

## SLIDE 1

### HOW TO WRITE A PAINTING- STEVE DUTTON

## SLIDE 2

Writing 'A'

Painting 'A'

Vanishing Point 'A'

Proposition 'A'

Text 'A'

Exhibit 'A'

Future 'A'

I take the present tense of the conference title as my cue.

*Writing* can be described as

*"a system of more or less permanent marks used to represent an utterance in such a way that it can be recovered more or less exactly without the intervention of the utterer"*<sup>1</sup>

The subject is *Writing*, the doing of, the *writing* of writing.

Oddly, the issue of writing lies at the heart of the project of artistic research, because of a curious and subtle illusion that the creation and dissemination of knowledge is that which can preferably be gained through written exegesis.

However,

*"As the most visible items of a language, scripts and orthographies are 'emotionally loaded', indicating as they do group loyalties and identities. Rather than being mere instruments of a practical nature, they are symbolic systems of great social significance which may, moreover, have profound effect on the social structure of a speech community"*<sup>2</sup>

Of all places, this is not a discussion we need to have here, suffice it to say that what some might think of as nothing less than the logic of linguistic imperialism

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<sup>1</sup> From: Daniels, Peter T. & Bright, William, *The world's writing systems*, P.3 (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1996) found on <http://www.omniglot.com/writing/definition.htm>

<sup>2</sup> Coulmas, Florian, *The Writing Systems of the World* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1991) found on <http://www.omniglot.com/writing/definition.htm>

(which makes such an illusion so potentially convincing), mistakes knowledge for knowledges (plural) and meaning for meanings and their own attendant *profound effects*.

I ask, what of the present tense of writing? Writing in a present which knows it is yet to be? A form of half-writing between an utterance and an incantation?

As if writing in the half light.

This writing-in-the-half-light might suggest an act of writing as the act of seeking or summoning something within the almost written (and the spoken), pulling something out, the latency of which is always and already some kind of 'profound effect'. A form of fetish of the yet-to-be-fully-formed.

Writing in this sense, might at least *feel* closer to reading and speaking than writing per se.

And what of a writing which shares some of its traits with comedy, writing which improvises, which enjoys slapstick, and acrobatics?

Writing in terms of artistic research might, in some instances at least, be a hybrid between an utterance and a 'speaking in tongues'. What might this difference between utterance and glossolalia mean then for an active *body of* or even *in* writing? The body as organism, (or in orgasm), a mutating body in spasms of doing and becoming as opposed to a mutated and hypostatic body of the written and the spent. A writing which is always becoming more of that something which always exceeds it, which always reaches out towards its own vanishing point until that very point reaches back up and swallows it whole in violent convulsion.

What perhaps, the late Jon Thomson, while writing of Blanchot's Space of Literature, described as the point of being 'moved by a desire for oblivion', of being 'enamoured of death.'<sup>3</sup>

Massimi writes.

*'Drop sink-holes. And I mean build them in – make them immanent to the experience. If the inside folds interactively come out, then fold the whole inside-outside interaction in again. Make a vanishing point appear, where the interaction turns back in on its own potential, and where that potential appears for itself. That could be a definition of producing an aesthetic effect'.*<sup>4</sup>

Writing, as an aesthetic effect then, writing which swallows itself up and spews itself out over and over like some Martin Creed reversed loop. A form of writing

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<sup>3</sup> Jon Thompson. (2011). Before and Beyond the Shadow. In: Akerman, N and Daly, E *The Collected writings of Jon Thomson*. London: Ridinghouse. 54.

<sup>4</sup> Brian Massumi "The Thinking-Feeling of What Happens" 1 *Inflexions* 1.1 "How is Research-Creation?" (May 2008) [www.inflexions.org](http://www.inflexions.org)

which refuses to 'dismember and disperse the human subject' (Thompson again p181).

Writing in and about movement, from the written to the spoken, from sign to image, that which dilutes what Barthes termed '*the aggressiveness of which the sign, which formed from the sad and fierce history of men, is the Pandora's box*'<sup>5</sup>

In the taking place of writing, I read and I speak, offering spoken and broken words which focus on images, in this case of two necessarily always 'incomplete' 'things' for which I have no words as yet. Things only as propositions.

