

UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

“Preparing the Body for Ascension in the Belly of the Whale”

by

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A THESIS

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DEPARTMENT OF ART

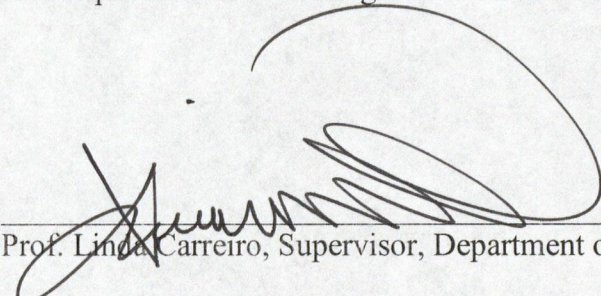
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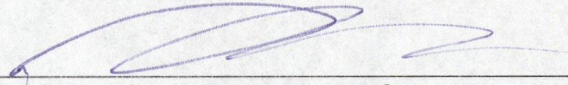
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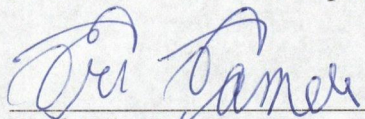
The undersigned certify that they have viewed and read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for acceptance, respectively, a Thesis Exhibition and a supporting paper entitled "**Preparing the Body for Ascension in the Belly of the Whale**" an accompaniment to the Thesis Exhibition, submitted by Travis Murphy in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts.



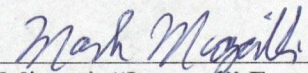
Prof. Linda Carreiro, Supervisor, Department of Art



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29 Aug. 06
Date

MFA Thesis Support Paper

“Preparing the Body for Ascension in the Belly of the Whale”

Part One

Viewers may gain entrance to the installation “Preparing the Body For Ascension in the Belly of the Whale” through either side of the free-standing wall which extends into the gallery space. This wall provides an approaching onlooker with a view of a two-tiered white box containing books, at the left entrance, while to the right, ruby velvet drapes enclose a space against the far gallery wall. Black acrylic lettering above the partitioned area reads: Death of the Sun. To begin at the white box with plexiglass casing, one is presented with a museum or gallery staple – the protective housing of the display makes precious its contents. Inside the case several books are opened to reveal pages of illustrated stories and scientific texts. Each opened text on the top level reveals an image of a whale. Among these texts are the Walt Disney illustrated story of Pinocchio, The Biblical parable of Jonah and the Whale, and a Biology of Whales. The box provides clues to the sources of imagery and content to follow as the viewer engages the ‘whale’s body’ suspended from the ceiling. This collection of signs and prompters for the overarching theme of the installation also marks an opening into the space. Standing at the entranceway, the eye is lead through a skeletal framework hovering above a white table at its center, pointing onward to the final wall and what will be revealed as a draped antechamber. Whale bones enact arched pillars lining the cathedralesque corridor and cling to objects below as some rough-hewn, imperfect skeletal hand. The pocked surfaces of the bones recall a body perhaps deteriorating from decay,

time and the punishment of the elements. The bones encase the central table and video component which anchor the place of 'the whale's belly'. A white, austere table holds a fleeting image of several bodies, which rotate as part of the projection. This table is reminiscent of an operating table; a place of medical intervention into the body. Yet, its positioning and height evoke an altar from which a priest, in Christian services, delivers Mass. The body lies in wait, hovering above the table, emerging in succession as several characters of the books provided at the entrance, to an empty table and back again.

My research over the course of two academic years in the Graduate Program in the Fine Arts involves several major categories: the contemplation of the "self", conditions of consciousness, the nature of desire, contingencies of "belief", and the possibilities of meaning in art production. Part One of this Thesis Exhibition support paper examines the notion of the 'self', described through various theoretical lenses, as the point from which all knowledge, experience and belief obtains. Through forays into the 'subject', the 'self' becomes the locus of the illusory: the narration that comprises consciousness, while maintaining, paradoxically, the site from which meaning becomes manifest. I will utilize several postmodern perspectives, and discuss my project *Self Portrait in Scarf and Grey Coat* (2005) to illuminate these perspectives on the "self". If the self is an illusion produced through language and culture, what possibilities exist for the production of meaning? From this inquiry stems a consideration crucial not only for the fulfilment of the graduate program, but for the ability for an individual to assume

the action of ‘artist’: that of production. The pursuit of this end requires a methodology; a way of engaging that culminates in a rendition of the ‘New’.

