

UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

Jennifer Rae Forsyth:
Writings, Notes, Interviews

By

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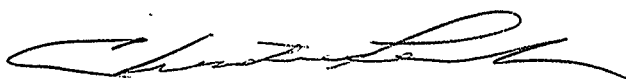
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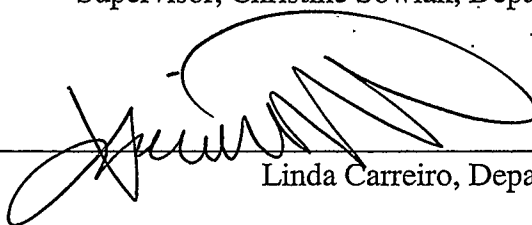
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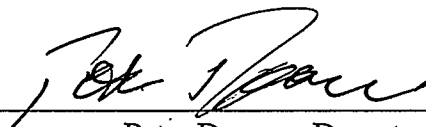
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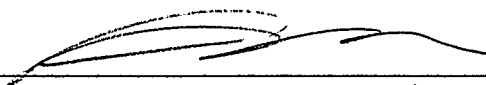
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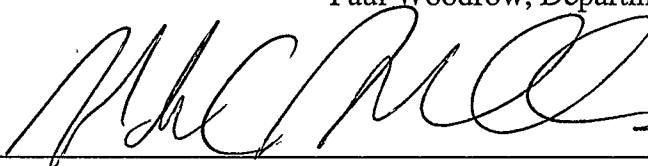
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I think [...] that, when you begin to work with the idea of suggesting, say, a particular psychological state of affairs, you have eliminated so much from the process of painting that you make an artificial statement which is, I think, not desirable. I think one has to work with everything and accept the kind of statement which results as unavoidable or as a helpless situation. I think most art which begins to make a statement fails to make a statement because the methods used are too schematic or artificial. I think that one wants from a painting a sense of life. The final suggestion, the final statement, has not to be a deliberate statement but a helpless statement. It has to be what you can't avoid saying, not what you set out to say. I think one ought to use everything one can use, all of the energy should be wasted in painting it, so one hasn't the reserve of energy which is able to use this thing. One really shouldn't know what to do with it, because it should match what one is already; it shouldn't just be something one likes.

Jasper Johns, 1965¹

¹ Kirk Varnedoe Ed. *Jasper Johns; Writings, Sketchbook Notes, Interviews*. (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1996) back cover.

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Dedicated to Lee Krasner.

I've never been more moved by a painting in my life.

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Introduction

I grew up on a forty-two foot sailboat off the coast of British Columbia. There were five of us onboard and space was limited, so organization really defined the way we lived. My own personal space (my bunk) was designed for one body. It contained a bookshelf and a box of my things. There was a curtain that separated me from the main part of the forward cabin, the place we shared. Every nook and cranny contained within it compartments that housed the items we needed to live and the objects we treasured. In recent years I have, through the nature of my discipline, been drawn to cities. It is in the city that I become aware of my youth and its impact on the way I move through the world, on what I keep and treasure, and how I relate to place.

Living small has its advantages – everything you possess is kept close, stored, and those things are significant because you can have so few. They become more precious, more desirable. In a small space, living with objects is luxurious and with everything close, your surroundings become less about space and more about place. Place, as opposed to space, relates to social interaction and the interaction between people and material culture. Space become place when it takes on a character that relates to the social activities housed within it. Living in a city makes me question this idea of place, and I question its loss.

The loss of place is common in North American cities. Many cities are no longer designed around or developed upon social networks but rather, upon commercial ones. Cities are built (and rebuilt) based upon the consideration of the movement of people and their objects, an approach that has been dominated by the car for some time. Roads and highways are built, and with them come the utility poles and the traffic signs, the bus shelters, benches and garbage bins. These things are not designed to live with, but to pass by without seeing. They also have a way of making spaces look ubiquitous – one space looking the same as the next, merging together into strings of locations, without significance, without individuality. This loss of personality leads to a loss of place. Cities become disregarded. They develop into collections of ordered infrastructures through which we negotiate our movement. It is within these structured environments that I find myself acutely aware of my own relationship to objects and how I experience the marks left upon them.

I am interested in the balance of our relationship with objects, the ones we treasure and the ones we discard, and how we separate the ones we desire from the ones we use. The flipside of this is equally interesting; the things we desire we collect, but sometimes we hoard. The act of hoarding becomes compulsion, and the collection becomes more about the act of collecting than the objects themselves. We discard other objects flippantly, thus leaving our mark, a trace of ourselves in the world.

We are by nature social creatures, and our negotiations within our cities reflect this. I believe our response to the loss of place is reflected in the traces we leave. It is by leaving traces that we are able to create or maintain a sense of place. Cities are full of material flotsam. People are constantly purchasing, using and discarding objects, large and small. This practice as I see it is both intentional and unintentional. There is of course the trace of movement from use and wear, and these occur over time. We also leave the unwanted from mattresses to gum wrappers, some by chance or misplacement, and others out of disregard. There are those who intentionally leave objects and inscriptions in this kind of space, some are commercial and some are reactive. This is where the corporate logo and graffiti meet.

I am drawn to this material flotsam, the debris and citations and the neglect, decay and damage that often accompanies it. These things are treasures, they tell stories. These stories are not linear narratives; they are both visual and virtual. We read and understand traces of past events, of interaction between people and material culture. The objects we make as humans are made to interact with others and ourselves. The way we interact with these things is taken for granted. But in many ways this relationship defines us – we want to collect, to order, and to leave a mark on the world.

The aesthetic result of these three compulsions and their effect on the urban landscape results in a visual aesthetic that I respond to. It prompts me to consider how I relate to the notion of place. It is like the way I experience fiction. Good fiction creates worlds.

Reading a story creates in the mind a picture of the story itself, generated from

understanding the words as they are written, and it creates allusions to the world and other narratives. In this action something else happens, I create my own world at the same time. It relates to what is presented and the way I understand it, but also to my own life, my memories, dreams, desires and experiences. This is what place does for me. It enables a virtual experience. With the work I am presenting it is my intention to offer a peek into this world. This work is not only based on objects I have observed, collected and organized, and the marks that I make, but how these objects can be experienced as events. It is for this reason that I have been drawn to the writing of French philosopher Henri Bergson, specifically with regard to his notion of 'duration'.

Duration relates to time, a notion of time that is not measurable, or quantifiable clock time; rather it is based on personal experience that occurs as the individual or 'self' is developing and changing. Something experienced in duration is never re-experienced because of the individual's own changing consciousness. The durational experience is virtual – that is, existing in the mind rather than as physical experience. We exist in duration, but this is never pure duration because there is no purity in experience. It is always altered by past experiences and the recollections that occur within duration itself. This is the 'condition of experience' or 'becoming'.

When I was first introduced to Bergson I developed an instant affinity with his thinking. This was not because I found it interesting, although I do, but because I felt I was having my own thinking explained. I look to Bergson in order to address two issues that have

repeatedly presented themselves within my own practice; how to move beyond representation, and to understand how art can perform.

The ontological perspective views the world in terms of being. This means that visually, art that is made is always understood as a representation of being in the world. My own engagement with the world does not follow this model, I do not see objects and images as representations, as much as incorporations of my experience. They become part of my own duration. Duration allows us to move beyond the state of being towards a constant state of becoming. Understanding the world through duration is not static, it does not result in re-presenting. It is about experiencing and the quality of experience.

I am interested in this notion of duration in relation to objects; not as objects in space, but how objects can be viewed as events. Understanding duration in relation to the material world is about experiencing the world rather than being in it. An object's duration can be evidenced through the index. Indices are examples of how time can perform. We respond to the index because it presents us with a kind of memory, a fleeting relationship between an object and a past experience or the understanding of someone else's experience. The result of this is a sensational response from the viewer that is virtual, constantly changing and subjective as it relates to an individual's own duration.

This compilation of writing is presented to address how place, duration, and the compulsions of collecting, ordering and leaving a mark informs the work presented in my MFA thesis exhibition. I have, as the title indicates, divided this work into three main

categories: *Writings*, *Notes*, and *Interviews*. I have compiled the text in this way in order to explore the various influences on my work and to address the different ways that I relate to these interests. This approach to my thesis support paper mirrors the way I address my studio practice in that I am drawn toward various approaches to my practice, in both content and methodology.

Writings explores the relationship between aesthetics and duration. I address this in two ways: through examining traces on urban structures and manufactured objects; and by addressing painting in terms of materiality and sensation. The reason for this separation is that these are two different inquiries that inform my practice. The work contained within the thesis exhibition relates to these two essays but each does so in a different way.

The first paper, *Traces; The Mark of Humanity on Urban Structures*, addresses Henri Bergson's notion of duration in relation to the mark of human presence on our created world. I examine how traces move from the realm of representation toward a more dynamic indication of humanity that can be understood not as damage, or urban decay, but as dynamic cultural legacy.

The second paper, *Duration in Plastic Speech; Materiality and Language*, addresses how examining painting can relate to duration through not only the process of painting but also by experiencing work by reading the language of paint. This way of addressing painting can be clarified by the use of three understandings of painting. These are put forth by James Elkins, Mark Rothko and Giles Deleuze. Elkins examines painting using

alchemy, Rothko addresses plasticity, and Deleuze defines painting as an analogical language. These understandings, while all different, come together on two main points; they address materiality, and a sensation particular to the medium of paint.

Notes directly addresses my thesis work, the compulsions they examine and how my process mirrors these notions. The notes look at collecting, at organizing and at leaving a mark as I address the three works that comprise my thesis exhibition: *Snapshot Collection of the Artist*, *Moving Boxes*, and *Museal*.

Interviews, is a conversation compiled from excerpts I have taken from interviews between various artists, critics and philosophers. These participants, either through theory or practice, inform (or misinform) my own understanding of painting. I have chosen these excerpts as they resonate with my own inquiries about the discipline, using the quotations to contrast different views and as jumping off points from where I respond, inquire and engage.