Only that which is destined or predesigned to be a particular other thing can be incomplete, until the thing-ness to which is yet to become, it's ontological dwelling if you like, is fully inhabited and the first thing made invisible.

A thing but not yet *the* thing (not Blanchot's oblivion yet). A thing not yet a painting, not yet poetry, not yet art, not yet philosophy, not yet research, a thing perhaps, only as some form of comedic faith. Something not yet, and yet, still something.

So, let me re-word. Re-write.

I present spoken words, which focus on two necessarily incomplete 'paintings'. That is not to say that these paintings are not complete in themselves as things, because surely they are 'things', or at least, either they are or they will never be. But they are incomplete as 'some things', in that they are *not* paintings as such. At least, not yet. That would be an aspiration perhaps, but only in the world of words. These failures themselves are the stuff of words.

How to write a painting? Or first? Why write a painting?

Because it seems impossible. The paintings (such as they are) are written in order to write themselves out of writing, to become something other than writing, but because they are written, indeed, because they are 'writing', and not simply texts, they may never be quite paintings.

There is a Steptoe-esque<sup>6</sup> sensibility here.

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<sup>5</sup> Roland Barthes, 'The Rustle of language', Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1986 title essay.

<sup>6</sup> *Steptoe and Son* is a British sitcom written by Ray Galton and Alan Simpson about a father-and-son rag-and-bone business aired in the early 1970's. The show veered between tragedy and comedy as it charted the intergenerational conflict between father and son, and in particular the thwarted ambitions (and pretensions) of the son.

### SLIDE 3



Vortex A. Steve Dutton 2016. Ink, Graphite, glitter on Canvas. 60 cm x 80 cm

Begin with an A. The first letter, the word, which precedes what is to come, and what is yet to come is, 'A' painting.

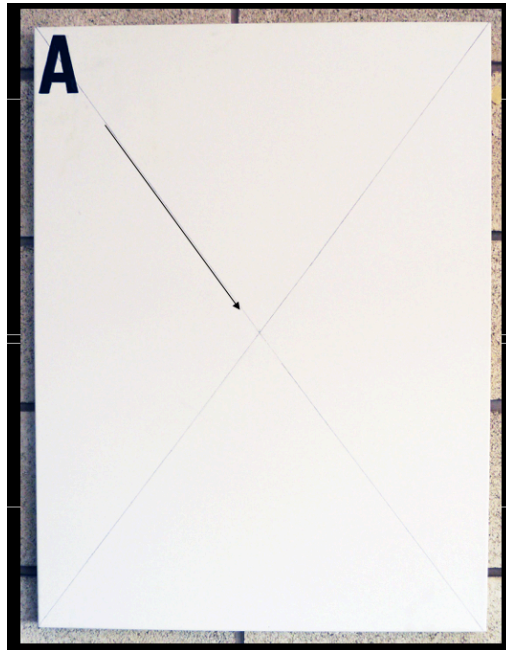
The image shows the first letter of the English alphabet, 'A' on its top left corner next to a cross or vortex or a double bisection of a primed surface. The 'A' suggests that the vortex/cross is either the exhibit itself (exhibit A), or the remaining 'text' of the sentence, which begins with 'A'.

A -X. The letter 'A', announces the object of a 'thing' into (at least) two worlds, a world of mattering and the worlds of signs.

The 'A' is a summoning to whatever follows, as if to say 'summoning itself is our transaction'.

