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LOST IN SPACE? “INVISIBLE” MARKS, ARTWORKS, AND ARTISTS

PERDIDOS EN EL ESPACIO? MARCAS “INVISIBLES”, OBRAS, Y ARTISTAS.

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Abstract

This paper addresses the issue of invisibility as relating to visual art through a discussion of my practical and theoretical research. Visual art addresses, at least partly, our sense of visual perception. For example, with regards to drawing, what is usually or traditionally visible is the mark of the artist—that is what draws the attention of the viewer. This paper investigates how the relationships between viewer, artist, artwork and space shift when the artist’s mark or action becomes almost invisible. Invisibility comes not as a result of the artist doing “nothing,” but rather as a result of carefully recreating preexisting marks on a surface. This methodology leads to the artist’s marks becoming “absorbed” by the surface or becoming indistinguishable from preexisting marks. Moreover, the artworks are not framed and, thus, they partially blend into the surrounding space. As a result, on first coming in the same space as the work, the viewers may not see the work. I propose that the partial invisibility of the artist’s marks ultimately challenges the status of artworks, space, viewers and artist. This opens a path for rethinking subjectivity and the relationship with the “other” through art—whether that other is the artist’s mark in relation to the surface and its preexisting marks, the artwork in relation to the surrounding space, the artist in relation to the viewer, or even, the self in relation to the other.

Key words: becoming, imperceptibility, invisibility, marking, matrixial subject, mimesis, practice-based research, self/other, site-specificity, subjectivity, visual art, zones of indiscernibility.

Resumen

En este artículo se aborda el tema de la invisibilidad en relación con las artes visuales a través de un análisis de mi investigación práctica y teórica. El arte visual, nos remite, al menos en parte, a nuestro sentido de la percepción visual. Por ejemplo, en lo que respecta al dibujo, lo que usualmente o tradicionalmente es visible es la marca del artista que es lo que atrae la atención del espectador. Este artículo investiga cómo las relaciones entre espectador, el artista, la obra y el espacio, varía cuando la marca o la acción del artista se vuelve casi invisible. La invisibilidad comprendida no como resultado de la no acción del artista, sino más bien como resultado de recrear cuidadosamente marcas preexistentes sobre una superficie. Esta metodología supone que las marcas del artista llegan a ser “absorbidas” por la superficie o se vuelven indistinguibles de las marcas preexistentes. Por otra parte, las obras de arte no están enmarcadas y, por lo tanto, se mezclan parcialmente en el espacio circundante. Como resultado, al encontrarse por primera vez en el mismo espacio que el trabajo, los espectadores podrían no ver la obra de arte. Propongo que la invisibilidad parcial de las marcas del artista desafía el status de las obras de arte, el espacio, el espectador y el artista. Esto abre un camino para replantear la subjetividad y la relación con el “otro” a través del arte, ya sea que el “otro” sea la marca del artista en relación a la superficie y sus marcas preexistentes, las obras de arte en relación con el espacio que lo rodea, el artista en relación con el espectador, o incluso, el ser mismo en relación con el otro.

Palabras clave: devenir, imperceptible, invisible, marcas, sujeto matricial, mimesis, la investigación basada en la práctica, el yo y el otro, site-specific art, subjetividad, artes visuales, zonas de indisponibilidad.

An invisible work is, by definition, not visible to the eye—it is a work concealed from sight. When this work falls within visual art, a seeming paradox emerges: How does one “make” an invisible artwork and how does one “view” or relate to such an artwork? This paper discusses two of my works that investigate the issue of invisibility as relating to the artist’s actions. The works employ subtle drawn and collaged marks that relate, in some way, to the appearance or character of the surface or space being marked. The artist’s time-consuming actions replicate, to some extent, features already present. As a result of this mimetic approach, the artist’s marks become confused with the surface or with other kinds of marks, such as accidental stains and scratches. They are, thus, rendered partially invisible, destabilizing the borders between mark/surface and artwork/space and creating moments of “indiscernibility” between each pair. The article argues that this “indiscernibility” ultimately challenges the status of artworks, space, viewers and artist and destabilizes the relationships between them. This destabilization may enable a different way of thinking about subjectivity and a different way of relating to an “other” through art.

Theoretical Background

Vision and visuality as sources of knowledge have been very important in Western philosophy since the time of Plato. The emphasis on vision and the primacy of visibility in Western culture has been criticized by various authors, including the feminist theorist and psychoanalyst Luce Irigaray.¹ Within visual art, the visible usually plays a crucial role. What happens, however, when there is “nothing” to be seen? There have been several attempts to challenge the privileging of the visual within art. Two important examples are the exhibitions *Voids. A Retrospective* at the Pompidou Center in 2009 and *Invisible: Art About the Unseen, 1957–2012* at the Hayward Gallery in 2012. Both exhibitions presented works that dealt with the issue of invisibility or the “nothing” to be seen. For example, *Voids* consisted of a retrospective of exhibitions that showed an empty space, museum or gallery, such as Bethan Huws’ *Haus Esters Piece* from 1993, while the Hayward exhibition included Gianni Motti’s invisible ink drawings from 1989 and Song Dong’s diary written with water which began in 1995.

This paper is specifically concerned with works that involve the notion of

“invisible” marking. Historically, in painting and drawing visibility rests with the artist’s mark. At its most basic, the mark is an area on a surface that somehow differentiates itself from that surface. It is also caused or made by something or someone. In the case of visual art, the marks are the result of the artist’s actions and they are usually what the viewers are interested in seeing. Traditionally, the marks of the artist differentiate themselves from the surface, which, in turn, forms the “other” of the mark, that in relation to which the mark is positioned². Feminist theorists, such as Griselda Pollock, Bracha Ettinger and Alison Rowley, have identified and criticized the historical emphasis on visibility, on the artist’s mark, and on the opposition figure/ground, which depends on the presence or absence of a mark, within specific art practices³. It is important to note that the artist’s mark, or evidence of the artist’s hand, has fluctuated in importance over time. For example, it might have been a key component in the work of the Abstract Expressionists but it was subsequently challenged and almost completely eliminated from the work of Minimalist artists, such as Donald Judd (Buskirk, 2003)⁴. It was also questioned in the works of Pop Artists, such as Andy Warhol and Roy Lichtenstein who directly used or emulated mechanical processes of image making.

The two works discussed in this article focus on the artist’s mark and investigate its limits with regards to invisibility. This invisibility comes not as a result of the artist doing “nothing,” but rather as a result of carefully recreating preexisting marks on a surface. As such, these works are found at a quandary. On the one hand, they are expected to offer some form of visual experience, being visual art. On the other hand, they approach a kind of invisibility or indiscernibility. They are not exactly anti-visual but rather operate near the limits of vision, turning vision into the equivalent of a “whisper” perhaps, and questioning the status of artwork, space, artist and viewer, as I argue later in the paper.