The research that I am presenting involves a sociological or anthropological approach to visual culture and the material world, as it relates to human compulsions and duration. This approach serves to examine why we collect, organize and leave our mark on the world, and how by doing so create aesthetically charged objects and surfaces. My aim is to explore these inquiries not by making any bold gestures or statements but by asking questions and by inviting the reader and the viewer to experience my world.

Chapter One **Writings**

Traces; The Mark of Humanity on Urban Structures²

In addressing the urban landscape as place, I examine both the geographical and sociological relationships between humanity and the created environment through the collected social traces on the surfaces of urban structures. These traces are generally considered to be damage and detritus; however, when examined in relation to Henri Bergson's notion of duration this accumulation of trace can be understood as dynamic cultural legacy.

I am examining traces on ordered urban environments. While cities themselves indicate a human impact on the world, it is our negotiations within them that specifically interests me. The traces I am addressing include intentional industrial and instructional information; personal and collective marking of graffiti and tagging; and incidental indication of use, decay, damage and detritus. Markings and residue of this kind develop as byproducts of our movement through a given space.

When modern cities (primarily North American cities) are built around the consideration of the car as a primary means of movement they lose character – they lose their sense of place. This happens because of the way we move through space. Cities are, to a large extent, defined by the transportation they support. Within the confines of vehicles people no longer engage within an environment as they did before the advent of the car. The

² Previously presented at the University of Victoria Graduate English Conference, *Talking out the Trash*, in Victoria, BC, March 15th, 2008.

urban spaces I am examining were created with vehicle transportation as the primary method of movement.

Maintaining an environment that supports mass transport requires an ordered infrastructure. As we move throughout our cities to work, and to obtain the things we need, we build networks and objects that facilitate our purpose (traffic lights and signs, bus shelters and benches, and dumpsters for example). These objects are the direct result of labor and consumption rather than social interaction. When our environment is relegated to such a utilitarian role, we ignore it; we move through forming no attachments, resulting in a loss of place.

As spaces become purely utilitarian they are not only ignored, they tend to be neglected. The result of this disregard is the accumulation of varied detritus and various other marks, both intentional and accidental. It is these traces that are the subject of my inquiry because they transform space into place. They do this by indicating evidence of human interaction with the environment. Traces provide an index of previous experiences which give a space character; it is this character that designates it as place. When adorned with visual indication of a human presence, structures in the public sphere – dumpsters, freight trains, utility poles, bus shelters and benches – become cultural signifiers or monuments.

Traditional monuments are intentionally built to indicate a specific time and place. They are meant to preserve an idea of the past, to stand in for or to contain the event in order to communicate and preserve a singular moment in time. This kind of monument typically

exists as a representation of an event or person, marking human presence and the interaction with that object in space. Because newer cities favor highways and roads over pedestrian traffic, the desire for traditional monuments becomes diminished. Graffiti, decay and damage, on the other hand, proliferate in these conditions. It is in this way that objects enveloped with traces become replacements for traditional cultural monuments. These structures do not exist as the aforementioned examples of monuments, they do not re-present humanity – they index it. They become indicators of a social environment that is constantly in flux. This is how we can come to view traces in relation to a particular concept of duration.

Henri Bergson's 'duration' or 'durée'³ relates to the realm of time. He describes it as, "the continuous progress of the past which gnaws into the future and which swells as it advances."⁴ This is not a measured time, rather it is "is an inner sphere of 'non spatial' time that contrasts to the dissectible and analytical time found in external objects."⁵ This theory of time relies upon the notion that our consciousness is constantly developing. It is the experience of time. This is a virtual understanding that precludes spatial thinking. It is not about 'being-in-the-world', but about 'becoming', the condition of experience. We are never *in* duration – we *experience* it. Durational perception or 'intuition' relates to memory. The idea that we are always changing means that neither memory nor experience is repeatable. Therefore in this understanding of experience no two moments

³ Trigg, Dylan. *The Aesthetics of Decay; Nothingness, Nostalgia, and the Absence of Reason*. (New York: Peter Lang Inc, 2006), 25.

⁴ Bergson, Henri. *Creative Evolution*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 3.

⁵ Trigg, Dylan. *The Aesthetics of Decay; Nothingness, Nostalgia, and the Absence of Reason*. (New York: Peter Lang Inc, 2006), 25.

are identical; one will always contain a memory of the other. There is no static existence, our experiences are always dynamic.

Experiencing traces in terms of duration involves the interaction with objects that exist in space. From an anthropological perspective this can be explained in the following way:

“aesthetic experience only completes itself when the object of aesthetic contemplation is discovered by the self: that is, when the reciprocity between subject and object is established.”⁶ This exchange between objects and individuals occurs when we interact with them. However, Bergson’s duration is not spatial; space is objective while duration is wholly subjective. I would argue that we become aware of duration because of the notion of place. This is because the traces we leave invoke an understanding of previous action, which in turn triggers memories, either of previous experiences or of our relationship to similar indices.

Space is quantifiable, objective, because it is based on measurement. The boundaries of place are not so easily defined. This is because place originates with social action and culture. Place can be both social and geographical. Anthropologist Miles Richardson explores this in his writings on place and culture. He asserts that place and culture are key concepts that “constitute the unique dialectic of being human.”⁷ He states that:

⁶ Trigg, Dylan. *The Aesthetics of Decay; Nothingness, Nostalgia, and the Absence of Reason*. (New York: Peter Lang Inc, 2006), 21.

⁷ Agnew, John A. and Duncan, James S. *The Power of Place*. (Boston: Department of Geography, Syracuse University, 1989), 141.

“As flesh and blood primates we occupy space; as creatures of the symbol we transform that space into place [and that in order] to turn the world of nature, a world in which we breathe, into the world of symbols, a world in which we speak, is the special destiny of us humans ... culture ... is the transfiguration of that destiny.”⁸

The traces that fascinate me are of the world of signs, an indication of use that transform neglected spaces into place. Place therefore becomes a venue where matter and memory can engage.

There is a relationship that develops between trace-laden structures and the observer made possible only because of the signs contained on their surfaces. These can be examined using the semiotic understanding as proposed by Charles Sanders Peirce. Peirce’s semiotics is based on three types of signs: index, icon and symbol. Each has a different way of carrying meaning. These signs are not objects themselves, nor representation, but are meanings associated with image. An index is a meaning based on a cause and effect relationship that is established through a “pragmatic relationship to the material world”⁹. For example rust on an object can be associated with time or weather and becomes an index of that environment. Icons and symbols are meanings regulated by a cultural understanding. An icon directly communicates an idea through a physical resemblance. A symbol is a meaning that is represented by a sign-standing in for some thing else, such as the written word.

⁸ Ibid, 143-44.

⁹ Jones, Andrew, *Memory and Material Culture*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 18.

Trace-laden objects are in a unique position to carry index, icon and symbols simultaneously. Citations such as graffiti can carry multiple meanings. A symbolic understanding is communicated by reading the words, and an additional reference to action because “citations can be treated like indices as they also reference previous performances.”¹⁰ With social tagging of names or personalized logos, repetition is common. In these instances, even though much of the text is illegible, the repetition of the signs causes a remembrance of one place when viewed again elsewhere. This recollection is both associated with the symbolic understanding, and the index of repeated action or inscription. Mundane urban structures become dynamic monuments when inscribed with such referents. This is due to the complex layering of the signs, which themselves evoke multiple meanings.

The types of signs on urban structures such as utility poles, bus shelters and dumpsters are varied and indicate a wide range of social activity. These markings can be instructional signs, corporate logos, personal markings (which may indicate political issues), personal information, artistic expression, territorial marking and the indication of labor, use, or abuse. This combination of varied trace indicates a complex community that is stratified. For instance the corporate logo and the graffiti on a dumpster indicate differing economic sources. Yet these come together on the surface of the container. It is on the surfaces of these structures where humanity can be represented as unified. This occurs in duration.

¹⁰ Ibid, 55.

Traffic lights and signs, bus shelters and benches, and dumpsters become saturated with meaning in this way because their value in relation to contemporary culture is considerably low. Because these objects tend to be ignored, they hold an invisible role in society; as a result they are not often maintained or repaired when exposed to damage or decay. This allows the objects to amass a layered patina of varied traces. When observed by an individual, this trace creates a variation of meanings simultaneously. These meanings also change over time as the object itself changes. This constant change that is due to the temporal nature of urban trace gives us an indication of the object's duration. In his text, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, Bergson states, "perception is never mere contact of the mind with the object present; it is impregnated with memory-images which complete it as they interpret it."¹¹ The perception of urban structures can be understood in this way because the signs contained on their surfaces provide us with these 'memory-images'.

Bergson's notion of duration is virtual time-based experience, "it is a case of a 'transition' of a 'change', a becoming, but it is a becoming that endures, a change that is substance itself."¹² Memory plays a significant role in this process. Bergson explains this when he writes, "Both the past and the present states form an organic whole, as happen when we recall the notes of a melody melting, so to speak, into one another."¹³ Here Bergson shows how multiple recollections combine into a memory that is constantly

¹¹ Bergson, Henri. *An Introduction to Metaphysics*. (NY: Hackett Publishing, 1999), 21.

¹² Deleuze, Gilles. *Bergsonism*. (NY: Zone Books, 1988.), 37.

¹³ Bergson, Henri. *Time and Free Will: an essay on the immediate data of consciousness*. (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1910.), 125.

changing, each affecting the next. He explains how this continual process of remembrance is not about a series of specific isolated moments, but about the way memory is a continual process that we carry forward as we experience life. He states, “It is Memory that makes the body something other than instantaneous and gives it duration in time.”¹⁴ Understanding meanings of signs on urban structures relies on this remembrance. Because these things are also constantly changing, the memories we associate with them develop and change with our observation. It is in this way that structures themselves be understood as *becoming* when experienced in duration.

Durational time is not understood through intellect, but through intuition. Intellect offers a relative experience or model of an experience that is based on spatial thinking. Intuition on the other hand is the direct apprehension of a process. In his writing on Bergson, Giles Deleuze explains Bergson’s use of intuition as “neither a feeling, an inspiration nor a disorderly sympathy, but a fully developed method” of philosophy. He does so by examining Bergson’s process. The method of intuition involves three rules: the creating and stating of problems, the discovery of differences, and the apprehension of real time.

