UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

600 YEARS OF COLOURED MUD:
IN DEFENSE OF PAINTING IN THE DIGITAL AGE

A Written Accompaniment to the Thesis Exhibition
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ABSTRACT

> The images of nature, at any rate, are not conventional
> signs, like the words of human language, but show a real
> visual resemblance, not only to our eyes or our culture but
> also to birds or beasts.
>
> Ernst Gombrich[1]

Imagery, like words or sounds, communicates meaning. Over time, and as the cultural fabric of context is simultaneously woven and unravels, so shifts the configuration of interpretation. The purpose of this paper is to address this topic, and specifically by comparing and contrasting two modes of image production, that of painting and digital technology. As is explained in the introduction, this text is not a direct address of the paintings comprising my thesis exhibition. Rather, I have deliberately employed a somewhat unorthodox approach, in order to address a number of issues to which I have assiduously concerned myself over the course of the past two years. My intent is for the reader to be able to draw connections amongst concepts I have written here, and what I have painted there. However, and although I have stated that both written and the visual are envoys of meaning, they are not equally languages, or at least not in the same sense. And it is this heterogeneous thread I wish to scrutinize and explain, in an effort to better comprehend the weave that is our present condition.

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[1] This is a quote which Rosalind E. Krauss uses at the beginning of her essay entitled "The Blink Of an Eye," David Carroll, editor, *The States of Theory: History, Art, and Critical Discourse* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990) pp 175-200.

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Acknowledgements

Over the course of the past century however, and through the filter of hindsight, we have come to realize that in terms of physiognomy there is more to identity than what merely meets the eye. In regards to our present situation, this could very well lead one to ruminate as to what will be revealed of our current representational models after having been posthumously sifted. For it is one of the shortcomings of historical immediacy that we are unable to see beyond the present enthusiastic application of a number of contiguous perspectives, such as the present enthusiasm for artificial intelligence. Only over time will the grade of some present contextual outlooks become more clearly revealed.

The following text is an attempt to more squarely identify some of the present day characteristics of both painting and digital technology. As will become evident, it is a treatise securely linked to a premise whereas paintings are referred to as the *face of the body*. To picture in this manner is to transfigure the body into a two-dimensional visual field. The painter, whose identity as *being* and *self* are linked to the actions and perceptions of her or his own body - something intermingled with the mirrored sagacity of the faces of others - is clearly a social creature. This being the case, it only follows that an identity based upon the facial visage of others is an extensive and manifest form of intimate indication, and not merely contingent upon those one wishes, for what ever reasons, to recognize.

With this in mind - and in terms of acknowledging those who have aided my own efforts to drag my identity into its latest configuration - I suppose that if I am true, I would have to acknowledge every person with whom I have had dealings. Such exchanges would understandably range from that of fondness to the avoidance of, or inevitable, confrontations. Therefore, and particularly over the course of the past two years, I have made efforts to accept the fact that my distinctiveness is somewhat subordinate upon the irrevocable fact that everywhere I look there are mirrors. This is an issue of embodiment that has helped to further substantiate my belief that we are clearly as much found, as we are created.

I am indebted to the members of my graduate committee, some of who I may have not encountered on a regular basis, but in their own peculiar ways had on occasion certainly left me with questions in which I could marinate. Although our discussions frequently extended beyond the scope of my own studio endeavors, or art in general, I have learned a great deal from associations with Bill Laing, Peter Deacon, and John Hall. I want to extend my appreciation for any efforts they may have made on my behalf. I am especially gratefull to Professor Paul Woodrow, whose perceptive zest for art, people, and the connection between the two has without doubt contributed to a considerable transformation of my own views about both painting and life. The culmination of the discussions, disagreements and observations I have shared with him have helped to confirm that the best

path for me is to follow is that of trusting in my own judgments. For that alone I am truly gratefull.

Last but certainly not least, I want to thank someone who on occasion put up with Hegel at seven in the morning, or my frustrations with institutional politics at midnight. It might have been Kipling who suggested that "If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster and treat those two impostors just the same...," but it was Kathie who was my companion while I tried, and sometimes failed, to do so.

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Painting Myself out
of a Corner

The problem is not the object in the picture, but picture-as-object. And the question what the artist is playing with - a chair, a cube or a human face - is quite simply a non-issue.

George Baselitz

The power of the artist is to show what could be, as if it easily were.

Arthur C. Danto

I believe that nothing can be more abstract, more unreal, than what we see.

Giorgio Morandi
Dialogues

Rethinking Painting

In the course of an interview in 1958, the Italian painter Giorgio Morandi
was asked how he would advise younger painters.[2] Would he advocate
"non-objective art" or figurative representations? Morandi responded by
stating that when he was young he never felt compelled to ask for such
advice, citing his best instruction being that of studying pictures
themselves; something he considered of enormous value to an artist's
queries if formulated properly. Referring to the younger artists of his
generation, this modest painter simply expressed that he could be of little
support, since he has always valued the privacy and freedom of the artist.
Besides, he added

> [T]hose younger painters of today, who really deserve this
> appellation as well as our attention would refuse, quite
> properly, to accept any gratuitous advice of the kind that
> [the interviewer] seem[ed] to suggest.[3]

Morandi lived his entire life in the provincial city of Bologna. It is highly
unlikely that he ever saw anything such as computer terminal before he
died in 1964. In the thirty odd years which have elapsed since then, the
Western world has experienced both considerable technological

[2] Edouard Roditi, *Dialogues: Conversations with European Artists at Mid-Century* (London: Lund Humphries, 1990) pp 104-108.
[3] Roditi, p 107.

advancements and the accompanying social formations. In terms of art's

status in an ever changing world however, his sentiments regarding the

potential direction of future painters are as poignant as they are poetic.

According to the man who conducted this interview, Edouard Roiti,

Morandi was an idiosyncratic figure. He was the practitioner of a vanishing

art, one that was neither too aristocratic nor public, and

> Like the French Impressionists, he remained committed to
> the standards and tastes of a stable middle class... In our age
> of mass culture, an old-world charm, in fact a certain
> informal courtliness about his modesty and discretion,
> characterized Morandi's way of life, [and] those of a
> vanishing class.[4]

Robert Hughes has referred to Morandi as a *seraphic misfit* who had

rejected the art world as a system - a position that in our present market-

driven society seems "noble and perhaps inimitable."[5] This is in part due to

the fact that the extensive transfiguration of image production since 1964

is the world Morandi's young painters have inherited. Moreover, the mass

culture that Roditi refers to has itself amplified into what has come to be

known as the information or digital age. As a direct consequence, not only

has the approach to painting that Morandi himself practiced become an

artform increasingly identified with that of a nostalgic past, but the entire

artistic activity of painting has come to settle in a unprecedented

predicament.

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[4] Roditi, p 104.

[5] Robert Hughes, "Giorgio Morandi," *Nothing if Not Critical* (New York: Knopf, 1990) p 184.

Although some would strongly argue otherwise, painting as a representational mode no longer possesses the same status it had before the turn of the century, nor during Morandi's lifetime. As the German art historian Hans Belting explains:

> The old antagonism between art and life has been diffused, precisely because art has lost its secure frontiers against other media, visual and linguistic, and is instead understood as one of various systems of explaining and representing the world.[6]

The assimilation of technology into our everyday activities has become something we typically regard as unremarkable. Our expectations of continuously applied research and innovative advancements have made it easy for our adaptation and accommodation of late-twentieth century instruments with our diurnal endeavors. It is a merger, notes Mary Anne Moser, that has come to be habitually accepted.

> Turning a blind eye to conditions and consequences that make these products available becomes simpler and simpler, as the technologies themselves become more ubiquitous.[7]

Ours' is a world comprised of numerous modes of representation inundating our most basic daily encounters. Therefore, and as Belting purports, the painted art form has been relegated to but one of those choices. With the advent and increasing expediency of a computerized

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[6] Hans Belting, (translated by Christopher S. Wood), *The End of Art History?* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1987) p xi (preface).
[7] Mary Anne Moser, (editor), *Immersed in Technology: Art and Virtual Environments* (London and Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996) p xvii (preface).

society, images can be produced, altered, and distributed in a manner that casts the practice of manually producing images with paint into that of a dated mode of representation.

Therefore, to be a painter in the present age becomes a matter of facing a number of unavoidable questions; two of which are paramount. The first is simply why continue painting? And the second query; how and what could one possibly paint? The objective of the following text is to explore, examine, and successfully as possible address a number of issues related to these two quandaries. Amongst my primary ambitions here is to situate and explain myself as a painter in the digital age. In order to do so, I will aim to distinguish and articulate the differences between painted and digital representations, all the while avoid endorsing either as superior, or more *true*. In place, it is my objective to indicate how the artistic practice in which painters picture with paint, as well as the methods employed to interpret paintings as cultural objects, has procured a significant transfiguration with the emergence and increasing omnipresence of digital technology.

Contextualizing Myself

I began to harvest the thoughts that resulted in this text over the course of the past year. While confronting the challenges in both my studio

endeavors as well as my theoretical interests, I found myself frequently having to address two distinct and reoccurring considerations. In the first case, I grew increasingly aware of the fact that the history of art is primarily the story of painting, that is something spanning about six hundred years in time. Simultaneously, I began to appreciate the fact that it was very difficult to discuss art in any respect, without referring to paintings literally or vicariously. In my mind, it only followed that painting had to be acknowledged as the primary historical contributor to our recognition and definition of art. Upon further investigation, I discovered that it is an affiliation that formulated in the fourteenth-century.

Painting and Art

Referring to Belting scholarship once again, painting was first recognized as an artform when early Western Christian devotional images began to lose their power. That "power" was not something affiliated with aesthetics nor philosophical concepts. It had to do with presence. As Arthur C. Danto has explained, "It was not that those images were not art in some large sense, but their being art did not figure in their production."[8] Once such painted images were viewed as art - that is something painted by an artist and negotiated with a individual beholder - religious portraits surrendered

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[8] Arthur C. Danto, *After the End of Art: Contemporary Art and the Pale of History* (Princeton: Yale University Press, 1997) p 3.

their former role as sacred images. The "artist" became someone granted with specific creative capabilities, and was enlisted and paid for their services. This had not the case with early Christian imagery, whereas the idea that an individual *artist* could have conjured up such images would not have existed.[9]

Throughout the Renaissance, painting increasingly acquired the identity of a profession, and eventually emancipated itself from that of craft. In the seventeenth-century the category of the *natural sciences* was established, further distinguishing art as a distinct category of representation. In the eighteenth-century, music, poetry and the visual arts were grouped into the *fine arts*, and the philosophical concept of *aesthetics* was established. As originally acknowledged by Kant, it was during this time period that painting was discharged from the service of topics other than analyzing its own identity. In addition, and not by chance of pure coincidence, during the eighteenth century the science of art historical research was instigated. Striving to be identified as a science, the early task of art historical study was that of defining the properties of the visual arts, which was primarily that of defining the properties of painting.[10]

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[9] Hans Belting (translated by Edmund Jephcott), *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image Before the Era of Art* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1994) p 4 (introduction).
[10] The defining properties of art during the eighteenth- century were primarily that of timelessness and universality. Martha Woodmansee, *The Author, Art, and the Market: Rereading the History of Aesthetics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994) pp 3-4 (introduction).

Painting and Technology

As aforementioned, the second concern contributing to the focus of this paper was my growing recognition of computer technology. Rather than choosing to disregard the extensive presence of computers and compartmentalize my artistic practices (as so many painters do), I felt compelled to justify my inclination to continue painting in the face of digital representations. Additionally, and although I am aware that painting has previously survived a number of historical advances in technology, altering its distinctiveness each time, the ramification surrounding digital representations is too immense to be ignored.

The invention of still photography in the the early nineteenth-century put thousands of portrait painters out of work. Although there does not exist a unanimous pedantic agreement over a specific date or artist, there is a general consensus that the seeds of modernism were sown at this point in time. In terms of more a more drastic representational threat, approximately a half a century later the innovation of early cinema eclipsed paintings' historical and effective relationship with narrative. The avant-gaurde of the time period has typically become recognized with those painters who sought a cultural terrain exclusive to painting. As is highly endorsed by mainstream art history, and particularly American, the nineteenth-century is heavily associated with trailblazing artists probing

alternative avenues of subjects and process, and solely for the sake of art.[11]

Throughout the early twentieth-century technology allowed for mass reproduction to further widen its scope, and by the second World War mechanically reproduced images had become accepted as commonplace. They simply became a form of representation in their own right. Albeit artists such as Bonnard, Picasso and Braque, and Kurt Schwitters had employed machine produced materials in their artworks, it was not until the Pop movement that artists clearly embraced the visual simulacrum of the modern age. Commencing with Richard Hamilton, and later Rauschenberg and Warhol, many artists began to accept, and in some cases exploit, a mode of representation that had become as prevalent to Modern artists as the forests of Fountainebleau were to the Barbizon painters.

As briefly summarized here, the emergence and subsequent widespread employment of previous technological advancements had presented painters with the need to claim a unique domain and significance for their artform. What I intend to demonstrate is that with the advent of digital representation - and particularly that of virtual environments - a number

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[11] There are an increasing number of texts being devoted to the historical misunderstanding of a great deal of nineteenth-century art. To suggest that early Modern pioneers simply liberated their art form for the sake of simplistic aesthetic advance is to underscore the much deeper historical reasons. Michael Baxandall, *Patterns of Intention: On the Historical Explanation of Pictures* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989), and Kirk Varnedoe, *A Fine Disregard: What makes Modern Art Modern* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1989) are two very good examples of more thorough examinations of the complex contextual contributions to a selection of specific historical and Modern artworks.

of unprecedented issues have emerged. These are issues that place considerable pressure on painters to renegotiate painting's purpose and distinctiveness in this era of phenomenal image production and distribution. However, and before introducing the topics that will be addressed in the following text, I will attempt to offer somewhat of a conceptual description and clarification of my own approach to painting.

Etudes

I began painting about fifteen years ago. In 1986 I instigated, and four years later completed, a fine arts degree at the University of Alberta in Edmonton. As with most art students, I struggled immensely with the task of developing a personal approach to painting. This has a great deal to do with culture of the kind associated with painting not being culturally indigenous to Western Canada. But that is something I will shortly address in more detail. And again, as with most art students, I mimicked the style of artists I discovered in art monograms and magazines. Putting such waywardness aside, having graduated gave me the opportunity to realize that the predominant focus of my studio efforts had been an intense exploration of painting in terms of a variety of sizes, methods, and subjects.

More specifically, the lesson of my undergraduate education was a personal acceptance of myself as that of a small-scale still life painter. I discovered that I had some ability with color and a relatively thick paint application, and that particular genre gave me plenty of opportunity to further cultivate my formal diction. Adjacent to this acquisition of a certain artistic identity, I also began to formulate a number of conceptual beliefs. In the first instance, I developed a conviction to the notion whereas I believed if I persisted to paint with the approach I knew best, I would evolve and mature as an artist. In tandem with this faith, I put a great deal of emphasis on traveling in order to view a wide variety of art, as well as reading as much as possible. And I believe to this day that these two self-imposed motivations are essential to anyone who aspires to become a visual artist, and particularly someone from Western Canada.

I am (Western Canadian).

In the introduction to the text *Against Method*, Paul Feyerabend reproaches the traditional methodology of science for simplifying its participants. Feyerabend instigates his accusation by explaining how the first stage of specific research in any field is to define its territory, then:

> The domain is separated from the rest of history (physics, for example, is separated from metaphysics and from theology) and given a 'logic' of its own. A thorough training in such a 'logic' then conditions those working in the domain; it makes *their actions* more uniform and it

freezes large parts of the *historical process* as well. Stable 'facts' arise and persevere despite the vicissitudes of history. An essential part of training that makes such facts appear consists in the attempt to inhibit intuitions that might lead to a blurring of boundaries. A person's religion, for example, or his metaphysics, or his sense of humor (his natural sense of humor and not the inbred and always rather nasty kind of jocularity one finds in specialized professions) must not have the slightest connection with his scientific activity. His imagination is restrained, and even his language ceases to be his own. This is again reflected in the nature of scientific 'facts' which are experienced as being independent of opinion, belief, and cultural background.[12]

Paying heed to Feyerabend's insightful common sense, I eventually chose to drop any expectations of my belonging to the grand historical canon that is chiefly associated with European culture. In place I elected to analyze the contextual fabric of my own peculiar situation.

An obvious early disclosure was the lack of any deep history of painting in Canada. This is simply because Canada, when compared to Western Europe, is relatively young and naturally lacks a similar cultural ambiance. As with most North Americans, the majority of my exposure to painting as an artform is via the slides used in art history lectures and the colored plates used in print. Exposure of this kind results in the exposure to *images* but not the subtleties of the actual objects, which is something imperative for an aspiring painter. It was insights such as this that directed me to weigh the ramifications of being from the prairies of Western Canada.

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[12] Paul Feyerabend, *Against Method: Outline of an Anarchistic Theory of Knowledge* (London: NLB, 1975) p 19.

Amongst the first formative instincts as a student is to be in awe and respect - if not fear - the history of their area of study. The second is to try and emulate it. Of course, I originally engaged in both of these prospects. As as would be expected, the more I applied myself the better I comprehended art history, the specific history of painting, as well as the entire topic of history itself. In the wake of a number of personal and inquisitive lines of inquiry and accidents however, I began to take interest in the topic of histories having come to an end.[13] What I was to discover was that the ensuing consequences which followed were of a revelatory nature. To begin with, I was able to view the history of art within certain contextual parameters. Subsequently, I began to formulate how my own individual position fit into the grand scheme of this history. The outcome was that I experienced a kind of liberation, that is a new perspective from which I initiated my questioning of the very practice that I was pursuing.

The End of Art

One of the first issues I felt I had to had to contend with was how could one possibly paint anything of significance while living in Western Canada.

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[13] The first text I encountered on this subject was that of Danto's essay "Narrative of the End of Art," *Encounters and Reflections: Art in the Post-Historical Present* (New York: Noonday Press, 1991) pp 331-345; followed by Hans Belting (translated by Christopher S. Wood), *The End of Art History?* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1987); and Gianni Vattimo (translated by Jon R.Snyder), "The Death or Decline of Art,"*The End of Modernity : Hermeneutics in Post-Modern Culture* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1988) pp 51-64. As will be evident, these three sources will be cited on numerous occasions throughout the course of this text.

In addition to the criticism and histories I read, I had resided in London, England for nearly two years, and had made the sojourn to Manhattan a half dozen times. Therefore, I have had a relatively good exposure to the immense scope and formidable achievements of the past, as well as those of our present day situation. In my mind, becoming a part of that incredibly sophisticated art *world* would obviously include contending with a number of challenging logistics. In order to do that, it appeared to me that I would have to make some decisions, obviously work intensely hard, and granting that a number of factors were in the right place; such as talent, breaks, locale; I might stand a chance of becoming a *player*. That is if that was the route I decided to take, which it wasn't...

Over the past couple of years I have come to understand the *artworld* as being less of a mystery than I had initially thought. I perceive it as being comprised of exceptional artists, some very good, and some that I fail to understand how they have received or merit the attention they have. But I suppose that this is what is meant by having *tolerance* in a pluralistic artworld. On the other hand, I have grown to accept that there is an explainable rational as to why various artworks and artists have acquired as much recognition as they have.[14] That is simply because the artworld is

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[14] What I am referring to here is the role art critics, and to some extent art historians, play in the promotion of art objects as of either pure cultural value, or the combination of culture and commodities, by providing plausible accounts of the artworks they write about. This is something covered in depth by David Carrier, "Art Fashion," *Artwriting* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1987) pp 109-134.

not exempt from political promotion or power, and the present pluralist situation lends itself such trafficking in a much broader scope of artistic genius.[15]

The present artworld situation as something I presently understand as being parallel to walking into a billiards game that is under way. Critically, one can only speculate as to how the balls had become settled in the manner they had, as well as at best infer as to the possible configurations that might follow. As David Carrier has noted, the value (and I mean this in both senses of the term) of artworks in North America is something to this day still determined on the eastern seaboard of the United States, and overwhelming in the action rooms and galleries of New York.

In keeping with my analogy of a pool table, it would be fair to state that the rules of this game are determined by the dealers, collectors, critics, curators, and artists of that community. In other words, they hold the cue. And this returns me to the initial item I had chosen to audit: How could one possibly paint anything of significance while residing in Western Canada? The answer for myself has become simple; I do not rest on the belief that there is just one art history or just one artworld. There is a portion of the present artworld Dominion that assuredly touts a case of

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[15] There are some who do not believe that the artworld is in a plural state, but rather that of hyper-capitalism. See Frederick Jameson, *Postmodernism: The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke Press, 1991) and Hal Foster, "Against Pluralism," *Recodings* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1985) pp 13-32.

new clothing, while basing each of its novel designs on the threads of a defunct emperor.

The Cultural Cringe

One of course learns a great deal from the environment in which they are immersed. Learning itself is something that can take many forms, and not necessarily results in the expected fruit of what is intended or promoted by a specific setting and its institutions. By consciously attempting to step aside the art historical canon, I began to apprehend the attitudes of some members of the art community I belonged to, as a painter in my formative years. For many of these people, the *center* of the artworld was that of London or New York. Therefore the merit of what they created was evaluated by holding it up to the standards of what was receiving the most attention in those centers. This is something that Robert Hughes has aptly ascribed to as the Cultural Cringe.

> The Cultural Cringe is the assumption that whatever you do in the field of writing, painting, sculpture, architecture, film dance or theater is of unknown value until it is judged by people outside of your own society. It is the reflex of the kid with low self-esteem hoping that his work will please the implacable father but secretly despairing that it can. The essence of cultural colonialism is that you demand of yourself that your work measure up to the standards that cannot be shared or debated where you live. By the manipulation of such standards almost anything can be seen to fail, no matter what sense of finesse, awareness and delight it may produce in its actual setting.[16]

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[16]Hughes, *Nothing If Not Critical,* p 4.

Amongst my own aspirations with regards to painting however, I came to realize that being situated in Western Canada had several advantages. Not being European relieved me of the weight of an enormous history shadowing my every painted effort. Although it took me some time to realize this, I eventually appreciated the fact that I did not have to learn to paint according to any specific model. From a vast plethora of examples I could solely absorb only those components which nourished my own artistic purposes. My being aware that I am prone to a certain kind of painting, I naturally looked for the best examples of such techniques to date.

In addition - and much as any painter would like to have success in a cosmopolitan center such as Manhattan - it is important to note that such cities are both extremely expensive and competitive to reside in. Besides such practicalities, I have discovered that to some degree I conceive my paintings for reasons that lay outside of the stereotypical success so often attributed to artists. In the first case I simply enjoy the creative act. Secondly, I consider painting central in my pursuit to widen my margins of knowledge with respect to how we comprehend visual phenomena, and the unfolding of my personal identity. To be intensely preoccupied with attempting to establish some notoriety as an artist would clearly distract me from the fundamental reasons I am engaged with this medium. As was

the case with learning, success is something that can materialize in a number of ways, and I firmly believe that all of that eventually follows in one form or another.

With these points in mind, it should be apparent that I have come to understand painting from a distinctive perspective. To date, my own studio endeavors represent an evolving example of how I understand the medium, as well as my perception of how the world *is*. As to whether or not my paintings are "Art," that is something I have tried to disregard, as I have the term artist.[17] I have made considerable efforts to consider my avocation to be that of manually creating interesting visual objects to look at, and not necessarily strive to make paintings representative of "Art." Furthermore, I consider it imperative to my role as an image maker to be aware of how my representations situate themselves amongst others, both historical and contemporary.

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[17] This has a great deal to do with my agreement that a certain era of "art" making has come to an end. Although this point is difficult for some visual artists to accept, I consider the mainstream notion of "Art" and "artists" to belong to an aspect of contemporary Western entertainment and commerce. On the one hand, there have been artists throughout history, and we are part of history, so we have "artists" today and their identities are retained as such. As already stressed, one of the primary aims of this paper is to address the issue of the artist, and explain how such a term does not warrant the same application that it historically used to. Visual artists are no longer those in control of representations. As a matter of fact, visual art has been relegated to a a much lower position on the list of mediums commonly employed in creating representations. And this puts a great deal of pressure on what visual art means today, and obviously this influences the role and interpretation of the term artist.

The Fruits of My Labor

As explained above, my being a painter residing in the prairies of Western Canada carries with it a different import than if I was living in, say present day Paris or Berlin. I paint in a manner that has evolved as I have evolved, and subjects that I am attracted to for a number of reasons. The subject matter that I habitually employ is what I will refer to as sub-narrative. That is to say that I don't want my paintings to literally "tell" the viewer anything. In addition, I do not want them to exhibit any overt social message, or be indicative any kind of hermetic symbolism.

In addition, I do not intend my paintings to represent any kind of Romantic nostalgia, although some may consider that issue to be amongst those to which my paintings allude. I consider the subject matter I employ to help posture my paintings in the direction of inquisition I intellectually gravitate towards. Sub-narrative subject matter is most appropriate when addressing topics associated with sight, since vision is a sensory indicator of our constantly changing perspectives. Simply put, there are no fixed points of interpretation, only temporal, contextual, and therefore subjective markers. In order to further support this component of my approach to painting, I will briefly touch upon but one historical account of the sub-narrative genre.

The Art Of Describing

Historically, there is a distinction between two types of painting. In what is certainly not a definitive rule or without exceptions, the northern European tradition can best be viewed as an art of description as opposed to the narrative art of Italy.[18] Although it could be argued that painting is by nature an art of description, that is of space and not time, it was essential to the Italian Renaissance that mimetic proficiency was bound to narrative themes. As Svetlana Alpers notes, Alberti had authoritatively written that the purpose of the *istoria* was to move the soul of the beholder, something achieved by depicting a man whose soul had clearly been shown to move. And this had its consequences:

> The biblical story of the massacre of the innocents, with its hordes of angry soldiers, dying children, and mourning mothers, was the epitome of what, in this view, pictorial narration and hence painting should be. Because of this point of view there is a long tradition of disparaging descriptive works. They have been considered either meaningless (since no text is narrated) or inferior by nature. This aesthetic view has a social and cultural basis. Time and again this hierarchy of mind over sense and of educated viewers over ignorant ones has been summoned to round out the argument for narration with a blast at an art that delights the eye.[19]

Portraits, landscapes, and particularly still lifes are the basic themes of

[18] Svetlana Alpers, *The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 1983) p xx (introduction). Here Alpers notes that "Numerous variations and even exceptions can doubtless be found. And one must leave the geographic boundaries of the distinction flexible: some French or Spanish works, even some Italian one can fruitfully be seen as partaking of the descriptive mode, while the works of Rubens, a northerner steeped in the art of Italy, can be seen in terms of the ways in which various occasions he variously engages both these modes. The value of the distinction lies in what it can help us to see. The relationship between these two modes within European art itself has a history. In the seventeenth century and again in the nineteenth some of the most innovative and accomplished artists in Europe - Caravaggio and Velasquez and Vermeer, later Courbet and Manet - embrace an essentially descriptive pictorial mode."
[19] Alpers, p xxi (introduction).

descriptive art. Reaching its highest pitch in seventeenth-century Dutch art, descriptive painting clearly represented the pleasures of daily living. Typically, Dutch paintings from this era depict the world seen instead of imitations of significant human actions. which are the themes of religious or history pictures. In Norman Bryson's view, it was the Dutch cultural response to Holland's new identity as a nation of overproduction.[20] Furthermore, this is trait peculiar to Holland due to *visual culture*, a term of Michael Baxandall's, being something of substantial import to the seventeenth-century Dutch community. As the Dutch society grew increasingly mercantile, visual images increasingly proliferated. "One might say that the eye was a central means of self-representation and visual experience a central mode of self-consciousness."[21] It was for the Dutch of the time what theater was to the Elizabethan English. As one example, during Vermeer's Delft there were more than 40,000 paintings inventoried, and approximately only 4,000 homes.[22] That's ten paintings per household. How would such a relationship correlate to a contemporary city of a comparable populace?

The reason for my drawing attention to specifically the painting of

[20] Norman Bryson, *Looking at the Overlooked: Four Essays on Still Life Painting* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990) pp 96-98.

[21] Alpers, p xxv.

[22] In addition, Carrier notes that in 1470's Florence the important cultural position of painter's is indicated by numbers. At that time Florence was a city of about 600,000 inhabitants. "There were forty-two members of the painters guild and eighty three silk weaving firms, seventy butchers, and sixty-six spice merchants..." The figures relating to Delft is quoted by Carrier from a historical study by John Michael Montias. David Carrier, *Artwriting* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1987) p 109.

seventeenth-century Holland relates to the fact that Dutch painting was an art which included its own processes as amongst its content. In addition, and as Bryson explains, "What makes Dutch still life unique is the symmetry between this anonymous, self-effacing technique and the particular range of possibilities afforded by rhopographic painting."[23] Furthermore, Dutch painting has no linear history. This is simply because it did not precipitate itself as a progressive practice. It did not participate in a history in the same sense that the art of painting did in Italy. "For art to have a history in this Italian sense is the exception, not the rule. Most artistic traditions mark what persists and is sustaining, not what is changing, in culture."[24]

For my purposes here, I would like to alter Alper's term of *description* and relate still life painting to that of *realism*. To begin with, it is important to point out that there exists a belief that realism emerged only in the nineteenth-century, and as a characteristic of Modernism. In all fairness, and as Alpers herself explains, there is a substantiating reason for this point of view.

> To a remarkable extent the study of art and its history has been determined by the art of Italy and its study. This is a truth that art historians are in danger of ignoring in the

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[23] Rhopography is a term Bryson uses to mark the kinds of paintings that operate in contrast to the idea of greatness: "While human beings may be capable of extraordinary heroism, passions, ambitions, it leaves the exploration of these things to others, and against meglaography it asserts another view of human life, one that attends to the ordinary business of daily living, the life of houses and tables, of individuals on a plane of material existence where the ideas of heroism, passion and ambition have no place." Bryson, *Looking at the Overlooked*, p 135.

