Simon Harris
Abstract submission for Fine art research network symposium 2016
Title of research: Deleuze and painting: Re-thinking the formal

I am a painter who studied for both my under-graduate (2004) and post-graduate (2007) practice fine art based degrees at the University of Wolverhampton. The paper I intend to present will address my recent PhD practice based research also at the University of Wolverhampton. The initial aim of my research developed out of an interest in what appeared to be a clear binary distinction between the structure and understanding of an abstract and a figurative picture plane. Specifically, that a figurative picture plane could achieve pictorial depth through Cartesian perspective. Conversely, an abstract picture plane has been initially flattened and was now increasingly expanding into literal space. This expansion was an observed phenomenon that wasn’t immersive but rather the passive perception of the continuation of actual space and in doing so was losing its previous immersive pictorial space. I mean an active pictorial plane in painting. By ‘active’ I am interested in creating a traditional pictorial space in painting - image painted on canvas – that has the potential to accommodate a more active viewer.

The research methodology employed within the research, and will be discussed in the paper, develops key concepts from Gilles Deleuze’s philosophical writings in order to establish a Deleuzian investigative methodology. The key concepts, which are employed as system of methods, within the investigative methodology are: The Fold; Smooth and Striated space in relation to Beauty and Sublime; The Monad; and The Virtual. A central premise of the research, both practically as a studio investigation in painting and theoretically, explores the potential of the internal pictorial plane of painting becoming a virtual, complex and plural space more akin to the cinematic. Giles Deleuze’s concept of ‘The Fold’ is at the core of the research and provides a method of thinking through a studio painting practice that might reactivate painterly, abstract and pictorial space for a contemporary audience.

It is important that the methodology is understood as a system of methods that allow an interlinking structure to be employed within the studio. The implication is that within the studio the painter is engaged in the development of a distinct structure of questioning of why or what is painting doing? What changed/altered subjectivity can be brought forth, within, upon, and of the surface of painting? What is allowed? What is not allowed? Subsequently finding permission.

I will discuss in detail the final painting titled ‘Something about now: Now about something’ made during the research period in relation to these ideas. I will discuss the shift in thinking and making evidenced between the start of the research, and the special investigation undertaken in a project which explored the pictorial potential of Johannes Vermeer’s ‘Girl with a Pearl Earring’ and the understanding of Deleuze’s notion of the ‘figural’ as a concept making the final work.