The first rule relates to the creating and stating of problems. Bergson writes, “the truly great problems are set forth only when they are solved.”¹⁵ This part of the method involves discovering true problems. For Bergson this first entails identifying false or badly stated problems. A false problem relates to the idea of absolutes, of ‘more’ or ‘less’. As an example of how this rule works, Bergson addresses the problem of being, or

¹⁴ Ibid, 26.

¹⁵ Ibid, 17.

rather, the idea that being supercedes nonbeing. This is a false question. It is problematic because his theory does not relate to absolutes such as the notion of being. He responds to this problem by stating: “there is not less, but more in the idea of nonbeing than that of being.”¹⁶ What Bergson means is that in ‘being’ one can only ‘be’. This indicates a closed system. Being does not account for nonbeing. Nonbeing, on the other hand, considers three things: being, its own position in relation to being, and the motivation for that position. This shows how, for Bergson, there are no absolutes, only intensities.

The second rule involves the discovery of differences. This rule is a struggle against illusion, and relates to Bergson’s understanding of false questions and explains the need to condemn them. In rediscovering the true, Bergson uses *dualisms*. Dualisms are composites that are divided according to their natural articulations, or true presences. These presences go “beyond experience, toward the conditions of experience.”¹⁷ They do so because the way they are divided allows us to understand them in relation to one another. For example, matter and memory are dualisms that are divided according to their natural articulation. Bergson uses this division as a way to make sense of things that are mixed together in reality. As dualisms they are distinguished from one another by their relationships to duration and extensity; memory is relegated to the realm of time (duration) while matter is spatial (extensity). These are pure presences but when they mix so completely that we can no longer distinguish one from the other, we are faced with a false problem. We need to condemn these problems because they prevent us from moving

¹⁶ Deleuze, Gilles. *Bergsonism*. (New York: Zone Books, 1988), 17.

¹⁷ Ibid, 23.

toward the condition of experience. To clarify further: if memory becomes spatial and space becomes time, we can no longer experience duration.

The third rule involves the awareness of real time, that is, the understanding and stating of problems in terms of time rather than space. By relating to the problem in terms of duration we become closer to the substance or the essence of it. The idea of essence relates to intensity. Bergson's thinking is based on the idea that time relates to quality while space relates to quantity. Duration therefore is the location of differences in 'kind'. Thus it follows that space relates to differences in 'degree'.

By setting up this method Bergson is challenging an ontological approach to philosophy, and instead introducing a method of inquiry that occurs outside of being. Being, from the root 'be' is a fixed state. Bergson denies this notion of being because his duration is internal and virtual, it relates to the constantly changing consciousness of an individual's own experience. Bergson does not consider space to be false, rather applies the method of intuition by examining it in terms of difference and dividing it into the articulations of the real. According to Bergson, the composite of space is time. By understanding space and duration as natural articulations, we can move toward the condition of experience.

Deleuze writes that: "Duration is not merely lived experience: it is also experience enlarged or even gone beyond; it is already a condition of experience. For experience always gives us a composite of space and duration,"¹⁸

¹⁸ Ibid, 37.

For Bergson this condition of experience is 'becoming'. In opposition to an ontological understanding that supposes that we leave our mark on the world through the use of representation, 'becoming' relates to a reciprocal relationship with the world that occurs in the virtual state of duration.

A monument erected with the intention of enduring as representation of a moment in the existence of humanity offers an ontological understanding of human presence that relates to physical space and measured time. It relates to the absolute. Trace on urban structures, however, becomes enduring evidence that provides us with the composites of space and duration relating to place and durational time. This is because the multiplicity of trace allows us to experience these objects in duration. Bergson writes: "No image can replace the intuition of duration, but many diverse images, borrowed from very different orders of things, may, by the convergence of their action, direct consciousness to the precise point where there is a certain intuition to be seized."¹⁹

Traces indicate a past, they index duration; the structures they envelop exist in space. These things differ in kind because they belong to different orders. These orders become unified in the process of intuition. This is because place is a socially activated arena that allows differences in kind to develop in a way that encourages the condition of experience.

¹⁹ Bergson, Henri. *An Introduction to Metaphysics*. (New York: Hackett Publishing, 1999), 16.

Because duration is internal and virtual, it relates to the constantly changing consciousness of an individual's own experience. Neglected urban places ensure a constantly changing situation that provides an ideal arena for the possibility of the awareness of duration. Using Bergson's method we can examine traces as qualitative elements that are not relegated to the absolute idea of representation (which relates to being), but as an accumulation of differences which through multiple recollections provide us with the possibility of apprehending real time – our own duration. It is in this way that the traces move from the realm of representation (from an absolute) toward a more dynamic and organic indication of humanity. The accumulation of these types of trace can be understood in this context not as damage, or urban decay, but as dynamic cultural legacy.

Duration in Plastic Speech: Materiality and Language

Painting can be understood in relation to Henri Bergson's notion of duration, to be viewed as experience, and not merely as a representation of the world or an indication of being. This view of painting is possible because of the language of paint. This term – 'the language of paint' – has recently caused me some distress because it is often quoted, or in my opinion misquoted, in the process of viewing work as a way of avoiding the actual discussion of the materials and how they speak. It is for this reason that I hope to examine painting as language and address how it communicates to the viewer. The relationship between the experience of making and the event of viewing relies upon understanding painting as language. However, the language of paint is complicated because it does not rely upon syntax in order to engage.

It is problematic to address the image or images in this discussion of painting as a form of communication. Understanding the language of images is not exclusive to painting, and relates rather to a semiotic understanding of how images or objects can refer to both themselves and to ideas beyond their representation. This way of addressing painting can be limiting because it can influence the way that we perceive painting as relating to being in the world and re-presenting it through illusionistic means. It is not my intention here to examine the role of the image or the subject matter of a painting, rather the language of paint regardless of whether an image is presented or not.

My purpose in exploring how painting can communicate is to examine not only how paintings can have duration, but also how the act of viewing relates to duration. For painting to be understood in terms of language involves the examination of its materiality. In order to observe painting in terms of duration we need to understand the ways it can be experience. To do so we must explore how Bergson understands time and space as opposing orders.

Thinking about time as durational relates to the distinction between ‘becoming’ (the realm of time which is understood through the quality of experience), and ‘being’ (an eternal unchanging state that relies upon examining the world in terms of quantifiable components of space and time). The two are both concepts that Bergson uses. He defines them as dualities and as such does not negate either, but claims a tendency toward becoming. While Bergson is biased toward becoming, it is through the polarity of the two that his intention is understood. Notions of time and space are therefore the core of understanding a Bergsonian concept of art. Ruth Lorand explains Bergson’s notion of opposing orders in her essay, *Bergson’s Concept of Art*. She states: “The core of Bergson’s criticism of Western philosophy is that it has reduced time into spatial concepts and thus made time illusory. Bergson’s motto is that *time is real*, and as such it is irriductable, effective, and relevant to the true understanding of philosophy.”²⁰ As Lorand notes: “Bergson considers durational perception (intuition) as the reliable channel for contemplating the true nature of things, whereas spatial (geometrical) thinking only has pragmatic values.”

²⁰ Lorand, Ruth. “Bergson’s Concept of Art.” *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 39, No 4 (October 1999): 402.

The two orders that Bergson defines in his book, *Creative Evolution*, are the 'geometric order' and the 'vital order'. Geometric order is "physical', 'automatic', 'spatial', 'intellectual', and is the order of 'unorganized (lifeless) bodies,'"²¹ involving a spatial approach to relations among parts of a given object. It is "created by the ability of the intellect to neglect natural parts of an object and break the whole into artificial homogeneous units."²² This relies upon what is juxtaposed. For Bergson the vital order is "intuitive', 'natural', 'positive', 'willed', 'creative', 'individual', and the order of organized (living) bodies."²³ The vital order consists of natural parts whose interrelations are, "directed from within and express their real qualities."²⁴ The vital order therefore does not rely upon perceiving the juxtaposition of objects in space but from using intuition to grasp a succession that Bergson describes as "a growth from within."²⁵

Considering art as the product of a geometric order supposes that intellect precedes an object or form. If content precedes form then, according to Bergson, art becomes an object. Bergson's vital order or 'vital-artistic-order'²⁶ denies the possibility of a preconceived state of art. This is because form and content cannot be separated. He states: "The thing and the idea of the thing, its reality and its possibility were ... created at one stroke."²⁷ Thus vital order is unpredictable, and as such it cannot be experienced in

²¹ Lorland, Ruth. "Bergson's Concept of Art." *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 39, No 4 (October 1999): 402.

²² Ibid, 402.

²³ Ibid, 402.

²⁴ Ibid, 402.

²⁵ Bergson, Henri. *Creative Evolution*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 35.

²⁶ Lorland, Ruth. "Bergson's Concept of Art." *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 39, No 4 (October 1999): 405.

²⁷ Bergson, Henri. *Creative Evolution*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 23.

the same way twice. Conversely the belief that intellect alone could create a work of art assumes that the end result would always be constant.

An understanding of the vital order allows us to address painting through an engagement with the materials. In the act of painting there is a reciprocal relationship between the painter and the medium, which is encapsulated in the event itself. Because of this there is evidence of the artist's own duration in the work. This is not our primary question here however; the question that begs to be answered is how does a painting perform? It is through questioning the relationship between materiality and sensation that I seek an answer. Through this inquiry I will examine three ways of looking at painting as they are presented in the writings of James Elkins, Mark Rothko and Giles Deleuze. I have chosen these approaches because the way they address painting differs from most. While the writers themselves vary in their understandings, they each question how painting is experiential and how the act of looking at painting creates an emotional response.

In *What Painting is* James Elkins explores painting in terms of alchemy. He does so in order to address the relationship between the material and the artist. Elkins discusses a physical reaction to index, and explains an emotional response to painting based on the physical responses of the body, as well as exploring the material and process using alchemy. Elkins describes alchemy as “an encounter with the substances in the world around us, an encounter that is not veiled by science.”²⁸ He uses alchemy as a model in order to discuss how painters work with materials to achieve unknown results.²⁹ Alchemy

²⁸ Elkins, James. *What Painting Is*. (NY: Routledge, 1999), 7.

