatial production, rather than a portrayal. Moreover, the lines refer to a change in F.E.'s position during the conversation. Whereas initially she stated that manipulation is important in order to achieve one's own goals, she subsequently revised this by prioritising the user above manipulation of processes and space. In order to position F.E. within our discussion, I asked her to draw an outline of London and to indicate the places of inhabitation. These are subsequently connected to the pictorial fields, making connections
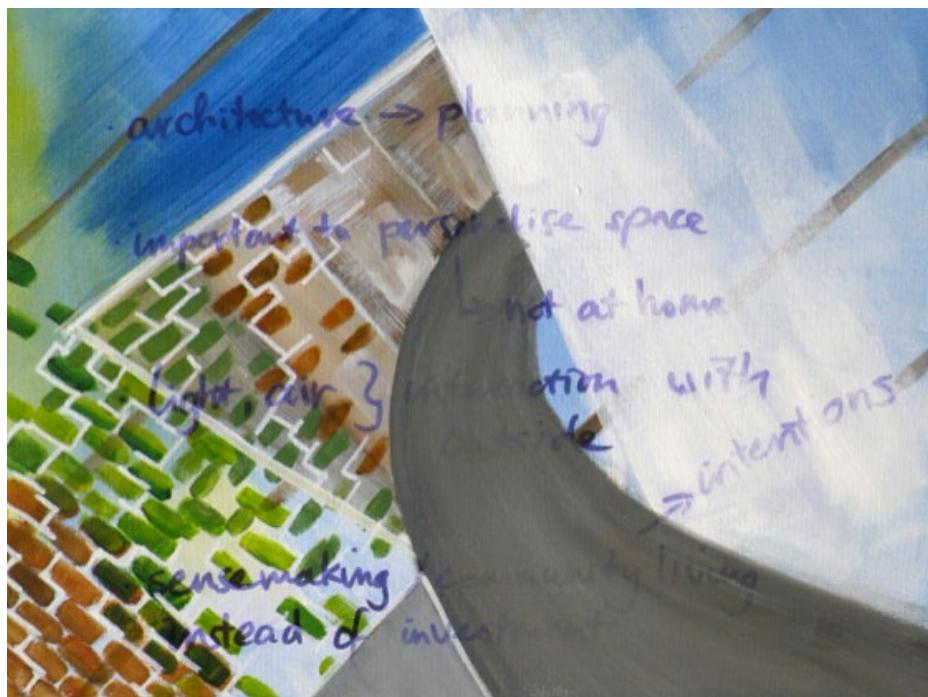
Figure 4. Painting Architecture session with I.N. 16.06.2012. Photograph: the author.

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between places and ideas visible. While painting became a mapping in this case, the development of the image depended on the style of conversation. In contrast to F.E., the session with J.C. (fig. 3) took the form of a personal narrative; she provided a personal account of living in diverse cities and buildings and took a leading role in the conversation. This provided ample time to paint and the composition reflects the sequence of events, but there is a lack of critical distance from the status quo. On the contrary, the conversation with I.N. (fig. 4) took place on a much more theoretical level. The dialogue was an in-depth exchange of knowledge about architectural practice, for example on the role of architectural education. Whereas in the former session the painting saw a more literal visualisation, shaped by memories and experiences of living in and moving through cities, the latter session is a layering of concepts through the merging of figurative and abstract styles of representation.

The development of a session can be described through three stages: confrontation, negotiation and collaboration. In the confrontation with another person's perspective, the painting can function as a mediating support to bring together ideas and themes for comparison. Negotiation is required to find common ground on which to develop a shared understanding of spatial production, which converges visually in the painting. Finally, the act of collaboration is when the propositional value is added to the painting created out of a shared knowledge, understanding and interest to produce space. In the session with F.E. the last stage seemed, in retrospect, to be missing. F.E. was not interested in painting collaboratively, and only contributed to the drawing of the map when asked. Although there was a lack of joined effort in painting, one incident implied that the painting evoked new thinking. F.E. asked to change the layers from natural hues to a brighter colour, because they represent something artificial. Though her comment wasn't taken up further, it could have led to a discussion of whether such processes are artificial or a 'natural' part of urban planning. In contradistinction, the level of collaboration was higher in the session with T.R. (fig. 5).