Methodology and works

The works discussed in this article form part of a research project that incorporates both art practice and theory. Within this project, artistic practice is addressed as research in that it involves an investigative process of making art that aims to examine different ways of seeing and

understanding. The knowledge or theory produced by artworks is not necessarily written but realized through the works. It is the result of ideas worked through matter, a kind of “matrixial theory,” as Katy MacLeod (2000) has called it, that combines ideas, matter, form and existing theory. This type of “theory” demonstrates the intellectuality of making.

The specific methodology adopted for the two works discussed here revolves around the use of marks, or ways of “marking,” that, somehow, relate to the surface being marked. The marks may relate to the surface’s appearance, its everyday use or its history. The surface, in each case, forms part of a space: a wall in a studio inhabited during a residency and the floor of a gallery space in which work was shown. The surfaces to be marked and the way of marking were not predetermined but rather “surfaced” after spending a few days within each space. For a work at the Stonehouse Residency for Contemporary Arts, completed in 2010, I drew over existing paint stains on a wall in the studio. Using colored pencils, I drew lines through the paint stains, following the texture of the wall. In a collage at Tenderpixel Gallery, completed in 2011, I covered big scratches on the floor with pieces of contact paper that I cut to match the shapes of the scratches⁵. The intimate relationship between mark and surface in these two works, becomes the starting point for an investigation into invisibility in visual art and its implications for the artist, artwork, space and viewer. Moreover, the emphasis on and close attention to the surface comes as a challenge to theorizations and practices that privilege the artist’s mark or action over other elements involved in the work, specifically the surface that is marked and the space in which the work is shown.

Experiencing “Invisibility”

The Artist: In the Making

June–July 2010. As part of a residency, I spent almost three weeks in a chicken coop turned studio, on the mountains of Miramonte in California. The first few days were spent studying the space: the colors, textures, and materials. On one wall, a previous resident had been making a painting using red and black paint. The painting was now gone but the space around

it was demarcated by paint marks. These were painted over with white paint, probably to prepare the space for its next resident. They were still, however, faintly visible. These traces eventually presented themselves as a potential drawing. I began drawing over the preexisting marks, using red and black colored pencils, the same colors as the existing stains. The outline of the drawing was dictated by the old paint marks. Within each area, I drew lines, following the texture of the wall. In a sense, my drawing recreated the faint stains, making them somewhat more visible. I worked centimeters from the surface, sometimes standing, sometimes sitting or standing on a chair, sometimes sitting on the floor. My position depended on the stains’ position.

As I was working on the drawing, confusion arose between the drawn marks and the preexisting stains. From a distance of about one and a half meters away, the marks and stains were hard to differentiate. I saw what I thought was a stain and approached to mark it only to realize that I had already drawn over that region. Even if I could see my marks from close by, whenever I tried to step back and look at the whole piece, I would lose some of them. The attempt to get a complete view resulted in the image partially escaping vision. Because of the limited time at the residency, I did not draw over every single stain, thus, the final piece consisted of both drawn-over and untouched stains.

August 2011. In 2011, I curated a group exhibition at Tenderpixel Gallery. The works exhibited involved interventions on found or preexisting objects. As part of my intervention, I covered scratches on the floor of the gallery with pieces of contact paper that I cut to match the shapes of the scratches. The floor was made up of wooden planks that were full of scratches, probably caused by people moving furniture and artworks over the years. I chose a contact paper design that approximated the gallery floor, both in terms of color and pattern. I worked on the floor, “crawling” from plank to plank, identifying scratches (only the most prominent ones), tracing over each one, cutting the contact paper according to the tracing, and sticking it over the scratch. The process took two full days. My work, in a sense, partially “repaired” the old floor.

Similarly to the wall drawing, the collaged pieces partially blended into the floor. From across the room, I could only faintly make out the covered



Figure 2. Marina Kassianidou: Untitled, 2010, colored pencils on wall 220x270cm, Miramonte, CA, USA, Stonehouse Residency for the Contemporary Arts.



Figure 1. Studio at Stonehouse Residency for the Contemporary Arts, Miramonte, CA, USA.