²⁹ Ibid, 9

is an intuitive process that is developed through the handling of materials, materials which are often unknown or have unknown results. Painting contains this approach in its unpredictability, because the materials can create variable results. Elkins compares the two with the common factors of stone and water. He writes: "In alchemy, the Stone (with a capital S) is the ultimate goal, one of the purposes of alchemy is to turn something as liquid as water into something as firm and unmeltable as stone."³⁰ This change in substance that results from the handling of materials occurs also in the act of painting and it is a process that relies neither solely on the materials, nor on the painter in order to occur; it is a direct result of interaction between the two.

Change in materials is the first correlation Elkins makes between the painting and alchemy. He continues to explore this in relation to physical responses between the materials and the body. His approach to viewing painting begins with the relationship between visual and physical responses to paint. Elkins calls these 'material memories', specifying that they are the parts not usually discussed about in painting. Material memories occur in the act of making, they are the history of the paint as it moves from water to stone, as the painter experiences the subtle or aggressive manipulation with the materials. These memories are part of the making; but also leave a trace in the resulting picture. It is in those traces that Elkins gains insight to the visual, and physical response to the act of seeing painting. He writes: "The material memories are not usually part of what is said about a picture, and that is the fault of the interpreter, because every painting captures a certain resistance of paint, a prodding gesture of the brush, a speed and

³⁰ Ibid, I.

insistence in the face of mindless matter: and it does so at the same moment, and in the same thought, as it captures the expression of a face.”³¹

In viewing a work, the painter’s gestures are indexes that indicate the history of action – the history of the painter and the materials and how they worked together. Elkins reads these marks as indication of the painter’s mood or energy. He is clear to note however, that the viewing is a response to the substances that are presented, an effect of the paint itself. Viewing with bodily responses such as tracing an indexical mark of the hand, with ones own body, Elkins describes a visceral reaction. His thoughts of the artist’s body at work also address the ways painters respond to the materials or as known to alchemists, “*materia prima*”³², and how those substances occupy the mind.

Elkins describes the way, as he puts it, ‘substances occupy the mind’ when the viewer experiences a sensation from viewing.³³ This can be tension, or anxiety, a sense of vertigo or calm, and is a reaction that comes from the viewing of paint wholly removed from either the image or subject matter of the work. This way of reading painting relates not to what is presented, but how it is presented. The gestures themselves carry meaning, and for Elkins this meaning is directly related to the artist’s movement that is captured in the index of the mark. He writes:

“Substances occupy the mind by invading it with thoughts of the artists body at work. A brushstroke is an exquisite record of the speed and force of the hand that

³¹ Ibid, 3.

³² Ibid, 68.

³³ Ibid, 96.

made it, and if I think of the hand moving across the canvas – or better, if I just retrace it, without thinking – I learn a great deal of what I see. Painting is scratching, scrapping, waving, pushing and dragging. At times the hand moves as if the linen canvas were a linen shirt, and the paint was a stain that had to be run under running water. Some painting motions are like conversations, where hands keep turning in the air to make a point. Others are like slow careful gestures, like touching someone's eye to remove a fleck of dirt”

Here Elkins describes his own response to painting as being relative to his personal experience with the medium. He reads the work as a painter himself, indicating that his own experience with similar actions provide him with an understanding of how the marks were made. Throughout Elkins' writing when he discusses how substances affect viewing, he refers to either his own response, or to the reaction that a painter has in viewing another's work. When examining painting using this model of alchemy and its relationship to a physical response, painting can be understood to perform in both the relationship between the painter and medium, and through an informed viewer reading the work.

Using Elkins understanding of what painting is, we can understand the durational nature of painting in two ways: through the act of making and through the act of viewing with the body. These two ways of understanding painting as durational rely upon the informed audience. Both the experience of painting and the act of viewing as Elkins describes them suppose that the viewer has had personal experience with the act of painting. Thus it

becomes clear that the primary example of duration in painting happens, according to Elkins, within the studio and as such he defines painting as a solitary practice.³⁴

While Elkins locates the practice of painting within the artist's studio, Mark Rothko defines it as a social endeavor. He claims that art is a social action, and is so because of the ability it has to communicate. Rothko states: "art is not only a form of action, it is a form of social action. For art is a type of communication, and when it enters into the environment it produces its effects just as any form of action does."³⁵ The effects that he speaks of here relate to sensual response that occurs as a result of experiencing a work of art. Rothko's paintings elicit just such a response. There is, in viewing Rothko's work, a feeling that is not describable with words, yet it is an overwhelming thing to experience. In his posthumously published manuscript, *The Artists Reality: Philosophies of Art*, Mark Rothko discusses how his understanding of plasticity – 'plastic speech' as he terms it – can explain this sensual action.

Rothko's aim with his notion of plastic speech is to unify the subjective and objective in order to come to an understanding of what he calls 'the artists reality'. He uses the term 'artist reality' to describe the outcome of artistic production that expresses the artists experience of their realm of existence, He writes:

“ A painting is the representation of an artist's notion of reality in the terms of plastic elements. The creation of a plastic unit reduces all the phenomena of the

³⁴ Ibid, 96-101.

³⁵ Rothko, Mark. Ed Christopher Rothko. *The Artists Reality; Philosophies of Art*. (New York: Yale University Press, 2004), 10.

time to unity of sensuality and thereby relates the subjective and objective in its relevance to man.”³⁶

He is careful to differentiate between sensual and sensation. ‘Sensual’ is the term that he uses to describe the response to work; he claims ‘sensation’ to be a problematic term for such a function because it can be broken into separate sensations – the physical senses. Sensuality, he believes, is our index to reality, and while it refers to an emotive response it is for Rothko a unified awareness. He likens it to the sense of touch but describes it as having the capacity to merge all the other senses into what he describes as a “basic language for the human experience of all things”³⁷

At the core of Rothko’s theory is the understanding of plasticity. Rothko discusses how the term ‘plastic’ is generally applied to techniques that use materials that are malleable.³⁸ He distinguishes his own use of the term ‘plasticity’ as relative to the act of viewing. He defines painting in his terms as follows:

“Plasticity is the quality of the presentation of a sense of movement in a painting.

This movement may be produced either by the inducement of an actual physically tangible sensation of recession and advancement, or by the reference to our memories of how things look when they go back and move forward.”³⁹

³⁶ Ibid, 25.

³⁷ Ibid, 25.

³⁸ Ibid, 46.

³⁹ Ibid, 55.

It becomes clear that Rothko is addressing the action of viewing as it relates to the visual engagement with tactile qualities of the medium. His use of the term is important because it connects the qualitative response to materiality with the act of communicating, which he refers to as 'plastic speech'. Like Elkins, Rothko locates the proximity of creation with the act of viewing, however Rothko's understanding of the physical reaction to materials is not based on previous experience or a viewer's familiarity with material elements, but on the apprehension of what is experienced and its sensual effect on the viewer.

Rothko describes the act of viewing as an experience by which the viewer moves through the painting. For Rothko the sensation of movement relates to a 'journey' throughout the work based on the appearance of both space (air) and tactility. He is careful to describe his meaning of space as neither illusionistic nor physical space but a space within the materials themselves. Space is what he refers to as 'air'. The air he speaks of is defined by materiality of paint that has the appearance of jelly in which tactility is found.⁴⁰ This journey is therefore one through the medium itself:

"In painting, plasticity is achieved by a sensation of movement both into the canvas and out from the space anterior to the surface of the canvas. Actually, the artist invites the spectator to take a journey within the realm of the canvas ... it is these movements that constitute the special essentialness of the plastic experience. Without taking the journey the spectator has really missed the essential experience of the picture."⁴¹

⁴⁰ Ibid, 48-50.

⁴¹ Ibid, 47.

Gilles Deleuze provides us with a very different understanding of how painting can function as language. Like Rothko, Deleuze's overall intention is to examine the experience of painting in relation to the senses, however Deleuze aims to define it as an analogical language that communicates a sensation. In his book, *Francis Bacon: the logic of sensation* Deleuze defines analogical language as one that is not understood as optical code or a violent expressionism but begins with the apprehension of unseen forces. Deleuze begins by elaborating on Paul Klee's formula: "not to render the visible but to render visible."⁴² Deleuze addresses how it is possible to make sensation visible; he understands this to be the main concern of painters. He states:

"Force is closely related to sensation: for a sensation to exist, a force must be exerted on a body, on the point of a wave. But if force is the condition of sensation, it is nonetheless not the force that is sensed, since the sensation "gives" something completely different from the forces that condition it."⁴³

In order to capture the "non given forces in what it gives us, to make us sense these insensible forces"⁴⁴ the painter must therefore make the invisible forces visible in order to convey the sensation. According to Deleuze this is done through the materiality of paint rather than through a representational convention.

The main difference between Rothko and Deleuze is that while Rothko attempts to reconcile the spatial, Deleuze opposes it. This opposition is made clear in his elaboration

⁴² Deleuze, Gilles, *Francis Bacon; The Logic of Sensation*. (London: Continuum, 1981), 40.

⁴³ Ibid, 40.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 40.

on analogical language. The analogical distinguishes itself from the spatial or geometric order. Geometric communication defines itself by the use of a code, which can occur in three ways: through the intrinsic combination of abstract elements; through a combination that yields a message or narrative; or by the creation of an autonomous code or shorthand.⁴⁵ Conversely analogical language is dependant of code. Deleuze defines it as “a language of relations, which consists of expressive movements, paralinguistic signs, breaths, screams and so on.”⁴⁶ For Deleuze this kind of language is created out of plane, color, and mass, and uses resemblance as the means to convey. Deleuze notes that this happens in two ways. The first form of analogical language comes from resemblance being the producer. Deleuze elaborates by stating: “resemblance is the producer when the relations between the elements of one thing pass directly into the elements of another thing, which then becomes the image of the first.”⁴⁷ The second form is possible when resemblance is the product. He writes:

“Resemblance is the product when it appears abruptly as the result of relations that are completely different from those it is supposed to reproduce: resemblance then emerges as the brutal product of non resembling means ... but instead of being produced symbolically, through the detour of the code, it is produced ‘sensually’ through sensation.”⁴⁸

Deleuze refers to this latter form of language as ‘aesthetic analogy’ because it is produced via plane, color, and mass of paint, resulting in a response understood not by the

⁴⁵ Ibid, 80.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 79.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 80.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 81.

intellect, but through sensation.⁴⁹ It is the absence of code or syntax that denies an intellectual understanding, and locates the apprehension within a virtual realm whereby the viewer understands the painting as an emotive durational experience – a qualitative experience.