Figure 5. Painting Architecture session with T.R. 11.06.2012. Photograph: the author.

The discussion focused on the flows of people in public space, which stemmed from his frustration with street design. We worked on this problem through the rendering of an abstract space, to which we both referred in order to develop our ideas further. The painting was less a design and more a diagram in which hidden structures could be revealed, for example the questionable role of councillors in urban planning in regards to drawing conclusions from public consultation. Whereas T.R. did not actively paint, he used the painting to explain his observations, thereby sharing his knowledge and providing ideas how to further develop the image. While a theoretical design started to emerge out of the visualisation, the painting has no instructional value because it does not contain information for the transformation of a specific place, nor is it legible to others. Rather, it has documented and facilitated a progression of thinking about a problem. Similarly, in the session with V.K., there was a clear focus on designing a space, which enabled a collaborative thinking and painting process. Her architectural training and knowledge of notational drawings merged with the more ambiguous rendering in paint. At first, there was apprehension on my part as to how our different approaches would influence the roles within the session. However, by rejecting fixed roles and by inviting V.K. to contribute to the painting, a shared pictorial vision developed. We discussed our different approach to colours and the importance of the changing of light within the space. It influenced the way that the paint is applied, by creating a more transparent layer which enables the underlying text to come through. Thus, it could be argued that a collaborative approach to painting is enhanced by a clear goal and by more variation in the use of materials and formats.


Figure 6. Painting Architecture session with A.B. 04.06.2012. Photograph: the author.

The course of a session depends for a large part on the expectations of the participant. F.E. did not express any, nor did she send feedback through the online questionnaire. A clearer position was taken by A.B. (fig. 6), who held very specific expectations for the session. Her written feedback revealed a disappointment with the lack of structure and clarity of outcome within the session, which in retrospect had an impact on the dynamics within the conversation: the process was confrontational rather than collaborative. A.B. was adamant about focusing on architectural floor plans instead of discussing the wider effects of her design ideas. The expanding of the 'brief', thus moving beyond the parameters of her design interests, was more difficult in this case. At the end of the session A.B. asked me to sign the painting, but upon following up some time afterwards the work had been disposed of because it had no artistic merit in her opinion. It reveals not only that the session did not meet her expectations, but also a more conventional understanding of what constitutes a 'good' painting. Equally, in the session with J.S. (fig. 7), the painting gained a certain status by being framed and hung after the session. J.S. stated at the forefront to be interested in a particular architectural style, and hoped to gain a deeper understanding of his aesthetic preferences from the session.

Figure 7. Painting Architecture session with J.S. 29.08.2012. Photograph: the author.

However, rather than discussing aesthetics, the dialogue addressed priorities within spatial production and, as a result, the painting reflects the wider context in which J.S. engages with architecture. Several other participants returned photographs of the painting in its new location. For example, V.K.'s painting was photographed stacked between various objects on a shelf, waiting to be used for a further project (fig. 2, bottom right), whereas J.C. returned photographs of the painting in a diversity of locations, exploring how the work reacts to different domestic settings. These reactions allow the painting to remain in an unfinished or contingent state. F.E. decided not to take the painting home, for undisclosed reasons. It might be an indication that the lack of reciprocal input in the session resulted in the absence of ownership over the painting. It reverberated in F.E.'s comment that the session had resembled therapy, signifying her interpretation of the level of participation in the session.

According to the ladder of citizen participation developed by Sherry R. Arnstein (1969), therapy indicates nonparticipation. It might be remedied by applying more structure to the sessions, as suggested in the feedback from A.B., and by clarifying the intentionality behind the project. More importantly, it calls for a deeper debate on the significance of contemporary painting.