[24] Alpers, *The Art of Describing*, p xxv (introduction).

present rush to diversify the objects and the nature of their studies. Italian art and the rhetorical evocation of it has not only defined the practice of the central tradition of Western artists, it has also determined the study of their works. In referring to the notion of art in the Italian Renaissance, I have in mind the Albertian definition of the picture: a framed surface or pane situated at a certain distance from the viewer who looks through it at a second or substitute world. In the Renaissance this world was a stage on which human figures performed significant actions based on the texts of the poets. It is a narrative art. And the ubiquitous doctrine *ut pictura poesis* was invoked in order to explain and legitimize images through their relationship to prior and hallowed texts. Despite the well-known fact that few Italian pictures were executed precisely according to Alberti's perspective specifications, I think it just to say that this general definition of the picture that I have summarily presented was that internalized by artists and finally installed in the program of the Academy. By Albertian, then, I do not mean to invoke a particular fifteenth-century type of picture, but rather to designate a general and lasting model. It was the basis of that tradition that painters felt they had to equal (or to dispute) well into the nineteenth-century. It was the tradition, furthermore, that produced Vasari, the first art historian and the first writer to formulate an autonomous history for art. A notable sequence of artists in the West and a central body of writing on art can be understood in these Italian terms. Since the institutionalization of art history as an academic discipline, the major analytic strategies by which we have been taught to look at and to interpret images - style as proposed by Wolfflin and iconography by Panofsky - were developed in reference to the Italian tradition.[25]

In keeping with my line of inquiry, it is the through the particular notion of realism, as a representational filter imposed on what I have referred to as sub-narrative subject matter, and particularly that of the still life, that I want to further explore.

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[25] Alpers, pp xix-xx (introduction).

The Still Life Takes Center Stage

The decorative potential of still life subject matter has been utilized since antiquity. By contrast, the theoretical potential of this genre is something that was cultivated during the Middle Ages. Throughout the sixteenth century the still life theme was further transformed, and was no longer relegated to the mere decorative or the hermetically symbolic. It became the heart of a novel liaison between the painter's eye, hand, and his brush. It is an approach to the painted art form that Robert Longhi has designated as characteristically modern.

> The emergence throughout Europe of the modern still life toward the end of the sixteenth century was a phenomenon related to rapidly evolving conditions of a European society at the threshold of the modern age in politics, science, philosophy and art.[26]

It was with the advancement of Modernism however, that the still life motif increasingly warranted a rightful place in the central realm of painted art. This is due to the fact that since the eighteenth century, painters began to enlist the qualities peculiar to the painterly processes amongst those comprising the resulting artifact. Amongst their various properties, it was the subordinate nature of still life subjects which offered themselves as the prime facilitator for such exploration.

Before continuing, I would like at this point to once again reemphasize my

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[26] William Jordan, *Spanish Still Life in the Golden Age: 1600-1650* (Fort Worth: Kimbell Art Museum, 1985) p 1.

intentions with the direction of this text. I do not wish to provide a sequential history of still life painting. My intended methodology is to point out how sub-narrative subject matter, what Bryson referred to as rhopographic (as opposed to megalographic), advanced in stages, and then assign significance to each of these stages. The purpose of doing so is in order to establish and explain, as evidently as possible, my own choices for employing the subject matter that I do. And in order to do so I will have to take frequent contextual leaps, such as the following.

Isolating the Aesthetic Space

As alluded to above, the very features that made still life painting so attractive to a painter such as Chardin made him equally appealing to the Modernists of the nineteenth and early twentieth-century. It was during the nineteenth-century in particular that an increasing interest grew in referencing past schools other than that of the Italians.[27] Additionally, and specifically in the second half of that century, there was a flourishing fascination in "the shift of emphasis from a narrative to a visual poetics."[28] For instance, whereas the Dutch had enlisted the subject of flowers, as

[27] It is important to note that this was not merely the result in an independently evolving French visual culture. After Napoleon had established the first Museum in 1793, David had arranged the painted pictures according to four schools; that of the Dutch, the Italians, the Flemish and the French. Thus the French school was the promoted not only in the spirit of the Revolution, but also as the intended culmination of the other three schools, and therefore the consummate example of painting for its citizens. It was through this compartmentalization of the history of art that the French were able to annex two things: the educational character of the museum, as well as the painted heritage of other schools it recognized.
[28] James H. Rubin, *Manet's Silence and the Poetics of Bouquets* (London: Reaktion Books, 1994) p 163.

illustrated by Alper's "art of description;" for the French floral motifs became the pretexts for which to make *art*. Already synthetic by design, the cultivated still life motif conveniently served the Modernist function as a contiguous metaphor for art.

As has been well documented, the subordination of still life subject matter by the early French Modernist school contributed to the establishment of a poetic aesthetic. Towards the conclusion of the nineteenth-century, and in specific reference to the paintings of Gauguin and van Gogh, an additional and significant shift occurred. Poetics could be argued to have given way, or pulled in tow, a stronger formal emphasis on the medium and processes of oil painting itself.[29] Qualities such as brush marks, arbitrary color, and expressive application increasingly appeared in the work of the French avant-garde painters. This is a practice that arguably reached its highest pitch with the short lived program of the Fauves.[30] However, I would like to turn my focus to an *ism* which lasted much longer, that of the Cubists.

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[29] I do not by any means want to further promote the mainstream notion that at this stage in the Modern canon, painting simply evolved into a pursuit of formal investigation of the medium. This is a view that has clearly been incredibly persuasive. The truth of the matter is that there are, as Danto insists, very "deep historical" reasons for the shift in artistic strategies at the turn of this century. Painting had to contend with not only the increasing availability of photography, but also with that of moving cinema. Therefore, the kinds of meaning associated with the formal properties of painting can be understood as efforts to distinguish the characteristics of this particular art form with the introduction of other forms of visual representation.

[30] Fauvism proper, was a movement that lasted only several months in the summer of 1905. What appears to give it a longer history is that after the major figures such as Matisse and Braque had moved on, others such as Derain continued to paint in a Fauvist *style*. In addition, the habits of elementary art history are to categorize the historical movements according to stylistic criteria, something of which the art market has leaned on heavily.

The Politics of Perspective

Over the past two years I have gradually come to regard the notion of multiple perspectives to be amongst the most significant insights recognized during the twentieth-century. What Picasso and Barque accomplished was to provide a visual objectification a revolutionary ocular conception. In doing so, they performed two feats. In the first case they offered a highly influential and formidable school style, and one that would have an enormous impact on art throughout this century. Secondly, they maintained the notion of France, and particularly that of Paris, as the Western cultural capital. This hub of the Third Republic was clearly recognized as the most modern of urban centers, something the French people, amongst others as I will soon explain, were proudly aware of well into the twentieth-century.

Cubism is regarded as amongst the summit of Modernist artistic achievements, and consequently is a subject bequeathed with an enormous amount of academic observance. According to Danto Cubism may have been "the first notational system alternative to the traditional one that largely governed pictorial representation from the early Renaissance onward."[31] Cubism turned the illusionistic indexing of appearances into but one mode of representation, because now there was an artistic option available.

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[31] Danto, "Fernand Leger," *The Nation* (New York: Vol #266, No14,) p 33-35.

As a form of picture making, Cubism had strong associations with several traditions. Initially, Cubist pictures were easel paintings created by the application of paint to canvas by means of brushes. The practice of easel painting itself, instigated in the latter part of the eighteenth-century, had by the late nineteenth-century eclipsed the large-scale history paintings preferred by the academies. Moreover, as a method of representation Cubism was extremely nationalistic. Very much in the spirit of David's original compartmentalization of the Musee Napoleon, whatever had been painted in the traditional approach could now be mediated in the predominant modern one, which had originated in France.

Views of Aix, portraits of a cultural personality, or a table top covered with the attributes of domestic cuisine, are three themes that had been central to the French modernist program. And all were available to be put through the Cubist filter. Within its context, Cubism was the Modernist universal style par excellent. It is as synonymous with Paris of the turn of the century as the Eiffel tower, another formidable French Modernist accomplishment.

For these reasons I will propose that the precise metaphorical center of Modernism was that of Haussman's transformation of Napoleon I's *Arc de Triomphe*. With this accomplishment, Haussman conceived a grand twelve-

pronged star from which emanated the broadest boulevards of Europe. Napoleon III's Prefect of the Seine had transfigured Paris itself into a city radiating the very spirit of the modernization. From Europe and abroad, people would make the pilgrimage along the twelve roads that led to the "Modern Rome."

All this changed drastically after the first World War. Although it is true that many people continued to flock to France in the twenties, they were doing so for very different reasons. As Romy Golan explains:

> For a century, if not longer, Paris had functioned as a magnet for aspiring artists in Europe and the United States. Yet, while the immigration of artists to France in the nineteenth century could still be considered as essentially a cultural phenomenon, by the first decade of the twentieth century it had increasingly become a political one. Most of the artist who came to Paris during the nineteenth century did so by choice, returning to their country of origin after a few years. By contrast, those who arrived during the teens were part of a larger flood of refugees from Eastern Europe, who came to France fleeing the pogroms in Russia, Slovakia, and Poland. As refugees, they came to stay.[32]

Consequently, a certain degree of cultural conservativism settled over France. Avant-garde artist were obliged to curb their formal experiments in favor of overcoming the threat to national identity brought on by the upheaval of war and the refugees inundating their nation. A distinctive cultural itinerary emerged, and one whereas many painters celebrated the indigenous characteristics associated with a prewar France. However, and

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[32] Romy Golan, *Modernity and Nostalgia: Art and Politics in France Between the Wars* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995) p 137.

even though Paris held the 1931 Exposition Coloniale Internationale de Paris, as well as the 1937 Expostition Internationale des Arts et Techniques dan la Vie Moderne, it would fail to turn nostalgia into reality and reachieve the heights of cultural distinctiveness it languished in before the World War I.[33]

I would now like to shift my focus from the Modernity of France to that of New York. In doing so, I would like to keep with the notion of nostalgia, and explain how the longing for a cultural center would persist, alter its character, and then eventually bring both Modernism, and painting as its chief agent, to a close.

The Aesthetic Planes of Manhattan

Clement Greenberg contributed a great deal to the mainstream conception of Modernism as the procession of incremental styles. His historical explanations provide both a genealogy for the artists he championed and describe painting's evolution as that of a progressive advance towards flatness; what he considered the most prominent feature of the medium.[34]

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[33] Golan, pp 105-6.

[34] "It was the stressing of the ineluctable flatness of the surface that remained, however, more fundamental than anything else to the process by which pictorial art criticized and defined itself under Modernism. For flatness alone was unique and itself exclusive to art. The enclosing shape of the picture was a limiting condition, or norm, that was shared with the art of the theater, but also with sculpture. Because flatness was the only condition painting shared with no other art, Modernist painting oriented itself to flatness as it did to nothing else." John O'Brian (editor), "Modernist Painters," *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays. Volume #4* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1991) p 87.

Through an incredible mixture of Marxist insights, his savvy as both a writer and personality, Greenberg became somewhat of a cross between Louis Vauxcelle and Bernard Berenson.

I will propose that Greenberg construed French Modernism as a scheme of sorts. This outlook offered him the model from which to construct his own critical prospects. Previously a literary critic, he must have recognized that one of the first conditions needed for that of a legitimate genus was a program with a destination. For Greenberg, that program entailed the reemergence of large scale paintings, and the destination was a heavily emphasized march towards formal flatness. Conveniently an additional condition was that of style, of which he became the prominent critical advocate.

Although it is unreasonable to try and draw a link between every characteristic of American High Modernism and Greenberg, there are a number of explicit features that he certainly recognized, and manipulated in order to nourish his theories. A lack of recognizable imagery severed Abstract Expressionist painting from any association with the European tradition in that respect.[35] In recognizing this, Greenberg was able to claim an artform that was truly American in origin. However, there is a paradox

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[35] "To achieve autonomy, painting has had above all to divest itself of everything it might share with sculpture, and in its efforts to do this, and not so much - I repeat - to exclude the representational or literary, that painting has made itself abstract." O'Brian, p 88.

to this. Greenberg had the curious dexterity with which to provide a cultural ancestry for the kind of painting he advocated. He could contrive a convincing account for American Modernists' rightful place within the grand narrative of European painting.

What I want to emphasize here is that Modernism was a concept with a conceptually comfortable past. What Greenberg did was respond to a nostalgia for the kind of cultural progress associated with Paris around the turn of the century. By taking part in the transformation of European Modernism into American High Modernism, he greatly contributed to transplanting the image of a Western cultural center from post-war Paris, to that of New York. Through Greenberg's rhetorical prescriptions and reviews, painting appeared to maintain a its historical significance, while actually representing an inflated faith heavily associated with aesthetic nostalgia. One of Greenberg's true accomplishments was to continue a belief that painting possessed redemptive social powers in a world that was rapidly changing, and in which it was no longer suited.

The Death of Painting

It is of course incredibly inaccurate to focus upon Greenberg as the sole propagator for Americanizing Modernism. He was however, certainly both

a central figure and by far the movement's most compelling stylistic ombudsman. In what might appear to be a preposterous contradiction is that it was likely Greenberg himself who led painting to its eventual casualty in the sixties.

To begin with, Greenberg's stylistic ideology was based on that of having experienced a great deal of paintings. His analytical stance was therefore that of taste. In what was a extreme Modernist critical procedure he simply considered the defining attributes of art to be the formal and material properties of the objects themselves. Having provided a view of modernism as being that of an advancement of styles, *style* was the unequivocal facilitator in drawing attention to the material. The artistic crescendo of this appreciative model obviously was best represented by the kind of painting he repeatedly endorsed.

At about the same time that *materialist abstraction* was receiving its most intense critical and curatorial attention, the style that had become associated with it had descended into that of a mannerism. The reasons for this are however, are not strictly internal to the New York artworld of the sixties. A cultural practice such as painting was by mid twentieth-century more vulnerable than ever to the larger socio-techno-economic shifts of the Western world. In regards to internal factors however, Greenberg's

philosophy was certainly a key contribution to this decline, and perhaps the painted art form's eventual demise.

As summarized above, Greenberg's critical structure was restricted to an appreciation of the material quality of the medium, as well as the innovative technique with which it was applied by the artist. Both the viewer and the artist were presumed to recognize this as the defining attributes of art. This is something which the Impressionists can arguably be acknowledged for instigating:

> ...With the impressionist painting, for the first time the insider's perspective in fact became the outsider's perspective. And, just possibly, paint took over, and the artist decided the pleasures of the painter could be delivered over as pleasures for the viewer, who, like the painter, became a sensualist of paint.[36]

There being an obvious difference however. The Impressionists' employed their brushes in order to depict the unceremonious aspects of French bourgeois life. The brushmarks and the literal material was not the intended point of ocular attention, but were features subordinate to the casual depiction of a casual scene. With material abstraction there was no recognizable imagery that the medium's work was employed to exhibit. In fact the very literal material *was* the image. What I would suggest is that by collapsing the barrier which previously separated the artist as creator,

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[36] Danto, *After the End of Art,* p 76.

from the viewer as audience, Greenberg conceived a *material aesthetic*. According to this imperative, painting had become a elementary *manner* of random and arbitrary application. As cultural artifacts, these objects did not hermeneuticaly depend on anything outside of their own dimensions, and thus were critically sealed within the skin of their own material objectifications. As a practice, the style associated with American High Modernist painting had become the concoction of a misapplied subjectivism and literal materialism. The gauge used for critical judgment of such paintings was simply that of taste. Those, such as Greenberg, who acquired the powerful positions of aesthetic say or nay, possessed the rhetorical skills to convince many that their opinions were of an empirical nature.

Earlier I had suggested that Modernism's symbolic heart was the of the *Arc de Triomphe*, from which radiated the progress and grandeur of Paris across the multi-national continent of Europe. Understandably, it was the first World War that extinguished any further advancement of that identity. The High Modern Manhattan on the other hand was ironically an island. Greenberg's *internal criticism* (a term of Danto's) severed any art that did not comply with his prescriptions, and this strict stance isolated the aesthetic he promoted from being amid a larger cultural community and discourse. His was essentially the conclusive judgment for qualitative

inclusion or rejection. Until his death in 1992, he continued to maintain his reputation by selling his critical taste to satellite groups of painters who remained dedicated to the material aesthetic he had propagated.

Video Killed the Modernist Star

With Post-Modernism and the formative stage of pluralistic artistic practices, analytical interpretation replaced the critical role of defining taste. Succeeding in the spirit of the Pop and Minimalist movements, many artists began to look for ways with which to engage with an audience through means other than that of aesthetic. Performance, conceptual and video art emerged and the identity of art was no longer adhered to a specific artistic practice or critical policy. The question of arts' essence had drifted into that of a philosophical query, and artists had been freed to create as they pleased.

Being heavily associated with aesthetic style, painting was increasingly marginalized by both artists and critics during the seventies. This did not mean that people did not continue to paint, or in the faith of previous styles or mandates, but that painting itself was no longer the central defining artform. It was but one choice of an increasing number of creative endeavors from which an artist could choose to practice. And where

painting did persist there was no longer a predominant style. As the Post-Modern condition gradually settled, it became apparent that style itself had become available as a subject.

This became progressively apparent as painters began to "appropriate" previous styles and imagery and integrated them on a single canvas. According to Danto, who views this as supportive of his end-of-art theory, "Since all styles are available as subjects, it is a further mark of the end-of-art condition that contemporary art is neutral with respect to all visible styles."[37] Whatever the case, the seventies was the beginning of a period of intense cultural self-consciousness, whereas any forward aesthetic drive had appeared to stall, but political and conceptual imperatives clearly advanced.

> All end-of-art artists are in this respect alike. Everyone, rights to one side, belongs to the identical artistic culture, which is accordingly neutral with respect to visible styles. This is the price - or it is the reward - of stylistic self-consciousness. The moment we seek to bring to consciousness what we are, we at once quote ourselves and in the process make the attributes of our identity available to others as subject matter.[38]

The combination of painting and style made another attempt at securing the artistic center in the early eighties. Neo-Expressionism however,

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[37] Gregg Horowitz and Tom Huhn (editors), *The Wake of Art: Criticism, Philosophy and the Ends of Taste: Arthur C. Danto Essays* (Amsterdam: A+B Arts International, 1998) p 198.
[38] Horowitz and Huhn, p 198.

displayed strong evidence that it was a movement driven by a market that depended on the modernist notion of progression, renewal and the reputations of individual artists. In what appeared to be a rebirth was merely the final and pensive shudder of rigor mortis. Painting in this specific historical sense, had ended. What is compelling here is that this marked the first time that the art market had played an internal role in defining the direction painting would take; and this becomes a crucial proclamation. No longer able to shield itself behind the exclusive guise of strict cultural significance, the possibility of painting having literally become that of a commodity had explicitly presented itself.[39]

By the 1980's painting was clearly in the wake an increasingly sophisticated variety of alternative representational conduits. Photography and television were the preferred mode for politicians and commerce. Film and video efficaciously amplified the promotion of personalities and celebrity, as well as the complexities of narrative. In addition, digital technology had been embraced by all of these analog image producers in order to fulfill the intensifying *charge* and *brief* of a rapidly changing

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[39] I do not know a great deal about economics, but I am aware that the throughout the eighties the concept of "marketing" had become increasingly active. Marketing was enlisted in order to reach untapped sectors of a public who was willing to spend. Products were made and aggressively advertised for seniors, children, and even pets, and to the point that anything was marketable. I believe that it is no coincidence that a market was found for a consumer group that wanted to hold onto the nostalgic Modernist idea of painting. In doing so, this particular brand of painting took on the characteristics of "collectables," similar to those Franklin Mint produces.

context.[40]

Today, the enormous impact that computers have had on our modern daily lives might have but one rival this century, that of plastic. In the same manner that these synthetic polymers have seeped into the most unlikely crevices of commonplace usage, so has artificial intelligence. With all of the above in my mind, it became progressively evident to me that painting would have to rise from the formaldehyde of prior eras if it was to endure future generations. Thus an unavoidable question for the painter looms: how to continue painting - and in a relevant and meaningful way - in the digital age?

A Point of Departure

I hope by now the reader has enhanced indication of my personal view of painting's evolution to date. It is to a large extent a neo-Hegelian account in that I have come to understand painting as the progression of our Western historical consciousness as demonstrated by one artform. As formerly explained, I am approaching the issues addressed here from the position that art - in a restricted historical sense - has ended.

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[40] "Charge" and "Brief" are terms coined by Michael Baxandall in his wonderful text *Patterns of Intention: On the Historical Explanation of Pictures* (London: Yale University Press, 1989). I will crudely explain them here as the former being the contextual conditions of cultural circumstance calling for a certain action, and the latter as the character of the response to that call.

As with Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, the progression of our conscious notion of art has experienced the oppositions and conflicts of its own processes.[41] Each succession, or "super session" incorporates the conflicting consequences that gave rise to it, and a resulting exhaustion becomes evident. Once consciousness (style) became self-consciousness (style as subject), that chapter had concluded and a new one had begun. And this is the state I am suggesting the artworld is in today. The imperatives that drove art, as a historical category primarily represented by painting, towards an increasingly explicit formal emphasis have been replaced by a pluralistic repertoire predominantly represented by ideas. It is the mark of our present period of time that the aesthetic of the conceptual have dislodged the aesthetic of the material.

A Painter's Way of Knowing

As someone intensely interested in painting, I spend the majority of my encounters with this topic actively "picturing."[42] The residual time is

[41] In what may or may not be an interesting side note to this concept, I have recently begun to consider the notion of successive historical styles as having an analogy in my own studio endeavors. Because I adhere to the notion that we are never fixed, how is it possible for one to maintain a "style" when one knows that such a procedure runs against the grain of a phenomenological philosophy, as I understand it. As my paintings evolved from that of more fully realized forms to more "open" works, I had to seriously contend with this issue, and consequently abandon a notion of a recognizable style. In this sense, freedom took on both a liberating as well as frightening associations.

[42] I use the term "picturing" here, as opposed to painting, in order to differentiate from the idea of making images. I have borrowed this term from Svetlana Alpers, who cites what I would consider as three appropriate reasons for applying this "verbal form of the noun" when referring to paintings. "It calls attention to the making of images rather than to the finished product; it emphasizes the inseparability of maker, picture, and what is pictured; and it allows us to broaden the scope of study..." Alpers, *The Art of Describing*, p 26. This is an issue that will be more thoroughly examined in the second chapter of this text

devoted to reading, writing and the discourse orbiting my studio endeavors. Therefore I do not approach this subject as scholarly equipped as an art historian, critic or philosopher. Rather, I possess cognizance of the issues I am drawn to that are of the kind Michael Baxandall regards as *vulgar* knowledge. "Painters," he clarifies, " cannot be social idiots: they are not somehow insulated from the conceptual structures of the cultures in which they live."[43] As a painter I assimilate various portions of a variety of ideas from the culture I am immersed in, and then attempt to interpret *my* comprehension of those ideas with or in amongst the peculiar studio diction I have cultivated to date.

My interests with painting lay in the potential for linking forms of medium with those of thought. Of course it is important to clarify that I don't mean this in a literal sense, as in a philosophical proposition having a adjacent pictorial correlate. Rather, I am referring to what Ortega y Gasset is suggesting when he states that "Just as Descartes reduces thought to rationality, Velasquez reduces painting to visuality. Both focus the activity of culture on immediate reality." Interestingly, Delacroix echoed a similar sentiment by pointing out that the feature of painting that is most similar to thought is that of its process, that is that the painter thinks with her or his brush. I frankly comply with with both of these views.

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[43] Baxandall, *Patterns of Intention*, pp 74-5.

I consider all pictures to slope or "posture" themselves towards the realm or use of certain descriptive or interpretive accounts, which are themselves the results of having had thoughts about looking at the picture itself. As Baxandall clarifies, "Every evolved explanation of a picture includes or implies an elaborate description of that picture." He goes on to specify that "though 'description' and 'explanation' interpenetrate each other, this should not distract us from the fact that description is the mediating object of explanation." And this helps to introduce two important points about my own painting, and this accompanying text.

As a first consideration, I do not intend to directly address my own paintings. This is to avoid the strategy of suggesting that this painting means *this*, or these marks mean *that*. Instead, the following essays examine the issues which serve as the satellite concerns of my studio practices. They are the issues that I continually contemplate and they subpoena *how* and *what* I picture. In reference to the kind of critical response I anticipate from the viewer, I will apply the metaphor of pointing my finger. Some will assign significance to to my finger, and others to where I might be pointing.

The second item refers to the title of this text, and that is placing painting in the context of the digital age. By doing so I intend to put pressure on the

fact that the interpretive planes with which we understand paintings has unquestionably altered. To be occupied in the industry of making paintings today is to partake in a mode of representation that does not *make us* in the manner, or to the degree, that it used to.

Before introducing the three following chapters, I would like to add that I will address the topic of digital computation from the perspective of a painter. This is of course because I am a painter. Therefore this document will address artificial intelligence primarily as it refers to images, and then examine the subsequent consequences such issues create for painting. I consider both painting and artificial intelligence to be modes of representation that the human race has conceived, so that in return they might - in remarkably reciprocal ways - enhance the vitality of our existence.

About this Text

When I initially sketched an outline for the position I intended to take with this paper, I consciously avoided the approach to which painters so often adhere. As an alternative, I wanted to distance myself from both the history of painting, as well as my own endeavors. Instead of purporting that I was a painter belonging and aspiring to add something to a certain

aesthetic lineage, and support that position in writing; I threw it all into question. It is an approach that I am sure will strike some as cold or "post-structuralist." Conversely however, my motives are not that of irony. Rather, I consider myself as an advocate of two things: that of both painting and the context in which I live, and subsequently my objectives here are twofold. The first is an attempt to expose and eradicate a number of cultural fallacies associated with both painting and artificial intelligence. Secondly, I intend to establish the contemporary parameters in which painting might conscientiously function.

Chapter one sets the above tone for the remainder of the text. It is a investigation into three types of image *indexing* (although not a completely appropriate term). I begin by offering the brushstroke as the primary material feature of painting. This position of course opposes Greenberg's emphasis on flatness, a misconception that is addressed in detail. After a lengthy examination of the brushstroke I offer a brief history for the *digits* or *pixels* employed in computed representations, as well as some indication of how they function. The last portion of this essay addresses the modern and contemporary form of paint application, that of the drip and its more contingent formal affinities such as the wipe, smear, splash and so on.

A notable absence in this initial chapter is any emphatic inquiry into the

possible meanings associated with these representational features. That issue is addressed in the second chapter, which focuses on embodiment and a strategy for interpretation.[44] The method I employ here is to regard paintings as the *face of the body*.[45] I explain this position by initially enlisting portions of three existential philosophies; those of Marcel, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty. As this chapter unfolds, I assign and metaphorically weave these strands of embodiment theories into that of "picturing." As will become evident, painting is explained as something akin to the *unraveling yarn of the self*. I then use this bearing as that from which I can pivot and examine the notion of embodiment in regards to digital representations, including the nonmaterial format of virtual reality. Here I consider the the question of material embodiment to be faced with its mirrored image.

The third essay confronts the issue of both paintings and digital computation as commodities. By applying analytical pressure in this way, my intentions are to expose a number of illusions regarding commerce, paintings, and computer technology. I begin by accounting for the

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[44] In addition, I purposely avoided engaging in a semiotic analysis for the simple reason that I wanted to elude getting bogged down in the elaboration of any specific technical explanation related to meaning. I considered the benefits of the approach I have employed here to be the fact that I can work in the type of broader strokes I felt essential in order to describe these two cultural modes as differing species of image production and the potential for representation.

[45] I was introduced to this notion initially by Robert Yarber, "Suspension of Disbelief: The Body of the Painter in the Face of the Virtual," *Art & Design: Painting in the Age of Artificial Intelligence* (London: Academy Group, Vol # II, No 5-6, 1996) pp 64-71, and then further amplified by Norman Bryson, *Vision and Painting: The Logic of the Gaze* (London: Yale University Press, 1983).

professional history of painting, something which coincides with the Western notion of "Art." Secondly, I create a genealogy for computed images, as well as briefly illuminate upon its vast scope and intense relationship with financial trade. The purpose of this chapter is really the marrow of this document, and that is to ascribe a portion of our cultural domain as the realm of representation exclusive to painting.

One last word about the arrangement of this text. As a painter, if I had to select one artist from the proceeding century to have had the largest impact on my own working methods, it would be Claude Monet. From what I understand of his working methods, and particularly in the last few decades of his life, in the studio I have a similar tendency to work on a large number of paintings in a single session. This has also proved to be the case with the amount of time and elaboration I have granted this manuscript.

In order for the reader to appreciate what I hope is a flow of ideas bolstering one another, I have provided elaborate footnotes where ever possible. My objective here was three-fold. I have done so with the intention to assist the reader in comprehending the focus of my thoughts as expressed in the primary text, reinforce something I may have had to quickly summarize, as well as offer a certain degree of subsidiary interest.

As is evident from the lengthy table of contents, this text is sectioned into three chapters, all of which are comprised of a number of titled subdivisions. I have found this method of writing and categorization to be the best suited to my personal habits of expression and explanation. As Richard Etlin has so impressively demonstrated, this late nineteenth and early twentieth-century French format, facilitates the reader's understanding by supplying organized cognitive markers to which the reader can refer to thereafter.[46]

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[46] Etlin uses this manner of organizing his own manuscripts. The text I am most familiar with is that of *In Defense of Humanism: Value in the Arts and Letters* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

Chapter 1

The Brushmark, the Digit and the Drip

A new technology of image production calls for new art. The refusal of a nineteenth-century politician to deal with industrialization would mark him as a reactionary: the same could be said of artists, dealers, collectors and museums who fail to use such technology. Before photography, all images were handmade, so the special value attached to an original was justified. To continue to make such images shows a deliberate blindness, which can only be explained by analysis of an objectively irrational art market.

David Carrier
Artwriting

Indexing Meaning

In this chapter I will attempt to differentiate between two types of paint application and the pixels or particles that comprise digital imagery. I will begin by examining the brushmark and the role it has played in the historical evolution of painting. I will offer an explanation as to why I consider the brushmark the most eminent feature of this art form, rather than the flatness which Greenberg had so adamantly insisted upon. It is also my intention to indicate how the brushmark increasingly established itself as the most conspicuous feature of painting as the program of Modernism unfolded.

I will then shift my focus from the brushstroke to that of the digit. I will first offer a brief history of the evolution of computer technology, and then preceded to explain how these particles contrast with that of analog media. The purpose of this particular comparison is to set up a distinction between the indexes used to compose paintings, and those provided by artificial intelligence.

The last section will be devoted to paint applications that are far less mediated than the brushstroke, a category I will refer to as being represented by the drip. My reason for addressing the drip last, is in order

to indicate how this particular index coincides with the emergence of Modernism and the subsequent amplification of artistic expression and critical interpretation. In addition, and for the specific purposes of this paper, I want to draw attention to the serendipitous nature of accidental paint application, and the relationship such contingency has in terms of widening the margins of both Modernist and contemporary notions of subjectivity.

As will be demonstrated, I will take the position that the drip is a form of paint application having strong indexal affinities with the digit. However, before embarking on the following inquiry, I will offer an explanation as to how I arrived at the distinctions I will elaborate upon in the following text.