It is the qualitative experience presented through engagement with painting that makes the medium so seductive, and the description of this experience so illusive. All three understandings of painting mentioned here define this illusive quality and in doing so they determine painting as durational. Not only is duration evident through the evidence of the creator, made visible through the index of the hand or brush, it is also evident in the act of viewing. This occurs in the journey one takes while beholding the indexical mark, the visual response to paint's tactile qualities and through the apprehension of sensation by analogical means.

What makes these understandings come together is that they inform us about painting in relation to (durational) intuition. These three writers place emphasis on the interstice between qualitative and durational aspects of painting sensation, and quantitative and spatial concerns about materiality. It is about how the intensities of these orders create sensation (or sensuality for Rothko) that defines them in terms of durational thinking and the language of paint.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 81.

Chapter Two
Notes; The Work

Introduction

“A painting is a statement of the artist’s notions of reality in terms of plastic speech.”
Mark Rothko⁵⁰

I am, and have always been, a painter. This might seem like an absurd statement, but I will explain. I have not always painted; I have painted for a long time – not always. The first time I picked up a brush and engaged with the medium I knew that we worked well together. There is in painting a relationship between the medium and the painter that is very much like James Elkins’ description of alchemy. There are no words to describe this – it is an act of intuition. This action allows for a kind of communication that is subjective in nature and avoids all the difficulties of spoken and written language. Painting is how I speak.

My thesis work is object-based. By this I mean that they are objects, but also they are a result of my interactions with them. The surfaces I paint on are manufactured and previously used and therefore hold traces that have already been inscribed. To these I have added my own citations, those I have collected. They are objects that are all paintings – they address the materials used (diskettes, cardboard boxes, stuffed animals, artificial flowers, and corrugated metal) as medium in that context. It is my intention that this body of work be viewed as paintings and I have chosen to work in the medium specifically because here the concept, materials, and language coexist to create my world.

⁵⁰ Rothko, Mark. Edited by Christopher Rothko. *The Artists Reality; Philosophies of Art*. (New York: Yale University Press, 2004), 22.

The previous chapters have noted my interest in duration and material culture. This combination is somewhat problematic: duration is virtual, and therefore belongs to a vital order that defines itself in opposition to spatial thinking. Despite that they are opposing orders, I see that we can gain awareness of the condition of experience through our exchanges with objects and the places they distinguish. This is possible because social interaction within a given place allows us to experience duration through recollection. As I move through places I become aware of the plethora of visual information and how it affects me in terms of sensation.

The objects that I am engaging with are those things I examine in my possession, and in my immediate environment. They become autobiographic – they contain traces of my experiences. They are not intended to be read as a record of my life, rather as an indication of experience. I am fascinated by these things; what they reveal about our negotiations through the world, and how they become evidence of my duration and its relationship to the duration of others.

These works testify to the way we are affected by the traces we leave. These traces vary in form and origin, and are both intentional and unintentional indications moving through a created environment as we respond or react to both this manufactured world, and the objects it contains. I am particularly interested in the location of our indices. We leave marks on structures and objects that are themselves an indication of humanity.

There are ways that I respond to my surroundings objectively. I observe and record the things that intrigue me – I collect. I use the objects and images in my possession to create order and disorder at will – I organize. In these actions I leave my mark. My own reaction is subjective; it occurs in my duration. It is what I experience in my own duration that I hope will come through in the work, through my trace. It is not a representation of the world as I perceive it, rather an amalgamation of the varied remembrances as I recall them through the process of making. It is my reality. It is my hope that the viewer will bring his or her own subjective experience into the event of viewing.

I have divided this section, *The Notes*, into three separate components, each focused on one work in the exhibition. Within these notes I will address each as it relates to duration, material culture and the exhibition space. The first, *The Photograph*, addresses the desire to collect, and elaborates on *Snapshot Collection of the Artist*. The second section, *The Container*, confronts the compulsion to order and informs *Moving Boxes*. The third part, *The Surface*, discusses leaving traces and addresses the work *Museal*.

The Photograph



Snapshot Collection of the Artist
Oil on 3.5" diskettes, 2007 – Ongoing, (140 Diskettes to date)

To collect

I have, as most people do, a collection of snapshots. They are collected from moments in my life, and while they reside within my entire collection of photographs, they differ.

They are different from my other photographs because they are representations of moments that have occurred; they are not preconceived in their inception; they happen as a result of social interaction in time and the compulsion to record that moment – to leave a trace.

These are photographic portraits whose main intent is not to display the likeness of the subject, but to capture the moment. Photography has the ability to make a portrait accessible for the purpose of collecting and archiving relationships and personal moments in our lives. They also allow us to amass a plethora of images taken by chance, in a hurry, and with little consideration of the resulting image. The photographs I am using as sources in *Snapshot Collection of the Artist* are of this variety. This kind of image has the capacity to simultaneously capture the intended and the unintended and to embed those in an object, which is then used in order to recall a moment.

Collections of snapshots, regardless of their possessor can speak to a random viewer because of the social understanding of the desire to record an event. It is in this context that photographs can be understood as souvenirs. Susan Stewart explains this in her book, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* when she states: “The souvenir speaks to a context of origin through a language of longing, for it is not an object arising out of need or use value; it is an object arising out of the necessarily insatiable demands of nostalgia.”⁵¹ We collect them because they are souvenirs of our individual experiences, and because, as Stewart explains, “the souvenir both offers a measurement for the normal and authenticates the experience of the viewer.”⁵² They offer a measure for the normal because they are taken at times we wish to remember, such as birthdays, holidays, and reunions. They signify milestones and moments we treasure and find worthy of monumentalizing.

The photographic sources I use do not exist as events themselves but as representations. They evoke a past experience. From an anthropological perspective this can be explained in this way: “When we speak of material culture as a surrogate or carrier of memory then we treat objects as a form of representation.”⁵³ What makes these photographs desirable is their capacity to evoke remembrance. It is the act of recall that provides us with an event that occurs in the viewing. This kind of recollection is personal and it relates to the viewer’s own consciousness.

⁵¹ Stewart, Susan. *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*. (London: Duke University Press, 1993), 139.

⁵² Ibid, 134.

⁵³ Ibid, 31.

The objects I have collected and displayed are not photographs. These are paintings of photographs. They do bear some resemblance to their source but do not aid remembrance in the same way. In the process of painting these portraits I am myself collecting and archiving and leaving my own mark. They are painted quickly, and contain traces of the duration of their making. They are personal images painted from the combination of photograph and memory. This painting is an ongoing



process that I intend to continue as I amass the photographs themselves. They are not painted in chronological order, and therefore do not respond in relation to the images that precede them, but to the response between myself as maker, the materials, and the memory that I experience with them. Within the collection the individual paintings lose their representational distinction, and thus are no longer surrogates for memory, rather they are now indexes of action, both the act of remembrance, and the physical act of my body.

The paintings in *Snapshot Collection of the Artist* are painted in oil on 3.5" diskettes, made to resemble Polaroid photographs. The Polaroid and the disk both indicate memory and the obsolete. The indexical mark of the painting does not itself reference photography; this is indicated through the format. I have chosen the Polaroid as the

means of representing the paintings as photographs. Beyond this reference to photography, the Polaroid, like the diskette, places these images within a specific timeframe. The disks themselves, previously used, have been reformatted for data – in this instance they are formatted for painting.

Snapshot Collection of the Artist is a collection that responds to personal moments. I have experienced these moments twice: first in the actual past experience of which the sources, my own photographs, become souvenirs; and secondly in the process through which the paintings become traces of the memory of that recalled experience. To be clear this is not the same experience. The engagement with the objects, through collecting and remembering, changes in relation to my experience with both the photograph and the painting. The act of painting facilitates a major shift because the indexical mark references the duration of painting – of remembering – and not the moment represented in the photograph.

These objects are no longer souvenirs, they are a collection. They respond to the idea of collecting rather than to the history of the individual objects themselves. As Stewart explains, “the souvenir still bears a trace of use value in its instrumentality ... the collection represents the total aestheticization of use value.”⁵⁴ The objects are therefore removed from the domain of representation, and viewed in the context of the grouping. Susan Stewart elaborates on the distinction between the souvenir and the collection by stating:

⁵⁴ Ibid, 151.

“The collection is a form of art as play, a form involving the reframing of objects within a world of attention and manipulation of context. Like other forms of art, its function is not the restoration of context, but rather the creation of a new context, a context a standing in a metaphorical, rather than a contiguous, relation to the world of everyday life. Yet unlike many forms of art, the collection is not representational. The collection presents a hermetic world: to have a representative collection is to have both the minimum and the complete number of elements necessary for an autonomous world – a world which is both full and singular, which has banished repetition and achieved authority.”⁵⁵

As an ongoing work this collection is without finality. It is my intention here to examine this act – the act of collecting. The disks, as objects, gain preciousness by their association to the collection. In this context they are coveted. It is however, the act of collecting that frames the work. It is a collection of objects, of information, of recollections, and of images. They are desired as objects unto themselves but also by their designation by type.

From a museological standpoint, displaying this work within The Nickle Arts Museum distinguishes the collection as an archive. A collection is a group of objects, while an archive is both a collection that contains records and the location that houses it. In response to this I have chosen to display this work within the framework of a grid. The grid offers a context for the individual pieces, as they exist in relation to one another and

⁵⁵ Stewart, Susan. *On Longing; Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*. (London: Duke University Press, 1993), 151-2.

as a collection. Collections can be organized and displayed in a number of ways, however in the best circumstances the method of display enhances the collection in order to allow for optimal viewing of each item. While a single line of these pieces would allow this, it would emphasize the autonomy of each painting and imply a narrative of sorts. *Snapshot Collection of the Artist* does neither. The organization refers only to the most rational format of objects this size and shape, as they might be in a formalized system that has no hierarchy or as they would logically be placed within an album or archive.