**Understanding:
The Significance of
Painting Architecture**

The reflection on the pilot study brings to the fore the paradoxical challenge of developing painting as part of a research methodology. While the analysis approaches painting foremost as a process, it raises the question of medium-specificity: what is so particular about painting? There is a discrepancy between explaining *why* painting has a potential to contribute to spatial agency, and *how* this can be achieved through painting. Both questions require fundamental changes to the understanding of what painting is. Painting can be broadly defined as the sum of its three equally essential parts; it is simultaneously a medium with inherent material properties, a method of representation and presentation, and a practice which manifests a critical and engaged project. The first part has been explored through Clement Greenberg's modernist project, which established painting's specificity through the material limits of the medium (Greenberg, 1992). The second issue has been debated extensively through the merging of various painting styles and the unfolding of painting into the expanded field (Armstrong, Lisbon, & Melville, 2001; Petersen, 2010b; Sturgis, 2011; Titmarsh, 2006). It is the third point, however, which significantly alters the way that painting is interpreted. The understanding of painting as a critically engaged project emphasises what painting can *do*, rather than what it *is*.

An investigation in which 'painting' is addressed as an active verb has two intertwined but consecutive trajectories. The first trajectory takes a new approach to the analysis of painting. As exemplified in the reflection on the practice, this is a study of the context in which painting takes place, thereby recognising the artist's project. Such an analysis identifies the nature of painting through the underlying intentions and expectations, rather than the tracing of the constituent parts of the pictorial surface. The second trajectory builds upon this analysis by disseminating painting as a project, thereby invoking a significant change in the interpretation of painting and, eventually, fundamentally altering its meaning. In the sessions, I observed that the expectations of some participants stemmed from a conventional understanding of painting. The painting had to be signed, framed and was judged in terms of its aesthetic value. This affirms the perpetual problem that while new media are automatically received as engaged and critical art forms, painting is still perceived as a disengaged medium, associated with notions of autonomy, beauty and originality (Petersen, 2010b). It is through the two trajectories, I suggest, that alternative associations of painting can emerge.

In his writing on painting as a medium of thought, Hubert Damisch asked the relevant question: 'Could there be a form of analysis whose aim was not to capture painting in the net of discourse but rather to allow oneself to be educated by it …?'(1995, p. 262). He explained this as 'a form of analysis…equipped to deal not so much with the question of representation as with that of painting's operation' (1995, p. 263). I hinted at this problem in the introduction of F.E's painting through terms such as 'represents', 'signifies' and 'reflects'. Such an analysis does not do any justice to the role that the painting played in the session, thus its operational mode within the relational context. It is this emphasis on the performative nature of painting which underlies Damisch's suggestion of an analysis that is not *about* painting but rather proceeds *with* painting. This requires an altogether new form of analysis, as has been aptly observed by Catherine Ferguson (2012). Building upon Damisch's ideas, Ferguson argues similarly that painting requires a different kind of interpretation to bring out its functional value. She applies the theory of autopoiesis to establish methodological principles of analysis which proceed with painting though logic instead of empirical observation. However, in pursuing the idea of proceeding with painting, there is a risk of embarking upon a philosophical enquiry which loses all links to the actual working processes of the artist. I argue, therefore, that an analysis of painting might have to stem from the insider perspective of the artist, rather than from that of the external spectator, in order to bring to the fore the method of operation

of painting. This cannot be achieved, as attempted by Ferguson and Damisch, through the analysis of painting by other artists because it is essentially based on observation of the object. Instead, I suggest, the analysis of painting has to focus on the moment in which painting is actively used and produced, prior to becoming 'a work'. Indeed, Barry Schwabsky (2010, p. 76) makes the relevant point that it is not by looking at the object that we can define painting's ontology—the misguided tactic of much contemporary philosophical writing. Rather, he proposes, painting provides only a clue to the artist's underlying project, which should be the primary focus of attention. He argues that in order to justify that there is a particularity to painting, which separates it from other mediums, it is necessary to examine its conceptual nature.