Part Two of this essay explores “desire” and “belief” through the Thesis Exhibition installation. The Thesis installation “Preparing the Body for Ascension in the Belly of the Whale” contemplates the dynamics of desire through several key concepts: Adorno’s “mastery over nature”, the psychoanalytic “annihilation anxiety”, and the notions of the “Real” and the “Lack in the Other” of Jacques Lacan, through the prism of Slavoj Žižek’s interpretation. The project touches on my need to understand the world around me and the medium through which it is perceived – the body. It makes contact with the void that occurred at the abandonment of my belief system as a young man. It also contemplates the language, culture and concepts that inform my self-identity from biblical narratives to popular culture. This is where the figures Jonah, Christ, Pinocchio, and the future “saviour” (as discussed in the space exploration via the “Death of the Sun” component of the exhibition) connect and assemble in the video projection and objects of the installation. It is the Sublime Beyond, as discussed by Žižek, that properly mimics his understanding of the “Lacanian analyst”, that is discussed through popular cultural references. It is through objects of both the quotidian and the enactment of repetition that my work attempts to point to the sublime place at the heart of belief, and the ultimate failure of this endeavour. “Preparing the Body for Ascension in the Belly of the Whale” points towards the futility of obtaining bodily or divine perfection, and the paradoxical necessity of its quest, whose end is the achievement of the immortal body.

The underlying topic of discussion which informs the thesis exhibition, is the nature of belief. It will remain a part of the discussion at every level of the project and support paper, yet its question is too vast and complicated to be directly addressed within a single essay on a particular work of art. While the task of answering these questions remains outside the jurisdiction of this humble support paper, the questions that guide its author are worth posing. What is the nature of belief as it applies to one's self, and our comprehension of the world around us? What instigates the effects it reveals, and how does *desire* perform in our embodiment of belief? Why do we adopt creeds that are in their nature religious or spiritual, atheist or agnostic, or scientific-empirical? Does belief continually evolve to appease the body's desire and anxiety? Are knowledge, belief and fact similar codes: are they each a bi-product of the body's necessity for survivorship, and a process that reflects on and begins a human project for immortality?

Knowledge and the Myth of Enlightenment

It is imperative to ground the initial discussion on the possibilities that comprise knowledge and belief in a framework that utilizes both a historical reading, a comparative analysis of myth in religion and science, while introducing inherent failures within each of these exclusive designations of 'truth'. Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer's seminal text Dialectic of Enlightenment provides a point of contact through which to address rationalism, the 'emancipation' of thought in the Enlightenment, and parallels and quandaries sifted from both mythical and

enlightened modes of knowledge. For these authors a paradox undermines the project of the West's Enlightenment. They state: "Myth is already enlightenment, and enlightenment reverts to mythology." (Adorno 11)

The Enlightenment is the "disenchantment of the world", according to these authors, "totalitarian" in its approach. The era defined as the Enlightenment, which marks the period in European thought beginning in the 18th Century, focussed largely on empirical (scientific) strategies to define the nature of the world, embarks on a major project of human knowledge: to overcome fear through mastery. These are among the claims made by Adorno and Horkheimer within the first few pages of the classic text "The Concept of Enlightenment", the opening chapter in the Dialectic. Myth came to be regarded an unreliable entity, a prevarication of nature; a way of describing the world through story which did not gather data systematically, nor interpret it through examinations to provide 'proofs'. The most important feature of Enlightenment's rational avocation was to conquer the natural through knowledge. If everything could be collated, systematized, understood, then it would cease to be a place of fear, even doom. As such, knowledge had staked out a potential for the fulfillment of its plot:

What human beings seek to learn from nature is how to use it to dominate wholly both it and other human beings. Nothing else counts. Ruthless towards itself, the Enlightenment has eradicated the last remnant of its own self-awareness. Only thought which does violence to itself is hard enough to shatter myths. (Adorno 2)

While the Dialectic functions as an indictment of the "Age of Reason", and its method of determinence, it is also a supplement to the events of World War II, during which it was written. It has been addressed at some length, particularly by

Carl Jung, that this event is treated wholly as an event of trauma, in which it can only be understood through a later, more, lucid condition. Yet, Adorno and Horkheimer worked through the ‘trauma’, and is understood through their own reading of the failures inherent in the project of rationalism from its inception. The question seemed apt to me, as I pondered the nature of my own desire. There was a lack at the heart of my understanding of the universe. What I had understood to be a necessity for redemption was grounded in fear. I required a kind of “absolute” comprehension – a system of conclusions; something a religious system provided through its narrative, and something science tended also to procure through its infallible logic. Before I could grasp the nature of the systems of belief that individuals assume, and the inherent necessity for humans to gain mastery over potentially destructive forces, I needed to comprehend the medium through which the world was articulated – the “self”. The assignment of “self” is at the heart of the creation, form and content of a work of art, by default. Yet, if the individual disappears, who is at the helm of this action, and how could its content be deciphered? These questions are addressed through earlier work in the graduate program, which will be discussed in terms of a project entitled *Self Portrait with Scarf and Grey Coat* (2005).