This collection, *Snapshot Collection of the Artist*, is not the representation of my life in painting. It is a collection of my act of remembrance; they are traces of that event – the experience of remembrance. This work is therefore not about the story of my life but about the act of collecting. It is also for this reason that the people remembered are not represented by likenesses; they have through the act of painting been obscured. The faces are not defined and in many cases not painted at all. There is also no reference to the specific time of the original source image. The evidence of time within the work relies solely on the indexical mark of the hand, the duration of my process, and the physical response of the viewer's interaction with this collection of events.

I offer these disks as a painted archive of my own recollection, and as an example of how we act upon objects so that they might perform for us. These paintings perform by presenting my mark, by offering an index to my photographic collection, and by presenting an indication of my own compulsion to collect.

The Container



Moving Boxes
Oil on cardboard with shipping labels, pallet, and timecard holder, 37" x 46" x 40", 2008

To organize

Early one morning in the receiving area of a retail store, I entered a thought process that initiated this work. I was moving boxes around in order to make room for more. These boxes contained various objects with little or no use value, things that had been mass-produced to be consumed and discarded, and it was my job to keep them moving. Feeling it was a futile endeavor, I began to consider how it came to be that this endless minutia of repetitive labour has become so seemingly commonplace. I have worked many menial jobs that require such labour but it was with moving boxes that I really began to question it. I thought of all the years I have spent on this type of work and wondered what the results were. I wondered if I had been stacking bricks, how big the pyramid I could have built would be? We look at the pyramids of ancient Egypt with awe and wonder and take time to consider why they are here. We do not often ask question this of the ordinary day-to-day movement of ‘stuff’.

It was then I seriously began to question humanity’s desire to order. We have a relationship with objects that are ordered whereby they come to signify our capabilities through evidence of the labour itself – a social understanding of individual worth based on the time spent with them. The kind of labour I am addressing here does not result in grand structures or monuments, but the basic movement of objects that we consume and discard. Beyond the trace of the individual left on the object, the result of this kind of labour is for the most part anonymous. Ordering objects is not solely the domain of employment but is a pastime that encompasses the private as much as the public. We

order our lives, and when we move from one location to another we organize our collections and re-order them anew.

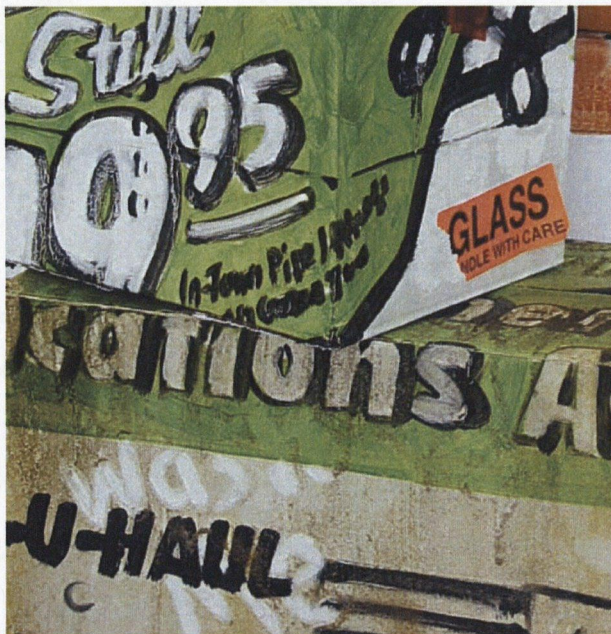
Moving Boxes is about this enquiry. I think about the movement of collections and our visceral response to that action. This work does not question the why; rather it examines the visual information that is acquired along the way. I have been examining containers that I pass daily and considering how they, as utilitarian objects, attract a variety of information on their surface and how this information indicates a history of use. *Moving Boxes* evidences this history by presenting a visual result of the kinds of activity that I experienced either through my own compulsion to order, or through the observation of this compulsion in others.

In creating this work I collected ordinary cardboard boxes, ones that have been used, for the most part, to house objects that are collected and moved from one place of residence to another; their contents used to define our immediate personal places – our homes. The boxes serve to organize and distribute – they suggest the compulsion to order. They contain traces of their prior use. Laden with information, their surfaces indicate an immediate history – a history of the container based on its period of usage. This information becomes a side effect of human presence through a given time and place.

Onto the surfaces of the boxes I have painted a variety of different traces, a merging of information from U-Hauls, freight trains and dumpsters with personal marks from other moving boxes, and the evidence of time that is evident on the surfaces of all the

containers involved. In addition I have added various instructional labels and packing tape. There is a chaos that results from the accumulation of varied information on the surface of these containers, creating a distorted language that encompasses several moving experiences – the personal, the public and the corporate. These layered signifiers become distorted and when combined signify the collection of traces we leave through the act of moving objects. In this way, the work examines the visual information acquired through the action of movement. The information that is obtained is done so visually, through the experience of the mover.

The surface marks incorporated into *Moving Boxes* are all derived from containers designed for the purpose of moving things around. I began with U-Hauls. There is a U-Haul lot not far from where I am living; it is adjacent to the bus I take nearly every day.



These trucks are covered with advertising, both for the company and the places they pass, an odd mixture of corporate logos and tourism in garish colors. In addition, these trucks are from many different places and contain dirt, finger marks, and inscriptions that indicate damage incurred after each use.

The other containers referenced are freight trains and dumpsters, which I have painted in previous bodies of work. These containers, like the U-hauls, carry recent history on their surface. Together they all

display an aesthetic that brings corporate logo and advertising together with an index of use and wear. The containers I am using are not only connected by their common usage, but also by their position in society. They are not normally coveted or revered; they are disregarded and overlooked. They become incidental elements in our daily lives passed by with little consideration.

I have collected and painted twenty-five boxes. They are placed on a pallet, which I have used to amass and display this collection. The boxes were not shipped on this pallet; they were shipped to it. Each box is painted on all six sides and was sent one by one to The Nickle Arts Museum where the palette awaited them; as this occurred, the work changed and grew. I have also included waybills that recorded the progress of each box – the duration of their movement. As the boxes were added to the pallet the waybills were collected in a timecard holder. The timecard holder has twenty-five slots and upon the receipt of the final box it was full.

I have shipped some boxes using campus mail, and moved some myself, all based on a shipping timeline I carefully scheduled to incorporate into the various other activities of my daily life. The work itself becomes about the activity involved in moving boxes and how that manifests in a painting that changes as it is built into its final form. In this action there is an element of chance. While I have created the piece, the work itself has its own impact on the outcome. This began with painting the boxes; the outcome is a result of the attempt to control paint, and the medium's own inclination to deny constraint. After painting each flattened box, they were rebuilt anew. Elements were added and lost as they

retook the shapes of boxes, both through the addition of tape and waybill labels and the folding of the piece itself. This change in the painting became complicated further by the shipping of the boxes. Each box was shipped in sequence based on the order stacked on the pallet; however the order of arrival remained dependant on their journey through the transportation infrastructure of campus mail. Because of this constant change in the stack of boxes upon the pallet *Moving Boxes*, was constantly altered. Throughout the course of shipping, which began with the installation of the work and continued until all boxes had arrived, each new box presented something new, while also obscuring something else. Once all stacked within the museum, the work allows a view only of the parts that remain visible, and provides the question of what is not and what may be contained within.

Due to the shipping of the work, the engagement with the museum differs from a typical relationship between the exhibition space and painting, offering a physical engagement to painting by the interaction with the delivery personnel and the museum staff. In this way the duration of the work is evidenced not only through the indexical mark of my hand, and the physical index of movement and resulting marks, but also by the evidence of time made visible through the inclusion of delivery records. Offering an engagement with the work that relates to repetitive labour, *Moving Boxes* poses the questions I have personally considered regarding the continual movement of objects, the desire to achieve order, and how we respond to this action visually.

The Surface



Museal
Oil, and mixed media on corrugated metal, 76.25" x 240", 2008

Leaving a mark

I moved to Calgary in the summer of 2006. I became immediately aware of the dominance of the car – the car and the highway. Not long after that I also noticed the roadside memorials that are located in frequent succession along the busier roads and intersections. They carry dust from passing cars and turn grey and brown as they age. For the past two years I have been documenting the changes in a number of roadside memorials. As I revisit them they are different, with older objects fading away or falling off. Sometimes they are replaced, or are covered up, and sometimes they are removed, but they are always changing. This work commemorates the life of these memorials.

Museal is a compilation of images, objects and citations that respond to my engagement with the constructed landscape. By collecting and combining these things within the painting, I aim to address how our collective need to leave deliberate marks in our constructed environments bestows objects with the power to serve as nostalgic reminders of our personal and even public histories. My own collection of citations, artificial

flowers, stuffed animals and accumulated images combine to create a painting that is my 'monument' to roadside memorials and various other collected traces. I have not restricted the elements in this work to the specific components of a memorial *per se*; rather I have gathered together those things that are put out into the world intentionally.

I have titled this work *Museal* in response to the essay, *Valéry Proust Museum*, by Theodor W. Adorno. In his essay Adorno addresses the term museal stating: "The German word, 'museal' ['museumlike'], has unpleasant overtones. It refers to objects to which the observer no longer has a vital relationship and which are in the process of dying."⁵⁶ I have titled this piece *Museal* for two reasons. The first responds to the position of the work within the museum, and the other addresses the notion that the collected traces of the memorials are themselves always in the process of dying.

Adorno's essay compares assertions made by Paul Valéry and Marcel Proust, describing how the context of the museum alters any work that enters it. Valéry rails against the confines of the museum, claiming that works suffer a sort of death when removed from the context of daily life to become a matter of education and information to be consumed as commodity.⁵⁷ Through this process, Valéry purports that they cease to be art. Proust views this conception of death as a positive one, claiming that the work is put to death in order to have a second life.

⁵⁶ Adorno, Theodor W. *Prisms*. (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1981), 175.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 178-180.