A new form of analysis, one that proceeds with painting, will necessarily be pragmatic by focusing on the gradual progression of painting. As noted by Schwabsky (2010), the artist's project indicates development and progress. Thus, he continues, it is by its very nature incomplete, unfolding and subject to revision. This implies that the writing about painting is an iterative process which can benefit from the use of the spiral method of reflection-for-action, reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action (Cowan, 2006). Most importantly, Schwabsky argues that such a project can never be addressed in full, only through glimpses of its various manifestations that *can* be painting (or any other technique that is suitable for the project). Such a utilitarian approach to the medium reverberates in the concept of the 'relational object'. In the practice of Marjetica Potrč, relational objects are used to negotiate one's relationship with the world. Instead of focusing on the objects themselves, her work shows how they are used as catalysts of change (Fischer, 2012). Potrč uses relational objects as tools in her work with communities to take ownership over the city, for example in the form of a vegetable garden. It could be argued that the paintings in the sessions functioned as relational objects, to the extent that they facilitated a conversation without being the anticipated outcome of the sessions. However, it is difficult to judge to what extent the paintings become catalysts of change, because tracking the transformational impact moves beyond the scope of the analysis. The paintings function as relational objects only insofar as they enable the creation of a shared ground for negotiating spatial relationships.

It might be more appropriate, then, to talk about the 'painterly effect' which emerges in genre-transcending practices where, as described by Daniel Birnbaum, 'painting no longer exists as a strictly circumscribed mode of expression; rather, it is a zone of contagion, constantly branching out and widening its scope' (Birnbaum, 2002, pp. 157–158). A similar but more pragmatic description stems from Anne Ring Petersen (2010b) who argues that, instead of an interest on formal types or demarcation, artists today are investigating 'the painterly' as an effect resulting from the use of colours or the modes of construction, representation and display. While her examples of painterly installations perpetuate the autonomous art object in the white cube, Birnbaum provides more 'expanded' examples of urban interventions by the artists Olafur Eliasson and Francys Alÿs. He argues that their performances aim to change our perception of urban space through a 'painterly sensibility'—they leave a trace of paint respectively in a river and on the road. While such practices indeed shift the understanding 'from the limitations of painting to its possibilities' (Petersen, 2010b, p. 124), there is a danger here of searching for a painterly *aesthetics*, rather than focusing on the *impact* of a practice that manifests itself through painting. This problem becomes explicit when Petersen (2010b, p. 125) argues that in order to identify what distinguishes painting today from other media one has to look at its formal aspects, because painting has, just like new media, expanded its content to wider social, ideological and political issues. This echoes the aforementioned paradox that when painting critically engages with other practices, it remains analysed in terms of its ontological status instead of its expanded potential. Maybe, after all, the question of painting's particularity is less urgent when the agenda of the artist-researcher addresses fundamental problems in the operation of other disciplines. In the process, the very notion of painting has to be adapted to new ways of using a medium, in order to respond to changes in our engagement with, and thinking about, architecture. As Ferguson (2012, p. 146) points out, rather unambiguously, the question what constitutes painting has become irrelevant. Artists have to explore new approaches to critical writing in order to 'expand or amplify an encounter

with art as integral to an on-going creative project', rather than contributing to the discourse maintained by a community of experts (Ferguson, 2012, p. 135). As such, the significance of *Painting Architecture* is the way in which the process and context of painting is disseminated through critical writing based on the artist's own practice. That, I propose, is how an analysis genuinely proceeds with painting.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have looked at the relationship between the making, the reflecting and the understanding of a specific kind of interdisciplinary practice, in order to highlight the problem of its analysis and interpretation. As stated at the beginning, this approach works on two levels of enquiry; the visual methods used in thinking about architecture as a spatial agency, and the potential of painting to critically engage with another field. The crux of the problem is that the former, which can now be referred to as the artist's project, appears to destabilise the latter, which is the reflection on the methodology from a researcher's perspective. There are, however, three concluding principles that can be drawn here, which enable an interwoven approach and subsequently contribute to our understanding of how research through art practice produces new knowledge.