Self Portrait in Scarf and Grey Coat investigates the methodology for painting a “self-portrait” in light of recent theories about the cessation of the artistic subject as an autonomous, creative individual. Several proponents of the death of the subject, from Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault, to Frederic Jameson examined within this text, offer critical discussion about the possibility of the true

‘subject’ in the world, the image, and art. This discussion introduces the project and guidebook that follows. The subsequent demise of ‘humankind’, as alluded to by these and other authors, and the simulacral paradigm, identify two of the foremost theories that have subverted ideas about the artist’s role and identity. In the wake of the humanist subject, art and its practitioners sought new methods that fractured the progressive-linear model of modernism. Some artistic turns involved appropriation and simulation of history within art. Examined within this text, a ‘traumatic’ response to the notions of ‘real’ and ‘illusion’, offers insight into the condition and the possibilities of and for the contemporary subject. *Self Portrait with Scarf and Grey Coat* gauges these possibilities. It subjects the attributes and identifiers of self to scrutiny, constructing the image through a deconstructive process of digitization, that then builds toward a ‘subject’. This process, in effect, echoes major postmodern trends in art and philosophy, particularly deconstructionism and identity politics. Yet, the final painting of the ‘self’ consists of a colour image, its aesthetics determined by a computer algorithm. In this manner it becomes devoid of the self-conscious stimuli and internal, autonomous inspiration that comprises the project of the modern human. This provides a method for dealing with painting, wherein a contemporary technology replaces the human at a crucial stage, determining the image, but redefining the artist’s role as the artisan behind the final production, not its exclusive, autonomous creator.

The project simulates Rembrandt’s *Self Portrait with Beret and Upturned Collar* from 1659, a painting that now hangs in the National Gallery of Art in Washington. I achieve this simulation by situating myself in the pose that the Dutch

painter strikes in his own self-portrait, mimicking the lighting effects within the painting on both the background and figure, and attempting to reconstitute the facial expression of Rembrandt, with particular attention to what I define below as the 'gaze'. The scenario for my self-portrait has involved setting up a studio-quality photographic portrait. The Rembrandt is also photographed in the same studio setting and by the same camera. This Rembrandt image, however, is a poster created to scale with the original painting. Here, the Rembrandt image and my self-portrait are coterminous, their equivalency determined by the digital-photographic process and media as 'digital file'. Although I have displaced the original by virtue of using a photographic depiction of it, both my self portrait and his resemble each other in form, insofar as they both represent bit - map images in the computer imaging software. The Rembrandt image shot in the studio derives from a poster of the original painting, a poster published to scale with the painting and purchased over the Internet from My Art Prints in the United Kingdom.

The state of the primitive art of painting at the burgeoning of the new millennium is confounded by a previous century's prodding and deconstruction, parody and annihilation. Painting has endured a succession of declarative moratoria, cynical reason, ironical turns and an emptying-out of form and content that would seem to seal its demise. The essential issue at the heart of its reasoning is the dislocation of the centered, autonomous subject, leaving any artist seeking to participate in its enterprise, in a state of subjective indeterminacy. For this project, which entails a guide to recreate a Rembrandt self-portrait through a photographic and digital set of parameters which are then utilized to create a painted portrait, the

content centers around comprehension of the terms ‘self’ and ‘subject’. Let us first look at the definitions these terms within the lifetime of the 17th- century Dutch painter Rembrandt van Rijn.

More than any other painter, the Baroque artist Rembrandt (1609-69) has earned esteem for his ability to render the human portrait, and he enjoys special renown for his many self-portraits. Different perspectives arise when deciphering meaning from Rembrandt’s self-portraits, but for my purposes I consider only how Rembrandt has presented an image of himself as a notation of the ‘individual’. Reputable Rembrandt scholar and historian Ernst van de Wetering posits a multiplicity of functions within the self-portraits by the painter. While self-portraiture constitutes an artist’s way of practicing on a model always on hand, there must also exist other reasons that painters have portrayed their own likenesses. Collectors attach value to the artist’s self-portrait. No longer do patrons in the 17th- century want to possess their own depictions; instead, patrons want to own a painting done by a certain artist of himself, because such images become a symbol of social status. Wetering attests that no other painter of this age recorded his own likeness with as much frequency as Rembrandt: there are forty paintings, thirty-one etchings and a handful of drawings that comprise this inventory (Buvelot, White 10) . The term “self-portrait” does not exist in Rembrandt’s day, according to Wetering, and he adds, “ inherent in the concept of self-portrait in the 19th and 20th- centuries was a form of self awareness that had a specific existential connotation, because from the end of the 18th- century the experience of one’s own individuality was very different to that current in Rembrandt’s own century ”