As Michael Baxandall has explained, paintings differ from the linearity of music or language because they offer themselves as visual fields, that is something that we may begin to inspect from any point on flat surface.[49] Coincidentally, Baxandall himself has stipulated that "if a picture is simultaneously available in its entirety, *looking* at a picture is as temporally linear as language." He then reverts back to his original insight and negates this overture by citing the incompatibility "between the gait of scanning a picture and the gait of ordered words and concepts." With this in mind, and contrary to the concluding substantiation of Baxandall's

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[49] Baxandall, *Patterns and Intentions,* p 3.

conceptual example, I would like to briefly maintain a simplistic correspondence between painted brushmarks and a feature of written language.[50]

By choosing to isolate a brushstroke, say one contributing to the visual illusion of a portrait, it could be reasonably be argued that the specific brushstroke under examination has the same correlation to the optical fidelity of that portrait as does a letter to a word, or a word to a phrase. In this sense, one could regard a painting comprised of brushstrokes to share some affinities with the grammar and syntax of written language; a specific brushstroke being to a painting what a alphabetical character might be to a written passage.

The problem that I have with this connection, which is questionable in the first place,[51] is what of a painting that is comprised entirely of accidental paint application instead of manually assigned brushstrokes? With such instances, order - in the form of brushstrokes - gives way to a contingency and temporality that puts a strain on the analysis of process and the

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[50] I am aware that there is a problem with any kind of relationship between painting and language, as Baxandall elaborates: "language is not very well equipped to offer a notation of a particular picture. It is a generalizing tool [...and] the repertory of concepts it offers for describing a plane surface bearing an array of subtly differentiated and ordered shapes and colors is rather crude and remote. [...therefore] there is an awkwardness, at least, about dealing with a simultaneously available field - which is what a picture is - in a medium as temporally linear as language: for instance, it is difficult to avoid tendentious reordering of the picture simply by mentioning one thing before another. Baxandall, *Patterns and Intention*, p 3.

[51] As Svetlana Alpers has indicated, in the visual arts "there is not even a shared medium such as language. Sticks, stone, paint, mortar, photographs, and so on, have all been used. And [in addition] the functions of art are so diverse." Berel Lang (editor) *The Problem Of Style* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1979) p 116.

speculation of meaning. More succinctly, an element of chaos and indeterminacy are shown to be, if not entirely agreed upon, something at the very least sustained by both relatively recent painting practices as well as contemporary hermeneutics. The critical search for meaning in paintings comprised of fortuitous paint application has been given no other option but an acceptance of the condition that all interpretive contributions are at best temporal and perhaps fragmentary.[52] Hence my distinction between the brushstroke and the drip, and the attribution to the latter of an indexical character that might possibly have more of an affinity with the digit than its historical, more certain, and material kin the brushstroke.

The Application of History

Over the course of the past six hundred years, and within the confines of the art historical canon, painting has "ended" or "died" and then resurrected itself at least a half a dozen times. According to the Vasari's art historical narrative, "Art" was something based on the succession and development of painting's capacity to represent visual appearances. He

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[52] This critical position is expanded upon by Andrew Benjamin "Matter's Insistence: Tony Sherman's *Banquo's Funeral,*" *Art & Design: Painting in the Age of Artificial Intelligence* (London: Academy Group, Vol # 11, No 5-6, 1996) pp 46-53, and *What is Abstraction?* (London: Academy Editions, 1996). Benjamin approaches abstract artworks, and by those I mean paintings consisting of a degree of applied accidental paint application, as "art work incorporating into an ontology of becoming repositions the ontology of the art work within those terms it sets for itself," which is, as Benjamin insists, "the Becoming-object." *What is Abstraction?,* p 50. In addition, Hans Belting suggests that only " provisional or even fragmentary assertions" in art history are possible today. *The End of the History of Art?* (Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press, 1987) p xii. I believe that this notion is highly relatable to that of producing artworks as well; something we might consider "The End of the Masterpiece."

considered Giotto as the artist who instigated this agenda, and who was subsequently surpassed by the accomplishments of Masaccio, who was latter eclipsed by Michelangelo. In 1550 Vasari wrote that art had reached the summit of mimesis with the achievements of Michelangelo, and thus had ended. Interestingly, and although Vasari suggests painting - the principal representative of art - could go no further in terms of achieving optical illusion, he did not propose that it had stopped. Rather, he simply speculates that it would be employed to do other things but unfortunately he fails to offer what those things might be. In the eighteenth-century however, a number of successive occurrences may surfaced, contributing to the substantiation of what it was that Vasari might have been implying.

Before Vasari's epoch, the Ancients had characteristicly compared poetry and painting. Their philosophical investigations established a link between that of painting and sculpture, and another between poetry and music. Throughout the Renaissance there was an emancipation of the three major visual arts from that of craft, as well as carrying forward the ancients' comparison of focusing primarily on painting and poetry. During the seventeenth-century the natural sciences were established (the emergence of what would evolve into both a very decisive and authoritative representational model) providing a category with which to contrast visual arts' campaign of assigning appearances and explanations to the natural

world. What has proved to be distinctive about the eighteenth-century is the establishment of the category of the *fine arts*, and perhaps more consequential in terms of substantiating Vasari's speculation, the notion of *aesthetics*.

Written in 1790, Kant's *Critique of Aesthetic Judgment* isolates aesthetic experience as something separate from one's recognition of the conceptual features of, amongst other things, art. Kant recognized aesthetics as a feature of painting that referred to the *representation* of a subject, but something that did not contribute to the interpretive significance of that subject. In a sense, and as the majority of the artistic preoccupations of the following century demonstrates, aesthetic representation was a subject in its own right. Although grossly summarized here, this line of thought has contributed heavily to the notion that it was at this point in time that the seeds of Modernism were sown.

Kant's philosophical propositions with respect to aesthetics were something that Hegel would further examine, as well as provide the criteria for a second occurrence of art's death. In 1828 Hegel recognized that Art, as something measured in its highest avocation, was an identity belonging to the past. Hegel accredited art with being an invitation for intellectual consideration. He stipulated however, that such contemplation was not for

the purpose of creating art again, but for the comprehension of what art was. For it was at this point in history, and in the wake of Hegel's obituary, that painting began to take what has historically been referred to as a peculiar modern characteristic; the notion of *art for art's sake*.

The Brushmark

When the French history painter Paul Delaroche was first shown a Daguerreotype in 1839, he responded by stating that "Painting is dead from this day on."[53] At the time he was reported to have made this comment, Delaroche - whose paintings one could reasonably regard as photographic - was in the process of completing a thirty foot canvas depicting the history of French art.

After some reconsideration, the painter did not maintain his pessimistic regard for Daguerre's discovery. In fact, he later wrote that:

> The process of M. Daguerre proves by its results that it satisfies completely all the conditions of Art and it carries so far the perfection of certain of these essential conditions that will become for painters, even the most gifted, a subject of observation and study.[54]

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[53] Norman D. Ziff, *Paul Delaroche: A Study in Nineteenth-Century French History Painting* (New York and London: Garland Publishing Inc., 1977) p 187.

[54] This was a response by the painter when asked by Francois Arago, a scientist and a member of the Chamber of Deputies, for his opinion of the photographic process for a report he was preparing for an address to the Chamber. Ziff, *Paul Delaroche*, p 187.

The particular feature of early photography that Delaroche was reacting to was its mimetic capabilities. It must have appeared to him that the majority of the technical abilities he had taken years to master could now be executed quickly and accurately by a mechanical drawing machine.[55] Additionally, it might have occurred to him that once the obstacles of scale were overcome, the camera would be able to reproduce pictures that were undistinguishable from his own.

Interestingly though, early photographers were not intent on establishing an antagonistic alternative to painting. Although true that they did aspire to the status of artists, they did not employ their cameras in order to snatch mimetic representation from painting. In fact, the contrary was the case. Since painters had already firmly established themselves as artists, early photographic professionals intentionally manipulated their representations in order to seize some of the characteristics of paintings. This they achieved by recruiting two distinct formal devices that were commonly used in painting.[56] Borrowing from a historical precedence and prototype, they appropriated the atmospheric effects that are similar to those associated with the canvases of someone such as Turner or Leonardo. In the second case, portraits were staged much in the spirit of the many painted examples that preceded Daguerre's invention. Both effects are

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[55] Danto, *After the End of Art*, p 75.
[56] Danto, *After the End of Art*, p 75.

something of which early photographers would have been very familiar.

As should be evident, it isn't necessarily persuasive that the emergence of photography replaced the kind of "photographic" exactitude associated with a painter such as Delaroche. It would probably be more appropriate to state that the two mediums were on equal footing in terms of mimetic proficiency. Arguably, and at best it was a match. Where Daguerre's technology had the upper hand however, was in terms of the duration of time required for execution, and more importantly the availability, albeit a very expensive procedure at the time, to mechanically reproduce such images.

Cinema and Painting

The very real threat to painted representation, and particularly that of the kind Delaroche was employed with, was the invention of moving pictures. First introduced to New York and Parisian audiences in the 1890's, this early form of cinema was able to display narratives in a linear fashion. Paintings on the other hand, had developed the historical precedence of representing decisive points along certain narratives. Such frozen moments relied heavily upon the viewers knowledge and abilities to recognize the specific point depicted. By contrast early cinema did not have to rely upon

any such inferential responsibilities of the viewer, because the narratives, although extremely simplistic before the turn of the century, were explicit. In regards to the impelling forces driving early Modernism, the representational ramifications that emerged with the advent of Daguerreotype and early cinema was that painters were relieved from having to subordinate their mode of representation to either that of copying the face of reality, or representing a point in a specific narrative.

Returning once again to Delaroche, it is of substantial interest and for very good reasons that the painter did not react by pointing out that there was one significant feature separating painting from photography - that of the brushstroke.[57] The camera, as Delaroche recognized, was obviously a very real threat in terms of successfully transferring appearances from the face of reality to that of a blank surface. Additionally, photography did not have to contend with the erasure of something akin to the brushstroke - something that a painter such a Delaroche would have addressed and considered as a constant technical nuisance.

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[57] This is something I began to take notice of during my undergraduate degree, which I obtained at the University of Alberta. At the time I was studying there, the U of A's painting department was one known for advocating various forms of materialist abstraction. There were constant references made by many professors about Clement Greenberg's insistence on the primary feature of painting being its propensity towards flatness. Throughout my undergraduate studies I was preoccupied with painting small scale and fairly thickly impastoed still life paintings. My thoughts at the time were that the brushmark was the most unique feature of painting, and that Modernism was in fact an indication that this was so, since many of the other representational capabilities of painting - such as mimesis - found alternative modes of expression. Further confirmation of my initial belief was to be found in a chapter "From Aesthetics to Art Criticism," pp 81-100, in Danto's recent text *After the End of Art.*

Throughout the history of art, painting illusionistic representations habitually involved the eradication of brushmarks and the pursuit of a smooth varnished surface. Much like the plastic covers on our television sets or computer monitors, the painted surface was something the viewer was expected to look past in order to see the action the painter had depicted "out there." The majority of nineteenth-century realists, such as Delaroche, would have regarded any overt evidence of brushstrokes to have been a distracting flaw in his representations.

The Liberation of the Brushstroke

Manet was likely the first painter to create paintings so obviously displaying the mechanics of artistic production. As has been so often emphasized in art historical scholarship, he is acknowledged with having simplified passages of detail and the utilization of factured brushstroke. Following suit, the Impressionists also departed from the traditional applications of paint. With both examples however, the viewers were not intended to inspect the painted surface as a repository of process, but to appreciate the manner in which the representations fused into their recognition.

In specific reference to Impressionism, the brushstroke was not a feature

of the medium subordinated to the ends of these paintings. Juxtaposed dabs of pigments were intended to optically mix color in the viewers' eyes and minds, as opposed to doing so on the canvases themselves. As a conceptual aim, these painters sought to achieve a certain level of chromatic intensity. In terms of tradition, the Impressionists still adhered to a relatively high degree of representational naturalism in order to provide a pretext for their experiments. As an isolated and predominant feature of painting the brushstroke became conspicuous only after the importance of mimetic representation had receded as the goal of painting.[58]

Greenberg and the Brushstroke

Although it is true that Clement Greenberg regarded Manet as the earliest Modernist painter, it was not Frenchman's brushstrokes that he was referring to. Rather, it was what Greenberg perceived as Manet's tendency to emphasize the *flatness* of the picture's surface. This is not the only instance of the critic's shun of features that did not support his theory. In fact, Greenberg paid little attention the brushstroke throughout his writings. Dating back to his formative years, and although he repeatedly accentuated the physical properties unique to the painted medium as its most prominent modern feature, he particularly insisted on that of flatness. In "Modernist Painting," an article written in 1961, Greenberg

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[58] Danto, *After the End of Art*, p 75.

states:

> The flat surface, the [rectangle] shape of the
> support, [and] the properties of the pigment.
> [Most important though is flatness, for it alone
> is] unique and exclusive to pictorial art.[59]

Greenberg's insistence on the flatness of painting as being its foremost

characteristic certainly does not constitute a historical fact. On the other

hand, it indubitably supported his conception of a materialist theory. This

can be demonstrated by clarifying, if not correcting, two important

components of Greenberg's theory before pressing forward.

In the first case, the term *formalism* does not so much apply to the kind of

painting Greenberg endorsed and advocated, but rather the kind of art

criticism he practiced. *Materialist abstraction*, if it can be called that, is a

manner or approach to painting that highly emphasizes - and in an

abundance of cases embellishes - the physical materiality of the paint

medium itself. As with all approaches to painting, materialist abstraction is

open to examination by a wide variety of critical models besides that of

Greenberg's assertion of "the innocent eye test."[60]

The second inaccuracy has to do with Greenberg's staunch insistence of

flatness being the feature most peculiar to painting. To begin with, it is

[59] O'Brian, *The Collected Essays and Criticisms: Greenberg*, p 87.
[60] In regards to my use of the term plastic, I am referring to the enormous popularity of acrylic paint, which was predominantly used by the generations of materialist abstract painters that proceeded the original Abstract Expressionists.

important to note he was not necessarily wrong by suggesting that the most distinctive characteristic of painting was flatness. The flaw in his theory was in failing to identify what it was that contributed to this prominent emphasis on the picture plane, and then provide a philosophical or theoretical explanation. A case in point is that of Monet.

According to Greenberg, Monet's late cycle of paintings were clearly his most *modern* achievements. Although Greenberg did not initially refer to Monet with innovative merit, he eventually bestowed him with the same Modernist stature he granted Cezanne. However, and before his influential essay "The Later Monet," Greenberg regarded the paintings which preceding the late *Water Lily* murals as more conservative, if not dated, when compared to the thin and anxious canvases of his eccentric contemporary from Provance. With creative purviews such as this, Greenberg was able to "reshuffle" or "stack" the art historical deck in order to provide an ostensible ancestry for his own critical prospects.[61] Oddly enough, had Greenberg specified that the flatness of painting had more to do with the historically routine practice of painters to eradicate brushwork, as was the case with someone such as Delaroche, his critical stance might have acquired a more credible ancestry.

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[61] Hughes, Robert, "The Medium Inquisitor," *The New York Review of Books*, (New York: Vol # XL, No 17, October 21, 1993) p. 46.

It should be apparent that Delaroche and Greenberg had disparate reasons for emphasizing flatness, and not the brushstroke, as the principal feature of painting. As demonstrated by the above case of Greenberg on Monet, there are a number of substantiating reasons for this. The chief one being that throughout the evolution and development of painting as a profession, the academic norm was to emphasize flatness, but only as a consequence of suppressing evidence of the medium's application. Before continuing with this line of inquiry, I would like to briefly depart in order to devote attention to some idiosyncratic exceptions to this rule.

The Brushstroke's Legacy

As Svetlana Alpers indicates, Vasari acknowledged that the coarse or contingent style of late Donatello or Titian was something that displayed imagination over and above the demonstration of mere manual skills.[62] Furthermore, Vasari had recognized how such qualities appealed to connoisseurs who attentively enjoyed filling in what the artist's "quick and brilliant" brushwork offered to their refined eyes and imaginations. Painters such as Titian, and particularly in the late stages of his life, aspired to draw attention to the material of paint and its utilization, rather

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[62] Alpers, Svetlana, *Rembrandt's Enterprise: The Studio and the Market* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1988) p. 17.

than exclusively to the objects it was employed to represent.[63] The facilitating vehicle used to accomplish this was the brushstroke.

Although not the only Venetian painter to employ such a method, Titian characteristically applied thin transparent layers of dark paint over a ground of lighter pigment, thus creating an optical interaction of color on a canvas weave that was characteristically rich in texture. Rembrandt, who was keenly attentive to the technical prowess of such predecessors, had formulated his own unique manner of manipulating the medium.

In what might come as a surprise to some is to acknowledge that Rembrandt was indeed a slow worker.[64] X-ray evidence of his paintings indicate that he would typically begin by "blocking" figures onto a prepared ground, and then build up a solid structure out of opaque paint. Once this was accomplished, he characteristically applied impastoed pigments, the most illuminated areas of the picture being the most built up. Close inspections indicate that he appeared to alternate between a brush, his fingers, or a palette knife in order to manipulate the paint.[65]

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[63] An interesting connection can be made here between the evolution of the brushstroke and that of the commercial value of painted artworks. Titian, during the peak of his professional lifetime, had a sizable monopoly on the European art market. His artistic fame brought him numerous commissions and the subsequent fame and wealth that followed. It is highly likely that he was aware of his talents, and certainly must have recognized the value of his brushwork.

[64] Alpers, Rembrandt's Enterprise, p 16.

[65] I had the opportunity to frequently and closely examine a number of Rembrandt's paintings while residing in London England between 1991 and 1993.

What is of interest here is that although Rembrandt was aware that painters during his time were praised for their abilities to meticulously recreate textures with paint, he sought to make "the materiality of paint itself representational."[66] His reason for doing so might very well have had to do with his desire for artistic immortality and market success, and both on a scale larger than that of Holland. By emulating the technical prowess of Titian in particular, it is not unreasonable to suggest that Rembrandt's paint application is indicative of two intentional properties. Firstly, it was a provocative aesthetic sign that was directed toward the cultivated viewer, and secondly, it implied his desire to be historically and financially associated with a painter of Titian's status.[67]

This kind of influential relationship was something that also occurred between Velasquez and Rubens. By the time that Velasquez would have met Rubens, the Dutchman had acquired not only the widespread reputation as an eminent painter and master of a highly prolific workshop, but had also been bestowed with the distinction of a political ambassador. This was an extremely high honor for a painter in the seventeenth-century and particularly unheard of in Spain, where artists had not adopted the status they had in other regions of Europe, such as Italy. Therefore Rubens associations with many members of the courts throughout Europe was

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[66] Alpers, *Rembrandt's Enterprise*, p 22.
[67] Alpers, p 17.

much more prestigious than that commonly endowed to an artist. It was recognition such as this that the younger Spaniard had so eagerly sought.

As these summary cases of Rembrandt and Velasquez indicate, the brushmark can be something associated with much more than a simple emphasis of the materiality of paint. But as already noted, the case of such painters were not historically typical. The majority of painters have been traditional in that they employed brushes to depict illusions of reality, but had strove to eliminate the means by which such an illusion was achieved. In other words, it has been the historical practice of painting to make the brushstroke invisible.

Possibly the first true break with this kind of painted naturalism appeared in the 1880's, and with the creative endeavors of Van Gogh, and to a lesser degree with Gauguin. It was with these painters that the brushstroke, as well as more obvious formal features such as the line and exaggerated color, collaborated with the *subject* of painted images. As Clive Bell recognized, art no longer had to copy appearances, it could depict reality.

In conclusion to this section, I will offer that it was Matisse, and particularly his Fauve canvases from the summer of 1905, that were the first to isolate the brushmark as such. Even more so than either van Gogh

or Gauguin, Matisse generalized his subject matter and employed a form of mark making similar to that of an enlarged Pointillism. Having done so invited an not merely an enhanced aesthetic pleasure of the application and medium itself, but an unprecedented conceptual departure as well. And as the Modernist spirit amplified, it was precisely such formal features that metaphorically, and later literally, became the identifiable features of the shrinking ground of high art.

The Digit

In December late December 1947, two Bell Lab scientists verified that a pea-sized device was capable of taking an electrical current and amplifying it, as well as turn it on and off. These *transistors* replaced the large vacuum tubes that had operated as the controllers and amplifiers of electronic signals in the earliest computers (the first named ENIAC and weighed in at a hefty thirty tons). Over the course of the next decade these transistors increasingly diminished in size, and by 1959 were woven into extremely thin silicon wafers, and identified as micro *chips*.

According to the National Geographic article where I located this information, these early microprocessors drew upon only a fraction of the electricity ENIAC needed in order to function, and increased the number of

calculations made in one second from the 50,000 of its predecessor to over one million.[68]

By January 1998 Intel had developed a thumbnail-sized Pentium II chip consisting of 7.5 million transistors and capable of an astounding 588 million calculations per second.[69] Such phenomenal capacity consisted of information mathematically organized, and then made translatable into the form of *digits*. Digits are the numerically arranged indexes of data that make available the computed information of artificial intelligence. In terms of digital imagery, digits are organized as representatives of pictorial elements called *pixels*, which are the separate colored dots of a screened, printed or virtual digital representation. It is something one might consider as picturing by numbers.

The predecessor of digital imagery is the variety of analog media, such as that of photography, film and video. Analog media is a format that is generally prepared for imprint, and is associated with careful material preservation in order to maintain optimum quality in regards to presentation. The converse is true of digital media. As an immaterial particle, the digit does not carry with it the same maintenance requirements of it physical counterparts. It is something which is

[68] Allen A. Boraiko, "The Chip: Electronic Mini-Marvel that is Changing Your Life," *National Geographic* (Washington D.C.: The National Geographic Society, Vol # 162, No 4, October, 1982) pp 421-458.
[69] Isaacson, Walter, "...driven by the passion of Intel's Andrew Grove: Man of the Year," *Time* (New York: Vol # 150, No 27, December 29, 1997 - January 5, 1998) p 28.

structured to signify rather than objectify, stored in an abstract manner, and is primed for both manipulation and presentation.

In contrast to analog representations, Timothy Binkley has observed that:

> Digital representations [...] take measurements rather than impressions of what they represent: their goal is *mensuration* rather than *maculation*. To achieve their transaesthetic epiphany, they convert information from material into numerical entities rather than transcribing it from one physical substance into another.[70]

The representations of reality created by digital computation differ from those of other media because they enlist a strict mathematics. Whereas analog media are constructed and prepared to receive and preserve traces of events, the digital mechanism is formatted in order to store and process symbols created by numbers.[71] As is reasonable, mathematics initially appears to be the most unlikely participant in the cultural field of the visual arts. Both mathematics and science tend to deal with aspects of reality in abstract terms. "At their most grand," suggests Binkley, "they are theories; frequently they are diagrams; and at their humblest they are simply raw data."[72] What is of significance here, and as Binkley goes on to explain, is that images arranged by the theories of artificial intelligence affects us, "simply because images do."

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[70] Timothy Binkley, "The Vitality of Digital Creation," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* (New York: Vol # 55, No 2, Spring 1997) p 109.

[71] The majority of this examination of digits and pixels is based on Binkley's article, "The Vitality of Digital Creation."

[72] Binkley, p 109.

Digital technology has been enlisted by science, a variety of commerce, and by comparison, relatively slowly by the visual arts. Interestingly, whereas the long deliberation for photography to be embraced as an art form took nearly half a century, the same period of probation was not assigned to artificial intelligence; and there are two reasons for this omission. When photography was a developing industry, painting was the most preeminent mode of visual representation. So a great deal of nineteenth-century critical reaction may have had to do with professional preservation and therefore understandable prejudice.[73] Throughout the twentieth-century however, painting's representational authority has diminished a great deal, thus signaling the second point of cause.

The large majority of digital technology operates at what Raymond Williams regards as "low culture."[74] Since the availability of personal computers has magnified, the extensive use of artificial intelligence has vicariously contributed to the further demise of painting's authority. The convenience of quick access to the creation, manipulation and increasing abundance of images simply leaves painting in a wake alternative image

[73] In a book entitled *Postmodern Currents: Art and Artists in the Age of Electronic Media* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1997), Margot Lovejoy takes the position that avant-gaurde characteristics of Modernism were the result of artists unwilling to embrace technology as an art form. Although Lovejoy's position is questionable in some areas of the history she provides, there is an important political thread she unravels. What I am suggesting is that initially the resistance must have been very strong and very political, whereas throughout the Modernist era I doubt, as Lovejoy so heavily emphasizes, that the innovative motivation of avant-gaurde artists was a strict unwillingness to embrace technologies.

[74] Williams remarks about the advent of technology and the repercussions for the arts as something which cannot be ignored. His comments are of an optimistic nature, rather than the common cynical negation of technology so often employed in order to preserve a certain notion of the arts. Raymond Williams, *Towards 2000* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1983) pp 128-152.

reproduction originally initiated by photography. An eclipse of this sort is not due to painting's lack of visual significance, but rather to the amiable convenience of image proliferation which digital technology further furnishes.

When contrasted with digital images, paintings take a comparative long time to produce. Computer derived representations are conceived by an *electronic* means. This means that the operations behind their conception is accomplished by charges in electrical currents passing through circuits rather than the animation of a physical apparatus. Their being *digital* means that they are dealt with in discrete numerical quantities, unlike the analog systems which enlist friction in order to extract their means. Digital images are something which can be recalled and terminated rapidly, and with relative ease.

Transcending Power

In *Understanding Media*, Marshall McLuhan alleges that with the introduction of each new media there are new relations established between our senses.[75] This is something that Jean Baudrillard advanced in

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[75] "What I am saying is that media as extensions of our senses institute new ratios, not only among our private senses, but among themselves, when they interact among themselves. Radio changed the form of the news story as much as it altered the film image in the talkies. TV caused drastic changes in radio programming, and in the form of the thing or documentary novel. It is the poets and painters who react instantly to a new medium like radio or TV." Extracted from Marshall McLuhan, Understanding Media (New York: McGraw Hill, 1964) p 39.

the mid-nineteen eighties by asserting that everything is simulacrum; implying a resignation to the fact that the real had been replaced by the fabricated or non-real. These statements support the notion that the proliferation of images becomes the property of those in the position to do so. Mcluhan's insight is an important one, and something that I will touch upon in the following chapters. As for Baudrillard's comment, it is highly probable to suggest that it heavily rests upon a misconception.

To begin with, and as Binkley has explained, "the computer is a media and not a medium."[76] Therefore, digital representations are not merely the improved versions of their analog predecessors. They also incorporate the potential to recruit us in a distinctive and personal interactive involvement. "If images make their subjects present to us, digital representations make us present to them."[77] Binkley goes onto add that

> The computer opens up our image-saturated culture to a virtual universe composed of numbers that are oddly capable of reaching out to us. Our individual presences are delivered to the subjects of digital representations, and vice versa, as they engage us in dialogue. Digital images transcend power to achieve vitality.[78]

This being the case, then one could surmise that people are communicating meaning and values associated with imagery in the same sense that early radio transmitted concepts of imagery were disseminated through the use

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[76] Binkley, p 111.
[77] Binkley, p 108.
[78] Binkley, p 108.

of verbal dialogue? It is a case whereas images could be said to stand in for phrases or stereotypical terms.

Images as Words

As Binkley himself states, "digital media transform physical form into conceptual structure." This means that computer images are generalized or generic. Should someone send an image to a computer in another country, the image can - in most cases - be translated without having to be transcribed. This is simply because their conceptual form can be reversed so as to enhance the potential of more closely involving the viewer(s). And this is a very important point.

Paintings are cultural objects of which interpretation probes. It is as though the meaning has to be harvested from the material object. The converse is true with digital imagery. Like leaves floating on a virtual sea of mathematical particles, it is their surface appearance that carries meaning. Unlike a painting, it is not the scrutiny of a singular image, but the succession of images or image transformation that communicates a message. The question posed by digital representations is not that of how we look at things, but the fact that we look at so many of these things, and the phenomena of looking itself being dependent on a number of factors.

Due to the fact that computers have to be encoded with information, that information is already conceptualized in order to be communicable to both the computer and others. Clearly, such images are not only already known, but so are many of the meanings associated with them. The proliferation of this particular form of imagery has some affinities with the nonmaterialty of spoken or written language, however the propensity for the signified/signifier relationship is unequivocally not as vast. To a large extent, computer manipulation and distribution of images is highly contingent upon what has been prosaically recognized about our sensitive rapport with vision.[79]

The Digit as Artistic Agent

Is the computer something that can be associated with art? Of course in our pluralistic artworld, an elementary answer would be affirmative. But a closer inspection is required in order to identify if such an affiliation is tenable, and if so, in what respect. In the first case, not everything about

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[79] What I am referring to here is the manner in which, for example, a variety of advertising strategies manipulate the features of models: enhancing lips, dilating pupils, exaggerating the appearance of erect nipples beneath clothing, etc. These sexually associated appearances are altered by digital means. In addition, I am also referring to the kind of plausibility created by someone like Steven Speilberg. In *Jurrasic Park*, scenes depicting the actions of a Tyrannosaurus Rex appear realistic due to the sophistication of digital augmenting, as well as the smooth amalgamation of plausible acoustic signs. We are intended to react as though this is what the presence of such a creature would "be like" in our actual surroundings. In comparison, think of the contemporary charm associated with older *King Kong* films, whereas one comprehends the down-scaled model city being terrorized by a man in a gorilla suit.

My analogy between the proliferation of images, in the manner I describe here, and that of spoken language is of course not a simplistic one. When we listen to someone speak it is not only the words that have meaning for us. We note the choice of words, inflection, emphasis, as well as indications of expression and intent associated with facial and bodily physiognomy.

digital technology is an independent high-tech product. In some instances artificial intelligence not only maintains a relationship with analog means, but is reliant upon them.

Although numerical and nonmaterialty arranged pixels operate as the rudiment of a visual form, they do not completely designate their appearances. As Binkley stipulates, "There is no privileged output."[80] When an image is printed, the computer transforms into a tool in the service of an analog medium. A more legitimate independent form of digitally created art is associated with that of virtual reality.

As was the case with printed digital representations, computers employ formulas and numbers in order to simulate environments intended for our immersion. And it is at this point that the computer departs from its role as a media:

> It transcends media sense it uses material symbolically rather than analogically, making its digital representations vital and active. While feverishly manipulating tokens, its purpose is to invigorate abstractions, and not to sculpt substance.[81]

In the most sophisticated editions of virtual environments, the computer is able to locate the coordinates of the viewer and respond to their movements. This *interactive* feature is the most unique representational

[80] Binkley, p 112.
[81] Binkley, p 114.

alternative offered by artificial intelligence. It provides not only the notion of presence, as opposed to that of a mere representation, "or a generically reconstituted likeness, but a spontaneously created intercourse with an individual participant."[82] However, and to date, this branch of artificial intelligence does have limitations.