Firstly, and most importantly, it is the realisation that instead of exploring a painting practice, this research investigates a project of which painting is only a manifestation. To a large extent, the making transparent of the methods of practice is the very essence of research through practice. However, in research that is led by, rather than based on practise, there is a particular emphasis on the investigation of the nature of a specific working method. The critical writing requires a special attention in regards to its organisation, since there are two intertwined enquiries taking place. There are in fact two kinds of writing; the first is based on reflection which relates to the artist's project, the second is the analysis which looks at the larger implications of the project. The two modes of writing are in a dialogic relationship, while continually testing the practice and being challenged by it in return. It is the writing which allows the artist to proceed with painting, instead of being about painting. By emphasising the project of the artist, it becomes a way of disseminating a new interpretation of the medium. Practice-led research is, therefore, essential to the development of painting in an expanded field of practice, one that is not just spatial but above all relational.

The second principle derives from the preceding, by emphasising the possibility of the researcher as artist, rather than vice versa. This is a decisive change, because it might result in a different emphasis towards that of painting's function rather than a painterly aesthetic. Inherent in the concept of proceeding with painting as a form of analysis is a pragmatic approach in which the researcher-cum-artist critically engages with the operations of painting. I suggest here that it is the writing about one's own practice, rather than philosophically or speculatively contextualising the works of other artists, that poses the biggest challenge and opportunity to reviving the significance of painting today. It means accepting and emphasising the subjective nature of such research, both within the creative work and in the analysis thereof. This subjectivity can, however, become more grounded through a collaborative working method where the participants contribute to an inter-subjective reflection and are consequently credited for their contribution by name.

The third principle is the iterative process in which the practice progresses through ongoing reflection and analysis. This means that the idea of a 'pilot study' is not helpful, because it is a part of a longer line of investigations. This iterative aspect of practice-led methodology entails an unconventional writing structure, for example requiring more than one section on the applied methods. An iterative process also lends the practice a more multifaceted function. Instead of seeing practice as creative production, it can become a form of dissemination of the research itself, because it reaches beyond the world of academia. Reaching out to theprofessional context requires more transparency as to the intentionality of the practice. Within the sessions of the pilot study, the intentions of demonstrating other functions of painting were not explicitly disclosed. It could be argued that the sessions worked in analogy to spatial practice, by appropriating its tactics and similarly working with

the general public. Rather than through analogy, the practice might benefit from a direct engagement with the architectural profession. Collaborating with architects would enable the artist to directly address and subvert the conventionally held idea of painting. By accentuating the facilitating role of painting within the meetings, more clarity could be brought into the complex negotiation of space. Furthermore, if the point of departure is an actual project being undertaken by the architect, the conversation gains a clearer structure and goal. In this manner, the research can more realistically test how painting can contribute to the architectural discipline.

With the ongoing development of the practice-led methodology, it has become increasingly obvious that there will not be a body of work to present alongside the written counterpart. More so, the documentation of the paintings themselves is handled ambiguously: in this article the paintings are shown as illustrating figures, substituting the more conventional approach of letting the art work 'speak for itself'. The initially symbolic statement of signing away each painting after the session turns out to be a consequential position within a practice-led methodology. But, as noted by Anne Ring Petersen (2010a), while it is increasingly difficult to define painting's particularity, there is still a need for 'painting'. Her hesitation as to what that 'painting' might be is telling—an indication of the need to continue the debate about the role of contemporary painting in the larger art and design production. After all, there is something satisfactory about anticipating that a painting might be discarded after each session, not only because it lends the process of painting more significance, but because it reveals a change in the artist's own understanding of what painting can and cannot do.

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