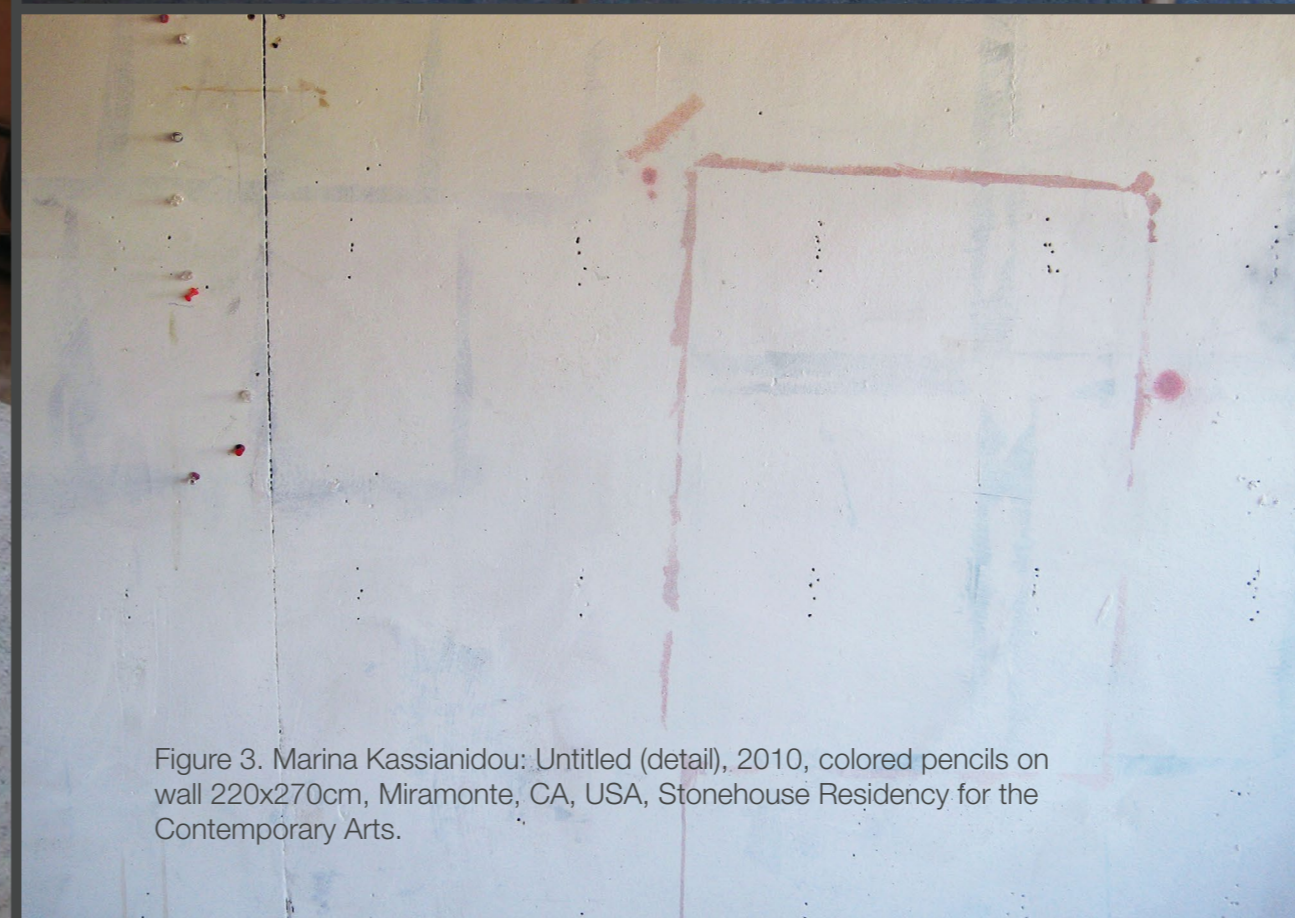


Figure 3. Marina Kassianidou: Untitled (detail), 2010, colored pencils on wall 220x270cm, Miramonte, CA, USA, Stonehouse Residency for the Contemporary Arts.

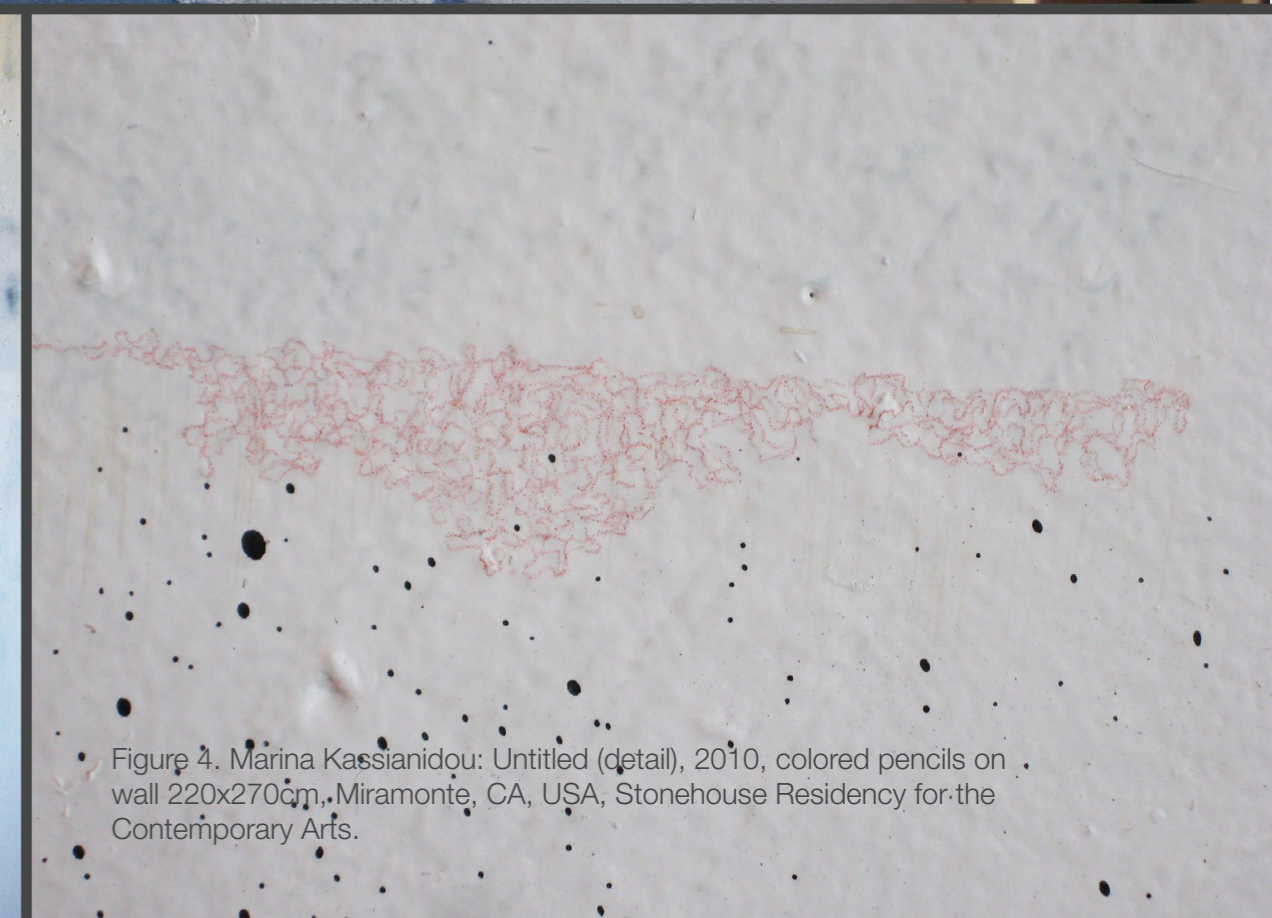


Figure 4. Marina Kassianidou: Untitled (detail), 2010, colored pencils on wall 220x270cm, Miramonte, CA, USA, Stonehouse Residency for the Contemporary Arts.



Figure 5. Marina Kassianidou: Untitled (detail), 2011, contact paper on floor
460x376cm, London, TENDERPIXEL.



Figure 6. Marina Kassianidou: Untitled (detail), 2011, contact paper on floor 460x376cm, London, TENDERPIXEL.



Figure 7. Marina Kassianidou: Untitled (detail), 2011, contact paper on floor 460x376cm, London, TENDERPIXEL.

scratches on the other end, even though the space was rather small. The contact paper surface had a satin finish to it that the wooden floor did not have, thus, as I moved around the space changes in light made some strips of contact paper more discernible.

The Viewer: While “Viewing”

June–July 2010. During the three weeks I worked in the Stonehouse studio, other artists would occasionally come into the studio to see what I was doing.⁶ Since they did not know that I was working on a wall drawing, they thought I was not doing anything. When they eventually voiced their confusion, I told

them about the wall drawing. This led them to occasionally checking all of the studio walls to find out if I had done any other drawings (resident artists, personal communication, June–July, 2010). During the open studio event, at the end of the residency, several viewers initially assumed that nothing was shown in the space. Others walked around in an attempt to find or “discover” the work. Those that happened to walk very close to the wall eventually noticed the drawn marks. Once again, this led them to study all the other walls closely to find any remaining hidden drawings (viewers, personal communication, July 3, 2010).