> The virtual environment is circumscribed by logical rather than physical limits. Indeed, one of the dangers of using computers is that they provide so much flexibility and forgiveness that it is easy to become engulfed in a mesmerizing odyssey of endless tinkering. The pitfalls of working in a virtual studio adumbrate whole new genres of artistic risk.[83]

Returning to Baudrillard's notion, and citing the shortcomings of virtual environments, the limitation of the latter illuminates the dramatic overture of the former. Virtual environments operate because they enlist our recognition of imagery and concepts such as space and scale. Our relationship with these environments are tenable because of, if not reliant on our historical relationships with nature and culture. To suggest that the real has been taken over by the non-real is obviously a dramatic exaggeration. It would be more apt to state that culture has amplified to such an extent that what we have come to regard as real is, in many instances, of our own fabrication.

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[82] There are a number of instances, this being one, where I do not agree with Binkley's choice of terms when ascribing a description to what artificial intelligence offers. In this case, the present limitations of computer technology may give the appearance of 'presence' or 'spontaneity,' but they do not actually provide such phenomena. This is not necessarily a criticism of digital technology, but perhaps a call for a more appropriate and articulate terminology necessary to describe the nature of virtual environments. Binkley, p 114.

[83] Binkley, p 114.

My aim here however is not to critique Baudrillard or engage in a cultural discourse regarding the various models of representation enlisted throughout history. What I am trying to accomplish is to draw an outline around the complexion of the computerized digit, its capacity for representation, the synchronous associations of virtual reality, and hint at the following cultural ramifications.

The Drip

As I had verified in the first portion of this essay, the brushmark has been the historically predominant procedure used to apply colored mud to the surface of paintings. However, and as I have also attempted to explain, this form of application has typically been modified to that of a marginal property of painted artworks. It is something that was used to negate its own presence in order to create the transparent surface the viewer was intended to look past or through. It would not be until painting experienced something akin to the Hegelian notion of *Erfahrung* - the venture of experience that results in transformation, and that for this very reason is the precept of truth - that the brushmark would obtain

autonomy.[84]

It is generally agreed amongst philosophers and art historians that painting acquired consciousness of its own processes in the eighteenth-century. This consciousness formally culminated in the following century, and likely with the achievements of Manet. At this point the brushstroke began to assert itself, and in tandem with the materiality of paint. As a direct consequence, the manner in which paint was applied to the support increasingly became a contributing factor in terms of expunging meaning from paintings. The painting process itself, something prior to the eighteenth-century had been a marginal preoccupation in the examination of paintings, began to situate itself amongst the most significant issues concerning critical and hermeneutical assessments. As the Modernist program advanced, the process itself extended its variety of signs beyond that of the traditional brushstroke. With this in mind, I would now like to focus upon the expressionistic affinities of the brushstroke, that of the drip, the smudge, the swipe, the splash, the rub, etc.[85]

Now although it would not be difficult to find an example of an accidental

[84] Gianni Vattimo, *Beyond Interpretation: The Meaning of Hermeneutics for Philosophy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997) p 60. Although I consider Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* and the *Philosophy of History* to be extremely informative accounts of the metamophasis and shifts along personal and historical continuums, I am insufficiently knowledgeable of the original texts. It is for this reason, and in this specific instance that I refer to Vattimo, who places Hegel's broader views of art within the context of a philosophical account of its historical evolution.
[85] Danto, "Modernism and the Critique of Pure Art: The Historical Vision of Clement Greenberg," *After the End of Art*, p 74.

drip or unintended spot of paint on the surface of a historical painting, the legacy of easel painting has predominantly been the practice of applying paint with a brush. However, and although there is strong evidence indicating that painters such as Rembrandt and Velasquez used palette knives and fingers, my emphasis here is in regards to the manual application of paint. To be precise, what I am referring to is paint applied to the canvas directly via the manipulation of the painter's hand. Mediating the material medium with a brush is clearly a preeminent feature of historical paintings. Any accidental portion of paint that remained on the surface of a finished painting would indicate that the painter was somewhat negligent with *quality* control. With the emergence of Modernism, such signs of "negligence" increasingly became an accepted mode of expression as well as surreptitiously enhanced the creative processes' contribution to interpretation.

In an effort to establish a history for the drip I made two important discoveries. The first relates to the fact that employing accidents amongst avant-garde artistic practices was not initially associated with painting, but with drawing. When we consider drawings as opposed to paintings, sculptures or prints, we are more likely to relate them to immediate expression, visual simplicity and a higher degree of technical lucidity. Moreover, drawings are in general more spontaneous and smaller in scale.

Hence they are something more likely to offer themselves as the site of serendipity.[86]

The second discovery was that the first artist to invite and exploit drips in representations was not a painter, but a writer. While it is unknown how many drawings Victor Hugo created, there are approximately 3000 that survive today. These renderings in ink depict figures (both human and fantastic creatures), as well as portions of brooding landscapes and castles or other Gothic architecture. Interestingly, and for our purposes here, is the fact that some of these forms appear to ascend from the puddles of ink that Hugo had initially dripped or blotted onto the page.[87] It is as though Hugo allowed himself to let go of the control that was so typically associated with the laws of pictorial diction in his time. In some of the most liberal examples, the stains and splashes of ink appear to form the images whilst simultaneously revealing the process of its conception.

I assume that a case could be made whereas Hugo's drawings can be regarded as having taken their imaginative cue from the advice of

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[86] A good historical example of what I am referring to here is Leonardo da Vinci's drawing, *The Virgin and Child with Saint John the Baptist with Saint Ann* (c. 1507-8), National Gallery, London. However, in regards to contemporary art, drawing has become heavily associated with the value (both artistic and monetary) of the notion of a more direct creative impulse. This directness is considered in such cases to be slowed down by the complexities that go along with executing a painting. As the last chapter indicates, the contemporary art market has converted the term drawing to that of "works on paper" so as the values of creative impulse can encompass a wider range of materials from an even wider range of artists. See Danto, "Works on Paper," *The State of the Art* (New York: Prentice Hall,1987), pp. 106-111.

[28] Picon, Gaetan, *Victor Hugo: Drawings* (France: Gallimard, 1985).

Leonardo da Vinci.[88] It was da Vinci who advised younger artists to draw inspiration from the random marks, cracks and stains situated on the surface of a wall. He regarded such demarcations as the necessary sources of imaginary inspiration one required in order to conceive complex compositions consisting of landscapes and figures entwined in battle. It is indeed tempting to suggest that it was Leonardo who supplied the kernel for an extremely modern theory, of which Hugo literally executed.

"...the actual function of thought..."[89]

The drip and its contingent nature made its next appearance in the drawings of the European Surrealists.[90] Surrealist artists, and in particular Andre Masson, Victor Brauner, and Joan Miró, approached drawing in a manner that expanded upon the imaginative impulses that I suggest were

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[88] Hughes, Robert, "Sublime Windbag," *Time*, (New York: April 27th, 1998), pp 61-62. Hughes quotes Hugo, who once wrote that "Great artists have an element of chance in their talent. and there is also talent in their chance." p. 62.

[89] This is a portion of a quote by Andre Breton, who regarded style as a prison; "the actual functioning of thought..., exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern." Breton, *Manifesto of Surrealism* (translated by Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane) (Ann Arbor, 1972) p 26

[90] Although this is not the place to examine such a connection, it is of significance to note that Surrealism was also a literary movement. Could there be some kind of connection between the relationship of the imagination to literature that provided the impetus for Hugo's drawing technique, as well as that of the French Surrealists?

instigated by Hugo.[91] And they did this in two ways. In the first case, Hugo's introduction of the accident is still connected to traditional depictions of the visual world. As noted above, the figures and landscapes situated in Hugo's drawings are yoked from the drips and splashes originally administered to the paper's surface.

For the Surrealists, the application of randomness itself was valued. It was an artistic strategy that did not have to culminate in a figurative image. Although it is true that many Surrealist drawings represent decipherable figures, the recognition of such was not their aim. These artists sought to produce drawings that were representative of the *subconscious*. As Hugo's figures might be considered to have evolved from the stains and drips which preceded them, so might some Surrealist reflexive depictions be considered to have ascended from the psychic aspect of our being. This notion alluding to the second distinction between Hugo and the Surrealists.

As was characteristic of the French Surrealists, they offered a number of precursors for their artistic practices, as well as some theoretical

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[91] Clark V. Poling, *Surrealist Vision & Technique: Drawings and Collages from the Pompidou Center and the Picasso Museum, Paris* (Atlanta: Michael C. Carlos Museum at Emory University, 1996) p 6. As Poling points out, due to the fact that Surrealism was not a style, but a "set of attitudes," there is a wide variance between those artists associated with the movement. Some artists, such as Miro, created artworks that were free and abstract compared to the meticulously crafted paintings of someone such as Dali. It becomes important therefore to cite the differentiations amongst the individuals involved because such differences indicate that Surrealism was both a complex and ambiguous movement. For our purposes here, I am only referring to the drawings displaying the use of randomness, something that is probably best exemplified by Masson.

justification. Due to the changes in the cultural and scientific milieu of Paris between the 1880-90's and the 1920-30's, Hugo would not have offered the same rational for his drawings. For the Surrealists however, such notions as automatism, formlessness, disorder and multiple meanings habitually orbited around the discourse of their activities.[92] In terms of influences, Breton had suggested that it was Duchamp, Picabia and Picasso to whom the Surrealists were most indebted to.[93] Duchamp's examples encouraged the role of chance and the ready-made. Picabia exemplified constant change and the renewal of style and technique, and Picasso was considered to have "liberated painting from representational convention," therefore unveiling "a virgin territory where the most sparkling fantasy can be given free rein."[94] As a consequence, the Surrealists had established the rational to carry forward their complex and far reaching agenda. As Clark Poling notes:

> This Surrealist vision manifested itself in many forms: the rapid registration of unconscious imagery in Masson's automatise drawings, Miro's drawings based on hunger-induced hallucinations, the "hypnagogic visions" of Ernst's frottages, and Dali's detailed renderings of his "voluntary hallucinations." [95]

In addition, Surrealism drew heavily on the contributions to psychology by Sigmund Freud. It was Freud who provided the Surrealists with the concepts of psychic and an involuntary rationale. The unconscious was for

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[92] Clark V. Poling, *Surrealist Vision & Technique*, p 8-9.
[93] Poling, p.13.
[94] Poling, p. 13.
[95] Poling, *Surrealist Visions*, p 8.

Freud the psychological terrain where internal forces brewed. Behavior and bodily physiognomy were believed to be latent with meaning, as well as evidence of the strong psychic undercurrents and manifested desires that lurked beneath the detection of our awareness. It was this arena where Freud applied his theories of dream interpretation and his science of psychoanalysis; both of which were of enormous priority for the Surrealists. In one such example, Louis Aragon had referred to the perspective and spatial quality in De Cherico's paintings as having created an "atmosphere of dream," something Aragon presumed could be subjected to a method of Freud's interpretive analysis.[96]

One last point about Surrealism and its association with the drip. As briefly explained, Hugo employed the accident as an emphasis and indication of the role of the imagination in creativity. For the Surrealists, the emphasis on a non-traditional technique had a different impetus. In a critical reaction to painting, Aragon supported collage because it countered such values as taste and the virtuosity associated with personal touch. As can be assumed, this stance resulted in a distinct mistrust of style, something Breton regarded as a prison, and Max Ernst considered a fetish.[97] In terms of drawing, the Surrealists intentionally abandoned the academic tradition that had been developed by the Old Masters and was further

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[96] Poling, p 13.
[97] Breton, *Manifesto*, p 26.

institutionalized since the Renaissance. And it was this precise rejection that allowed the Surrealists to align their efforts with concurrent discoveries in psychology, thus widening the margins of the subjective content associated with their own art program. As Breton declared, there had to be "a total revision of real values," and art had to refer to an internal world rather than that of visible reality.[98] It was a perspective that would later take part in contributing to a new a branch of artistic representation, that of abstraction.

The Drip's Summit

Increased chance taking has added an expressionistic aspect to painting throughout this century. In fact, it is something that has become highly valued by the aesthetic criteria of our present day sensibilities. In the late painting of the Old Masters we often appreciate sketches or incomplete canvases.[99] This is due to association of such indexes with the balance of technical virtuosity and expression, the trademark characteristics of Modernist painting practices. Unarticulated and distorted forms have become something that the modern viewer characteristically completes and interprets in their minds. Historically however, forms abandoned in a

[98] Poling, *Surrealist Vision*, p 8.

[99] In nineteenth-century French academies, there existed a glossary of terms referring to the various states and types of painted images. I suppose the emergence of this kind of categorization accommodated the strict agenda of such academies in accepting the more liberal application of such painters as Manet and the Impressionists. John House provides a list of these terms in *Monet: Nature into Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986) pp 157-166.

sketchy state would have resulted in the painter being accused of failing to understand and complete the representation. With Modernist painting the converse was true, and intentional lack of finish itself signified meaning.

The drip then came to represent a further disengagement with traditional representation. Hugo had associated it with creativity, and the Surrealists had identified it as the facilitator of the subconscious. In other words, the more it appeared in artistic representations the more subjective the interpretations of the artworks became. And this concept reached its highest pitch with Jackson Pollock's paintings, and specifically those executed between 1947-51.

The Big Dripper

The amount of critical and academic ink devoted to Pollock and his paintings is enormous. For that reason I will avoid any such recounting of those texts, or offer any further contributions. I am specifically interested in how the drip managed to situate itself in what has been frequently referred to as one of the most important achievements of High Modernism, if not its summit. For this reason I will treat Pollock as a participant, rather than the hub of this topic.

Pollock himself considered his paintings to be a record of his creative performance. As is well documented, he was influenced by Indian sand painting, as well as Cubism, Surrealism and the the universal psychology of Carl Jung. It follows then, and according to Pollock's personal itinerary, the drip likely had associations with aspects of our being that could not have been expressed by figurative representations. Its very contingent nature was something he could control or interfere with to a certain and limited extent, and resulting in what we consider as Pollock's style.[100] Having stated this, I would now like to further dismiss Pollock's involvement with these paintings and delve deeper into the character of the drips themselves.

Without a doubt, one of the most profound facets of these drip paintings is their capacity to elude complete comprehension. Although, and to some degree this could be said of artworks in general, the dominant occurrence of drips in Pollock's paintings raise the level of contingency to that of a substantial level. Although it has been reported that the painter "touched up" some of his drip paintings with small brushes, for the most part they are paintings comprised of lines of paint dripped onto the canvas, therefore not painted on as an upright visual field. This is an important point in the sense that unlike Hugo or the Surrealists, Pollock had further

[100] I use the term style here with some trepidation. As Alpers points out, it is a far more complex issue than just a method of categorizing periods of painting. Svetlana Alpers, "Style is What You Make It: The Visual Arts Once Again," *The Concept of Style* (edited by Berel Lang), (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1979) pp 96-117.

liberated and increased the chance taking character beyond the history of traditional picture making. In order for a drip to make contact with the surface, it must be flung or allowed to fall downwards, and this procedure is an unprecedented departure from the kind of marks typically inscribed by brushstrokes.

As Michael Baxandall explains, the signs of accidents that we observe in artworks are not to be discounted in terms of contributing to meaning. Although a rather lengthy quote, it is beneficial to the substantiation of my position to cite it in its entirety:

> The fact that a brushstroke may have been unreflectively made does not isolate it from the skills and dispositions acquired in a history of reflectively purposeful activity. The downstroke I make with my pen as I write the *p* in 'problem' is something I do not reflect on but is certainly intentional. Long ago I put conscious effort into learning to write *p*, and into learning the purposes of doing so: if challenged on why I make this unthinking movement with my hand I could produce a purposeful reason. It is intentional in two ways.: it is a disposition acquired in the course of a history of purposeful activity; and it is an action that contributes to a larger purpose - writing the word 'problem'. The intentionality of a brushstroke not reflected on is similar. At the same time the brushstroke we see in the picture lets us assume a decision that it will do, or will have to do. Even in the extreme case of a deliberately accidental mark - if it has been left, it has been judged suitable. For an accident to be serendipitous there must be serendipity criteria, and these constitute intention.[101]

What then of an artwork that is comprised predominantly by serendipity? In the first case, Pollock lived in a time period that had witnessed changes

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[101] Baxandall, Michael *Patterns of Intention*, p 67.

of a substantial kind when compared to say that of Paul Delaroche's world. As for Hugo and the Surrealists, the toleration of a painting to be entirely comprised of dripped paint was a possibility that was not available to artists to the degree it was for someone of Pollock's generation.[102] In the case of the latter, having not interfered or significantly altered with the paintings after dripping the paint onto their surfaces is, as Baxandall proposes, an act of intention on the part of Pollock. But of course the most pertinent question that remains is what is it that Pollock *intended*, and does that intention have anything to do with what the drips situated in these kinds of paintings might represent?

As one response, I will offer the following as an explanation, and I will assiduously enlist the accidental paint application of the drips themselves in order to do so. First of all, it is obvious that Pollock relied on a high degree of chance taking in order to create the drip paintings. Therefore, there exists a certain pitch of chaos that is on the one hand temporal and stylistically recognizable in terms of the historical context in which these paintings were executed. On the other hand, there is a degree of their chaotic appearance that eludes comprehensible closure to this very day. It is this latter chaotic feature where the elusive aspect of meaning is to be situated, and thus this evasiveness offers itself as the material index from

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[102] Wolfflin, *The Principles of Art History,* New York: Dover Publications, 1950) vii-ix (preface). Wolfflin cites that not everything is possible in every period of time.

which pivots the potential for meaning. Andrew Benjamin offers an explanation of this predicament in notably detail.

In an attempt to provide a definition of *abstraction*, Benjamin cites the employment of a drip in abstract painting as not existing as "pure elements of the process of abstraction," but rather as allowing "the process of abstraction to be figured within the paintings."[103] The drip, according to Benjamin, has

> left behind its dependence on immediacy and consequently the rhetoric of the distinction between the vertical and the horizontal. The drip attains the status of a figure that has come to be deployed within and as the field of painting.[104]

As with the drawing of Victor Hugo and the Surrealists, the paradox of Pollock's drip paintings lie in the questions concerning the phenomena of accident, which contributes largely to a concept of abstraction. By allowing a drip to remain in a finished artwork, rather than subsequently altering or manipulating the accidental placement with a brush, is related to the deliberate injection of paradox into any attempt at interpretation. Dripped paint, or what Benjamin refers to as "placed paint," carries with it a message of the incidental.[105] Therefore, when an entire painting is comprised of such indexes, meaning becomes something deliberately more

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[103] Benjamin, *What is Abstraction?*, p 46.

[104] Benjamin, p 46.

[105] Benjamin, p 47. Here Benjamin distinguishes between "placed paint" and paint manipulated on a canvas in order to present a figure or paint being placed so as it merely eschews representation. He considers that the former "involves the recognition that the work of painting is the operation of placed paint."

difficult to harvest. Having stated this, the drips in contemporary paintings might possibly have more to do with painting's relationship with a phenomenological quest to *become*, then they have to do with any specific and finite interpretation.

At issue here is not an attempt to interpret Pollock's artworks. Rather, what I am trying to draw attention to is the fact that the drip has become a painted index referring to a number of specific contemporary associations and concerns. These associations are related to a context that differs greatly from that of Delaroche, Hugo, the Surrealists, and even Pollock. As Benjamin has alluded to, composing a painting entirely of dripped paint is not necessarily a representation of the accidental, or *abstraction* proper. The canvas itself has become the site for a *display* of the accidental, whereas the drips comprise the epistemological and figural elements indexing the painting's narrative of becoming.

In addition, the topics of artistic creativity and representation, as well as interpretations of both of these concepts, are concerns that remain in a constant state of alteration and therefore contingent upon temporal circumstances themselves. Hence interpretation itself becomes an extremely provisional application. This being the case, then paintings such as Pollock's might be regarded as having heavily contributed to the

pluralistic period of art making that followed the reign of Abstract Expressionism. With this proposition, it is possible to draw a connection between the material indexes of Pollock's drips, and some of the liberal artistic activities of the sixties and the seventies. For instance, consider the activities of performance art to be linked to Pollock's physical drip-painting method, but without the paintings as an end product. Whether a plausible connection or not, I am certain this is not an analogy of which Greenberg would approve.

The Problem of Embodiment

This environment - shared by the painter's body and its object of desire, the painting - comprises a kind of Nature, or more rightly a nature reserve, for there are other natures and other love objects encompassing other terrain, and other denizens of the virtual.

Robert Yarber
"Suspension of Disbelief"

Painting is a spectacle of something, only by being a spectacle of nothing.

Maurice Merleau Ponty
Phenomenology of Perception

The way of this world is like that the edge of a blade. On this side is the underworld, and on that side is the underworld, and the way of life lies between.

Hasidic saying

The Empty Mirror

Tony Sherman is a Canadian painter who works with a method of oil paint and encaustic wax. *About 1789* was an exhibition of Sherman's paintings that took place at a Californian gallery in the spring of 1998. In the accompanying catalog, Leah Ollman writes that the surfaces of Sherman's paintings operate somewhat "like the objects they contain," in that they

> Are sites of contention and change, embodiments of the viscous, ensnaring time. Sculptures in low relief as much as they are paintings, they evoke a changing topography, an evoking landscape that knows no closure."

Ollman's comments are not unlike similar remarks made by writers about other paintings, either historical or contemporary. Ollman treats Scherman's paintings as both an object comprised of literal physical properties, as well as the location of an image. As is commonly the case, it is from the fusion of these two features that an interpretation is yoked.

What is both intriguing and of interest here is that this writer refers to Scherman's paintings as *embodying* particular signifiers of meaning, and specifically those of time.[95] I would surmise that what Ollman means by embodiment is that traces of "viscous, ensnaring time" are at the very core

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"Leah Ollman, *About 1789* (La Jolla, California: SOMA Gallery, 1998) p 4.
"I cite "time" here due to the fact that as this chapter unfolds, I will address the notion of paintings embodying, or trapping traces of time in the sense of *spatiality*.

of meaning in the artworks being addressed. The issue I am interested in here is how can this be so? Ollman herself does not offer any such explanations, and in fact goes onto to amplify her declaration with a conclusion whereas she suggests that Scherman,

> Like the historian Simon Schama, privileges "chaotic authenticity over the commanding neatness of historical convention." Though he puts names to these faces, he doesn't label them as heroes or villains. In the paintings, they are simply daunting presences, mirrors to our own capacities, our own moral range, the multiple possibilities of the self. Looking back through time compels us to look within. By infiltrating our consciousness, these paintings of historical figures ascend into the role of historical agents themselves.[96]

As is the case with most artwriters, Ollman's text is an attempt to supply a plausible account of an artist's creations. She concentrates her discourse on successfully establishing two assertions. The first relates to the larger circumference of her own philosophical or metaphysical position, that being the perspective from which she views something such as Scherman's paintings. The second is that Ollman's explanation contributes to the

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* *About 1789* is a series of paintings that Scherman has devoted to the French Revolution. As with a number of similar themes he has employed in the past; *The Rape of Io* and *Banqou's Funeral*, Scherman invokes a sub-theme for a group of paintings by using a particular point of departure from the actual narrative itself. Tom Stoppard's **Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead** is a theatrical equivalent to what Sherman attempts. For example, there is a painting in the *About 1789* series, *Marat* (40 X 40 inches), depicting the head of a eagle. In terms of the French Revolution Marat, along with Goebbels, was one of the "primary engineers of propaganda in their day. Marat, a journalist martyred in the revolution (and famously immortalized in a painting by David), begged for the blood of the people in his speeches." Scherman offers the following explanation for this painting. "When Marat was alive, doing his oratory, he was referred to as a bird of prey, swooping down on his enemies and attacking them through rhetoric." Ollman, p 4.

credibility of Scherman's paintings. By equating these pictures with both a historical genealogy and contemporary relevance, Ollman attributes Scherman's paintings with the peculiar distinction so often awarded to artworks. It is the kind of significance that can be equated in both monetary and cultural value.

To account for Scherman's paintings - or any artworks - in this way is representative of two co-mingled issues. In the first case, to list these paintings as "mirrors to our own capacities, our own moral courage," as well as "the multiple possibilities of the self," is to attribute them with belonging to a certain spectrum of meaning. Since there is a large number of active writers at work today, and each possessing different philosophical bearings, there is likely going to be disagreements on the significance of the artworks in question.[97] Evidence of such discord is certainly not a critical or modern phenomena, for there have been gallons of art historical ink spilt in over two hundred years of interpretive debate.

The second issue is of primary consequence, and in fact the pivotal point of this scenario. Candidly put, there are no fixed meanings attributable to an

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[97] As an example related to Scherman's paintings, see Andrew Benjamin, "Matter's Insistence: Tony Scherman's Banquo's Funeral," *Tony Scherman: Banquo's Funeral* (Montreal: Concordia College, 1996) pp. 49-55. Benjamin interprets a similar group of this artist's work by attempting to establish the relationship between the literal and physical material of paint and the temporality of meaning. "Once there is the centrality of the paint's presence, then the meaning of the work becomes the relationship between the elements that have been present; remembering that this presentation takes place in terms of the temporality of painting's presence." p 52.

artwork. The difficulty in providing hermeneutical verification for any interpretive account is directly adhered to the difficulties with the concept of embodiment itself. I have over the past few years considered meaning as something akin to that of the gravity of planets. Interpretations orbit these spheres (artworks) in various circumferences - the most sensitive sometimes briefly penetrating their atmospheres - but all attempts failing to successfully make contact with surfaces. By referring to this personal analogy, I will now proceed to try and address the notion of embodiment and its application to the meaning of paintings in this age of artificial intelligence. In order to do so, I will also appoint some attention, albeit brief, to the notion of embodiment and digital representations themselves.

The Face of the Body

Although not lengthy or philosophically rigorous, Ollman's brief text on Scherman's paintings does touch upon a significant relationship. She begins her essay by stating that

> The body needs no glossary to comprehend the impact of Tony Scherman's paintings, no definition of terms or itemized references. The experience is visceral first, a bit of a shudder beneath the skin, immediate and palpable, as in the witnessing of a cataclysmic force of nature, whose violent beauty at once seduces and dismays. One senses power and a certain defiant grandeur in the work, marks of its resonance with the moral landscape, past and future.[98]

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[*] Ollman, p 1.

The association between paintings, our physical bodies and artificial intelligence is something that Robert Yarber has explored. To begin with he notes that with the increasing omnipresence of digital technology, the division between the real and the illusionary are disappearing at an accelerating pace. He differentiates between language, which *speaks* us, and the pictures that *pose* us. Both are understood as the vehicles employed by a humanity that has always struggled with the desire to escape the body.

Yarber regards the history of art as being the very history of the body. As mentioned in the introduction to this text, the practice of painting has supplied the identity of visual art with its primary historical example. And it has carried out this central role by impregnating the imaginary within that of the image. In other words, the "lived body becomes effigy." This was something of which the Ancients were attentive. For us today however,

> They have become speaking statues and and a return to idols body gets sucked into becomes more fragile. [99] symbolic. The nostalgia for the weeping paintings lingers however, is underway via cyberspace. As the the virtual, our belief in its reality

The body in question here is obviously that of the painter. "The painter

[9] Robert Yarber, "Suspension of Disbelief; The Painter in the Face of the Virtual," *Art & Design: Painting in the Age of Artificial Intelligence* (London: Academy Group, Vol # 11, No.5-6, 1996) p 65.

believes in the body. 'The painter takes his body with him', states [Paul] Valery."[100] This being the case, stipulates Yarber, then it is over " scarred ground," and one littered with other painters bodies. That ground to which Yarber refers to has been heaped with enormous change since the late nineteenth-century of Valery's comments. Today, "The battle for reality effect is being waged on many fronts, painting now relegated to but one skirmish along a long line of conflict."[101]

In an attempt to differentiate the painter from his cyberspace counterpart, Yarber describes the painter standing before the painting as an "act of display, an act of mirroring. The body becomes face, it is frontalised, ocularized, before the nascent scene."[102] To create a painting, that is a world of imaginative virtually, the painter must sacrifice her or his body, something that is real, for its very opposite. This account is highly instructive, and it will prove to be useful in our preparation for differentiating between the potential for the kind of embodied meanings offered to us by both paintings, and later those of digital representations.

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[100]Yarber, p 65.
[101]Yarber, p 65.
[102]Yarber, p 65.

Facing the Body

By proposing that paintings represent the face of the body, Yarber invites an examination of the very features serving as the residual evidence of the body's actions before the painting in question. And this creates a link between the very notion of embodiment, as it relates to our selves, as well as the pit of interpretive meaning believed to be personified in the virtual world of paintings.

Before continuing, it is imperative that I extend a cautionary disclaimer. Simply expressed, embodiment is a very difficult issue. It is not a philosophical question posed as a problem, and one having a particular solution. Rather, it is an attempt to define a phenomenological subject; that of *becoming*. Having stated this, I must clarify that the segments of the few sources I will enlist here are not positions universally agreed upon. In order to progress my specific examination of paintings being the *face of the body*, I will use such portions as the points of departure for my own perspective as to what paintings can represent today. By no means is my position intended to be an empirical one, in even the loosest sense, but rather it is an attempt to apply current contextual parentheses to a cultural activity and the resulting objects.

The Body and Identity: Marcel

The Cartesian view of the body, as endorsed by Descartes, was that of the body being separate from that of the mind. The *physical* person exhibited a particular kind of identity, and that person's *mind* another. This view of the mind/body question has not only come under a great deal of scrutiny in modern times, it has been incrementally and now generally rejected.