I am particularly interested in Proust's considerations because he addresses the nature of cultural objects in relation to Henri Bergson's concept of duration. He does this by refusing to view artwork as fixed and determined, choosing instead to view the contents of a museum as subjective to a viewer's changing consciousness. It is through his affinity with Henri Bergson that Proust assigns objects duration, and that he is able to view objects as standing in for mortality. Adorno makes this clear, stating, "He recognizes the physiognomy of decomposing things as that of a second life. Because nothing has substance for him but what has already been mediated by memory, his love dwells on the second life, the one which is already over, rather than on the first."⁵⁸

For Adorno, Proust's understanding of material culture is based on the way objects can indicate death. Proust does not



necessarily complete his concept of this mortality, elaborating instead on how a secondary existence of work within the museum relates to the viewer. Adorno explains that for Proust, "works of art are from the outset something more than their specific aesthetic qualities, they are part of the life of the person who observes them; they are an element of his consciousness"⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Ibid, 182.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 181.

The objects contained in roadside memorials exist in this way, put out into the world as a second life. They age and decay as a metaphor for the person whose life is commemorated, yet they do not index this person as much as those who mourn for him or her. They testify to mourning. *Museal* picks up on this idea, the notion that we display objects that they may have a second life. I am offering this work as an object in much the same way; it is contained within the museum and carries the notion of mortality with it. As a memorial, it does not reference one particular location or individual but serves instead to indicate the idea that objects are used to symbolize our desire to intentionally leave traces that remind us of our own mortality.

As a substrate for this painting I have used corrugated metal. The metal allowed me to accomplish two things: to move away from depicting the surface, and to offer my view that the trace of humanity is expansive and encompassing. Avoiding the depiction of a surface allows me to engage with world rather than re-present it. The work itself is a surface, an object rather than support, and by painting on it I am focusing solely on the subject matter – the traces. The metal itself references the manufactured world, consisting of ten panels from a demolished pre-fabricated shed. In its current configuration, the metal references instead industrial buildings and freight cars. While it is clearly neither, it offers a relation to both. The surface is anonymous, without a specific reference to one place, or one object, rather offers a resemblance to many. It references industrial or manufactured world in a metaphorical, not representational way.

Unlike the structures that hold roadside memorials, the surface of *Museal* is expansive. Memorials tend to be collected around signs and posts that are either the site of an accident or are adjacent to it. When we view these in the world they are specific, relating to location of tragedy. My monument does not exist in this way; rather it examines traces as the indication of the compulsion to leave a mark, how traces are put out into the world intentionally, and how by doing so they designate urban structures as monuments to human mortality.

The traces become anonymous to a viewer who is unconnected to the incident itself. The citations and objects memorials contain offer an understanding of the grief, but do not usually create a specific reference to the incident that preceded it. Because of this they cannot be read as a monument that signifies a moment in time, but the continuous process of mourning itself.

I have incorporated graffiti into *Museal* for the same purpose. Like memorials, graffiti is put into the world intentionally. Citations and tagging (whereby the author has put an indication of their duration out into the world) exist as reminders, as “*I was here*” declarations.

I look at the objects and graffiti as a patina on our constructed world, a residue that becomes continuous from one memorial to the next. They coat the areas we pass through, claiming human existence in a world we are constantly ignoring. In *Museal* I amass these traces to offer a resemblance of this desire, the desire to leave a mark. The substrate itself

facilitates this. It allows me the opportunity to connect different types of traces along an expansive surface that implies potential extension or expansion.

Museal provides an example of how painting can be viewed as experience. This is portrayed by the evidence of duration made by the index of my mark, the viewer's journey through the surface, and the treatment of images and objects within the work itself. My approach to painting responds to Bergson's concept of art, particularly because of the intuitive way I have engaged with the work. While painting *Museal* I relinquished control over the end result, painting only in response to the materials themselves, attempting to avoid a predetermined outcome. This approach allowed me to interact with the work in a way that resembles the engagement one has in contributing to a memorial.

What can be seen in the painting, both within painted elements and the objects that are combined, indicate duration through the way they are painted; the mark of my hand, the layering of elements, what is covered or removed and what is left behind. It is in this way that *Museal* uses the viewer's journey through the painting to address how the compulsion to leave a mark and the neglect of urban structures combine to indicate our mortality. This allows us to consider the dynamic relationship we have with objects that is made possible by the traces we leave behind.

Chapter Three

Interviews

Interviews

Q: “Rather than positing a thesis, you are asking a question and then doing some kind of artistic experiment to answer it or to contribute to an answer.”⁶⁰

A: “But I do it selfishly. I want to know.”⁶¹

JRF: The following questions and answers are a fictional interview that stems from my approach to research. My initials denote my own questions and thoughts, with quotes from published interviews woven in between. I have ‘cherry picked’ these statements and responded to them freely, rather than follow a strictly academic format in order to present the way I engage with discourse during my research.

JRF: I have been asked countless times why my I paint. I see this as perhaps the most annoying yet most frequently asked questions. It seems redundant to ask this, especially as a painter, or to ask it of a painter. But still, the question is there, so I have to ask: Why paint? It seems like a good place to start.

A: “I’d like to point out that painting has a unique capacity to present the viewer simultaneously with both a depicted (or mediated) experience and an actual one. Therefore painting is particularly suited to examining the process of mediation and also to countering it with the actuality of a physical medium, which insists on actual presence to complete its experience.”⁶²

⁶⁰ Richard Kostelanetz to Robert Rauschenberg in: Hunter, Sam. *Robert Rauschenberg; Works, Writings, Interviews*. (Barcelona: Ediciones Poligrafa, 2006.), 138.

⁶¹ Robert Rauschenberg to Richard Kostelanetz in: Hunter, Sam. *Robert Rauschenberg; Works, Writings, Interviews*. (Barcelona: Ediciones Poligrafa, 2006.), 138.

⁶² Johnathan Lasker in Storr, Robert “Thick and Thin: Painters and Curators Discuss the State of Painting in the Last Two Decades”, *Art Forum*, April (2003): 9.

Q: "Are we talking about the relations between painter and painting, and painting and viewer? If we are, we are bringing into view, as part of our opening question 'what do I have here?', the *space* of painting that is neither purely within its borders or a matter of its surface, nor purely external to it, like the space of exhibition or of critical discourse."⁶³

JRF: I think painting has all of these things, and for me this is the attraction. There is the relationship that I have with the paint that in many ways is personal. I respond to its visceral nature and tactile qualities on a very physical level. In the act of painting I also respond to the way paint has its own physical response to the material world that is evident through the way it moves and changes as it becomes part of a painting. There is a dialogue between painter and material that occurs through the act of painting. In viewing, my relationship to paint changes, I become engaged in both the reading of this action and in the reading of the combination of illusionary and tactile spaces. Beyond that, painting retains the ability to address content that can relate to a variety of subjects other than painting itself. However, I am most interested in the capacity of painting to oscillate between the two.

A: "Right. Well there has been a long-standing argument against painting throughout the century. I've personally always asserted that in fact it's one of the most interesting media currently, because of its capacity to engage illusionism, or rather a mediated image, something that doesn't actually exist, and at the same time to present a very actual

⁶³ Alison Rowley to Griselda Pollock in: Harris, Jonathan ed. *Critical Perspectives on Contemporary Painting*. (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2003), 45.

experience. It's a dialectical situation. In this way painting presents these two tendencies very clearly, whereas other media do not. In most films for example, you're really not aware of the cinematic process, you go straight 'through' the medium into the illusion. The image that is presented in painting, I'd like to think of it as 'ethical' image, which can have a very strong moral grounding force. This is very important today, I feel." ⁶⁴

JRF: While I think this makes an interesting point, I'm not sure I can wholly agree. I think the same thing you say about film can be said about painting, depending on the viewer. Likewise a viewer can be as aware of the processes of other media. It's possible that the same person who would look at a painting as an 'ethical image', as you call it would look at cinematography in the same way. Film often tries to lull the viewer into illusion, but then we have to remember that in terms of creative media it's very young. I would go so far to say that it is easier to present painting in a way that both the medium and the illusion are visible, but not as a blanket statement, as this is not always the case. You could argue that one is always aware of the surface of a painting, but the same can be said of a screen.

A: "To paint one must see the surface not so much as empty but rather as intense, where intensity means filled with the unseen virtuality of other strange possibilities – one must become blind enough to see the surface as mixed or assembled in a particular transformable and deformable manner rather than just flat." ⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Johnathan Lasker to David Ryan in: Ryan, David. *Talking Painting: Dialogues with Twelve Contemporary Abstract Painters*. (London: Routledge, 2003), 148.

⁶⁵ John Rajchman as quoted by David Ryan in: Ryan, David. *Talking Painting: Dialogues with Twelve Contemporary Abstract Painters*. (London: Routledge, 2003), 244.

JRF: I first questioned the act of painting when I became aware of its supposed demise. It therefore follows to consider the death of painting and its continued impact. How does the notion of ‘the death of painting’ still impact contemporary practices?

A: “It might seem strange to ask a group made up of mostly painters to consider the idea of ‘the death of painting’ which posited a historical position on the medium, but now also has a history behind it. The compelling related question would pertain to the way in which painting moved beyond or outside of this particular issue. Has there been a shadow or ghost of it in practices? Or did it in fact never really register among the painters you found most interesting? What were some of your original thoughts when you came across this idea, in general or in terms of your own work? What do you find the most productive modes to bypass or enfold the issue?”⁶⁶

A: “The distrust of painting by ‘smart people’ made painting more attractive to me as I thought about the implications.”⁶⁷

JRF: In some ways I had a similar reaction. I found for me the notion of a painting that was purported to be a ‘last painting’, or painting taken to its ultimate conclusion, was very disturbing. I became angry at the arrogance of this idea, which

⁶⁶ Tim griffin in: Storr, Robert. “Thick and Thin: Painters and Curators Discuss the State of Painting in the Last Two Decades,” *Art Forum*, April (2003): 176.

⁶⁷ Carol Dunham in Robert Storr, “Thick and Thin: Painters and Curators Discuss the State of Painting in the Last Two Decades,” *Art Forum*, April (2003): 177.

made me want to paint more. I found looking toward the pop artists helpful, and Jasper Johns in particular. I think by looking to Johns as a model I was able to look at, and use, different kinds of images. I think that still impacts my work now because much of the subject matter I am working with draws upon this influence, mostly because of my interest in the object as a combination of form, subject, and medium, but also I use many images that are flat from their source.