August–September 2011. In the case of the floor collage at Tenderpixel Gallery, which was shown as part of a group exhibition, viewers walked around the space looking at the other works, usually without noticing the floor collage at first. A number on the printed exhibition plan, which showed where works were displayed, indicated the presence of something on the floor of the gallery. That something was very subtle and not easily visible at first, a fact that became clear during the exhibition. During the private view, several people asked where my piece was. I would point to the floor at which point they would see the collaged pieces. Some people thought that the collage was at a specific place and did not immediately realize that it covered the whole floor. For others, the collage eventually became all they could see since it took over the whole floor (viewers, personal communication, August 11, 2011).

Analyzing “Invisibility”

Mimesis, Zones of Indiscernibility and Becomings

In the two works discussed above, the artist’s marks “follow” each surface quite closely, revealing a mimetic tendency. The artist’s marks, in a sense, mime preexisting features of the surface. The drawn marks on the wall at Stonehouse mime the shapes and color of the preexisting paint stains as well as the rough texture of the wall. The drawing comes as a repetition, recreating, in a way, what is already there. The collaged pieces of contact paper on Tenderpixel’s floor, mime the shapes of existing scratches as well as the colors and patterns of the wooden planks. The chosen contact paper

itself mimics wood by essentially being a processed image of wood printed endlessly in rolls.

Mimesis itself, of course, does not necessarily imply invisibility. Any attempt to try and define mimesis accurately is difficult or even undesirable, as Gunter Gebauer and Christoph Wulf (1995) suggest. According to Gebauer and Wulf, mimesis is “a highly complex structure in which an entire range of conditions coincide” (p. 309), a structure that is heterogeneous and can only be described through its various and varied dimensions. Gebauer and Wulf go on to discuss these dimensions. The dimension that most obviously relates to the works discussed here is that of reference: something that mimes is, in effect, establishing a reference to that which it mimes (Gebauer & Wulf, 1995). This mimetic reference generates correspondences and similarities between what is mimed and the mimesis (Gebauer & Wulf, 1995).

The relationship between mimesis and partial invisibility is explored by Roger Caillois in his essay “Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia” (1984)⁷. In this essay, Caillois focuses on the distinction between an organism and its surroundings. He describes organisms that mimic their environment, partially blending into it. For example, he discusses the Kallima butterflies which come to resemble the specific types of bush that they frequent (Caillois, 1984). In the case of the Kallima, “imitation is pushed to the smallest details: indeed, the wings bear gray-green spots simulating the mold of lichens and glistening surfaces that give them the look of torn and perforated leaves” (p. 22). The butterflies, thus, “become” leaves on the bushes, rendering themselves, as actual living butterflies, “invisible.” The “invisibility” of the organisms, Caillois discusses, comes about precisely due to their tendency to mimic their specific environment. It is, thus, a combination of mimicking something and situating oneself, as the mimic, over or next to what one mimics. Through mimicry and placement, the organisms blend into their environment/background, becoming continuous with it.

A similar situation occurs with the works discussed here. The artist’s marks not only mime preexisting stains and scratches but are also placed over and next to these prior marks. Thus, the artist’s marks become partially lost in the surface. From a distance, the drawn marks on the wall look like

actual stains. In the case of the floor collage, the similarity between the contact paper and the wooden floor results in the partial absorption of the contact paper strips by the floor. The collaged strips can be mistaken for real wood or for scratches and stains since the old floor is full of these. The similarity of the various kinds of marks and their physical closeness lead to visual confusion. In both works, instead of standing out and asserting their difference from the surface, the artist's marks become part of the surface, continuous with it and with its preexisting marks. They, thus, become partially invisible since they are not always visible as what they truly are⁸.

The continuity between mark and surface in these works can be further conceptualized using the idea of zones of indiscernibility developed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. In *What is Philosophy?* (1994) Deleuze and Guattari discuss zones of indiscernibility with respect to concepts. Every concept consists of components, which may potentially be seen as other concepts (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994). Within each concept, the components are distinct and heterogeneous, but, at the same time, inseparable (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994). According to Deleuze and Guattari (1994), each component "partially overlaps, has a zone of neighborhood [*zone de voisinage*], or a threshold of indiscernibility, with another one" (p. 19). Even though the components of each concept remain distinct, "something passes from one to the other, something that is undecidable between them" (pp. 19–20). There is, thus, "an area *ab* that belongs to both *a* and *b*, where *a* and *b* 'become' indiscernible" (p. 20). A zone of indiscernibility, then, involves both a partial overlap and an interchange between distinct terms. In her analysis of the concept of zones of indiscernibility, Erinn Cunniff Gilson (2007) clarifies that what passes between the terms is not actually transferred from one to the other but is shared by both. The element that is shared is "something imperceptible and indistinguishable in a quality, a form, or a statement—it is something sub-individual" (Gilson, 2007, pp. 100–101).

The partial overlap between the terms leads to their temporary suspension. A situation is created where the terms "endlessly reach that point that immediately precedes their natural differentiation," thus, endlessly remaining just on the brink of differentiating (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p. 173). According to Deleuze and Guattari (1994), a zone of indiscernibility is a

place of becoming since it involves a passage or interchange between terms. In this zone, one term is in the process of becoming the other. Deleuze and Guattari insist that becoming is not the same as imitating or identifying with something other. Becoming cannot be reduced to a matter of resemblance "because becoming operates at a sub-individual level through affects, capacities, imperceptible movements, and intensities" (Gilson, 2007, p. 101)⁹. Moreover, becoming is always double—"that which one becomes becomes no less than the one that becomes" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004, p. 336). Of course, in the process of becoming, one does not actually turn into something other but rather is constantly becoming-other—there is no beginning or end but an in-between. Becoming "constitutes a zone of proximity and indiscernibility, a no-man's-land, a nonlocalizable relation sweeping up the two distant or contiguous points, carrying one into the proximity of the other" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004, pp. 323–324). The process is one of resonance and of change. As Deleuze and Guattari (2004) write, "becoming produces nothing other than itself" (p. 262).

Deleuze and Guattari's discussion enables a move from mimesis to indiscernibility and becoming. When discussing art, Deleuze and Guattari (2004) suggest that what starts out as a "representation" or imitation, enters into a becoming. The works discussed in this article start out by following a mimetic approach but result in a kind of continuity between mark and surface and between different types of marks, making it difficult at times to differentiate between them. Clearly, the marks and the surface are not the same thing nor can anyone claim that the drawn or collaged marks are the same as the preexisting stains and scratches. The stains and scratches are accidental marks, caused by people who were present in those spaces in the past. The drawn and collaged marks, on the other hand, have been made intentionally and carefully. They required a long time and intense concentration on the part of the artist. In terms of motivation, method of making, and materials used, the two types of marks are not the same. There is, however, a perceived continuity or proximity between them, leading to moments when they *appear* to conflate.