Earlier this century, Gabriel Marcel endeavored to determine the metaphysical conditions of personal existence by examining the components of his own being. After an initial attempt, Marcel found himself faced with the fact that it would be impossible to differentiate what was being investigated, from the one carrying out the investigation. Marcel's philosophical insight here is a crucial one. From this point onwards, he did not attempt to provide a concrete definition for disclosing identity, but rather explain the question "Who am I?" as a profoundly mysterious quest. It is an appeal to one's essential identity that he considered a *metaproblem.*

Being drawn into the sphere of one's own inquisition is at the core of Marcel's theory. He cites the self not as the subject or object to be exposed and explained, but rather the *stage* where identity unfolds. Thus he was able to avoid the establishment of a differentiation between "here," which

is the subject, and "there," which is the object. A common example of this separation, as Feyerabend has explained, is the scientist who negates his own presence for the sake of *pure objectivity*.[103]

Marcel devised two stages of *reflection* in this self conscious investigation. The first relates to the Cartesian model and seeks to engage "an ideal non-involvement of the spectator in the spectacle." As was the case with Fayerabend's laboratory scientist, this does not allow for a unprejudiced picture. The second reflection is the participation of a unified individual, and one who understands what Camus so aptly expressed: "Between the certainty I have of my existence and the content I try to give to that assurance, the gap will never be filled. Forever, I shall be a stranger to myself."[104]

Essential to Marcel's theory is that the self cannot be the "object" and still be considered as "self": "To be a self is to be *myself*; and for me, myself cannot be an object."[105] Marcel preferred to avoid any kind of detachment, such as subject/object or within/without. He sought certainty of identity not in a substantiated validity, but in the acceptance of an existence full of contradiction and unsubstantiated confirmation. Acceptance of such a

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[103]Richard M. Zaner, *The Problem of Embodiment: Some Contributions to a Phenomenology of the Body* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1964) p 7.
[104]Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays* (New York: Vintage Books, 1959) pp. 14-15.
[105]Zaner, p 7.

situation however, is a precarious concern. The conception of "I exist" is both metaproblematic, as well as an assurance of the identity being sought after. With these explanations, Marcel replaces Descartes' "I think therefore I am" with not merely *I live*, but with what he termed *I experience*.[106] Moreover, and vital to Marcel's "I experience," is the element of wonder:

> Accordingly, the philosopher seeking to unravel the exigency intrinsic to the human condition must maintain himself in "wonder" in order to keep faith with his own task. He must, that is to say, maintain a kind of fundamental shock...[107]

For Marcel, man is a being who's motivating force is the demand or call upon *a* or *the* self. He is his own inner urgency, his own quest. The body becomes the shadow and not the object of the center, and consciousness is phenomenon considered to be embodied by the animate organism that is one's self. "To exist is to manifest oneself as a consciousness of oneself as embodied, and in this sense rise up or emerge outward by means of an *alterite d' emprunt*."[108] A person is not limited however to acting out for the sake of others recognition, and therefore be dependent upon a vicarious substantiation of one's identity. An individual also has the ability

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[106]As is often the case with translation, Marcel points out that in order to employ this term in its "maximal indetermination," the German language is more accurate than that of his native French tongue: "*ice erlebe* ... to the point where the *Ich erlebe* is indistinguishable from the *Es erlebt in mir* ... " Zaner, *The Problem of Embodiment*, p 10.

[107]Zaner, p 10-11.

[108]Zaner, p 11.

to apprehend himself inwards. And it is the duality of this identity that Marcel regarded as my *body qua mine.*

Returning to Yarber's hypothesis, we can now apply a particular notion of embodiment to the drama of creation carried out by the painter. As explained above, Marcel's theoretical *self* is a shadow at the center of identity, and not the commonly held reverse - that is as something which casts specters of certainty. Conversely, identity is something constantly being carried out on a stage that is at the core of one's self. It is never still. But what if we considered the act of painting as the stage were this quest unfolds. In such a case, Marcel's metaproblem of identity as apprehended within, and acted out, results in a manifested residue that is deposited for frequent inspection. And it is specifically this that Yarber refers to as amongst the meanings associated with paintings.

> Two poles of attraction are established in a 'seance' during which the body of the painter hangs suspended within the world of the scene, in a stilled moment within which the body is levitated, weightless and floating, within the diaphanous substance pervading the osmotic field of regard. Settled within its projection, the body is the 'nullpunkt' or zero-point of origin that is nonetheless compelled to send itself out within the sphere of its own self reflection. This projection founds the habit of a provisional, virtualized world, a recursive feed-back scenography in which the pulse of protention and retention support a fragile 'now'. The superflux of the sensate is stalled down within a congealed, Medusean prolapsus of the stare. A still world.[109]

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[109]Yarber, p 66.

The surface of the painting becomes a site for a scene of identity's process of becoming. This is something which is not to be confused with mere style, but rather related to the more complex issue of the body's relationship with identity. If such a scene were considered as style, comprehension of the resulting painting would have more to do with Marcel's first reflection, that is in the Cartesian sense of the mind have thought and the body having acted.

It is with Marcel's second reflection that I prefer to investigate the notion of paintings as the *face of the body*. This more involved network concurs with Yarber's explanation of the body's responses and reactions with the canvas before it, and resulting in an indication of identity cast as a two-dimensional face. Most importantly for my purposes here, it is this extremely crucial connection I anticipate making explicit.

For Yarber's painter, Marcel's fiat is a vital necessity.[110] This is something that Delacroix alludes to when he frequently stated that the painter thinks with his brush. "Faced" with the task of becoming before it, the *self* of the painter must confront the "ascending dialectic" in which "Who am I?" changes its significance, "becoming now a sort of appeal, an asking which is

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[110] Marcel uses the term "fiat", in order to indicate the point of breakthrough whereas the fruit born from first reflection no longer sustains one's quest for identity. "For, within that sphere, there are no "reasons," no "grounds," nor any persuading evidence" to the contrary. All I can do, Marcel argues, is *opt*: being "fed up" with the half-solutions to irresolvable "problems," having had "too much" of "everybody," I have open to me only a radical fiat, "I *will* not...!" Zaner, p 17.

essentially a calling-for response."[111]

> Perhaps to the extent that I become conscious of this
> appeal qua appeal, I am led to recognize that this appeal is
> possible only because, within my own depths, there is
> something more inward to me than me myself - and at the
> same stroke, the appeal changes its sign.[112]

The painter, in recognizing her or his quest as an appeal carried out on the surface, alters their original intent, and transforms it into a response to the appeal. The quest for artistic identity is no longer satisfied by the application of signs, and one is forced into the deeper waters of one's *being*, where there lay responses "more inward to my self than myself."[113]

It is important to remember that all of this quest-as-process is the result of sight and touch working in tandem. The painter vacillates between internalizations and external actions, and thus reworks a scene of their becoming as objectified evidence of such. But sight and touch are not zones of identity exclusive to the lone painter. As is the case with the body, paintings are objects which are available for social inspection and discourse. Others employ sight in order to assimilate the touch of another, as in the application of paint to the surface of a painting. In other words, they recognize and attempt to comprehend traces of the body.[114] In

[111]Zaner, p 17-18.
[112]Zaner, p 18.
[113]Zaner, p 18.
[114]Anthony Synnott, *The Body Social: Symbolism, Self and Society* (London: Routledge, 1993): "Touch," pp 156-181, and "Sight," pp 206-227.

addition, and in keeping with what Marcel himself indicates, others contribute to identity recognition. This being the case, it will prove beneficial to further address the social aspect of identity and its relationship with embodiment.

The Of and For of Sartre's Being

Encountering another human being is essential to Sartre's ontology of embodiment.[115] Being *"objectite"* is dependent on the Other's "look," as is the objecthood of the *Other* made possible only by one's gaze. Looking and being-looked-at create the foundations of one's cognizance of an existential identity. It is something Sartre regarded as *subject to object*, and *object to subject*; a co-dependent characteristic of "being".

Sartre rejected the concept of a *primacy of knowledge*, and instead focused on the above social relation.[116] The phenomena of *being* is, by Sartre's account, somewhat similar to Marcel's in that it involves a unification of all concerns that fall under the very question of being. Existence refers exclusively to itself. It designates itself as an organized ensemble of qualities that is a condition of all disclosure. As with Hegel's

[115] In Sartre's *No Exit*, the main character expresses the despair of this reliance by stating near the play's conclusion that Hell is "other people." Arthur C. Danto, *Jean-Paul Sartre* (New York: Viking Press, 1975) pp 107-8.

[116] Zaner, *The Problem of Embodiment*, pp 61-62.

Phenomenology of Spirit, Sartre's being is "being-in-order-to disclose," and not "being as disclosed." And it is this disclosure that carries with it the social connection.

Sartre's rejection of an ascendancy of knowledge is replaced by his belief in a reliance on the Other for one's recognition of their own object identity. One understands themselves as a individual body by being amongst other individual bodies.

> If I am looked-at, I have a consciousness of *being* an object. But this consciousness can be produced only in and by the existence of the Other. In this respect, Hegel was right. However, this Other consciousness and this Other freedom are never given to me. [ie., there can be no subject-subject relation] since, if there were, they would be known, and thus objects, and I would cease to be an object.[117]

What Sartre is referring to here is the self's inability to obtain the distance required in order to see itself as subject in the form of an object. Thus its being cannot be placed within the realm of knowledge, simply because such reticence is required. One's being compensates for this lack of this distance by making use of the Other in order to obtain recognition of its own object identity. In Sartre's terms, being as a phenomena is "transphenomenal."[118]

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[117]Zaner, *The Problem of Embodiment*, p 60.
[118]Zaner, p 61-62.

The body, according to Sartre, was something for the individual that "cannot be apprehended in sensuous perception like other physical things, including the body of the Other."[119] One cannot sense their own skeletal structure, eyes, or nervous system. If one should attempt to do this, one must take oneself as an object, and this would be to destroy the "worldliness" of one's world. In terms of paintings as the *face of the body*, this is a particularly important connection.

Sartre placed a great deal of importance on the sense of sight. Whereas Marcel had emphasized that the body must sustain a shared environment with the objects on which it acts, or which it perceives, Sartre furthers this notion. The eye, as the organ of visual perception, is not only the locus of the visual field but is also "continuously referred to by the objects oriented with respect to it."[120] Therefore it adopts the role of being in the world as well as being-the-world of perceived things. Hence, the figure-ground relationship of the world acquires a third component - that of the eye as "center of orientation for the appearance of visual things ordered in the figure-ground relation."[121]

Being at the center of this self-world, the eye functions by both defining the visual world as well as being defined by it. It cannot see itself,

[119]Zaner, p 81.
[120]Zaner, p 92.
[121]Zaner, p 92.

therefore it cannot define itself. This being the case, it would itself have to become an object of vision for that of another center. For Sartre, the eye exists because it is the "referred-to" of visual objects, so it is at best "indicated." It cannot be perceived by me, simply because, in Sartre's terms, I am it.

> My being-in-the-world, by the fact that it realizes a world, makes itself indicated to itself as a being-in-the-midst-of-the-world by the world which it realizes... My body is everywhere on the world... My body is at once coextensive with the world, spread out across things, and at the same time gathered into this single point which all these things indicate and which I am without being able to know.[122]

Sartre views this being-in-the-world as a space of situation, and one "furrowed with paths, places, by-ways, routes, locales, ways of going and coming, of using, doing and the like."[123] It is the world one operates in. And essential to being in this world is that one cannot consider their own actions as an object any more than they can regard their body as such. Only the actions of another can be regarded as an object for one to witness.

As specified, one's eye is the facilitator in watching for confirmation of self on the faces, and in the actions of the Other. The question I would like to pose here is what if that face of the Other was that of a painting. How then, could one expunge any sense of their identity?

[122]Zaner, p 92.
[123]Zaner, p 95.

Painters make paintings with two essential pieces of knowledge in mind. That of a history of paintings, and the fact that others, including themselves, are going to look at these paintings. In the first instance, painters acquire the ability to paint in the same sense that we acquire language.[124] They are aware of both historical, as well as contemporary reactions of others to these paintings, and knowledge of that specialized category of discourse certainly contributes to their identity, and *that* identity's further relationship with the occupation with which they are engaged.

Keeping in mind Marcel's two stages of *reflection*, and my subsequent application of that concept to the practice of painting, there are painters who settle for a *style* or artistic disposition that finds its identity in the conceptually comfortable past. According to Marcel's first reflection, these

[124] "Two very important points regarding this statement. In the first case, learning a language as an infant differs a great deal from that of being an adult, that is having already acquired an notion of a language, and therefore being able to comprehend, to various degrees, the notions associated with learning an additional language. This is something that Wittgenstein tried to examine with an investigation of how we learn or are taught language. This inquiry is then interestingly adapted by Richard Wollheim in order to examine, in a similar procedure, "The Art Lesson," *On Art and the Mind: Essays and Lectures* (London: Allan Lane, 1973)pp 130-151. An additional comment regarding this statement relates to the fact that painters are no longer taught how to paint in the same manner that was institutionalized over the course of the past six centuries. Although pockets of academic or schools strictly devoted to the traditional processes of painting are still in operation today, as a general rule, the programs of current art schools are to offer painting as amongst the other disciplines available for aspiring artists. It is likely that as many of today's painting instructors retire (who were active as painters during the sixties when the popularity of mimicking the predominant manners of the kind of medium application associated with Abstract Expressionism was at its peak), there will be an even further deterioration of painting taught as a discipline. This situation may add credence to what the British painter Howard Hodgkin suggested, that being that those practicing painting today will never offer the kind of significant artistic advancements of the Modernists... today all one can do is add footnotes: "To be a painter now is to be part of a very small, endangered species," and "I no longer think it is possible for an artist to think of themselves as part of history." Excerpts from an interview with the author, Andrew Graham-Dixon, *Howard Hodgkin* (London: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers, 1994) pp 178-179.

painters would associate their identity directly to the face of the painting they had created, even though it was *a face* they had seen before (as in mimicking the styles of others). As I stated earlier, the painter I am more interested in is the one who is engaged in the process of second reflection face-making.

By acting out before the canvas, the painter can participate and then observe the residue of those actions as the kind of objects she or he would observe as if they were the *actions-as-objects* of others. This would give one the opportunity to look at *objects* of their identity. The painting becomes a 'pure fact' of the painter's presence in the world, as well as a validity of that presence for the Other to recognize. That recognition takes the form of an additional object, the responsive actions of the Other, as a further tier of confirmation of the presence of the painter's identity of being in the world.

Paint as Flesh

Sartre regarded the flesh of the Other to be representative of "the pure contingency of his presence to me."[125] That flesh however, is not to be simply understood as an object. As is the case with one's understanding of one's own body being-in-situation, the physical mass of the Other is

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[125] Zaner, p 95.

understood in a similar manner. And this is an important contribution to the notion of embodiment, as well as aiding in distinguishing between human beings and that of objects such as paintings.

> ...one cannot perceive the Other's body as flesh, like an isolated object having purely external relation with other thises. That is so only for the cadaver. The Other's body as flesh is immediately given to me as the center of reference of a situation which is synthetically organized around it, and it is inseparable from that situation...[126]

To understand paint as flesh is, of course, another matter. For Sartre this would not be possible simply because paintings would not possess the two contingencies necessary for his attribution of meaning. For Yarber, the "facialised, ocularized body of the painter confronts its mirror-image in the scene of the painting" as a visceral fact, and not necessarily a visual one.

> Much has been said about paint as flesh (as in the work of Bacon for example), but this phrase has been understood too metaphorically. The danger of painting, to the jeopardy of the painter, is that this enfibrillation of painterly and bodily flesh is literally real, on the level of the virtual [my underlining]. An evisceration of the body proper (the biological organism) must take place to empower the virtualisation that will empower this transubstantiation. The production of this expenditure is key to our understanding of the desire for virtual reality.[127]

Manipulated paint becomes an indication of the painter's being-in-situation. Although it is true that a painting lacks Sartre's notion of a "taste of himself," the fleshy marks placed, smeared, erased, and reapplied, are,

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[126] Yarber, p 100.
[127] Yarber, p 65.

for the viewer, the residue of those oscillating interior and anterior presences that are the metamorphoses that are the painter's situations. And since "the presentness of presence is fleeting," the painted surface becomes the mirage-like "resting places" of the painter's having been "here".[128]

Shedding Skin: Merleau-Ponty

As was the case with the Impressionists, paintings have often been referred to as slices of life, and this is a notion I would like to further augment. Keeping in mind the "here" of the painter being represented by the resulting painting, in due course I will propose that marks that comprise these mirror-bodies impound time. Unlike an analog representation such as a photograph, they are a manifestation of the painter's presentness of presence, as a result of them having been executed over a terrestrial duration. In order to introduce this point however, it is necessary to further explain how paintings serve as the reservoir of meaning I have enumerated to this point.

As indicated by the above references to Marcel and Sartre, throughout this century it has become increasingly accepted that our identities are under constant transformation. Contingency playing a nuclear role. Recently

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[128] Yarber, p 67.

Thomas Csordas has written that

> If behind the turn to the body lay the implicit hope that it would be the stable center of the world of decentered meanings, it has only led to the discovery that the essential characteristic of embodiment is existential indeterminacy.[129]

This is something Marcel referred to by suggesting that there is no center, or self as object, but only a stage. On this stage is the unfolding of contingent situations that are the culmination of one's self. Returning to my earlier analogy of the activity of painting acting as that stage, I would like to explain what I mean by the application of paint entrapping *time*.

What I am suggesting here is that each time a painter places marks upon a painting, they are, so to speak, metaphorically shedding phenomenological skin. As with the constant revision that is our self's, that shed skin is replaced and replenished by the phenomena of constant epistemological alteration. It is a phenomenology of both the painter, and painter as manipulated and representational medium. It is the painter reacting and responding to an object that they metaphorically understand to be themselves. It is in this sense that paintings acquire a virtual identity.

Merleau-Ponty writes that "perception reveals objects as beings, beings

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[129]Thomas J. Csordas (editor) *Embodiment and experience: The Existential Ground of Culture and Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) p. XI (introduction).

which pose certain at first only confused "problems" to my body."[130] They

beseech possible action from my body upon them.

> Without the exploration of my vision or my hand, and
> before my body is synchronized with it, the sensible, what
> is sensed, is nothing but a vague solicitation... Thus a
> sensible which is going to be sensed poses to my body a sort
> of confused problem...[131]

Our bodies conduct, as in facing the potential for action upon an object as a

problem to be resolved, is a quality we attribute to identity.[132] For

Merleau-Ponty however, this relationship is more complex than mere

visual contact with what he called *visible beings*.

Merleau-Ponty considered perception not as merely a sensory ability or

capacity, but rather as a "mode of access to..." or "being to..."[133] He rejected

the notion sensory data or qualities, and referred to objects-as-beings as

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[130] Zaner, p 131.

[131] Zaner, p 131.

[132] Merleau-Ponty's work is understood as essentially "a recovery of that primordial intertwining of human subject and world which precedes analytic and scientific thought." Paul Crowther, *Art and Embodiment: From Aesthetics to Self-Consciousness* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993) p 63.

[133] Merleau-Ponty's rejection of the Lockean-Cartesian theory is that it is empiricist and rationalist. This traditional model presupposed that sense perception was essentially a mode of knowledge. "That is to say, there is said to be a certain object, X, which perchance emits a certain series of "waves," perchance "picked up" by a part of the sensitive surface of another object, an organism; this objective occurrence then has certain consequences which are explainable, it is assumed, by means of the law of causality pertaining to physical objects in general. When the sensitive surface is "stimulated," certain "sense-data" result; corresponding in a one-to-one correlation the "local stimulation," certain other, equally objective (physiological) events occur, transmitting the "information" to neurological centers and, ultimately, to the brain, wherein a "terminal condition" is set up. As a consequence to this whole story a certain experience happens: "smelling a rose." But here a foreign agent has slipped into the supposedly objective framework: the "sensation," supposedly provoked into being by the stimulation, are nevertheless said to be "purely private," i.e., "subjective," is said to have been "caused" by the emission of physical waves of a certain kind; so to speak, the receiving station has translated the objective data into the data of experience, in this case, olfactory language." Zaner, p 133.

"lived unites," "beings," "meanings," and "poles of action."[134] The traditional conception was something Merleau-Ponty viewed as relying to heavily upon an "unwarranted metaphysical assumption." The body, and the experience of the world through sensory experience, becomes for Merleau-Ponty, as for both Marcel and Sartre (although not without distinct differences), central to the issue of *"conscience-incarnee."*[135]

Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology insists that one's reflection is not of one's self as a "subject" separate from the world., nor as the world (the "object" of consciousness) separate from one's self. Instead, one is a "being-to-the-world," as a "subject committed in the world."[136] The body arises as a "problem" in that it must contend with "sense-data," or "impressions," and "ideas." It follows that a theory of the body translates for Merleau-Ponty into a theory of perception, which in turn becomes a theory of sensuousness. He explains the experience of a "thing" in such terms.

> The thing and the world are given to me along with the parts of my body, not by "natural geometry" but in a living connection comparable (or rather, identical) to the one

[134]Zaner, p 132.

[135]It is important to further note that for Merleau-Ponty, as with Marcel and Sartre, that they were not in agreement on many of these overlapping issues. As one example, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty are in complete disagreement on the one's identity via the body. The later perceived identity as the body lived, as "I can *apprehend it as experienced by me*.... I know my body-proper by living it... and apparently in no other manner;" a view Sartre would strongly oppose. Zaner, pp 138-139. In addition, there are of course subsequent critiques of these phenomenology's. My intent here is to establish an understanding of how to relate the notion of paintings being the "face of the body" (Yarber) in a manner that will allow for exercising the application of concepts of embodiment as they relate to us as peculiar living organisms. As will follow, I will propose that paintings exhibit manifest *signs*, and that their function as in *embodying meaning*, is the relationship of these signs to the issues of embodiment that are adhered to our existence.

[136]Zaner, p 137.

which exists among the parts of my body itself. [Objects
meaning, as Marcel indicated, "existing" for one only to
the extent that a relation is maintained with them that is
analogous to one's body.]

External perception and the perception of the body-proper
vary together because they are two sides of the same act...
It is the replica or correlate of the synthesis of the body-
proper - and it is literally the same thing to perceive a
single ball and to use two fingers as a single organ."[137]

The body becomes a "expressive unity" that can only be known by the
conduct it carries out as it performs "living," a structure that is visually
communicated to the sensory world itself. It is something that one can
witness, and most importantly through sensory perception. This explains
why a theory of the body is for Merleau-Ponty a theory of perception.[138]

Merleau-Ponty's emphasis on the body as *being* is useful here because it
amplifies Sartre's social connection. As I have already touched upon, the
painter is engaged in a socially recognized activity. Although it is true that
painters produce their artifacts in isolation, the high majority of what they
create is intended to be seen by others. In regards to this examination,
paintings, both historical and contemporary, are to be understood as the

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[137]Zaner, p 151.
[138]"All external perception is immediately synonymous to a certain perception of my body, just as all
perception of my body is explicated in the language of external perception. If now... the body is not a
transparent object and is not given to us like the circle to the geometry (by its law of constitution); if it is an
expressive unity which one can learn to know only be performing it; then this structure imparts itself to the
sensible world. The theory of the corporeal scheme is implicitly a theory of perception." Zaner, p 151.

meeting point of individual and social aspects of identity.[139] Frequently

citing Merleau-Ponty, Richard McCleary explains:

> My body as the self-awareness of an "I am able to "is thus a
> sort of "intersection" of perceiving and perceived within
> an existential system of exchanges and "equivalences," in
> which the flesh of sensible being both reflects and forms
> the counterpart of my own incarnation. In the presence of
> another man as flesh, my flesh extends this coexistence of
> perceiving and perceived through an intentional
> encroachment similar to the one which originally
> constituted it as a perceived thing. My body as an "I am
> able to" is faced with something visible whose behavior
> evokes my body's motor possibilities as if it were my body's
> own behavior. This alien behavior thus becomes not just
> the visible and constituted "other side" but the constituting
> "other side" of the intention of my body. My intentions are
> in "circuit" with its own, and pass through them toward
> the public meaning structures of a common world. Like the
> reflecting mirror which is its technical amplification,
> carnal self-awareness draws my flesh outside me in the
> public world of caranal intersubjectivity. I am embodied in
> the world as one dimension of that primordial, all-
> comprehending Being of "many foci" which Merleau-
> Ponty describes as being coming to be through the
> fundamental "we" of the evolving human community. In
> the "absolute of presence" of carnal intersubjectivity,
> flesh meets flesh in the flesh of the world, and man can
> now become a living mirror for his fellow man.[140]

Paint as flesh is therefore not considered as such until socially confirmed

as the residue of the activity of the painter in question. Flesh, in the sense

I am exercising it here, recognizes identity as being the culmination of the

individual and the social. The combination of the two establish identity,

and the painting is to be understood as the point of agglomeration.

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[139]"Gombrich proposed that this meeting was one whereas the viewer is give his role, and that the kind of work he is guided by the work to perform is supplied by the image itself. For Norman Bryson however, the manner in which a painting is constructed, including formal techniques, determine what kind of viewer the painting "proposes and assumes". Bryson, *Vision and Painting: The Logic of the Gaze* (London: Yale University Press, 1983) p xiii (preface).

[140] Richard Mcleary, *Signs: Maurice Merleau-Ponty* (Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1964) p xviii (introduction).

The Constituted Other Side

I suppose it would be fair to allege that I have identified the painter as an obsessive member of society, and one engaged in the task of expunging identity from the manipulation of the colored mud that is paint. And that would be a fair assessment. But due to the fact that paintings are, as I have explained, objects like the body - in that they are open to social recognition and inspection - they possess interest of a social nature.[141]

The manner in which we relate to paintings is, as Yarber has provided, that of *mirror-bodies*. The application of the paint medium can be considered as the objects of Merleau-Ponty's ontology, or manifest signs comprising the face or frontalised body of the painter before us. Understood as signs, the application of paint; brushmarks, swipes, drips, smears, etc., makes two points of signification available to our inspections. The first is evidence of the body's action, and the second as multitudinous indications of the ephemerality of presence.

Merleau-Ponty postulated that "perception already stylizes." Thus, beneath the surface of expression lies the salient sea of our carnal and inarticulate source. Communication, painting being one kind, is for Merleau-Ponty a

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[141] As noted by Thomas Csordas, the attitude towards our bodies has altered in recent times, that is as something no longer considered as "a brute fact of nature." It has now become the cite of "bodily care" and a "marketable self," thus transforming the body from object to agent, that is as something to be acted upon. Thomas Csordas, *Embodiment and Experience: The Existential Ground of Culture and Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) pp 1-2 (introduction).

manner in which a portion of this invisible can be made visible. A view such as this aids in our effort to recognize in something such as a painting, the signs of an increased descent into the genesis of our *being*.

As Umberto Eco has noted, some presume that the notion of *signs* can only be applied to linguistic communication. He dismisses such an incarcerated outlook by clearly noting that throughout history there have been repeated attempts to "find a common basis for the theory of linguistic meaning and for the theory of pictorial representation, and also for the theory of meaning and the theory of inference."[42] In addition, this objection opposes the philosophical instinct of 'wonder,' of which Aristotle suggested originally motivates induces one to philosophize.

According to Peirce, a sign is "something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity."[43] The "stands to" association is bases or terrain of an inferential scheme. A sign is an signal present, and one that stands in for the absence of that to which it is referring. To infer as to the significance of a sign is, as Aristotle summarized, to 'wonder.' The task of philosophy is to both speculate on that which is invisible, and it is

[42] Umberto Eco, *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language* (Bloomington: Indian University Press, 1986) p 18-19.
[43] Eco, p 14.

certainly applicable here.[144]

> To see human beings as signifying animals - even outside the practice of verbal language - and to see that their ability to produce and to interpret signs, as well as their ability to draw inferences, is rooted in the same cognitive structures, represent a way to give form to our experience.[145]

Manifest Signs or Embodiment?

The painter motions her hand towards the support she is working upon. A moderate sweeping motion is made with her forearm as the first few strands of the brush hairs make contact with the surface. With a arched wrist, the elbow begins to bend as the painter sensitively exerts enough pressure of the brush so that paint begins to scumble onto the scarcely visible and heightened textures of the support's surface. The painter repositions her feet, slightly adjusting her hips and intensifying the scrutiny of her eyes (following in sensory tandem the cadence of the brush), in order to maintain the dexterity required for the intended and aspired mark to result. As the arm is further extended, the painter lifts her right shoulder, dipping the other, and then employs her free hand in order

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[144] An interesting sidenote to this is that the many contemporary art critics are philosophers. To "wonder" or speculate over what is invisible is the trademark of our present artworld; obsessed as it is with cryptic irony and stretched conceptual metaphor. In terms of writing about art, this has created an interesting phenomena, as Danto explains: "Artwriters in general have too weak a grip on philosophical analysis to examine with an appropriate level of critical power an argument sustained over several pages, and philosophers, again in general, have too little interest in art or too scant a knowledge of it to be able to appraise an argument that, like mine [his "End of Art" theory], derives from a certain intimacy with its recent history." Horowitz and Huhn, *The Wake of Art*, p 193.
[145] Eco, p 13.

to hold onto the supports edge as she reaches across the painting. The brush hairs are increasingly being pressed onto the surface as the amount of paint begins to taper. The painter's elbow straightens and the wrist follows as the brush is gently lifted off the surface of the painting.[146] The painter steps back, and scans her effort with the realization that the resulting endorsement is indicative of this motion. An important question however, is this physical motion the sum of what such a sign indicates?

According to the earlier references to embodiment, no it is not. The culmination of Marcel, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty's philosophies indicate that the identity of self is related to, if not dependent upon, a relationship with the world, via the body. As stated at the outset, my intentions here are not to imply that any one of these ontology's is the better. Rather, it is vital to our understanding of paintings that we appreciate how complex a concept such as embodiment can be, and particularly when applied to something other than humans, but with the notion that humans are applied to them.

As such, paintings do not merely display signs. Western painters have historically sought to manipulate signs in such a way as to disguise their

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[146] This piece of description is similar to that of Norman Bryson' s account of a film devoted to Matisse in the act of painting. Bryson, *Vision and Painting*, p 163.

legible recognition.[147] A mark is placed on the surface, then smeared or erased and eventually replaced. The painting could be as laconic as a Morris Louis, or as complex as a Velasquez. Both are the result of a composite and manifest cooperative effort between perception - that is intuition and cognition - and the manual execution. The result is an object displaying a portion of the process of *becoming,* which is employed in order to forge a visual synthesis of that very alliance. An application of paint operates somewhat like a term in language in that it is representative of an absence. Referring to a painting comprised of such marks is to indicate that they are what Paul Crowthers attributed as "sensuous manifolds," or what Joseph Margolis has referred to as cultural entities, in that they exhibit *expressive* and *intentional properties.*[148]

Temporal Traces

The application of paint to the surface of a painting takes place over a duration of time. The realization of a painting itself can be executed over a condensed interval, once again as with a Louis, or over a longer term, as

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[147] The death of painting could be said to have come at the hands of Greenberg's prescription for making such pictures, both "the painter and the viewer becoming sensualists in paint." Danto, *After the End of Art,* p 76.