A: "Positing a 'last painting' is a weird thing for an painter to want to do and bespeaks a particular psychology. The 'deaths' always happen when something new gets people excited, but paintings just keep getting made."⁶⁸

A: "There seem to have been two bases for making the statement that painting is dead or dying. The first is that the developed conventions of modernism were producing diminishing returns – increasingly academic or rarified versions of once fresh ideas. The other is that painting as a medium, once central, is now increasingly marginal compared to other technological means – the obvious historical ones like photography and film, plus all manner of printing technologies, and newer ones like video and ... the internet."⁶⁹

JRF: The notion that other technological means could actually lead to the death of painting seems absurd to me. I have never shared this view. I think the impact of 'newer technologies' serves instead to open painting up and broaden its possibilities

⁶⁸ Caroll Dunham in: Storr, Robert. "Thick and Thin: Painters and Curators Discuss the State of Painting in the Last Two Decades," Art Forum, April (2003): 177.

⁶⁹ Storr, Robert. "Thick and Thin: Painters and Curators Discuss the State of Painting in the Last Two Decades," Art Forum, April (2003): 178.

because of the way they can exist with painting. I use technology in my process, with photography, and sometimes digital manipulation of images. I do this in the process of making, however, I am still drawn to physical engagement with paint. This is because I am interested in the relationship between the body and the material, and a major component of the work I make relates to the idea of physical labour. I think that is where my interest in the photograph comes up. I use photographs in two very distinct ways, as subject, and as source.

Q: “Would you say that the advent of photography has to do with the advent of modernist Painting at all? As a threat I mean?”⁷⁰

A: “They (the Impressionists) didn't cope with it. They didn't have to, they didn't feel the threat, that's why they didn't cope with it, they didn't feel it as a threat. And incidentally, Walter Benjamin's famous article is written by someone who obviously had very scant experience with pictorial art.”⁷¹

JRF: I was very affected by Walter Benjamin's article (*Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*⁷²) because it made me question representation. It made me consider the idea of moving beyond representation while still employing the image. I think whether Benjamin had experience with pictorial art or not is unimportant – what reading his work did for me was to offer up the idea of the image and how the

⁷⁰ De Duve, Thierry. *Clement Greenberg Between the Lines*. (Paris: Dis Voir, 1996), 154.

⁷¹ Clement Greenberg in : De Duve, Thierry. *Clement Greenberg Between the Lines*. (Paris: Dis Voir, 1996), 154-55

⁷² Benjamin, Walter. *Illuminations*. (London: Plimico, 1999).

reproduction of the image through paint can be dynamic. I was attracted to the idea that a painted representation becomes something new.

Q: “What are the differences between the image you find and the image you make? Is there any difference in your mind?”⁷³

A: “No, actually taking the photo accomplishes several things. One, it forces me to be in direct contact, intimately, unprotected, in an ambiguous outside world and therefore improve my sight. Also it gives me a stockpile of both experiences and literal images to draw on for other works. So it’s the experience of taking the photographs that keeps my mind open to unprogrammed images, uncontrolled and then permits me to handle them rawly or allow them to be digested in a cacophony of other specifics.”⁷⁴

JRF: In a way I think the relationship to the photograph I take differs for me because, while it relates to my experience and my memory of an event, I have total ownership of it. This allows me to use it freely without any baggage attached. It is this reaction to photography as source that allows me to manipulate it and break it down into components from the original. Images that I find are different for me because I become attracted to what is already there These I tend to use whole, whether I am incorporating them as part of the medium or reproducing them as objects.

⁷³ Hunter, Sam. *Robert Rauschenberg; Works, Writings, Interviews*. (Barcelona: Ediciones Poligrafa, 2006.), 152.

⁷⁴ Robert Rauschenberg in: Hunter, Sam. *Robert Rauschenberg; Works, Writings, Interviews*. (Barcelona: Ediciones Poligrafa, 2006.), 152.

This distinction really pinpoints my relationship with representation. I want to move away from the notion of re-presenting, which is what I strive for in the totality of a finished work, but I am interested in the ways that representation can be used to achieve this. Painting photographs allows me this.

When I paint a photograph often they remain in a similar format, as the individual components of *Snapshot Collection of the Artist* resemble Polaroid photographs. I am frequently asked why I do this, rather than present the photos themselves. This begs the question: why paint from photographs?

A: “Material seduction. Spiritual seduction. It’s to be able to communicate with people. You know the work has absolutely no aesthetic values that it respects, other than the aesthetics of communication. And to be able to seduce. A photograph for me does not have a sense of spiritual seduction, it does not have an essence, that is something that permeates, and which is eternal through time.”⁷⁵

A: “I would say the photo generates h o r r o r, whereas the picture of the same subject evokes s o r r o w, that would come close to my intention.”⁷⁶

JRF: This mirrors my own feelings on the matter, however I would go further. I think that there is something in the materiality of paint that serves to evoke reaction

⁷⁵ Jeff Koons in: Renton, Andrew. “Jeff Koons; I have my finger on the eternal”. Flash Art, Summer (1990): 111.

⁷⁶ Gerhard Richter in: Thorn-Prikker, Jan. “Gerhard Richter; Oktober 18, 1977.” *Parkett* 19 (1989): 14.

that is both physical and visual, and the result combines these senses in a way that transcends my response to the unmediated photograph itself.

Of course, this is entirely subjective but I respond to the physicality of paint – the history of an indexical mark of the hand and the viscous nature of the material. I don't think I would go so far as to say that it is spiritual or eternal, but definitely it is seductive.

In my work I am using photographs as elements of the piece as a whole. If we consider a pluralistic approach to painting, one that encompasses other media, how can we address painting regardless of the images it contains?

A: "I see abstraction as being equivalent to fiction, in that its bound up with the impulse to create another world. Abstraction and illusion share a remove from matter. I experience abstraction and my work as parallel to, or perhaps as a metaphor for, the mind. On some level, I don't understand image-making or figuration, as distinct from abstraction, though I don't dispute that there are differences between the two." ⁷⁷

JRF: I think there is always the choice to approach a painting from either perspective, as image making or as abstraction, however for me the two are often entwined. I am also attracted to the ability of painting to encompass other media,

⁷⁷ Jessica Stockholder to David Ryan in : Ryan David, *Talking Painting: Dialogues with Twelve Contemporary Abstract Painters*. (London: Routledge, 2003), 237.

particularly sculptural components. This often raises the question of why I consider them paintings.

Work that crosses the disciplines between painting and sculpture could be addressed from either perspective, or in a more pluralistic way. When is a work sculpture and when is it painting?

A: "I thought of them as paintings, but what to call them – painting or sculpture – got for some people to be a very interesting point, which I did not find interesting at all. ... once I called them 'combines' people were confronted with the work itself, not what it wasn't."⁷⁸

A: I do think it's interesting to talk about what painting is, and what sculpture is, as they're words we use complete with history and each embodies a complex convention. But I'm not myself concerned to define whether my work is painting or sculpture."⁷⁹

JRF: Primarily, I would refer to my practice as pluralistic, and I do shift my approach depending on the content of the work I am making but I usually consider the work that straddles the two disciplines to be painting. I lean this way not because I have a need to declare painting above anything else, but because my main focus is with the surface. In my current work there are few barriers between

⁷⁸ Robert Rauschenberg in: Hunter, Sam. *Robert Rauschenberg; Works, Writings, Interviews*. (Barcelona: Ediciones Poligrafa, 2006), 138.

⁷⁹ Jessica Stockholder to David Ryan in: Ryan David, *Talking Painting: Dialogues with Twelve Contemporary Abstract Painters*. (Routledge: London, 2003), 239.

medium and method because the intention of the work and the mode of creation are both engaged with my intention.

A: “Where object and method converge in the process of representation, the concept of the method, first of all loses its conventional meaning, insofar as method is never just method, never a means in relation to ends or a path toward a goal”⁸⁰

JRF: I would rather say ‘in the process of relating’. It is more important to me how an artwork can relate to the world than re-present it. The work may resemble something without having to be a representation of it.

A: "What's an artwork? Any artwork materializes a relation to the world; if you see a Vermeer or a Mondrian, its concretized, materialized, visible in relation to the world they had. You can decode or interpret it for yourself and use it for your own life. Or for your work if your an artist. It's a chain of relations. History of art is about that, a chain of relations to the world. So, any artwork is a relation to the world made visible."⁸¹

JRF: I would agree with this last statement, making art is like creating worlds. My work does not present what is already out there. It relates to what is in the world, but offers a way in to mine. I mediate between what I observe and what I remember.

⁸⁰ Richter, Gerhard. *Benjamin's Ghosts; Conventions in Contemporary Literary and Cultural Theory*. (California: Stanford University Press, 2002),123.

⁸¹ Nicolas Bourriaud at the Walter McBean Gallery, Oct 18, 2002. as published in: Delaney, Ella. "Nicolas Bourriaud and Karen Moss: Part 1". Stretcher.org. <http://www.stretcher.org.archives.html>.

**It is when these things enfold that my work becomes experience; it is a visual index
of my duration.**

Conclusion

I was once asked why it was important for others to view or understand my work. This was a question I could not answer. I am not championing a cause, taking a stand, or making a new revelation. Instead my work asks questions. Why do we collect, order, and leave our mark? It is here I began my enquiry. Within this paper I have collected my thoughts, organized them, and as a result I leave my mark. This mark on paper responds to the thesis work I have presented in *Culmination: MFA Thesis Exhibition*.⁸² This written support does not complete the work, rather it provides an indication of the thinking that informs it. My paintings lie in relation to the world in which we engage - the world we order, and claim. As such they offer an experience, one that poses my questions while it provides an opportunity for a view into my reasons for questioning our relationship with material culture as it can be examined using Henri Bergson's notion of duration.

⁸² *Culmination: MFA Thesis Exhibition*, The Nickle Arts Museum, The University of Calgary, August 8th - September 13th, 2008.

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