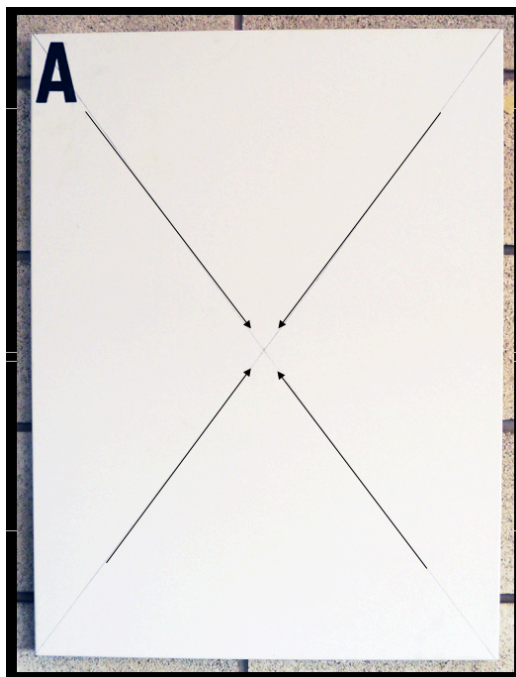
The 'A', announces the incoming 'thing', the thing that fills the vacuum created by the 'A'. There is no vacuum without the 'A', and thus no vacuum to fill.

#### SLIDE 4

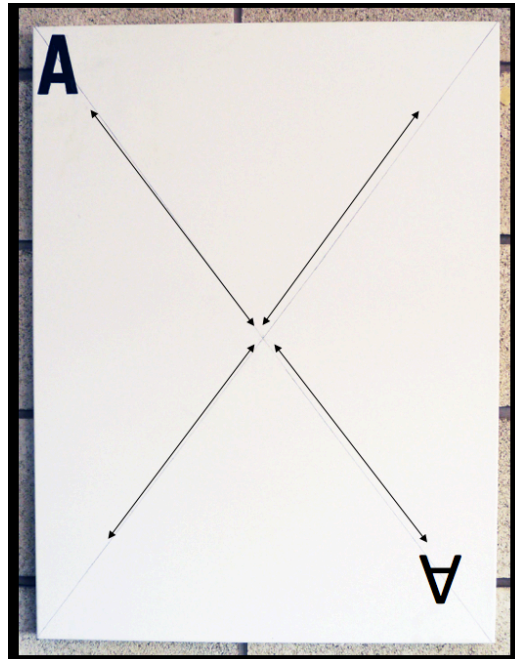


And is the 'A', the writing into the world of the painting, the image of a painting, the indefinite article to A vortex, A centre, A future, or better *A before text*?