[148] The terms "expressive" and "intentional properties" are those of Joseph Margolis. He used these features as characteristics differentiating artworks such as Duchamp's *Bottlerack* from a common bottlerack. Joseph Margolis, "The Ontological Peculiarity of Works of Art," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* (New York: Winter, 1977) pp 45-50. The term "sensuous manifolds" appear in the introduction to Crowther, *Art and Embodiment,* p 4.

with a Velazquez.[149] Each time paint is applied or erased from the surface, a decision was made that a particular mark is amongst those adequate agents required in order to procure the aspired optical fidelity. This constant reassessment of the relationships amongst all of the characteristics situated within the painting, contribute to the painting serving as the rostrum for an identity striving for visual determination. It is in this sense that we can regard painting as not reproducing the visible, but rather, and in the spirit of Merleau-Ponty, making visible.[150]

I would like now to revisit Leah Ollman's comment that Tony Scherman's paintings are "embodiments of viscous, ensnaring time." As I have indicated above, amongst the messages related to the traces of paint application is time. A painting therefore becomes the dispersal of the presentness of the painter's presence, as carried out over a duration and transcribed with a material medium. The kind of presentness I am referring to is a fleeting phenomena of becoming. This fleeting aspect naturally cannot itself be concomitant, but only indicated by the vitality of the material application. This is due to the fact that the only time that paint moves is when it is being utilized. Hence, paintings represent a peculiar kind of narrative that is the unfolding of a process of becoming.

[149] In regards to Velazquez and temporality. Ortega y Gasset notes that "Painters, until Velazquez, had wished to flee the temporal and invent an alien world immune of time, peopled by creatures of eternity. He attempts to the contrary; he paints time itself, which is the instant, which is existence as it is condemned to be, to pass, to decay." Ortega y Gasset, *Velazquez, Goya and The Dehumanization of Art* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company) p 105.
[150] Crowther, "*Merleau-Ponty: Vision and Painting*," pp 102-118.

They are comparable to varied collections of phenomenological snapshots, each flash being indicative of temporal presence. In this sense, they are the corpse or snake's skin of the painter's presence.[151]

That paintings transcend their materiality in order to invoke a temporal notion is not where their potential for meaning is exhausted. In the same manner that paintings display a peculiar narrative of "at onceness,"[152] they also represent a especial inception of spatial relationships to the body.

The Spatial Question

Although it is true that the material object of a painting is limited by its physical span or frame, interpretation is not a finite spatial reduction, as someone like Greenberg would endorse. Rather, paintings petition the notion of the painter's physical spatial maneuvers. The creation of a painting is linked directly to action, and action is itself dependent on space with which to unfold. But by action here, I do not wish to draw attention to simply that of the physical painter, but also that of the inner painter.

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[151] I state "varied collections" here because as Andrew Benjamin points out, a painting such as Poussin's The Nurture of Jupiter inscribes "a complex temporality within it, in part because it remained indifferent to materiality..." Paintings such as those of Sherman's are absolutely attentive to paint's materiality, and eschew what Benjamin refers to as "paint's work," whereas the Poussin plays down the former in order to emphasize the latter. Andrew Benjamin, ""Matter's Insistence, "Tony Sherman: Banqou's Funeral (Montreal, Concordia College, 1996) p 55. As is the case with most Modernist and contemporary paintings, the materiality of painting has become increasingly thrust at the viewer.
[152] Andrew Benjamin, What is Abstraction? (London: Academy Editions, 1996)p 23.

As one makes an ocular account of a painting, there is an effect somewhat similar to looking down and into a brook or pool of water. There are leaves floating on the surface, the surface itself, then there are weeds and particles floating at various depths beneath the surface, and finally - and if visible - the texture of the bottom. It is each one of these metaphorical consignments that commensurate the spatial maneuvers of the painters body, all of which have taken place within the fluidity of the creative act. It is the painter's thinking-feeling-acting chain as represented by matter.

As similar to the temporal aspect of paintings, this spatial feature contributes to an "openness" of meaning. The embodied significance of paintings, and the complex ontology I have provided here, contain threads of interpretation that are at once resolvable and unresolvable, thus eluding absolute identification. This evidence should indicate that the very nature and politics of interpretation is itself open to repeated revision because the viewer, like the painter, is a subject also in the constant process of becoming.[153] The viewer, again like the painter, is organically in the constant state of reconciliating to their epistemological identity. Their *becoming* is something they bring to the painting as to all else they encounter. As Benjamin puts it, "Repetition, within judgment, will always

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[153] Gianni Vattimo, *Beyond Hermeneutics*,(Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997) p 28. Here Vattimo states that reality is "plainly nothing more than a conflict of interpretations, it is still possible for interpretations to emerge that are so compelling as to precipitate violence and struggle in the current sense of the world."

be mediated by what occasions it, namely the insistent presence of the becoming-object."[154]

Images and Meaning

I would like at this point to acknowledge an omission that I am certain the reader has noticed; that of any analysis of images. The reasons for my avoidance in addressing this aspect of paintings is twofold. In the first case, in terms of imagery I have already established that the painting as *face of the body* is the desired destination for the painter. The internal image, whether figurative or abstract, is but a co-mingled component of that mirror-body. Secondly, the converse is true with reproducible imagery, such as print-making, photography, cinema and digital computation. In such modes of representation, it is the convenience and expediency with which an image can be reproduced that is of the utmost importance. In other words, for these modes of representation it is the *image* that is the destination.

What this variety of representational modes have in common is the desire to transcend their particular materiality and incorporate a meaning other

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[154] Although Benjamin is referring to abstract paintings, his sentiments are applicable to the identity I attribute to paintings here. My examination and explanation has been concentrated on the process of painting. The image is a notion that will be addressed when I turn my attention to that of digital representations. Benjamin, *What is Abstraction?*, p 50.

than their constitute parts. With the advent of photography, cinema, and eventually that of computer technology, the transcendence of matter has appeared increasingly veritable. Subsequently, and with the emergence of each one of these representational modes, the notion of our human identity has been given a new cultural *yardstick* with which to be measured, and a consequent shift in meaning. In recent years that focus has intensified on the body as the "mutable mediator between self and society."[155] In what is a peculiar coincidence, the mirror-body images of paintings have drastically declined as the primary conception of the body throughout this century, coinciding with the above technologies' continual dissemination over our cultural terrain.

The Death of the Body

As impact of artificial intelligence advances, a belief in the body may very well continue to decline. Enormous amounts of data available via computer banks and networks has eclipsed former routines of systematic research. Information has to some extent become mistaken for the aphrodisiac of transcendence. This has transpired because computers are constantly being referred to as the digital equivalent of our brains. "Who for instance speaks of the brain when experiencing an abstract painting?"[156] With the

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[155] Csordas, *Embodiment and Experience*, p 106.

[156] David Moos, "Architecture of the Mind: Machine Intelligence and Abstract Painting" *Art & Design: Painting in the Age of Artificial Intelligence* (London: Academy Group, Vol # II, No, 5-6, 1996) p 55.

advent of digital technology, and more attention brought to the neurological functioning that is our brain, we confront an abstract painting, or a Rembrandt, increasingly equipped with exposure to such notions. In order to examine this issue in relation to digital representations, I will suspend issues related to the tactile feature of paintings. That is a topic I will return to at the conclusion of this chapter.

The process in which we visually perceive imagery is a complex issue.[157] To begin with, images offer themselves as visual fields. This equips the viewer with the opportunity to begin inspection from any point on that plane. When we look at images, and even at the lowest level, we do more than simply scan them.[158] We enlist our minds, and our mind enlist concepts. These concepts vary from those which are pre-verbal (before being mediated by thought), and the genetic and general cultural overlap which comprises our specific personal and social horizons. Of course these parameters vary a great deal amongst individuals and the frequency of encounters with the same imagery.

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[157] "The gross structure how the eye functions was sketched in the eighteenth-century. This is where the term 'distinctiveness of vision' originated. Baxandall, *Patterns of Intention.*, pp 81-82.

[158] In an effort to distinguish between the nature of looking at a picture, and the temporal linearity of language, Baxandall offers a concise description of how we scan an object. "When addressing a picture we get a first general sense of a whole very quickly, but this is imprecise; and, sense vision is clearest and sharpest on the foveal axis of vision, we move the eye over the picture, scanning it with a succession of rapid fixations. The gait of the eye, in fact, changes in the course of inspecting an object. At first, while we are getting our bearings, it moves not only more quickly but more widely; presently it settles down to movements at a rate of something like four to five a second and shifts of something like three to five degrees - this offering the overlap of effective vision that enables coherence of registration." Baxandall, *Patterns of Intention*, pp 3-4.

A perfect example of what I am referring to here is that of Doc Eggerton.[159] During the course of a lecture Eggerton would frequently hold up a photograph of something such as a satellite image, describing what was in his hand as a "storage medium" encoded with information. He would add however, that one would have to know "How to read them." Eggerton would then unravel what he perceived in that generic photograph: "Everything from geographical location to geological character to celestial time to local temperature, humidity, wind and so on, as he moved to a finer and finer grain of detail."

An interpretation of this kind, in details layered with encoded circumstances, has been the bedrock of scientific methodology. This may help to explain why art history had initially established itself as a branch of scientific discipline.[160] As Eggerton points out however, one has to be an informed viewer in order to recognize the plethora of topics he related to a static photograph, but not necessarily a scientist.

Of course one may choose to ignore the internal image and take recognition of the format, size, the dot matrixes, or the gloss or matte finish. These are affinities which I will bend somewhat in order to incorporate them within

[159] Doc Eggerton was an MIT scientist who invented strobiographic photography, whereas images of stop-motion, such as a bullet photographed at the point it passes through a playing card. Stacey Spiegel, Emerging Space: From Plato's Cave to the Rotterdam Harbor Simulator, *Art & Design: Painting in the Age of Artificial Intelligence* (London: Academy Group, V. II, No. 5-6, 1996) p 27.
[160] Vernon Hyde Minor, *Art History's History* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall Press, 1994) p 89.

Kant's notion of *representation*. In a prior passage, I suggested that the representational veneer of reproducible imagery is a by-product, that it is the re-production of the image that is the *ends* supporting the *means*. Here I have isolated these details in order to specify them, and as with the tactile application of painting, sift the relationship of their formulation through the filter of embodiment.

Making Acquaintances

As described at length, the examination of a painting's production is an important component when formulating an interpretation. With reproducible imagery however, this relationship is not as intense. The factor that divides painting from reproducible imagery is that of a viscous material substance. By this I mean the manner in which each painter manipulates the medium in order to create a painting. Although it is true that all paintings are made of paint (amongst other materials), the *style* in which each *individual* painter applies the medium is a feature of meaning.

This is not the case with reproducible imagery. The method with which an ink jet or laser printer images is impersonal, as is the paper on which it is adhered. Therefore, the distinguishing features between digitaly created images does not lie in the employment of physical substances and material.

These are for the most part constants. The significant distinctions are the images themselves. And it is this particular feature of image reproduction that the computer age has enhanced greatly.

Photoshop programs provide a context whereas an image can be altered into a variety of states and over a short period of time. Aspects of images can be manipulated so as to remain beneath our immediate perceptual detection, but continue to operate as a sign related to a directed meaning. The fact that we habitually scan reproducible imagery, rather than inspect them in the manner we do paintings, is part of their built-in effectiveness. Whereas paintings reward inspection with interpretation, reproducible images transact meaning with much less hermeneutical currency being exchanged.[161]

Computer as Agent

When we speak of digital images, we do not speak of the computer as an artist. What we usually refer to is the magnitude and precipitance with which computers can organize and facilitate us with a certain kind of visual information. Artificial intelligence offers an enormous output potential. Consequently, we do not perceive digital computation as creative

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[161] I realize that at this point I could apply a semiotic examination into the effectiveness of reproducible image - and particularly that of computers - with a semiotic tool. However, I am more concerned with questions of how images are created and this relationship's significance in terms of embodiment.

in the same sense that we relate creativity to a painter. In order for a comparative examination in relation to the subject of embodiment, I will now turn to an area of contemporary research that is currently receiving enormous attention.

Strong Artificial Intelligence are technological projects seeking to establish paradigms for the functioning processes of our brains. It is a field of research that is both immense in scope and the target of ardent critical scourge. In the first case, to attempt to parallel the functioning of the brain is not as simple as loading a data base with applications of intelligence, innovation and biological functions, all of which would be governed a neurological program. As cognitive psychologist Margaret Boden explains

> ...most computers are *digital* systems, in which the basic units either 'fire' or they don't. The brain, on the other hand, is to a large extent an *analogue* device: synaptic activity varies continuously (and nerve cells often fire 'spontaneously' as a result). Digital computers are designed as *serial* devices, in which only one instruction is executed at a time. By contrast, the brain is a parallel-processing device: neurons have rich interconnections, which enable cells to encourage or inhibit their neighbors activity.[162]

Supposing that we place a computer in a situation whereas it can work paint, in the same manner as its human counterpart might. This digital artisan would be rigged with a robotic armature, and equipped with a

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[162] David Moos, " Architecture of the Mind: Machine Intelligence and Abstract Painting ," *Art & Design: Painting in the Age of Artificial Intelligence*, p 56.

number of data bases incorporated with the kind of "parallel-processing" Boden refers to as the computational nature of the brain. In addition, we will also add a file consisting of *a* history of the practice of painting.

The computer will be programed to initially apply paint in small patches at, say, the center of the support, increasingly working outwards towards the edges of the surface. This digital process has been encrypted so as the color and size and sensitivity of application are never repeated in an obvious sequence. On account of this last feature, the computer is programmed to never repeat a painted image.

There is however a distinct problem here. As David Moos reflects, painters "each reflect upon the altered territory of individuality conveyed through selected methods of mark-making."[163] A computational device, such as our computerized painter, simply is not immersed in the same situation. The process through which it makes a creative decision is calculated and restricted to the information of its algorithms.[164] The kind of paintings it will produce will be of the kind of limited critical interest we associate with the arbitrary and randomness of a formula painter.

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[163] Moos, p 57.
[164] It is important here to point out that there are cognitive scientists who support the notion of our own subjective behavior being explainable "behaviourable acts." This is a topic that David Chalmers addresses in relation to artificial intelligence. David J. Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind: In Search of a Fundamental Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996) pp 184-186, and pp 309-332.

In Search of the "I Think" Device

So it proves that pitting the computer against the activities of the painter yields little artistic comparison. But it does put pressure on an interesting issue, and this returns us to *Strong Artificial Intelligence*. The crucial question for such projects is that of simulating the methodological intricacies of the brain. How could a computer possess the bases from which to make the kind of spontaneous creative decisions that the painter makes? Are these kind of rich-interconnections possible? These are queries that computer scientist Raymond Kurzweil regards as paramount in considering the notion of building a brain.

> Clearly, we need a capacity for hundreds of levels of parallel computations (with parallelism of each stage potentially in the billions). The levels cannot be fully *self-organizing*, although the algorithms in some cases allow for 'growing' new interneuronal connections. Each level will *embody* an algorithm, although the algorithms must permit *learning*. The algorithms are implemented in two ways: the transformation performed by the neurons themselves and the architecture of how the the neurons are connected. The multiple layers of parallel neuronal analysis permit information to be encoded on *multiple levels of abstraction*. For example, in vision, images are first analyzed in terms of edges; edges from surfaces; surfaces from objects; objects from scenes.[165]

Clearly, the obstacles are located in artificial intelligence's inability for consciousness. It simply lacks "a taste of itself." Cognizance of this kind is something which John Searle points out are not discovered in the

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[165] Raymond Kurzweil, *The Age of Intelligent Machines* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990) p 233.

computer, but are assigned.[166] In my explanation of paintings as the *face of the body* however, consciousness is of central importance. It is something which could be understood as the parallel or driving force of the painting process itself.

Without the capacity for consciousness, the computer is unable to re-create "the vast constructed crust of the self," as something which acquires "resolution through its position within a given system."[167] Additionally, digital devices have also been unable to simulate human sight.[168] For these reasons I do not wish to not further pursue the notion of embodiment in a comparative manner. I will instead divert my inquiry to that of how embodiment differs between paintings and digital representation.

A Numerical Reality

Digital imagery is available in two arrangements. The printed and screen format, and that of virtual reality. I will refer to the printed image as just

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[166] Amongst the most steadfast critics of 'strong AI' is Searle, a cognitive scientist and philosopher. Searle emphasizes that regardless of phenomenal computational power, the "digital machine" will be unable to display traits such as 'intentionality' and 'consciousness', due to the fact it can only be programed formally. "A computer can only manipulate pre-ascribed abstract symbols that have no inherent value; the system constitutes a syntax but comprises no semantic- thus it can never know what it is doing." John Searle, *Minds, Brains and Science* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984) pp 30-31 (footnotes).
[167] I have relied a great deal upon this article by David Moos in order to draw connections between painting and artificial intelligence. Here I quote Moos recounting the thoughts of Marvin Minsky, the co-founder of the Media Laboratory at MIT. Moos, *Architecture of the Mind*, p 58.
[168] Ulric Neisser, "Without Perception, There is no Knowledge: Implications for Artificial Intelligence," *Natural and Artificial Minds* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993) p ix (introduction).

that, a static edition of digitaly calculated manipulation and formulation. Due to the fact that the material form of each printout is primarily unfluctuating, I would have to turn my probe to various images, which I choose to avoid.

Screen images, including those of word processing are more complex than that of a paper printout. The monitor displays artificial intelligence in action, as it is directed by keyboards and the computer mouse. The screen depth is itself fathomless. It is the filter by which impulses can be arranged into images and manipulated by photoshop and other programs. Paul Virilio has praised this form of artificial vision and the impact he imagined it would have on "our entire method of relating to and relaying the world through our faculty of sight."[169] The closest period of artmaking that relates to such programs is that of Post-Modernism, whereas the applicability of style became a subject in its own right.

However, I would like to use the monitor as a point of departure for this examination. We will step, so to speak, behind the screen and into the realm of technologicalized virtuality. Here we have entered what appears to be a new medium for image representation. What I intend to disclose

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[169] Moos, *Architecture of the Mind*, p 57. Additionally, in *The Vision Machine* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University State Press, 1994) pp 59-76, Paul Virilio describes a concocted 'perception', an 'absolute-speed-machine' that would debilitate standard conceptions of geometrical ocularitys such as "observables and non-observables."

however, is that VR is not a medium in the same sense painting is, nor is it necessarily unprecedented, and that both of these factors contribute to the meaning of virtual reality.

Non-material Representations

In an article he wrote on Raphael in 1830, Delacroix lamented that painting since the Renaissance had progressively become "an object of self-luxury rather than nourishment for the soul."[170] He understood the reason for this as due to easel pictures having replaced that of murals. This is a provocative insight, simply because in most cases mural sized paintings would have been intended to *immerse* the viewer in the virtual space exhibited by the image. This was something of considerable significance to the religious mandate of the Baroque.

> For Baroque, and especially Rococo painters such as Boucher and Fragonard, the story often becomes secondary to the depiction of a fulsome and supple, yet airy, almost pneumatic materiality in which the atmosphere itself is palpable. A revivification of the virtual is attempted in its own expenditure through the 'fetishization of space itself."[171]

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[170] A contributing factor to Delacroix's lamentation is related to his personal desire to "paint on a large scale and for a large public." As Elspeth Davies has explained, this seems odd considering that the painter had never seen the Italian murals of the Renaissance. What I am interested in here is the fact that Delacroix perceived an end of the kind of grand-scaled painting: "Goodbye to the magnificent decorations of temples and palaces; no more that passionate interest which flashes from a painting made for one place and which the artist painted on the wall in the hope that the impression would last forever." (The statements by Delacroix are quoted here form Davies text.) Elspeth Davies, *Portrait of Delacroix* (Cambridge: The Pentland Press, 1994) p 61.

[171] Yarber, "Suspension of Disbelief," p 69.

With Renaissance artistic strategies, the incorporation of the earthly with the divine would result in the contamination of the latter. This was plainly a Neo-Platonic prejudice. In what is an interesting paradox, a Renaissance art theorist, Lomazzo, had esteemed Raphael in demigod like proportions. His one failing however, was that he was engaged in the physical act of painting, thus "the truly divine aspect of Rapheal's vision was tarnished in its translation into material form."[172]

The renewal of the real within the virtual can be uncovered at various points in Western history. It has been suggested that the first instance was that of the ancient *Village of Mysteries* frescoes in Pompeii. Other planes of existence, such as the Catholic Heaven, are both a historical and frequently referred to alternative space. The heavenly was an extra terrestrial plane of moral and ethical perfection, and that *space* was implied by the identification or presumed presence of a saint in something as simple as a pre fourteenth-century Christian icon. The architectural ceilings of the Baroque reveal the great demand for such illusions in the sixteenth and seventeenth-centuries. And successive attempts to "transpose the onlooker into the image" throughout the modern era have resulted in the "*Stereoscope, Cineorama, Stereoscopic Television, Sensorama*, and the *Circular Cinemas* of the fun fairs."[173]

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[172] Yarber, p 69.

[173] Oliver Grau, "An Historical Approach to Virtual Reality," *Consciousness Reframed: 1st International CAiiA Research Conference Proceedings* (New port: University of Wales College, 1997) unpaged catalog.

The Mind as Stage

It is ostensible that the eighteenth-century witnessed the death of mural painting, and thus a death of a peculiar notion of the virtual. Somewhat similar to Lamazzo, Hegel, who admittingly had *qualified admiration* for art, considered painting to be unavoidably limited by its sensuous means.[174] As a result, it was incapable of achieving a complete realization of self-consciousness and *Spirit*. Hegel regarded the highest period of art to have been that of the Classical, whereas the universal was most completely realized in a sensuous form. Art from later periods, and particularly the Romantic, exhibited for the Romantic philosopher, an understanding of art's origin in self-consciousness, but the outcome was a more limited artistic achievement. And it was this feature that denotes the beginnings of art about art.

According to Hegel's allocation of self-consciousness as a feature exhibited by art, the painting of Romanticism had acquired a kind of self-knowledge regarding the history of its own processes. It is in keeping with Hegel's *phenomenology of spirit* that a history of this sort would philosophically conclude when a point of self-consciousness had been achieved. Art about art was for Hegel a kind of freedom, and one that would subsequently

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[174] The comments and quotes I employ here are extracted from Hegel's "Introduction" to *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Arts*, (translated by T. M. Knox), (London: Oxford University Press, 1975) pp 69-90, (footnotes omitted), as it appears in Stephen David Ross (editor), *Art and its Significance: An Anthology of Aesthetic Theory, Third Edition* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994) pp 143-159.

define the achievements of the following two centuries.

The Mind as Theater

In the spirit of the age, and what is no mere coincidence, Diderot instigated the practice of critical narration.[175] As the mural gave way to easel painting, the concept of immersing a viewer in the large scale of a mural was superseded by Diderot's critical employment of a *mental theater*. Julie Wegner Arnold offers the description of Diderot's critical mind as divided into six planes of *dramatization*, and she does so by referring to theatrical jargon itself.[176] Through the use of Diderot's critical review of a landscape by Claude Joseph Vernet, Arnold establishes the various stage sequences; for example, downstage being closest to the audience, and upstage conversely furthest from the audience.[177]

What is of interest here is that Diderot recounted his immediate and

[175] As Julie Wegner Arnold explains in her wonderful text *Art Criticism as Narrative: Diderot's Salon de 1767* (New York: Lang Publishing, 1995) p 1, Diderot was "not unique in this capacity." Citing the research of Richard Wrigley, Arnold explains the how critical practice of this sort "proliferated" and was "distributed" as published art criticism in "periodicals, pamphlets and brochures from the mid-eighteenth into the nineteenth century. [Wrigley, *The Origins of French Art Criticism from the Ancien Regime to the Restauration* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993) pp 156-158] Reasons for this diffusion of literature ranged from critics' desire "to be a thorn in the side of the Academie" [Wrigley, p 164] to a need for educating the public and providing language with which to interpret salon art. [Wrigley, p 259] [...]The survival of Diderot's art criticism is due partly to his prominence as an Enlightenment figure and to the fact that his work has therefore been taken seriously. [Wrigley, p 3] However, it is also true that Diderot took his role seriously and did everything he could to learn about the arts. He read extensively, and he frequented artists' studios to watch them work and plague them with questions. The artists and philosophers who influenced Diderot's ideas and his aesthetic taste have been well documented."
[176] Arnold, *Art Criticism as Narration*, pp 82-83.
[177] Arnold, pp 82-100.

emotional responses to the natural *sites* in Vernet's painting with an imaginary guide, who was actually himself. This guide was a "staged persona which allows Diderot to perceive the landscape and reflect upon what he perceives..." This relates to what David Carrier referred to as *moving* a picture.[178] Here the "artwriter" is confronted with a representational picture which lacks literal association with a visual text. Until this connection is made the picture remains ambiguous. What the artwriter can provide is *a* text, and thus *move* the picture.

My point here is that with Diderot's critical narratives, the inferred other realm of picturing was transferred from that of a material depiction to the virtual plane of the viewer's mind. As large narrative paintings began to retreat, alternative forms of appreciative understanding evolved. In what would prove to be a dominant form for nearly two centuries, was that of paintings serving as the pretext for one to induce Kant's "aesthetic delight."[179] This had been an aspect of art criticism that until recent times was unquestionably imminent.

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[178] David Carrier, *High Art: Charles Baudelaire and the Origins of Modernist Painting* (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996) pp 79-104.

[179] Kant distinguished between the aesthetic and the concept of an object. As our senses absorb the chaotic stimuli of our surrounding environment, our imagination organizes it into discrete objects. The understanding then categorizes those objects into concepts and classifications so as they are comprehensible and communicable. In this case the understanding restricts "the imagination by binding its synthesis to a general concept." In the case of the aesthetic however, this restriction does not apply, and the imagination and the understanding enter into a "free play." Colin Lyas, *Aesthetics*(Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997) pp 25-26. By the mid-nineteenth century, art criticism had habitually enlisted aesthetic terminology. Shortly after the turn of the century, aesthetic judgment had become a school of criticism; "Formalism."

As the notion of *art for arts sake* advanced throughout the nineteenth-century, the role of critical explanation amplified. Depictions of visual reality gave way to increasingly subjective correspondences, and the art critics task evolved into that of formulating methods with which to explain such pictures as those of Courbet, Manet, the Impressionists, and the Post-Impressionists. Oddly enough, the most profound connection made between critical explanation and imaginative virtuality was not asserted by either a critic or a painter, but by a Symbolist poet.

Stephane Mallarme was a close friend of Manet's, and much of what he learned about painting precipitated from that relationship. The mature canvases of Manet treat reality as "perpetually unstable," and a "constantly changing continuum hovering between being and non-being."[180] This is something the poet aspired to express in his own literary efforts. In a supportive description of Manet's approach to his art form, Mallarme offers a view of reality which is very similar to his own.

> That which I preserve through the power of Impressionism is not the material portion which already exists, superior to any mere representation of it, but the delight of having re-created Nature touch by touch. I leave the massive and tangible solidity to its fitter exponent, sculpture. I content myself with reflecting on the clear and durable mirror of painting that which perpetually lives yet dies every moment, which only exists by the will of Idea, yet constitutes in my domain the only authentic and certain merit of nature - the Aspect. It is through her [ie, this] that when rudely thrown at the close of an epoch of dreams [Romanticism] in front of reality, I have taken from it only that which properly belongs to my art, an

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[180] Gordon Millan, *Mallarme: A Throw of the Dice* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1994) pp 218-219.

original and exact perception which distinguishes for itself the things it perceives with the steadfast gaze of a vision restored to its simplest perfection.[181]

Arts' potential to evoke the translucent ephemerality of reality was a prodigious concern for Mallarme. His famous expression: "Paint not the thing but the effect the thing produces," prompted not only his own poetic aspirations, but also supplied a number of painters with a transcendental artistic imperative.[182]

Mallarme's artistic strategy was to create an image and then attempt to nullify the *thingness* of that image through the use of negating terms. This agenda might be regarded as the beginnings of a pure notion of art. And it is this purity in relation to the notion of images that I would like to utilize in order to draw a connection between "the effect of the thing" and virtual reality.

Non-Material Embodiment

In an essay entitled "Embodied Virtuality: How to put Bodies back into the Picture," N. Katherine Hayles contends that "our bodies are no less actively involved in the construction of virtuality than in the construction of real

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[181] Millan, p 219. Originally published by Mallarme in *The Art Monthly*, 29 February 1876. This periodical was an English magazine devoted to current artistic movements. Millan, p 213-216.

[182] Mallarme's poetic quest influenced many artists. Those I am knowledgeable about are Matisse, Motherwell and a little known American sculptor, Christopher Wilmarth.

life."[183]   Hayles touches on a number of topics including that of gender and historical-transcendental associations with digital technology. Although illuminating issues, for our purposes here I would like to expound upon Hayles acknowledgement of the body as being a compound of both ephemeral information and physical solidity. As I explained when interpreting the painting as the *face of the body*, these are central topics with regards to the issue of embodiment.

Hayles confronts the commonplace attitude whereas the body is regarded as remaining on one side of the screen, and the virtual on the other.[184] She simply states that "If it is obvious that we can see, hear, feel, and interact with virtual worlds only because we are embodied, why is there so much noise about the perception of cyberspace as a disembodied medium?"[185] She adds that:

> To create the illusion of disembodiment, it is necessary to draw a sharp boundary between the body and the image that appears on the screen, ignoring the technical and sensory interfaces connecting one with another.[186]

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[183] Mary Anne Moser (Editor) and Douglas MacLeod, *Immersed in Technology: Art and Virtual Environments* (London: The MIT Press, 1996) pp 1-28.

[184] Two points: In the first case, my explanation of the virtual is explained in the first chapter under the section of "The Digit." When I make reference to artificial intelligence or virtual reality in an electronic sense, it is within the parameters of this explanation that I do so. Secondly, whenever Hayles refers to the screen in regards to the virtual, I understood her to be implying virtuality in both senses of the term; as either displayed by a monitor and as perceived through the interfacing equipment as a virtual environment. Should I miscomprehend her usage of the terms, at the very least this is how I want her quotes to be comprehended in the passages I quote here.

[185] Moser, p 1.

[186] Moser, p 1.

In other words, this view helps to perpetuate the distinction between the mind and the body. "The dualities line up as follows: mind is superior to body; silicon technology is superior to organism..."[187] A further installment to this acumen identifies digital representations, as an art form, lacking what Hegel referred to as *sensual manifestation*. An important point, and one due to the fact that artificial intelligence is a media, and not a medium.

Trafficking in Imagery

Virtual representations do not display the mechanisms of their own processes, as do the practice of painting. Instead, artificial intelligence is a facilitator employed in order to illustrate concerns other than itself. A great many of its presumed future ramifications are due to the enormous enthusiasm that has been fostered by science fiction and fantasy, not to forget an expanding commercial market. Associations of this kind overshadow the actual identity of artificial intelligence in the same manner that dated romantic and bohemian virtues are stereotypical artistic trademarks of the past.