In the works discussed here, zones of indiscernibility, as theorized by Deleuze and Guattari, emerge between different types of marks and between marks and surfaces. Within these zones, marks almost become

surface or almost become another type of mark. At first, the viewers may not notice the artist's marks or, even if they do see something, they may think they are looking at a stain or part of the floor. The moment of recognition is delayed. Of course, recognition eventually comes when the marks of the artist become visible to the viewers as what they really are. The viewers may walk close to the wall and see the drawing or they may notice that something is not quite right about the floor and realize that the artist has intervened. The zones of indiscernibility may re-emerge as the viewers step back again. The difference now is that the viewers are aware of the existence of the drawing or collage. This leads to a different kind of confusion that involves the viewers seeing stains and scratches and mistaking them for drawn or collaged marks. Thus, confusion is somehow double. From some distance away, the artist's marks may appear to be stains and scratches and, at the same time, stains and scratches may be perceived as drawings and collages. The two types of mark overlap and become partially indiscernible. Both the artist's marks and the surface with its preexisting marks are partially transformed through their encounter.

These zones of indiscernibility between what the artist did and what was already there render the works partially invisible, preventing the viewers from immediately knowing what they are looking at or even what it is they are supposed to be looking at. The works could amount to a form of becoming-imperceptible. Becoming-imperceptible is, according to Deleuze and Guattari (2004), "the immanent end of becoming" (p. 308). It can mean becoming-everybody/everything, making a world by finding one's proximities, or becoming an abstract line or trait "in order to find one's zone of indiscernibility with other traits" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004, p. 309). Deleuze and Guattari (2004) discuss the example of a fish, which "is crisscrossed by abstract lines that resemble nothing, that do not even follow its organic divisions; but thus disorganized, disarticulated, it worlds with the lines of a rock, sand and plants, becoming imperceptible" (pp. 308-309). Similarly, the artist's marks/actions in the works discussed here become-imperceptible by becoming a continuation of the space and its preexisting marks—the works "world" with the space.

The Initial Marks

Invisibility comes into the two works on another level as well. In some ways, invisibility is already inherent within the original marks to be recreated—the leftover paint stains on the wall and the scratches on the floor.

These marks are leftovers of an activity. In fact, these leftover marks form an index. An index, as Rosalind Krauss (1977) writes, is a "type of sign which arises as the physical manifestation of a cause, of which traces, imprints, and clues are examples" (p. 59). The paint marks on the wall at Stonehouse are traces of the activity of painting and the scratches on the floor of Tenderpixel Gallery are traces of the activity of moving objects in space. The marks are leftovers of people and objects that were there in the past but are no longer there, a fact nicely signified by the "unmarked" rectangular section on the wall at Stonehouse, where the painting a past resident artist was working on once hung. There is an element then attached to these marks—what caused them—that is absent and, thus, partially invisible.

Yet one could argue that what is present—the traces of the activity, the actual marks—is still partially invisible. The specific marks recreated in the works discussed here, are usually overlooked. Paint stains on a wall in an artist's studio do not particularly stand out, especially if they have been painted over with white paint so that they are only faintly visible. Scratches on an old wooden floor, which is actually full of scratches and stains, are nothing special or noteworthy. These specific marks are partially invisible by nature since they do not ordinarily capture the attention of the onlooker. They recede into the background, becoming part of the space. They are also not meant to be seen in a way a painting is meant to be seen, for example. In fact, these types of marks are most likely accidental. It was probably not the intention of the artist making the painting at the Stonehouse studio to make those marks on the wall just like it was probably not the intention of the people moving furniture, artworks or other objects to scratch the floor at Tenderpixel. These marks are the unintentional leftovers of an activity, not made to be seen by anyone.

An Issue of Framing (or Lack Thereof)

In addition to the levels of invisibility discussed in the earlier sections, yet

another level of invisibility arises that results in the continuation between the artworks and their surrounding space. The artworks discussed are not visually framed as artworks. The wall drawing is a site-specific work on a wall in a studio—it is not framed by anything other than the wall. Similarly, the floor collage takes over the whole floor of the gallery. Again, it is not framed by anything other than the actual floor. In fact, we might say that the floor collage was “framed” by being named in the list of works shown in the exhibition and by being numbered on a map that indicated where each exhibited work was found. The wall drawing, on the other hand, was presented as part of an open studio with no accompanying text and, thus, no “framing.”

In *The Truth in Painting* (1987), Jacques Derrida discusses the frame of a work of art in relation to the idea of the parergon. According to Derrida (1987), the frame, as parergon, is neither inside nor outside the work of art, “neither work (*ergon*) nor outside the work [*hors d’oeuvre*]” (p. 9). It is separated from the work of art by an inner border but, at the same time, it is separated from the wall by an outer border (Derrida, 1987). Derrida (1987) continues,

...the parergonal frame stands out against two grounds [*fonds*], but with respect to each of those two grounds, it merges [*se fond*] into the other. With respect to the work which can serve as a ground for it, it merges into the wall, and then, gradually, into the general text. With respect to the background which the general text is, it merges into the work which stands out against the general background. (p. 61)

Moreover, the presence of a parergonal frame “gives rise to the work” (Derrida, 1987, p. 9). It creates a differentiation between work and space that signals to the viewers where the work is and what exactly they should be looking at. Derrida’s text also suggests a connection between the frame and invisibility:

There is always a form on a ground, but the *parergon* is a form which has as its traditional determination not that it stands out but that it disappears, buries itself, effaces itself, melts away at the moment it deploys its greatest energy. (p. 61)

At the moment when the frame performs its function of differentiating between work and space and pointing out the work, it disappears.

If there is no frame, then there is no transition between work and environment. The two either differentiate themselves absolutely—where one ends, the other immediately begins—or they blend into each other—the differentiation between the two is unclear. If there is no frame, there is nothing to indicate which is the work or what the viewers should be focusing on. In the works discussed here, artwork and environment are continuous. The artist’s marks blend in with the surface of the wall and floor and are confused with preexisting marks, as discussed earlier. The lack of any kind of visual framing renders the artist’s actions even more invisible. A zone of indiscernibility emerges between artwork and environment, a zone in which it becomes difficult at first to definitively say whether something is an artwork or whether it just forms part of the environment. The artwork is partially “lost” in space or becomes-space, becomes-imperceptible.

In fact, with many site-specific works the question may arise as to whether something, if anything, frames them. Derrida (1987) asks this with regards to the Sistine Chapel frescoes. One suggestion might be that the work, in the sense of the actual drawing or collage, somehow slips into the role of a parergon or becomes parergonal. In the lack of framing, the work melts into the surrounding environment and partially disappears. The balance sustained by the presence of a frame, which “gives rise to the work,” is now gone and the space seeps into the work. Which begs the question, if the work (the actual drawing or collage) is parergonal, then where is the *ergon*/work/action and what gives rise to it? This issue is explored in the following sections.