#### SLIDE 5



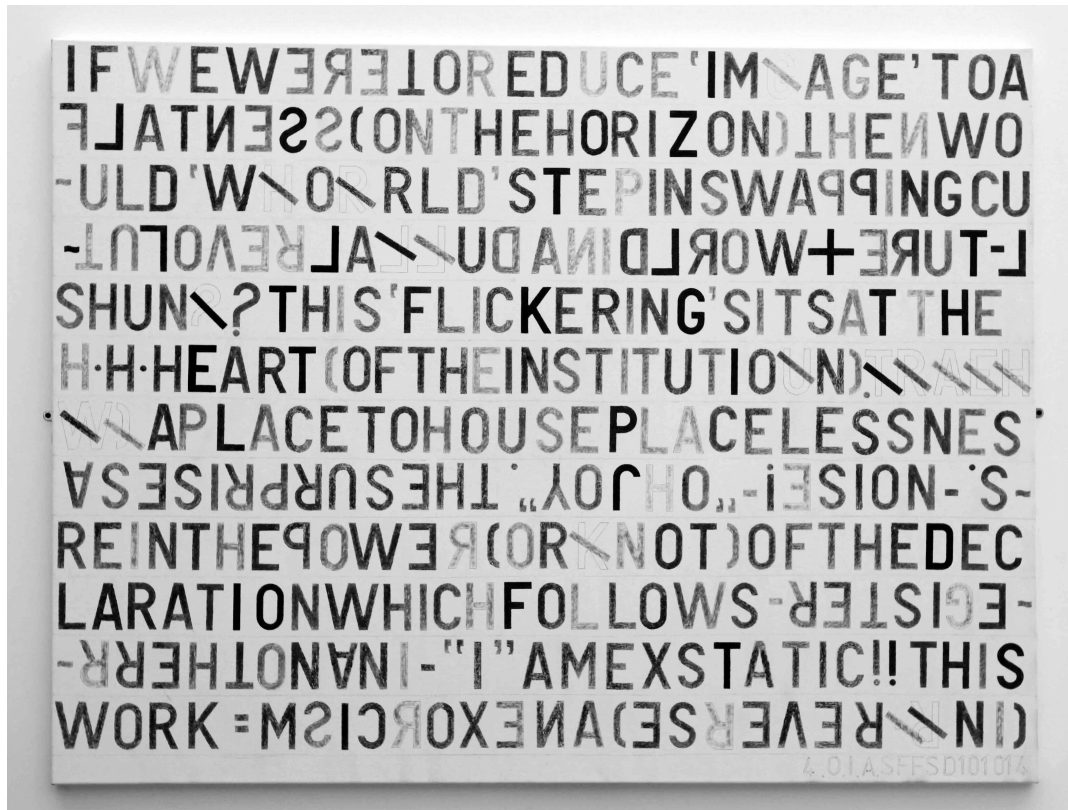
## SLIDE 6



The 'A' positions us to witness a perspective, from the outside to the inside of the vanishing point and back again, but also from the written to the not-written. From A to B for Blank.

A so-called 'writing - painting' enters into two worlds, the worlds of retinal and physical mattering and the worlds of signs. The contradiction between the two are remainders of the violence to the mind done by words alone in an impossible non -alliance.

## SLIDE 7



The production of a writing-painting. A stand-off which summons the particular potentiality located in the dynamic and fluid third meta-sphere of a transaction which embraces two ontological spheres.

The negotiation of a post-conceptual realm that collapses (or fails to collapse, by presenting its collapse) around the tortuous arguments around matters of meaning, meaninglessness, exegesis and subsequently, subjective and institutional power.

The work gains its own articulation at the cost of its own strangulation. Anything else is consolation.

Different 'voices' or 'registers' are located. Individual letters themselves are positioned up, down, and/or mirrored to get inside and behind the 'writing' in a spatial/conceptual play, in another form of writing, often losing themselves on their way, veering into malapropisms, stutters, mistakes and confessions.

At the canvas, here I am then, painting some text, then, here I am writing a text on painting a text, and then speaking a text, on writing painting, here. Having given up the ghost on presenting themselves as either text or image or indeed as presenting themselves as anything at all other than what they seem to be at any

given moment, these works then present themselves only as models of something somehow vaguely generative, but of what?

Something out of kilter and a little aimless, not yet themselves.

Writing in a half-light.

Although they are set within the limits of canvas, paint, glitter and stencil, in making them, I feel their ontological status is up for grabs as images, signs, paint, pencil and text slip, slide and pore over each other for currency. This ontological flickering is seductive and elusive, but I suspect may also hide a violence. It is precisely this erotic shimmering which is a potential for some form of rupture, which marks the *work* of the work, as the work continues to perform itself in its making.

## SLIDE 8

**THE WORK IS A SCORE PERFORMED IN THE MIND**

**THE WORLD IS A WORK PERFORMED IN THE WORDS**

**THE MIND IS A WORK PERFORMED IN THE WORLD**

This text here then is a play on the nature of the task which lies ahead, which is to say it is a declaration of what it *is*, which is precisely that which it has yet to become.

This precognition suggests that the work, the mind, the score, the world, and the word are all interwoven in the performance of something at some point unspecified in the near future. In mind of Benjamin's reading of Klee's 'Angelus Novus', we must be indifferent to a future as imagined by the present, if we are to escape the limiting and restricting nature of our own foresight.<sup>7</sup>

As aim is removed, or at least, quietened, is it possible (finally) for the things to be 'themselves' (and me to be 'myself?'). And if this is to be the case, is there a space for a form of practice/writing, which is contemporary in the sense that Boris Groys describes as a '*prolonged and potentially infinite period of delay*'<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> "A Klee painting named Angelus Novus shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress." Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History", p. 249

<sup>8</sup> Boris Groys. "Comrades of time" in *E-Flux Journal: What is Contemporary Art?*



And, as a consequence might we find ourselves asking, if there is space for a non-teleological approach to acquisition of knowledge and fetish of progress, in the form of writing's potential 'profound effect' in the present?

**SLIDE 9**

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