Where virtual environments are innovative is in their capacity to provide

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[187] This quote concludes with "... man is superior to woman." Something which I omitted in the body of my text because I do not wish to get sidetracked by any other issues related to this topic. Hayles comments regarding the gender politics that persist with artificial intelligence is without doubt a significant concern. However, due to the factors of time and space, my intent here is to adhere to the examination of how virtual representations are be considered in terms of embodiment. Moser, p 4.

a representational pattern for the nonmaterial activities of our minds at work. Although this pronouncement might appear to suggest that this model fulfills Mallarme's imperative, I will offer a couple of words intended to restrain such a literal understanding.

As Raymond Kurzweil had suggested, the brain has the capacity for a number of levels of parallel computation: "with the parallelism of each stage potentially in the billions."[188] In order to construct visual imagery comparable to those which are mentally detectable, information has to be encoded into computer data banks. Information in this sense relates to that which Kant explained as *understanding*; in that it is knowable and communicable. Whereas the mind/brain combination has the capacity for "billions" of possible parallel computations (from sources beyond our cognitive grasp), some of which we regard as traits of a race, gender or individuality (others being biological, cerebral, lateral, creative or artistic, etc.), artificial intelligence is restrained in the same sense that Kant's *imagination* is restricted. Furthermore, there is intriguing evidence which indicates more "cognitive" information isn't necessarily the utopian elixir for this incompatibility.

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[188] Moos, p 57.

Too Much Information

At the 1995 *Ars Electronica* conference, economist Saskia Sassen spoke

about the collapse of the Behring Bank in England. Her talk centered upon

the opposition of two systems:

> The ability of the computer to model vast amounts of information was linked to the ability to mobilize billions of dollars so quickly that human judgment could hardly understand what was happening. Upper management, sustained by well mannered and, no doubt, well meaning, leadership, had little grasp of the programs that could predict and be used to transfer the entire resources of the bank at speeds that were unimaginable. On the one hand, she identified this as a crisis of centrality. In a transterritorial economy, power was dispersed so invisibly that understanding and judgment could not preclude the event before it happened. And on the other hand. And perhaps more significantly, Sassen concluded her talk by suggesting that mobilization and collapse represented the "triumph of pure reason." Computation destroyed the Behring Bank in an act of programming that is deeply inflected with human greed and simultaneously beyond the scope of judgment.[189]

The complexities of our mental processes are not entirely dependent on a

cogent reservoir, or at least not a compartmentalized one. Even should this

be the case, there is likely a portion of the mind/brain's epistemological

infrastructure that will continue to elude human detection. I will refer to

but one role of our mental assets as a demonstration.

Pertaining to our capacity for memory and location, Ulric Neisser prefers

the notion of spatial knowledge as opposed to that of "cognitive maps."[190]

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[189] Timothy Druckrey, "Wild Nature, free Radicals, and the Nerve Self" (Internet: druckey@interport.net, 1995) p 2-3.

[190] Ulric Neisser and Eugene Winograd (editors), *Remembering Reconsidered: Ecological and Traditional Approaches to the Study of Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988) p 369.

By making this distinction, Neisser clarifies that humans and other animals *remember* sites where they have been, as well as the spatial organization of those places. For Neisser, this aptitude does not function according to the recall of information accumulated in some speculative memory system. Rather, it is more likely that the "spatial module preserves the needed information itself, on its own terms and in its own format. In other words, it is a memory *system*."[191]

The crucial issue here is that such mental systems operate whilst co-mingled with other parallel systems. In contexts such as Neisser's example, many of these functioning parallel systems are in a sense put on hold, enabling one to focus upon something such as recognizing a spatial situation. An important note refers to what I state as "put on hold," in that I do not intend to imply that other or residual neural and mental processes cease. Rather, they are a phenomenological constant; some active beyond one's consciousness, and others attempting to run interference on the task at hand.

The Issue of Illumination

Returning to Mallarme's purest criterion, another crucial concern arises; that of a light source. Paintings demonstrate their particularities as a result

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[191] Neisser, pp 368-369.

of natural and artificial light reflecting off their surfaces. Digital technology is reliant on electrical currents and glowing phosphors. Rather than reflecting light, digital imagery enlist what Gaston Bachelard required of poetry, that it glow from within.

By referring to Jean Baudrillard's 1983 text *Fatal Strategies*, Martin Jay touches upon a crucial theme concerning the connection between light and meaning.[192] Jay initially alludes to the telescope as a virtual apparatus on account of it rupturing notions of presence and immediacy. Turning to Baudrillard, Jay notes that the French theorist "introduces precisely the speed of light as a metaphor to explain what he describes as the progressive attenuation of meaning in the contemporary world."

Although Jay cites Baudrillard's grasp of Einstein's *Special Theory of Relativity* as "faulty," he does credit him with an important insight.[193] By applying a metaphor himself, Jay draws a connection between Baudrillard's notion of *simulacra* and star gazing in order to indicate the peculiar constitution of virtual imagery. The formation of these new images in turn necessitates a reconsideration of "gazing" at anything.

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[192] Martin Jay, "Astronomical Hindsight: The Speed of Light and Virtual Reality," (Berkeley: University of California, <martjay@socrates.berkeley.edu>, 1998), unpaged article.

[193] "Because light, unlike other waves such as sound, is able to travel in a total vacuum uneffected by the medium through which it moves - such as the "ether" whose existence modern physics has disproved - and the speed and directional movement to is observer do not effect its velocity, it is strictly speaking [it is at this point that Jay denotes Baudrillard's fault] wrong to speak of "slowing down" of light. Jay, unpaged article.

> For it unexpectedly undermines the equation of virtual reality entirely with a non-referential system of signs totally indifferent to any prior reality that admittedly is operative at other moments of his [Baudrillard's] work. That is, by comparing the world of virtual reality with the delayed light from distant stars, Baudrillard alerts us to the attenuated indexical trace of an objective real that haunts the apparently self-referential world of pure simulacra. Like the memory traces in Freud's optical version of the unconscious, such images are not made entirely out of whole cloth existing in an atemporal cyberspace, but are parasitic on the prior experiences that make them meaningful to us today. The temporality of virtuality is thus not pure simultaneity or contemporaneity, but the disjointed time that disrupts any illusion of self-presence.[194]

As previously explained, digital representations are not self- referential in the same manner that painted ones are. Jay's reference to the light of distant stars is brought down to earth through the filter of Baudrillard's theory. When one gazes at an object such as a painting, spatial and temporal notions begin to uncoil. When confronted with virtual imagery however, one's gravity is displaced. "It is through the memory traces of the reality that haunts virtual reality from the start, inadvertently betrayed by Baudrillard's metaphor of sidereal light that reaches us after a long delay."[195]

In addition to citing Baudrillard, Jay refers to what N. Katherine Hayles terms the "flicker" of signifiers produced by artificial intelligence.[196] Hayles states that queries regarding presence and absence are not relevant in this

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[194] Jay, unpaged article.
[195] Jay, unpaged article.
[196] Jay, unpaged article.

situation. One is and is not present while operating a computer, as is one present and not present on the other side of the screen. Although Hayles herself does not draw the same analogy, Jay relates the "flicker" of imagery that continues to be linked with the corporeal embodiment that such images appear to have left behind, and "especially those that interact with the human sensorium and environment," and "the twinkling of stars."

This tentative nature of meaning has in the case of the virtual offered a response to Mallarme's charge. And in tow is the hermenutical barge of historical hindsight. In what might initially appear to some as a further post-structuralist dissection of reality, is actually the proposition of the potential for "a" future. As Jay himself so poignantly phrases it

> For after all, is not the light reflecting off us, radiating our images to any eyes open to receive them, somehow destined, even if in increasingly diffused form, to travel forever, making our present the past of innumerable futures to come.[197]

A Conclusion: A Menagerie of Images

As I hoped to elucidate in the above text, *embodiment* is a particularly challenging issue. To begin with, to suggest that a non-organic entity embodies meaning is to open up a hermenutical can of worms. With the increasing advent of artificial intelligence, that can itself comes under an

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[197] Jay, unpaged article.

unprecedented scrutiny. It has become considerably crucial in our attempts to comprehend our *being* to realize that the oscillating issues of embodiment and interpretation are something woven into our present contextual fabric.

We can only speculate as to the increasing sophistication of future technology, and how those digital machines might be exploited by various lines of inquiry, including the arts. Therefore, and possibly for the time being, we might retard the immense leverage associated with digital technology by keeping in mind that all images are trapped in their mode of representation.

In terms of virtual reality, there is presently so many people so enthusiastically engaged in a discourse about the potential for a truly virtual existence, that we forget the distance from which artificial intelligence deploys its messages. Through interfacing equipment the virtual enlists the body vicariously at best, and generalizes imagery in order to do so. The style - if it can be called that - of the virtual is cool and analytical. The role of images presented by this means are intended to implement by recognition, and not necessarily be the locus of interpretation themselves. In terms of virtual reality, embodiment is an issue related not to *what* we visually comprehend. Instead, it is the *process*

of visual perception itself. Rather than a prolonged exposure to one image, it is the sum of many that heralds meaning.

The representations truly most intimate with us are those of the activities on both sides of our perception. To suggest that nature had been replaced by industry, and that industry has been eclipsed by a world of signs is not an credible view. As with Sartre's notion of "one choosing to be born," what makes some theoretical utterances so appealing is their definitive nature. We cannot escape culture anymore than we can escape nature.

What has changed is the number of images we gaze at, for instance, in a single day. Paintings were at one time the most dominate mode of representation. With the emergence and continual sophistication of other forms, the majority having emerged in this century, they have been relegated to but one of many casts. What is of significance is that with the increase in the quantity of imagery, the manner in which we scan and discern from this surfeit is of contemporary priority, quite simply because we made these things. Probing our relationship with them is unavoidably about ourselves.

Of course there still remains an audience for painting today. And although some may find this fact uncomfortable, it is true that a portion of that

audience consorts with painting for nostalgia, market, or entertainment purposes. Nevertheless, there are those who take a vested interest in the employment of painting as an analytical tool for issues in the humanities, an area of scholarly insight which has languished of late. However for the painter, a cohesion of this kind is vital. It is a the molding of a relationship Jonathan Brown associated with Velasquez.

> The ability to analyze, evaluate, and articulate the condition of man and nature is the foundation and fruit of humanistic learning and it was this ability, fostered in the academy of Pacheco [whom Velasquez apprenticed under], which enabled Velasquez eventually to recast the principles and practice of the art of painting.[198]

Although the same realm of influential impact does not exist for today's painter, the notion of "recasting" certainly has alternative reverberations. The difference being that the planes of practice and interpretation have significantly altered since the seventeenth-century.

These are the reasons for which I regard it artistically negligible to overlook the situation artificial intelligence has contributed to the present condition of painting. It is not a threat, but a difference which separates the two modes of representation. And in response to this difference, I will offer the following extrapolation in conclusion to this section: Painting and digital representations are both available for exploitation, the former footnotes reality whilst the latter strives to create its simulated parallel.

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[198] Jonathan Brown, *Velasquez: Painter and Courtier* (London: Yale University Press, 1986) p 3.

Dealing in Material Nostalgia and Invisible Particles: Representation, Power and Commerce

That in which the painter declares most his
views is his choice of subjects.

Stephane Mallarme

Escaping the Body

As the preceding chapter indicated, paintings manifest the traces or indexes of the physical body that has manually applied the medium to their surfaces. This relates to Yarber's stipulation of paintings being something we can regard as the *face of the body*; and this is how we relate to them. Digital imagery on the other hand, is devised from mathematical computation and is nonmaterial. We can either summon an image with a monitor, manipulate and print it, or adorn a head set and immerse ourselves in a virtual setting. Stated in this simplistic manner, one mode of representation relates to our material being, and the other possesses the potential for disembodied vitality. But is this truly the case?

Throughout Western history there has persisted a desire to transcend our bodily existence. Characteristically, the doctrines of religion have provided two lofty destinations for our being; those of the spirit and heaven. Consequently, disembodied expression and celestial form have come to be commonly regarded as more profound than that of our biological incarnation.[158] In addition, the historical habit and posture of philosophy and science have also routinely attributed more significance to the mind

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[158] In terms of a philosophical subject, the "fruitless pendulum " was set in motion by Descartes' dilemma of *interaction*, swinging from "Descartes' dualism to Hobbes" materialism, to Berkeley's idealism, and then back to dualism, idealism and materialism, with a few ingenious but implausible adjustments changes of terminology." Daniel C.Dennet, *Content and Consciousness* (London: Routledge, 1986) p 3.

and thought than to that of the body. As the following passages will demonstrate, my position will be that these two commonly held beliefs have contributed to the view that painting has gradually become an obsolete form of representation, as well as the enormous appeal for and delusions regarding artificial intelligence.

A   Mythunderstanding

According to the dominant Western religion, the body is amongst other things the vehicle for sin.[159] It decays and deteriorates beneath the earth's surface while the ethereal forces of one's spirit are believed by most to transcend this terrestrial reality. In recent years the sexual sites of the body have increasingly become associated with sexual disease, and particularly that of *aids*. As with the growing depletion of the earth's resources and the permanent damage caused by consumption and pollution, aids has come to be regarded as a sign of our fraying ethical, if not spiritual existence. In order for Western societies to persevere,

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[159] That religion has declined in popularity throughout modernity, might find parallels in the same beliefs that used to be adhered to artworks such as paintings. This, of course, is a topic on its own. For my purposes here, I would like to refrain from examining in any depth, the state of religion today. There are two recent texts that address this subject in depth: Thomas C. Reeves, *The Empty Church: Does Organized Religion Matter Anymore?* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), and Richard K. Fenn, *The End of Time: Religion, Ritual, and the Forging of the Soul* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1997). My reference here to religion is in relation to a comment by Hans Belting, and one that will appear at a later point in this text. Belting, "Art and Art History in the New Museum: The Search for a New Identity," *Art and Design: Painting in the Age of Artificial Intelligence* (London: Academy Group, V. II, No. 5-6, 1996) p. 35. Belting explains how the enormous amounts paid for artworks has provided the awe for art that art can no longer provide itself. And he views that amazement with having provided "a remythologizing of art, which people are as reluctant to lose as the religion that has already been lost."

morality has had to become more elastic, and in tow, the continued belief in some kind of biological utopia has refashioned itself in order to be sustained. In a transformed disposition, there becomes new hope for the notion of an *afterlife*. To escape the body would be to escape disease and pollution. Therefore, one can appreciate how the nonmaterial potential that artificial intelligence appears to offer provides a most auspicious alternative. But this is where religion ends and the rational advances. Since the Enlightenment, our destination is no longer Heaven, but rather that of data and computation.

As is the habit to associate the body with our mortal existence, the brain, and more specifically the mind, has habitually been regarded as the locus of thought.[160] This attitude may have very well reached its summit to date in our present situation. Our ability to rationalize is what is believed to separate, and in fact elevate humans from that of other animals. In addition, thought is something regarded separate from emotions, and overwhelmingly considered of more significance.[161] The body's needs are considered common. Everyone eats, sleeps and defecates, but not everyone

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[160] Three texts that I am familiar with are Antonio Demasio, *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain* (New York: Avon Books, 1994), Karl R. Popper, *Knowledge and the Body-Mind Problem: In Defence of Interaction* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), and Mario Bunge, *The Mind-Body Problem: A Psychobiological Approach* (Willowdale: Pargamon, 1980).

[161] "Since the role of reason in the arts is sometimes regarded as questionable, I shall compare it with the sciences, where the role and importance of reasoning are normally unquestioned. Although of course there are considerable differences between the two ares, there are also important similarities with respect to the nature of reasoning and objectivity." David Best, *The Rationality of Subjectivism* (London: The Falmer Press, 1992) p 28.

can devise a theory of relativity or chart the size of our solar system. Of course it is true that not everyone can run a mile under four minutes, or swim the English channel, but such achievements are not considered acts of intelligence. As indicated in the previous chapter however, I adhere to the notion that we do not *think* with our minds alone, but with our entire bodies. As I have also demonstrated, paintings are both records and evidence of this concept.[162] But what of digital representations?

Disembodiment is what the computer age is commonly believed to have provided us with. It does not need the body because it computes, an activity our minds are commonly believed to independently execute. Over the past few decades, and as the computer age advanced, it was understood that filing cabinets would become obsolete. Enormous amounts of information could be stored in computers memories, and parallel to the habit of negating our bodies in thought, the manual maintenance of such material objects could be illuminated. Expediency and efficiency were proudly circulated as amongst the obvious benefits of artificial intelligence. In terms of visual representations, digital images - an amplification of reproducible mass imagery - have become the most widespread mode of representation. Additionally, this has occurred to such an extent that many people regard it superior to all other forms of imaging, including that of

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[162] My proposition has been that paintings are the *face of the body* (Yarber), as well as an indicator of the body as a *yardstick* (Damasio) from which to affirm and acquire identity.

painting. In the wake of impact and hype associated with this technological phenomena, paintings have been relegated by many as simply cultural commodities. The former is proficient, concise, bodiless and supposedly exceedingly novel, whereas the latter is centuries old, slow to produce, exchanged on a market bases, and occupies space as do filing cabinets. However, and as I intend to demonstrate, neither of these descriptions are necessarily valid.

Nonmaterial Representations

With the expanding development of computer technology, digital images have increasingly acquired the potential for virtual existence. As is the case with virtual reality, they have become something both intangible and invisible, and perhaps the disembodied parallel to our thoughts and memories. By enlisting interfacing apparatus we are able to perceive these ethereal representations, composed as they are by numerical particles or *pixels*. Timothy Binkley focuses upon the mathematical digit as the "original virtual reality."[163] He stipulates that they represent the timeless abstractions which have had a profound impact on our everyday lives. In theory, we employ the numerical capacity for rational and measurement in order to build things, as well as destroy them. Numbers, in this virtual

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[163] Binkley, Timothy, "The Vitality of Digital Creation," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, (New York: Vol # 55, No. 2, Spring 1997) p 112.

sense, are concepts that one might think of as having escaped the body.

Paintings on the other hand are physical objects. We are able to perceive them as portraying imagery due to light being absorbed and reflected off the variety of hues and textures composing their surfaces. (The converse is true with computer screens, which are somewhat similar to televisions in that they emit colored imagery via glowing phosphor.) According to Robert Yarber, the history of art - the majority of which is represented by painting - is the history of the body.[164] Briefly referring to a segment of the previous chapter, Yarber suggests that humanity has always struggled to escape from the body, and that what we have been able to envision has played a vital role in that quest: "Our embodiment within the virtual space of the imaginary is made manifest in traditional modes of creative expression."[165] The buttress of this statement is an expression by the French Symbolist poet Paul Valery; that being that the painter believes in the body, and that he "takes the body with him."[166]

> This environment - shared by the painter's body and its
> object of desire, the painting - comprises a kind of Nature,
> or more rightly a nature reserve, for there are other
> natures and other love objects encompassing other
> terrain, and other denizens of the virtual (the aural,

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[164] Yarber, Robert, "Suspension of Disbelief: The Body of the Painter in the Face of the Virtual," *Art and Design: Painting in the Age of Artificial Intelligence*, (London: Academy Group, Vol # 11, No 48, 1996) p 65.

[165] Yarber, "Suspension of Disbelief," p 65.

[166] Yarber, p 65.

offactory, etc.).[167]

As this distinction between digital and painted representations conveys, the rivalry for reality effect is being carried out on many fronts. Virtual reality and painting are but two kinds of filters through which reality can be viewed. Medicine, science and philosophy are others. In this particular pairing however, it is important to observe that the emergence of the former has cast the practice of the latter into an arena of unprecedented queries regarding its contemporary validity and cultural status. And although it is true that a number of obituaries have been written for painting throughout Western history, and that it has always managed to persevere, the advent of a digital model is indeed a very formidable alternative of representation that painters ought to consider. In an expanding capitalistic and consumer society, paintings have become objects growing increasingly vulnerable to being consigned amongst other items of cultural commerce.

Both David Carrier and Arthur C. Danto have suggested that paintings in our present day have become sophisticated and luxurious upper middle-class commodities. Carrier explains how the cost of painted artworks can be directly related to the cost of their production. Contemporary artists are laborers engaged in an "old-fashioned industry," performing isolated

[167] Yarber, p 65.

production in small shops (studios), and creating artifacts that are distributed in a capitalist society by a marketing system.[168] Paintings, as something produced in the age of inexpensive mass production, are relatively expensive to create, and therefore very few people can afford to purchase them. According to Danto, this emphasis on paintings as commodities is associated with the fact that in our post-historical situation, painted artworks have lost their bygone power of presence, and therefore their capacity to transform consciousness. It is a fact which he considers present day painters must accept. This is a certainly a considerable shift from previous periods of time, that is when paintings held a sanctified position and status within society.

The Era of Images

In the introduction to his text *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image Before the Era of Art*, the German art historian Hans Belting states that we are indeed so deeply influenced by the "era of art" that it is difficult for us to imagine an "era of images," before there existed any notion of art. What Belting is referring to is the kind of painted devotional imagery affiliated with Medieval Christianity. These early forms of paintings portray the images of persons whose presence was believed to be embodied in the object itself. Their status was that of "cult" or "holy"

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[168] Carrier, "Art Fashion," *Artwriting*, (Amherst: Th University of Massachusetts Press, 1987) p109-111.

images and they were representative of both a local community and the authority of its religious institution, and not the widespread faith of a universal church. This is a significant point, as Belting further reveals, "Holy images were never the affair of religion alone, but also always of society, which express itself in and through religion."[169]

It is both interesting and imperative to note that early Christian devotional images were not in any sense of the term considered *art*. They were not bought and sold, or collected and displayed in the same manner that we do so in galleries, museums, or in our domestic dwellings today. These were portraits considered to have supernatural origins. It was commonly believed that these objects of devotion "had fallen from heaven, or affirmed that Jesus' [or a particular saints'] living body had left an enduring physical impression."[170]

Within their context, these devotional images were typically associated with three kinds of legends. In the first case, as indicated above, there were legends about their origins. Secondly, there were legends about visions, whereas a beholder might recognize the very image of a sacred person who had appeared to that individual in a dream. The third kind of legend was that of miracles. In such instances the depiction of a saint who

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[169] Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, p 3.
[170] Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, p 4.

had long since died, was believed to demonstrate their supratemporal presence by working miracles through their power as a heavenly embodied representations.

As one might imagine, early Christian images led a unique existence, and to some degree an independent existence. They were presented at ceremonies as if an actual person. They received a great deal of protection and reciprocated by granting protection to those who served as their guardians. As for who was responsible for its creation, the notion of a creative artist did not come into question. In fact, "the intervention of a painter in such a case was deemed something of an intrusion; a painter could not be expected to reproduce the model authentically."[171] Interestingly, and as Belting points out, it was not until these early devotional images lost their power to transform consciousness that they obtained their new role as art.[172] Once the notion of the artist had begun to emerge, the particulars of a given image - something previously understood and respected as sacred - became a feature anesthetically negotiable between artist and beholder.

It was during the fourteenth-century that the notion of the professional

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[171] Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, p. 4.
[172] The declining power of presence of early Christian imagery was due to the Reformation and a reemphasis by theologians on religious texts, as well as the simultaneous emergence of "the Artist." Belting indicates that the former did not necessarily result in the latter or vice-versa, but rather that these two developments occurred independently. Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, p 14-16 (introduction).

artist began to emerge. An "artist" was someone considered to possess unique creative abilities, and was paid for employing those abilities as a service. In what was likely the initial step in converting painting to a profession was made by Guido da Sienna, who is credited with improving upon the unsophisticated painting practices of the previous century.[173] Guido da Sienna was then surpassed by Duccio di Buoninsegna, who acquired a considerable raise in income when compared to that of his predecessors. As is well documented, Duccio had been entrusted with the most prestigious commissions in his surrounding region of Sienna. His workshops were instrumental in transforming alter pieces from simple panels to that of elaborate constructions of crafted carpentry, and multiple painted panels composed of a extensive variety of images. Moreover, the workshops of this Siennese master also amalgamated the efforts of painters, furniture-makers, carpenters, goldsmiths, and sculptures. In addition to Duccio, the other two other well known fourteenth-century Italian artists who were able to procure substantial prosperity were Simone Martini and Giotto.[174]

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[173] Kempers, Bram, *Painting, Power and Patronage: The Rise of Professional Artists in Renaissance Italy,* (London: Penguin Books, 1987) pp 145-152.
[174] Kemper, p. 150. In addition, it is important to note that Duccio's fame and fortune was not a common occurrence of painters during his lifetime, throughout history since then, and as is not to the present day.

Painting and Commerce

Returning to our present time, Belting has recently commented that art is something no longer possessing a convincing strength of its own.[175] He specifically cites the enlargement of institutional spaces and market prices (as advertisements for cultural status), as contributing to the weakening of the earlier and conventional authority of art. In terms of value, the enormous amounts involved in the exchanges of art, "bring forth an astonishment that is actually meant for art, but which it is unable to bring about itself."[176] This, according to Belting, has contributed to "the remythologizing of art, which people are as reluctant to lose as the religion that has already been lost."[177]

Commercial and private wealth had surpassed the budgets of public institutions, a condition that situates museums - representing what is believed to be the best visual interests of its surrounding public - outside of the proportion of those who can afford to acquire certain artworks. Incentive for Belting's skepticism can found by referring to the sequence of relatively recent art market events. In a November 1989 *Time* cover story, Robert Hughes reported that

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[175] Hans Belting, "Art and Art History in the New Museum: The Search for a New Identity," *Art and Design: Painting in the Age of Artificial Intelligence*, (London: Academy Group, Vol #II, No. 5-6, 1996) p 35.

[176] Belting, "Art and Art History in the New Museum," p 35.

[177] Belting, p 35. In regards to Belting's reference to religion, there is an interesting account of how contemporary Christians have abandoned the church, and are seeking other avenues in their search for spiritual and moral renewal: Thomas C. Reeves, *The Empty Church: Does Organized Religion Matter Anymore?* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998).

From the point of view of American museums, the art market boom is an unmitigated disaster. These institutions voice a litany of complaints, a wrenching sense of disenfranchisement and weakness, as their budgets of $2 million to $5 million are turned into chicken feed by art inflation.[178]

In tandem with wanting acquisition budgets, museums have increasingly lost their former and initial status as the site of aesthetic contemplation, what I suppose was intended to be the visual equivalent to libraries. Instead, they are increasingly becoming yet another site of mass entertainment, and in the most excessive cases that of spectacle. As is the case with professional sporting teams, amusement parks, and commercial shopping venues, museums have found themselves in the business of contriving schemes to attract entrants; and I apply the term *scheme* here deliberately. For in the past, it was the amassing of a significant collection that had previously attracted visual arts enthusiasts into making the pilgrimage to a specific museum. In the wake of the rising costs of paintings, accruing a reputable collection has become something museum

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[178] Robert Hughes, "SOLD!" *Time* (New York, Volume and Issue #'s, November 27th, 1989) p72. Hughes' article is in response to the art market boom of the late 1980's, and particularly the auction prices paid for Post-Impressionist paintings such as Picasso's self-portrait *Yo Picasso*, which made what Hughes called a "freakish $47.85 [US] million" the proceeding May.

directors can no longer be reasonably expected to expedite.[179]

As is the imminent aim of profit motivated marketing, the notion of quality for the individual has given way to access to all. The escalating prices paid for artworks is something now equated with the gross box office take of block-buster films, or the substantial amounts actors or athletes secure for their respective skills. And this is exactly what impresses public interest about historical paintings, as well as contributes to the enormous value and amounts paid for some contemporary artworks. As Bonnie Burnham wrote in 1975, well before the art market boom of the late eighties:

> One of the unfortunate consequences of life within an increasingly mechanized and depersonalized society - which, we are told, allows us all to afford the better things of life - is that the availability of these so-called better things cannot increase in proportion to the number of people who are able to appreciate them; thus the prices of these 'luxury goods' cannot be restrained. They rise to heights so absurd that nobody can really afford to buy unless his purchase also represents an investment. And to invest in a pleasure is corruptive: it converts an item of personal use or enjoyment into a anonymous negotiable asset.[180]

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[179] In an interesting twist to this situation, in November 1961, the Metropolitan Museum outbid the Cleveland Museum in order to acquire *Aristotle Contemplating the Bust of Homer* by Rembrandt. At the time, the price of $2,300,000 was not only the largest sum ever paid for a single artwork, but it was also the initial time a painting had fetched more than a one million dollar figure (the previous record had been $875,000 paid for a Fragonard that sold minutes before the Rembrandt, and at the same auction). The trustees of the Met had anticipated that they would have to pay a sum over a million dollars, and some opposed the purchase for this reason; citing that it would tarnish the museums public image. Others noted that the museum already owned thirty-one Rembrandt's. But the President of the Met at that time, Roland Redmond, highly endorsed the purchase, and expressed to the director James Rorimer, that it was "really great pictures that make a collection.... In the long run the price will be forgotten but the picture won't." B. Burnham, *The Art Crisis* (London, Collin's and Sons, 1975) p 231-232.

[180] B. Burnham, *The Art Crisis* (London: Collin's and Sons, 1975) p 228.

As earlier referred to by Carrier, the price of a manufactured object is largely determined by the costs of the materials and craftsmanship used to produce it; not to overlook the costs and risks involved in advertising. As is the case with many manufactured commodities, the costs of producing some products is often negligible when compare to the expenses of marketing. The bottom line in this mercantile process is to set a price, test the demand, weigh the supply, and sell as many entities as possible.

To establish the economic value of an artwork on the other hand, is not as straight forward. Unlike the manufactured products described above, the price of paintings is based on the alliance of a number of discernible and indiscernible factors. The catalysts involved are contingent upon intangible considerations such as the reputation of the artist in question, the painting's significance within her or his *oeuvre*, the rarity of objects like it, the dictums of contemporary taste, and often most importantly, the financial sum the purchaser is able or willing to pay. Throughout this entire transaction, it is imperative to remember that arriving at what is agreed upon as a reasonable price is a consideration that involves a reliance on paintings' identity as an important historical agent and contributor to Western cultural identity. To acquire a painting – including contemporary paintings – is to purchase a portion of our civilization's resume. Paintings are clearly commodities strongly associated with myth.

Returning to the point raised by Belting, when an artwork surpasses what might be considered as a reasonable price - $82,5 million for a van Gogh being a just example - the qualities for which the object was originally conceived and valued can no longer be considered. "It is bought and disposed of as a commodity, or as a freakish curiosity."[181] Indeed, it has become the mark of our present situation that the balance of factors determining something such as value has become so distorted, that not even the largest institutions can afford to purchase an object agreed upon by experts to be of enormous aesthetic and cultural worth. Thus paintings have lost the majority of their power to transform consciousness, and in place they have acquired the capacity for astonishment in relation to financial value.