“Invisibility” and Beyond

Shifting Roles and Relationships: Viewer, Artwork, Space and Artist

Having discussed the various levels of invisibility that come into play in the two works, I now turn to the potential implications this invisibility may have. If, as suggested in the previous section, the works (the actual drawing and collage) become at times parergonal, then the *ergon* (the work or the action) may also be somewhere else. I suggest that the partial invisibility of the works problematizes common notions of viewing and making. This alters the roles of the various elements involved in these processes—viewer, artwork, space, artist—and subtly shifts the relationships among them. These alterations and

shifts become part of the work.

When artworks are partially invisible, the activity of viewing is problematized. The partial invisibility of the artist's marks/actions/works makes it quite challenging for the viewers, when first entering the space, to discern what the artist actually did. In fact, the overall role of the viewers as viewers, that is, as those who look at something, is brought into question. Initially, at least, the viewers cannot fully see or identify the works. The partially invisible marks do not allow the viewers full access to a clearly visible image, which is what they may expect when coming before a drawing or collage. As such, the viewers may need to renegotiate their relationship to the work, becoming perhaps more active and attentive participants in their encounter with the work. Viewers in the same space as the wall drawing or floor collage employed movement and close and sustained looking. They walked close to the surfaces to study the marks and they even started searching for marks elsewhere in space. Thus, the actual viewing of the works cannot happen from a distance but requires the viewers to move around the space and to come very close to the surfaces. When the viewers step back again, they "lose" the artist's marks. They may see drawn marks and take them to be stains or they may see stains and think that they are drawn marks. They may see scratches from across the room and think that they are collaged marks or they may see collaged marks and think that they are scratches. There is no clear view of the works at all times. Instead, visibility and perception change as the viewers move in space.

The closeness required for the viewing of the works, draws the viewers' attention to the preexisting elements in space. The drawing at the Stonehouse studio directs the viewers' attention to the wall's surface. In order to see the drawing, the viewers find themselves so close to the wall that they cannot help but notice aspects that are usually ignored: the slightly bumpy texture of the wall, small holes created from pins and nails, old paint marks, leftover pieces of masking tape and so on. Similarly, the floor collage at Tenderpixel Gallery draws the viewers' attention to the floor. The wooden planks, the scratches, areas where planks have been replaced with newer wood, all become more visible. The usually overlooked—stains and scratches or the texture of an ordinary wall or floor—becomes visible through the works. Thus, even though the works start out as partially invisible, by drawing the viewer close, they render more visible not only themselves but the preexisting elements in the

space. The viewers are drawn into the space, close to the artist's marks and preexisting marks and, hopefully, begin to consider the potential of the space and the possible relationships between marks and surfaces and works and spaces.

Given that the viewer's attention may shift between the artist's marks and the space, it is reasonable to suggest that the works are not solely based on the artist's marks and their differentiation from everything else or on the differentiation between artwork and space. Even though the works fall within the fields of drawing and collage, they diverge from the usual mark/surface or figure/ground distinction. The partial invisibility of the artist's marks and their continuity with the surface and preexisting marks, when seen from some distance, means that we can no longer talk about the presence or absence of the artist's mark in absolute terms. Moreover, the placement of the artist's marks on a wall and floor and the lack of obvious framing, allows the works to become-space or to become-imperceptible, as suggested earlier. Instead of remaining independent and separate, the works open up to the surrounding spaces. They become-space and the spaces become-work. When seen from some distance, the works and the space are almost indistinguishable. When seen from close up, the interdependence between mark and surface and between work and space emerges. This may lead the viewers to look elsewhere in space for more "invisible" works. Thus, instead of only emphasizing the artist's marks/actions—the drawing or collage—and instead of presenting themselves as the only thing to be viewed, the works bring to the fore the relationships between what the artist did and what was already there. These relationships do not fully resolve into hierarchical oppositions. Detailed pencil drawings and carefully cut strips of contact paper coexist with accidental stains and scratches. A group of differences and similarities exists between the various marks but it does not exactly break down to fixed dichotomies. Strict differentiations, such as mark versus surface, figure versus ground, accidental stain or scratch versus constructed drawn or collaged marks are, I would suggest, difficult to fully sustain. Instead, there is partial continuity between the various elements, a continuity that may allow for a different conversation and for a working together rather than against each other.

This continuity or interdependence is manifest in the making of the works as well. In fact, the actual making of the works depends on preexisting marks

in space which “invite” possible responses by the artist and are, thus, key in bringing into existence the art pieces—in rendering them visible, in a sense. The preexisting paint marks on the wall at Stonehouse, eventually led to a wall drawing while the old scratches on the floor at Tenderpixel led to the creation of a collage. The artist based her marks/actions on what was already there. As a result, the artist’s marks, as indication of her actions, partially disappear into the surface/space. This questions the activity of making itself since the artist is “making” something that partially effaces itself. The actions of the artist/maker and, consequently, the results of the making, are difficult to see or identify at first.

This partial “disappearance” of the artist’s marks/actions, takes us back to Caillois’ essay on organisms that employ mimicry. Caillois (1984) argues that this mimicry is not a process of defense but rather a process of assimilation into the surroundings. He compares this to legendary psychasthenia, which is the disturbance between personality and space (Caillois, 1984). Schizophrenics may see space as a “devouring force” which “pursues them, encircles them, digests them” and, eventually, replaces them (Caillois, 1984, p. 30). This “replacement” results in the person feeling herself or himself “becoming space” (Caillois, 1984, p. 30), moving, in other words, from the animate towards the inanimate. Caillois (1984) calls this process “*depersonalization by assimilation to space*” (p. 30). In the works discussed here, marks performed actively and carefully are partially turned into passive matter—they become part of the surface, as if they appeared by themselves or were always there. This challenges the agency and body of the artist. The artist, as subject, almost becomes object through the near assimilation between her marks and the surface/space. In other words, the artist is no longer someone who asserts her marks/actions, presenting them for viewing.

Moreover, there is actual physical closeness involved in the making of these works—the artist has to be physically very close to the surfaces with which she is working, studying them carefully and trying to get her marks to follow the preexisting marks closely. There is also a significant time investment and physical effort. During the making, the artist is somehow absorbed by the surface. It is almost like having empathy with the surface—the artist and her marks are partially becoming that surface. It is also interesting to note that

the actual gestures or movements the artist performs are small in scale. The wall drawing requires continuous movement that is focused on a very small area for a relatively long period of time. The same is true with the making of the floor collage. There are no large or forceful gestures that emphasize movement and presence. Rather, gestures are restrained, kept small and relatively still, perhaps trying to emulate the stillness of the surfaces the artist is working with. In addition, one could suggest, as discussed earlier, that the mark the artist is making, whether drawn or collaged, acts as an index of the preexisting stain or scratch, itself also an index of the physical action that brought it into being. The artist’s mark follows and overlaps the preexisting mark, setting up a physical relationship to it. At the same time, the artist’s mark is an index of the artist herself—the physical trace left by her actions. The resulting mark is, thus, an index of a scratch or stain, an inanimate thing, and of the artist, a living being. The drawn or collaged mark becomes the meeting point of artist and surface, bringing the two together. The artist becomes surface, the surface becomes art.