The relegation of paintings to that of relatively expensive cultural commodities is a notion understood by a number contemporary artists themselves. Jeff Koons has certainly benefited from the relationship between the sanctity of art and its conversion into capital. Koons however, is neither strictly a painter nor an artist widely accepted by critics and academics as seriously engaged in art making. The German painter Gerhard Richter on the other hand is both. In a 1992 interview Richter was asked by Doris von Drathen if interpretations of his paintings as "walking along

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[181] B. Burnham, *The Art Crisis*, p 229.

an existential knife-edge," were at all accurate.[182] The painter responded by stating that it would be ridiculous if he spoke about his artworks in such a manner: "I can't come along and say here I am walking along a knife-edge, right on the brink, another day and I'll kill myself."[183] When posed with the question as to why continue painting then, Richter's answer was simply "money." Van Drathen's reflex was to point out that in the first case the painter must have enough financial comfort by now, and secondly that the painter couldn't seriously mean what he has just said. But Richter did, and there are very good reasons for that.

As Michael Baxandall has revealed, the relationship between an artist and money is more complex than might be initially thought.[184] Baxandall distinguishes between the *economists' market*, and the kind a painter participants in, which is a what I will refer to as a *cultural market*. In the economists' market there exists a number of contact points so as producers and consumers of a commodity can meet for the purpose of exchange. The market itself is typically a location comprised of a variation of competition amongst both the producers and the consumers. Participating or abstaining by either party can be expressed in a variety of ways, as in "talking with one's feet." Markets themselves are usually defined by the kinds of

[182] Hans-Ulrich Obrist(editor), *Gerhard Richter: The Daily Practice of Painting: Writings and Interviews 1962-1993*, (London: MIT Press/Anthony d'Offay Gallery, 1995) p 239-240.
[183] Hans-Ulrich, p 239.
[184] Baxandall, *Patterns of Intention*, pp 47-48.

products exchanged within its boundaries, and in our present day, they are not restricted by geographics. Furthermore, and in addition to a larger general market, there are frequently a variety of specialized or sub-markets.

At the heart of any market is the fact that all of the participants possess choices. As noted above, in the economists' market, "what the producer is compensated by is money: money goes one way, goods and services the other."[185] In the cultural market however, Baxandall articulates why this exchange is much more complicated:

> ...[I]n the relation between painters and cultures the currency is much more diverse than just money: it includes such things as approval, intellectual nurture and, later, reassurance, provocation and irritation of stimulating kinds, the articulation of ideas, vernacular visual skills, friendship and - very important indeed - a history of one's activity and a heredity, as well as sometimes money acting both as a token of these and a means to a continuing performance.[186]

And as Baxandall elaborates, the actual commodity that is exchanged is not so much that of pictures as a profitable commodity, or as something pleasurable to look at. Rather:

> The painter may choose to take more of one

[185] Baxandall, *Patterns of Intention*, p 49.
[186] Baxandall, p 47-48.

sort of compensation than of another - more of
a certain sense of himself within the history
of painting, for instance, than of approval or
money. The consumer may choose this rather
than that sort of satisfaction. Whatever the
choice painter or consumer makes will reflect
on the market as a whole.[187]

The key here is that any choice made on either side of these transactions
will have consequences for the scope of choices on both sides. This is
something which does not occur, at least not to the same extent within the
economist's market. That the art market proves to be a more complicated
network than that of an common financial trade, helps to distinguish
paintings from other kinds of commodities. It is something which according
to Carrier is in need of "a full sociological analysis," if one wishes to account
for the specific roles and degree of contributions provided by artists,
dealers, collectors, and critics.[188]

There is one other contributing factor to the present consignment of
paintings to a market system. Throughout the twentieth-century the
practice of entrusting artists with commissions - something so influential
on the professional development of artists for the preceding six hundred
years - had increasingly declined. Furthermore, after 1950 even the
temporary interest and revival of commissioning war monuments had died

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[187] Baxandall, p 48.
[188] Carrier, *Artwriting*, p109. Carrier's main philosophical focus is one what he calls Artwriting, and deals primarily with the role of modern and contemporary art critics in the artworld and market system.

out.[189] The power of modern societies was annexed by the increasing growth of capitalistic companies and wealthy entrepreneurs, both of which had very little or no interest at all in commissioning art. Thus, "the tradition of patronage established in the Renaissance had come to an end."[190]

As Brian Kempers has recognized, the emphasis of art during modern times has shifted from the system of commissioning artworks to that of amassing collections. Throughout the twentieth-century, the *nouveau riches* have had very no stake in commissioning artists.[191] Consequently, there no longer exists the display of patron power that we associate with families such as the Medici. In place is variety of government arts policies that are usually generalized in format, and enlist their public museums as the very summit of a particular community's cultural identity.

The End of Art

That paintings have become commodities cannot be disputed. Religious institutions, monarchs, and politicians used to enlist paintings for the purposes of spreading their respective propaganda. As mass media emerged and advanced throughout modern times, visual messages could

[189] Kempers, *Painting, Power and Patronage*, p 312.
[190] Kempers, p 313.
[191] Kempers, p 313.

be dispersed by quicker means, perhaps supporting what Vasari had suggested; that painting would find other things to do, which it did. And this is the manner in which art history has customarily explained the development of art, and predominantly as the evolution of painting. However, art, in the sense of "a tradition which provides artists with a common program," no longer exists.[192] "Art" as a philosophical concept is a notion previously fastened to a "work," that is an object providing the axis for hermeneutic interpretation. In recent times however, object based interpretation has come to be considered but one method of addressing artworks. In this case, the critic or and art historian habitually set themselves "up as as a second artist, a "re-creator" of the work."[193]

It should be remembered that the practice of art history joined the practice of making art well after the later had been firmly established. For nearly the past two centuries it was generally accepted that artists carried out the practice of creating artworks, and historians explained that practice

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[192] Belting, *The End of Art History?*, p ix. I am also referring to another end of art theory, as provided by Danto, that of "The End of Art," *The Philosophical Disenfranchisment of Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984) pp 81-116.

[193] Belting, *The End of Art History?*, pp 20-21. Here Belting is addressing the notion of the end of an agreed upon consensus of art, as well as the "scientific" validity of art history. "The quarrel over judgments and aesthetics is left to art criticism. The object for scholarship is no longer the vindication of an ideal of art but rather interpretation as a method. The interpreter, according to Dilthey, aims at a "scientifically verifiable truth"; he is able to "understand" the aesthetic product, namely, through a productive process of understanding between the subjective consciousness and the aesthetic constitution of the work. [...] But the consciousness here becomes more important than its object, and the interpretation, which is bound to its own perception of things, in the end confirms only itself. In its less felicitous art-historical applications it permits the interpreter, left to his own devices, to "reproduce" the work in the conjuring act of a guaranteed method. The danger increases when such hermeneutic principles harden too quickly into a system. The "creative act of viewing" (Sedlmayr) is exercised upon an object which is metaphorically called a "Werk" and distinguished from a material "Kunstding."

and the resulting objects. Today however, "both have lost faith in a rational, teleological process of artistic history."[194] That the "death of art," the "end of art history," pluralism, and the appearance of the digital age have coincided is no mere coincidence.[195] The unequivocal consequences of this unprecedented setting is that the practice of painting, and paintings themselves, have acquired an altered significance. One aspect of this shifted identity being their absorption into the stream of commodities that flood our contemporary Western societies.

As briefly touched upon, what must be acknowledged is that paintings are peculiar kinds of commodities, differing in terms of *value* and *meaning* when compared to that of automobiles or fast food. In comparison to their digital counterparts, paintings are often considered to be dated representations, simply because they have lost their previous status with the expediency of the former. As mentioned at the outset of this chapter, my intentions are to explain how paintings have not necessarily forfeited their capacity for meaning, but rather that their potential for meaning has altered. In order to further substantiate this claim, I would now like to explore the topic of digital technology as a commodity, and I will begin doing so by tracing the historical precedent for storing information.

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[194] Belting, *The End of Art History?*, p ix.
[195] Gianni Vattimo, *The End of Modernity* (Baltimore: John Hopkins, 1988) pp 51-64.

The Drawn Line

A drawing is a visual art form comprised of features we commonly associate with more immediacy than more complex artworks such as paintings. The forms of drawing are customarily expected to correspond to the forms drawn. Over the course of history however, this has proven not to have endured as a rule. During Modern times, the kind of contingency related to elasticities of expression and the resulting distortion has increasingly been the focus of artistic signification.

As a historical practice, drawing exceeds the paradigm offered by painting. It was not until the early Renaissance that drawings began to be accepted as legitimate artforms. As with Belting's examination of painted images before the "era of art," for our purposes here I would like to address the history of drawing before it came to be recognized as an art form in its own right. I will proceed to do so by consulting the same historical context the Belting had, that of the Middle Ages.

Paper was first introduced in the fifteenth-century. Before there was paper, drawings were executed on a variety of impermanent surfaces, thus providing some reason as to why there are virtually few existing examples

dated before 1350.[196] The first drawings were likely transcribed on the ground we stand upon. Referring to Syracuse in 212 BC, Archimedes was reported to have been in the process of rendering a technical design shortly before he was killed.[197] In a similar account in John 8:6-8, and while in the presence of a woman taken in adultery, Christ is pronounced to have been scratching an image onto the ground with his finger.

Amongst the earliest supports known for drawing upon was the clay tablet, dating back to the third-century before Christ. A related support which served a assortment of purposes was that of a wax tablet. These tablets were composed of layers of beeswax that filled a hollow and shallow slab of some kind. Although there are no surviving examples of such diagrams, there are written accounts of ancient merchants, administrators, writers and artists having used such supports.[198]

On the other hand, examples of a number of other cheap supports have survived. Egyptian artists for instance, commonly drew on ostraka of

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[196] For the following passages regarding the importance of drawings for Medieval artistic processes, I relied heavily upon the introductory chapter of Robert W. Scheller (translated by Michael Hoyle) *Exemplum: Model-Book Drawing and the Practice of Artistic Transmission in the Middle Ages (ca. 900 - ca. 1470)* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press,1995) pp 1-8.

[197] R. Scheller, *Exemplum* p 2. Here Hoyle notes that the manner in which Archimedes was reportedly drawing, "in pulvere," may be interpreted as a floor covered with sand.

[198] "In the 7th century, Adamnan, abbot of Iona, asked his informant Arculfus to make sketches on a wax tablet of the holy places in Jerusalem before having them copied into a codex." Scheller, *Exemplum*, p 3. In addition: "Notker the German (ca. 950-1022) mentions in passing a drawing of an animal on a wax tablet, and Alexander Neckham (1157-1217) reports in his De Utensilibus the use of wax tablets in the training of goldsmith's apprentices, which suggests that they also played an important part in education." p 4.

limestone, or what was known as *potsherds*. As a further example, excavations in Ireland have uncovered samples of animal bones, or 'trial-pieces' displaying evidence of craftsmen having rehearsed incising complex strapwork designs. Similar practice sketches have been discovered in the form of graffiti on the walls of Norwegian stave churches, as well as on the reverse side of some copper plates, typically used for *email cloisonne*.[199]

Beneath the surfaces of walls decorated in the Middle Ages, there exists proof of concealed drawings. As was the case with some fifteenth-century Italian panel paintings, some of these sketches have no apparent relationship with the resulting design or image. With the increasing sophistication of x-ray technology, we are currently equipped with the capability to intensely inspect the variety of drawings located beneath the highly finished surfaces of late medieval panels. Such drawings range from extremely gestural to thoroughly detailed renderings, akin to the process of *sinopie* in the mural painting.[200]

Model Books

The majority of drawings that have survived from the Middle Ages are preserved on what was at the time, a rather expensive type of vellum.[201]

[199] R. Scheller, *Exemplum*, p 5.
[200] R. Scheller, *Exemplum*, p 6.
[201] A breif account of the nature of this material can be found in Daniel V. Thompson, *The Materials and Techniques of Medieval Painting* (New York: Dover Publications, 1956, pp 27-28.

The archival disadvantages of such circumstances are that these pieces of vellum are often poor in quality and frequently tattered. Their torn appearances also gives the impression of having originated as discarded scraps. Collections of these drawings are characteristically unbound and instead wrapped. They have been passed down to us in the form of paradigm collections, or what has come to be art historically known as 'model books.' These are batches of drawings displaying evidence of generic use. The fact that many of them have been reinforced or retouched indicates that they had been repeatedly used, for a variety of purposes, and over an extensive period of time.

So even though not a great number of drawn examples survive from the Middle Ages, model-books indicate that drawing, and a very specific notion of drawing, was essential to the production and transmission of images throughout this duration. Texts such as Belting's *Image and Presence* have contributed to the growing recognition of how medieval concepts of visual art differed from those of subsequent periods, but as Robert Scheller explains, this does not

> Alter the fact that in the Middle Ages, as in all other periods, a work of art was the end product of a working process governed by workshop traditions and techniques. Even without the intermediate stage of studies from nature, which is such a distinctive feature of later periods, the sequence of operations carried out by the medieval artist could not have been essentially different from that followed by his

more modern confrere, on whom we have more documentary and visual data.[202]

What the available evidence does suggest, is that drawings meant something different to the medieval artist than to either of their Renaissance or modern counterparts. As stipulated above, during the Middle Ages visual concepts were distributed from one region to another, and passed on from one generation to another in the form of drawn designs. This type of handmade reproduction, commonly called a 'model' (in Latin; *exemplum*), was used to transcribe the design and content of works of art. Collections of these models are something we might identify as an early form or algorithm, and one that was obviously *user friendly*.

The alterations and reinforcements of many of these drawings indicate that certain compositional and component features of such diagrams were frequently employed. It is a predicament creating some problems in historical attempts to account for a comprehensive understanding of a medieval iconographic program. Conversely however, such evidence provides the grounds for verification of a pivotal series of drawn schemes from which a variety of artists could utilize. Each artists altered parts of these drawings with the accent of his own 'style', however, never drastically changing the configuration of the drawing he employed.

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[202] Scheller, *Exemplum*, p 1.

It was not until the sixteenth-century that drawings began to become coveted for their display of spontaneity and personal artistic expression. From this point onwards, style became an increasingly valued feature of drawings. The personal touch of a specific artist had by this time come to symbolize a certain kind of aesthetic significance. As indicated above, this is a departure from the kind of importance the drawn line had during the Middle Ages. And it is this particular differentiation that I would like to put continued pressure upon.

The Graphic Capacity for Representation

Drawing is an medium appropriately convenient for the workings of science, technology, and obviously art. Although during the Middle Ages it was not considered an independent art form, it was certainly an important part of the artistic processes. As a transcribable tool, drawing was something not limited to that of conceiving painted panels. It was also employed in the initial draft of technological mechanisms. In this sense, early craftsman would design things, paintings being amongst them, by drawing and calculating concepts which previously lay outside the scope of experience. Their function was that of conceiving and organizing, thus bringing such forms or *data* into the range of experience.[203] This is

[203] Patrick Maynard, "Introduction", *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism: Special Issue: Perspectives on the Arts and Technology* (Milwaukee: The American Society for Aesthetics, The University of Milwaukee, Vol # 55, No 2, Spring 1997) p 99.

something that Binkley suggests confirms the digit as the "original virtual reality." This being an important connection amongst science, technology and art, and the literal link itself being that of the drawn line.

If we consider the supports on which drawing takes place, it is not difficult to understand such a surface as "not only a place for thinking, but for storing and transmitting information to other designers, and also fabricators."[204] As the example of *model-books* indicates, this was a common Medieval workshop procedure. An important precursor however, is that it is misleading to think of the resulting drawing being simply that of transcribing an idea from the mind of the craftsman to that of the surface. As Patrick Maynard suggests:

> The drawing surface might even be called the place at which a broad kind of information was invented, since to make design drawings for invention and manufacture, it was necessary to invent radical forms of abstraction and analysis not prominent in other forms of drawing. Clarity for the given purpose partly consists in what is left out: for like many amplifiers, this one works partly by filtering. This is also a kind of drawing that could be copied, metrically annotated, changed in scale. Notably, its information could be transferred operationally to and from materials: a measurement on the representation can be transferred to a measurement on its denotation.[205]

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[204] Maynard, p 99.
[205] Maynard, p 99.

With digital technology, drawing has become thoroughly intellectualized through "a specific mode of interface with science." As Maynard further explains, the historical progression of this culturally distinctive graphic capacity for representation, armed with a phenomenal informational system of retrieval and creativity, fluent transmission, logic, modification, and fusion, offered by a palpable agent that is "user friendly," shares many characteristics with the contemporary marvel of artificial intelligence.

In what might be an interesting endnote to this section is that of the fate of "artistic" drawings. Whereas the drawn line - in the form of working out ideas - has evolved and been assimilated into digital technology, drawings prized for their display of individual artistic style, immediacy and expression have shifted in identity. They have now become known in the market place under the chic substitute *works on paper*. With exceptions of course, this is the epitome of the artwork as commodity. It is a term likely coined by a dealer, and with the objective that it would help to underscore "the practice of charging higher prices for works executed on canvas, panel or any support less paradigamatically fragile than paper."[206] Contemporary

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[206] "It would be wrong, however, to designate certain artworks as works on paper, even though they are indeed works and are in fact on paper, like the scrolls of China or screens of Japan. In part this is due to the fact anything might have been a metaphor for ephemerality in those cultures which set no particular premium on inalterability in their philosophies. To be sure it could be argued that the fact that they used paper so widely in their art was itself an expression of their metaphysical celebration of the fleetingness of things. But in these Oriental cultures paper was appreciated for its beauty and paper workers appreciated for their skill in regimenting so fragile, so naturally insubordinate stuff. Nor would we designate as works on paper etchings and lithographs, though literally this is what they are, because the medium of considerable technical prowess fits awkwardly with the spontaneousness insinuated by the new term." Arthur C. Danto, "Works on Paper," *The State of the Art* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1985) p106-107.

drawings have come to be artistically associated with a certain degree of impulsiveness, experimentation, presumption and even capriciousness. Interestingly enough, many of so called *works on paper* are not even works-on-paper; they are works-on sheet metal, plastic, roofing tiles, or any other surface which appears the artist might have otherwise discarded. According to Danto, and in the worst case scenario, "Works on paper exactly suit an art world defined by perishability and fashion."[207]

Distributing Technology

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, artificial intelligence ventured from the labs and into the marketplace. The sales of computer products helped to offset the enormous amounts it cost to research and develop digital products. On a personal bases, computers were amiable tools that could process the natural language of their nationality. This eliminated any necessity to ascertain the complex and awkward computer languages. Initially, natural language comprehensibility was limited to words transcribed through a keyboard, but recent developments have extended this communication to that of spoken words.

Artificial intelligence also found appointments in the work force. Their tasks ranged from that of maintaining inventories, projecting demands,

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[207] Danto, "Works on Paper," p 108.

and accumulating market results. When employed in tandem with robotic systems, computers entered the factory line and designated parts and assemble products. Although private and industrial use of digital technology is widespread, the branch of artificial intelligence which has received the most publicity is that of *expert systems*.[208]

Specialized fields of research, such as mathematics and medicine to name two, utilize computer systems in order to manipulate research data and previous results in order to further advance the frontiers of their field. Given the amicable nature of computers, their capacities can be accessed by such experts in order to provide results that might have otherwise taken a great deal of time to produce manually.

Although the basic functioning of computers are relatively easy to grasp, when the agile proficiency with which computers can recall information from their vast data banks is coupled with the simple means by which they are summoned, an unimaginable concept becomes conscious. This is no more the case than with the employment of digital technology in the entertainment and communication industries. It is at this juncture that these sophisticated technologies stand closer to the arts than with any other examples.

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[208] Larry R. Harris, Ph.D., and Qwight B. Davis, *Artificial Intelligence Enters the Marketplace* (Toronto and New York: Bantam Books, 1986) pp 9-11.

The previous link between the technologies and the arts was that of a media. This format shaped power with physical materials, "with meaning in both the making and the use."[209] But the digital technologies of this era differ a great deal. With their far-reaching tentacles and liquefied intellectual configurations, they threaten to inundate the arts as much as everything else they engulf.

Digits and Dollars

During the past few years AT&T has accumulated revenues of up to seventy-five billion dollars.[210] Over a seven year period, the value of Blockbuster video rentals (purchased by Viacom for over eight billion) increased twenty two thousand percent by 1994. That same year, Time-Warner, comprised of the world's largest recording company, film and television studios, three quarters of the four most popular U.S. magazines, and the cable channel HBO, instigated a broadcast network and heavily invested as the second largest cable-owning organization - "with a bet on future 'interactive' television so confident that its reported present hourly losses would pay the salaries of two university professors."[211] In 1996, and with little doubt, Time-Warner acquired CNN for seven billion dollars.

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[209] Patrick Maynard, "Introduction," p 100.

[210] These figures are supplied by Maynard in his summary of the articles comprising the above issue. Maynard, p 100.

[211] Maynard points out that twenty years ago Warner Communication's annual report stated that, "Entertainment has become a necessity." Maynard, p 100.

Other members of the top four entertainment and communication conglomerates have recently maneuvered in order to acquire more representational authority. In 1995 Seagram's (Ortega) purchased 80% of MCA from Toshiba and Disney went into cooperative collaboration with a number of telephone companies. Additionally, Disney made an astounding nineteen billion dollar purchase of Capital Cities/ABC in July 1995, instigating the trend towards the merging mass "products" that we associate with such organizations as Disney and Macdonalds. That same year Westinghouse acquired CBS for a reported 5.4 billion, which augmented its radio holdings to nearly 90 stations, something allowed by a U.S. telecommunications deregulation bill passed in 1996.

Other industry giants employing digital technology include News Corporation; approximately one hundred and thirty newspapers and twenty four magazines, and Fox movie-television; studios, broadcast and cable networks, book publishing, control of much sports broadcasting, and the Sky and Star satellites over Europe and Asia. Although they are not related *tout de suite* with the arts, these "communication" industries have an enormous amount of influence and control of imagery that we encounter everyday. With the inevitable emergence of increasingly refined technology, the residual effect on art forms such as painting cannot be underestimated.

Our Days are Numbered

The most powerful computer company in the world at the present time is that of Microsoft. Recently its founder, Bill Gates, has been ranked amongst the wealthiest men in the world (one television report suggested that he is worth approximately fifty billion dollars). His corporation presently has a monopoly over the personal computer systems market, and he has recently come to an agreement with NBC for an on-line news service. In what is an interesting contemporary connection between the drawn line and digital technology, in 1997 Gates purchased the sketchbooks of Leonardo da Vinci's, which he has since placed in public view.

In addition, the market for digital technology and commodities has reached beyond the scope of the Western world or developed nations. Presently a number of American communications enterprises are jockeying for the virtual real estate of China. This is a matter that the Chinese Communist ministry is having a great deal of trouble trying to regulate, as the speed with which inter net information can be distributed and downloaded is beyond the censorship reflexes of "watchdogs" assigned by this government.

Closer to home, a recent *Maclean's* magazine reported that employment in "high technology" has begun to surpass considerably established sectors of

the work force.

> High technology has replaced forestry as British Columbia's
> biggest employer, a new study says. Consultant's Ernst and Young
> and the Toronto Dominion Bank said high-tech firms employed
> 61,000 people in the province at the end of 1997, compared with
> 33,000 in agriculture and 30,000 in forestry. High-tech
> employment has been growing by 22 per cent a year since 1996,
> compared with a 10 per cent annual rate of decline in forestry
> jobs.[212]

All of this suggests that relegating paintings to the trash bin of history on the bases of their being cultural commodities, is not a comparatively substantial enough reason. The kinds of monetary sums I have listed above more than likely exceed the entire market exchange for paintings throughout Western history. And the technological mode of representation employed to traffic in imagery is without dispute far more widespread and effective than painting had ever been. For the painter, the pressing question as to why continue painting is thoroughly embroiled with such issues to contemplate.

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[212] *Maclean's* (Toronto: Maclean Hunter Publishing Limited, vol. III, no. 17, April 27th, 1998) p 27.

The Final Stroke

Matisse once suggested that the reason the painter makes another painting is in order to recover a sense of equilibrium.[213] I comprehend this as referring to the painter's desire for further indication of their process of *becoming*.[214] To look at a painting is to look into an empty mirror. As we confront its surface our appearance is absorbed through the glass, its trajectory impeded and reflected off the silver backing. It migrates back through the glass and presents itself for our inspection. Neither the glass nor the silver tape alone could reproduce such a unequivocal replicate; they must perform in tandem. Digital representations differ in that they are synonymous with the reflections offered by chrome.

The painting stands for the painter, and her or his audience, as a representation of watching ourselves. It may or may not verifiably *embody* anything, but perhaps at best serve as a manifest sign of our

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[213] Two years before his death, in 1952, Matisse gave an interview with Andre Verdet. I chose this statement because for several reasons. In the first place, Matisse was one of the consummate Modern artists. He had been trained in a manner which reflected the traditional master's workshops that had existed for nearly 500 years. He was also a major pioneer in exploring the possible representational avenues painting could explore. At the time of this interview Matisse had been forced to give up painting due to health reasons. In place he turned to collage and drawing. Having done so would have given Matisse the distance form which to reflect on his relationship with painting. In addition, by 1954 televisions had been introduced onto the public market. Jack Flam, *Matisse on Art: Revised Edition* (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995) p 211.

[214] The notion of desire I am referring to here relates to that which Gilles Deleuze explains as the reacting body. Here Deleuze cites Cezanne's term *sensation* in order to explain how the nervous system responds to paint as though it were flesh. I find Deleuze's account of painting is interesting, however, his literal enlistment of quotes and comments about the paintings of Francis Bacon puncture the credibility of the theory he offers. At times his explanations appear more like admiration for the late painter than a philosophical pontification. Constantin V. Boundas, *The Deleuze Reader* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), pp 187-192.

existence, indexing that aspect of our being which is not exclusively rational nor subjective, but the interpenetration of both. As Daniel Arasse had remarked about Vermeer, "The aim of painting was not to make it's object known but to make the viewer witness to a presence;" we can make the contextual translation as to what constitutes that "presence" in paintings today.[215] In picturing with paint, the body becomes the yardstick and the resulting frontalised face whereas we confront ourselves; in the frequently messy, often clumsy, but sometimes graceful and superlatively sensitive identity that is our body, that is us.

If painters accept their new context, and are willing to work in a marginalized terrain of representational import, then they can contribute something more to the world of visual images than that of nostalgic ornaments and cultural commodities. Paintings, by their peculiar characteristics, have the capacity to state conceptions of *reality* in a manner in which no other representational mode is able. And undoubtedly, it is their thurible like nature that rejuvenates paintings appeal for us.

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[215] Daniel Arasse (translated by Terry Grabar), *Vermeer: Faith in Painting* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994) p 74.

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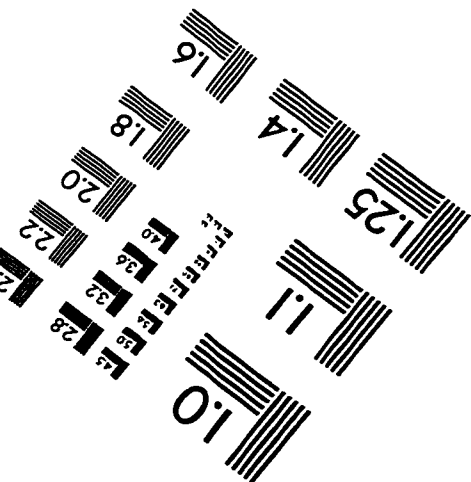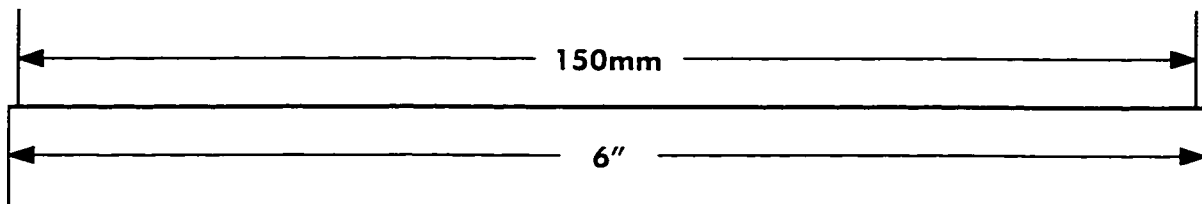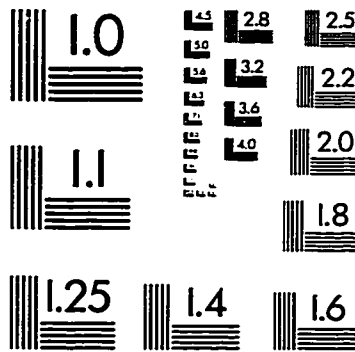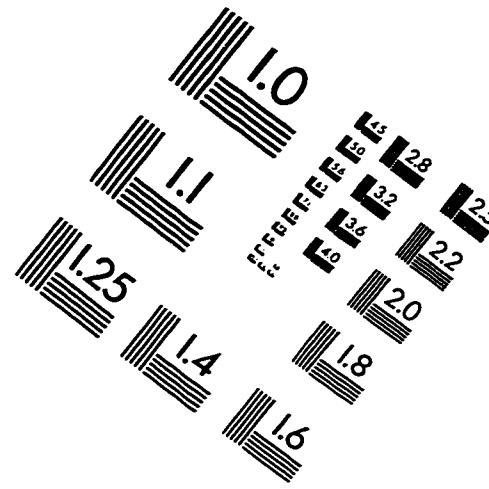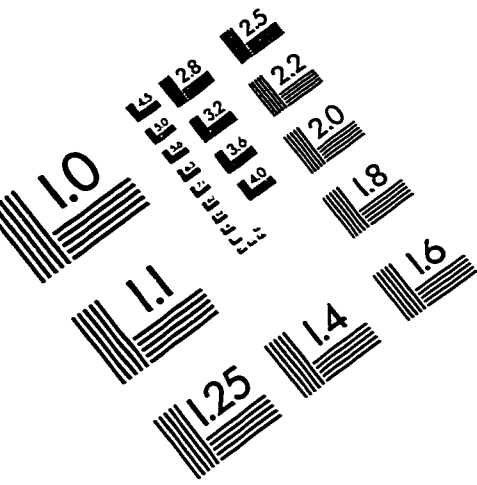
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IMAGE EVALUATION
TEST TARGET (QA-3)

150mm

6"