Partial invisibility, then, leads to a rethinking of the role or status of artist, artwork, space and viewer and the relationships between them. The activity of making is questioned since the actions of the artist/maker and, consequently, the thing made, remain partially invisible. As a result, viewing is no longer so straightforward and the viewer is asked to work in order to try and fulfill her/his role. The ergon/work/action, then, may be found somewhere between the artist’s marks/actions and the preexisting space, between the viewer and the marks/actions/space, between artist, viewer and world.

Conceptualizing Subjectivity, Relating to an “Other”

I would like to suggest that partial invisibility and the ensuing shifting relationships between mark and surface and between viewers, artworks, spaces and artist, open a path for rethinking subjectivity and the relationship with the “other” through art—whether that other is the artist’s mark in relation to the surface and its preexisting marks, the artwork in relation to the surrounding space, the artist in relation to the viewer, or the self in relation to the world. I suggest that there emerges an overlap between self and other, yet, without the other ever being fully retrieved. To discuss this possibility, I will briefly turn to the work of feminist theorists Bracha Ettinger and Luce

Irigaray¹⁰.

Ettinger's theorization of the matrix enables a different conceptualization of subjectivity. Ettinger proposes the matrix as a supplementary signifier in the Symbolic, in addition to the phallus, and, thus, as a distinct stratum of subjectivization¹¹. She models the matrix on certain dimensions of the late stages of pregnancy¹². As Ettinger (2006) explains, the late intrauterine encounter "can serve as a model for a *shareable dimension of subjectivity* in which elements that discern one another as *non-I*, without knowing each other, co-emerge and co-inhabit a joint space, without fusion and without rejection" (p. 65). The mother and fetus are partially unknown to each other since they cannot really see each other, yet they coexist and develop together in a non-aggressive manner, without rejecting each other as wholly other or assimilating each other into themselves. Ettinger (2006) sees the "*becoming-mother* (the mother-to-be)" and the "*becoming-subject* (baby-to-be)" as co-emerging "partial-subjects" (p. 66)¹³. Each of these partial subjects has her/his own bodily and subjective borderlines, yet where these come into contact borderlinks are formed. These borderlinks become thresholds through which the partial subjects transform each other's phantasies by sharing psychic traces (Ettinger, 2006). A shared space, thus, exists between them through which the partial subjects affect each other by constantly readjusting their relationship¹⁴.

The unknown "Other" with respect to the pregnant woman is the fetus but Ettinger (1992) expands this to include many Others: "the other unknown to the *I*," "the unknown elements of the known *I*," and/or "the unknown elements of the known other" (p. 200). In the matrixial stratum of subjectivization, subjectivity becomes an encounter in which "partial subjects co-emerge and co-fade through retuning and transformations via external/internal borderlinks with-in and with-out" (Ettinger, 2006, p. 84). Ettinger calls these transformations metramorphosis. Metramorphosis transforms the borderspace between several partial subjects, allowing them to inhabit a shared space and to transform together but differently—what Ettinger (2006) calls "*differentiation-in-co-emergence*" (p. 65). Metramorphosis, then, is the "*becoming-threshold of borderlines*" (Ettinger, 1994, p. 44).¹⁵

Subjectivity within the matrixial sphere then, involves an encounter between

several partial subjects that affect each other through a shared space and transform together but differently. Metramorphosis allows this sharing by transforming borderlines into thresholds and, thus, opening up the partial subjects to each other. Within art practice, one way in which we can think of metramorphosis is as transformations that may potentially occur in the overlap or shared space between seemingly distinct elements. In the two works discussed here, a temporary but recurring partial overlap emerges between artist's mark and surface, between different types of marks, and between artworks and space, making it challenging at times to differentiate between them. These various elements are obviously not the same—the artist's marks are never turned into a stain or a scratch and the artworks do not completely disappear into space. There is never complete assimilation of these elements. Neither is there complete differentiation at all times. The various elements are not strictly "others." The surface is no longer the "other" of the mark, a painted or collaged mark is not just the "other" of an accidental stain or scratch, and the surrounding space is not simply the "other" of the artwork. Instead, they share a space between them through which they transform each other. The various elements coexist, not as separate and independent entities, but as interrelated and interdependent parts. In fact, the relationships between mark and surface, between different types of marks, and between works and space are constantly shifting. As the viewer moves in space, marks and works partially appear and disappear, existing in constant negotiation with each other and with the viewer. Moreover, if we take invisibility to be the "other" of visual art, then, in these works, the other is given a way in since the experience of making and viewing these works revolves around the partial invisibility of the artist's actions. The borderlines between "others" become thresholds, enabling encounters and partial overlaps.

If the artist is the viewer's "other," then something is partially shared between them. Aspects of the experience of making these works are partially transferred over to the experience of viewing. The confusion experienced by the artist is translated into the confusion experienced by the viewer. The physical closeness of the artist to the surface and the time taken to make these works are reflected in the physical closeness between viewer and work, as the viewer approaches to see the marks, and the time needed for that process.

Thus, the confusion experienced while making, the time of the making and the physical closeness to the surface are all transferred over to the viewing. I am not suggesting that the two experiences are the same but that some aspects of the experience of making are somehow translated into the experience of viewing—in other words, something is shared between artist and viewer.

Despite the overlaps and sharing between the various elements of the encounter, it is important to point out that the other cannot be retrieved in full but only partially. The artist's marks and the preexisting marks approach each other but never fully turn into each other. The artist and artwork are not presented as "other" for the viewing pleasure of the viewer. The viewer cannot define herself/himself as such when faced with these works, which are partially invisible. This point can be seen alongside Luce Irigaray's conceptualization of subjectivity. Irigaray (1996) calls for "a new economy of existence or being which is neither that of mastery nor that of slavery but rather of exchange with no preconstituted object" (p. 45). In order for this exchange to occur, each subject needs to accept her/his limits and recognize that the other cannot be reduced to an object or to one's self (Irigaray, 1996). Irigaray places emphasis on invisibility—the other will never be entirely visible or known and it is due to this that the other can be respected as different (Irigaray, 1996). According to Irigaray (2004), we need to recognize that "the other as other remains invisible for me and that the first gesture with respect to him, or her, is to accept and respect this invisibility; which then transforms my perception of the world" (p. 395).

The way to communicate with this other is via "reciprocal listening," which requires attentiveness and concentration (Irigaray, 1996, p. 46). Irigaray (1996) writes,

I am listening to you: I perceive what you are saying, I am attentive to it, I am attempting to understand and hear your intention. Which does not mean: I comprehend you, I know you, so I do not need to listen to you...
(p. 116)

This practice of listening emphasized by Irigaray implies a practice of engagement between two subjects, "an active practice of intersubjectivity," as Hilary Robinson (2006, p. 78) writes, that involves sharing and communication. Robinson (2006) relates this practice to the activity of viewing or experiencing

an artwork. Instead of "viewer," she suggests using the phrase "attentive audience" (Robinson, 2006, p. 78) to emphasize the attentiveness required if an artwork is to act as an intersubjective object—an object that enables some kind of communication between two subjects. The "viewer" is asked to be attentive and to "listen" closely so as to offer the artwork "the possibility of existing" (Irigaray, 1996, p. 118; Robinson, 2006). With regards to the works discussed here, the viewing experience is converted to the equivalent of listening to a whisper. The works do not announce themselves present but rather require to be found. The viewers are requested to be attentive and seek out the works, engage with them, and *give* them the possibility of surfacing.

In the end, making and viewing these works perhaps suggests a different way of existing in the world. The artist works with the world, performing subtle interventions that do not resolve to full assimilation or rejection. Through these subtle interventions, artist and artwork become-imperceptible. This partial invisibility or imperceptibility involves challenging boundaries and taking the risk of "becoming indiscernable as a social subject, and unsettling a coherent sense of personal self" (Lorraine, 1999, p. 183). Taking these risks is worth it because becoming-imperceptible also involves an opening up to the world, which could result in new forms of living (Lorraine, 1999). As Tamsin Lorraine (1999) writes, when becoming-imperceptible "instead of excluding the world in order to maintain a determinate organization of self" (p. 183), one opens up to the world, transforming the world as well as becoming transformed by it. The potential of becoming-imperceptible, or of invisibility within visual art practice, may be suggested by the fact that the two works are still there, in the spaces in which they were made. They have not been painted over or removed precisely because they can coexist with other works that are brought into the space. They are still there for viewers to find. The viewers that enter the space will encounter a world that cannot be fully known or owned. They will then be asked to open up to this world and become actively involved in it, in an attempt to get to know it.

Conclusion

The two works discussed in this paper are partially invisible. This invisibility results from the partial assimilation of the artist's marks into the surface and, following from that, from the partial "loss" of the artworks into the

surrounding space. Thus, when the viewer enters the space in which the works are found, she or he may not see the work. Even if the viewer sees the work, she or he may mistake it for something else, a stain on the wall or a scratch on the floor. As a result of this partial invisibility or “loss,” the activities of making and viewing are questioned, and the status of artwork, space, artist and viewer, as well as the relationships between them, are destabilized. The artworks are not solely based on the artist’s marks/actions or on their differentiation from the surrounding space. Instead, artworks and spaces coexist in a non-oppositional and non-hierarchical relation, bringing attention to the overlap between them. The artist’s marks/actions partially disappear, leading to the partial withdrawal of the artist herself. Finally, the viewers need to renegotiate their relationship to the work—they need to look for the work, approach it and be attentive to it.

As I have suggested, partial invisibility and the ensuing shifting relationships between mark and surface and between viewers, artworks, spaces and artist, open a path for rethinking subjectivity and the relationship with the “other” through art. The overlap between seemingly distinct elements, suggests an overlap between self and other. Making and viewing become encounters between others, encounters that lead to the partial transformation of all participating elements. These others that encounter each other cannot be fully retrieved but can be approached and attentively “listened to.” Going back to the two artworks discussed here, their partial invisibility or imperceptibility may suggest, at least temporarily, a way of existing in the world, a way of making and/or viewing, that involves opening up, attending to the world, allowing it in, and, eventually, transforming *with it*.

Notes

1 See, for example, Jay (1993), especially chapter 9, for a discussion of Irigaray’s critique of vision.

2 The term “other” is based on the Lacanian Other as that which structures the subject’s coming into existence—that in relation to which the subject is positioned. See, for example, Lacan (2001).

3 See, for example, Pollock (1996), specifically pages 245–261, Ettinger (2006), and Rowley (2007), specifically pages 34–44.

4 Interestingly, according to Buskirk (2003), the removal of the artist’s hand does not in fact lessen the importance of artistic authorship but makes the connection between work and artist more significant.

5 Contact paper, also called fablon, is an adhesive surface used as lining or covering, usually for shelves. It has a patterned surface on one side.

6 This was something I discovered towards the end of my residency. It was also quite normal since the studios were all joined together. I myself often went into the other artists’ studios to see what they were working on.

7 According to Gebauer and Wulf (1995), the differentiation between the terms “mimesis” and “mimicry” relates to intentionality. Mimesis is a term used to refer to mimetic activities performed intentionally and consciously, which might relate to pleasure, pedagogy etc., something that only human beings can do (Gebauer & Wulf, 1995). Mimicry, on the other hand, refers to the mimetic activities of animals. Moreover, mimicry is confined to a physical relation whereas mimesis can mean a mental relation as well (Gebauer & Wulf, 1995).

8 For further discussion on this issue and for further examples, see Kassianidou (2012), which discusses additional works.

9 Intensity is difference that tends to “deny or to cancel itself out” (Deleuze, 2004, p. 281).

10 This section points towards a different way of thinking about invisibility in relation to subjectivity. The ideas introduced here form part of my current PhD research and will be developed fully in my dissertation.

11 According to Jacques Lacan, the Symbolic indicates the preexisting structures, including language, into which a child will eventually enter. The Lacanian phallus is a privileged signifier—the signifier of the desire of the Other. As Ettinger (1992) writes, the phallus is “the signifier of the lost unity between the mother and the child, and is related to the lost or impossible object of desire” (p. 189). For further discussion of these ideas see Lacan (2001). For a critique of the phallus as a symbol see Ettinger (1992, 1994, 2006) and Irigaray (1985).

12 Ettinger always clarifies that she is dealing with the late stages of pregnancy, when the fetus is at a post-mature stage and when it is assumed to have a phantasy life. On this issue, see Ettinger (2006), specifically page 219, note 46.

13 The matrixial “becoming,” as Ettinger notes, relates to but also deviates from Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of “becoming” (Ettinger is specifically referring to Deleuze and Guattari’s “becoming-woman”). According to Ettinger, “becoming-woman” is assembled in an infinite arena while the matrixial “becoming” is a “becoming-in-jointness,” oriented by the several (Ettinger, 2006, p. 220, note 78).

14 For extensive analysis of Ettinger’s writings see, for example, Pollock (2006).

15 Metramorphosis is different to metamorphosis in that the nature of the parts participating in metramorphosis is still somehow present throughout the transformation. Metramorphosis, in other words, does not involve replacement or elimination. It, thus, leads to plurality rather than unity or duality. On this issue, see Huhn (1993).

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