(Buvelot, White 17) . Wetering does not specify whether or not Rembrandt's enterprise as self-portrait painter represents a quest to contemplate the inner-self by analyzing the subject through its outward depiction. He cautions that a Romantic reading of the self-aware Rembrandt probing the deepest of human musing may be the product of a post-Romantic scholastic venture (Buvelot, White 17 -20) . Art historian Svetlana Alpers depicts Rembrandt as a skillful creator of a tangible world that might embody the artist's own inner life, but Alpers also argues that in the painter's day, the individual comes to be defined in essentially economic terms. The individual defines himself or herself by the right to property, and thus, by extension, the individual becomes cognizant of the vessel by which that right to ownership manifests itself – through the image of self. The historian maintains that in Rembrandt's later pictures the "roles" that he assumes, the costumes, and the theatricality seem to fall away as the painter zeroes in more closely upon himself, and his own image, so that, for example, the paint in the 1659 portrait is more thick and more gestural. Alpers determines that Rembrandt is not, "defining himself professionally as a painter, but defining the self in paint" (Alpers 114-16) . Alpers continues:

The 19th-century credited Rembrandt with being uniquely in touch with something true about the individual human state. I would put it differently. Rembrandt was not the discoverer, but one of the inventors of that individual state. And so his late works became a touchstone for what Western culture, from his day until our own, has taken as the irreducible uniqueness of the individual (Alpers 86 – 7).

These notions of uniqueness and individuality now scrutinized through a theoretical 20th– century framework enable us to comprehend the state of the ‘self’, the ‘subject’, and the possibilities for the creativity of the artist and painter.

Walter Benjamin’s seminal text “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”, for example, questions notions inherent in the individual artist’s capacity to implement authentic, unique modes of production. Art, via mechanization – the logic of industrialism – dismisses the original genius and the art object’s “aura of authenticity” (Benjamin 218 – 220). The machine vanquishes the autonomous object of ‘beautiful semblance’, and in its wake, a ‘parody’ that gazes endlessly into its refractory continuum of self reflection. Benjamin notes that the portrait represents the early object of photography, enabling an ‘immortal’ semblance of the person depicted within its inventory of light. He states: “The cult of remembrance of loved ones, absent or dead, offers a last refuge for the cult value of the picture. For the last time the aura emanates from the early photographs in the fleeting expression of a human face...[but] as man withdraws from the photographic image, the exhibition value for the first time shows its superiority to the ritual value” (Benjamin 226) . Here, Benjamin identifies a break in meaning. At this dislocation of the ritual value of an image (capturing the portrait), an exhibition value takes on a ‘superior’ eminence. The photograph becomes a document of history, the image an arbiter of both conscious and unconscious political agency. Benjamin determines that, “when the mechanical age of reproduction separated art from its basis in cult, the semblance of its autonomy disappeared forever” (Benjamin 226) .

Frederic Jameson outlines the phenomenon of the ‘death of the subject’ in a 1983 text entitled “Postmodernism and Consumer Society”:

this new component is generally called the “death of the subject”, or, to say it in a more conventional language, the end of individualism as such. The great modernisms were...predicated on the invention of a personal, private style, as unmistakable as your fingerprint, as incomparable as your own body. But this means that the modernist aesthetic is in some way organically linked to the conception of a unique self and private identity, a unique personality and individuality, which can be expected to generate its own unique vision of the world and to forge its own unique, unmistakable style (Jameson 114) .

In Richard Kearney’s The Wake of Imagination, the author cites the project of postmodernism as a dismantling of the modern ideology of progress and its totalizing or universalizing doctrines, in favour of pluralism and a multiplicity of historical experiences. His scheme for reinterpreting the self and its artistic project falls within a sphere of both “poetics” and “ethics”. His attempts at a resolution respond to the dismissal of the humanist subject. He avows that structuralism has denounced the subject as an illusion buried in unconscious signifiers while, “poststructuralists went further still in declaring the human self to be a ‘desiring machine’ which exults in schizophrenic disorder (Deleuze). One thus finds the self being portrayed as a ‘dispersed decentered network of libidinal attachments, emptied of the ethical substance and psychical interiority, the ephemeral function of this or that act of consumption, media experience, sexual relationship, trend or fashion’ (Kearney 394 – 5) .

Kearney alludes to Paul Ricoeur’s concept of the ‘depth hermeneutic’ of historical imagination; a hermeneutic that necessitates a reinterpretation of our cultural

memory. His project conforms to the political imperative of postmodernism, and represents an imaginative recollection that deciphers methods for anticipating the future. Kearney notes that a multiplicity of narratives might surface, “[as] the project of freedom can easily degenerate into empty utopianism unless guided in some manner by the retrieval of past struggles for liberation” (Kearney 393) .

Kearney’s “ethical” imagination refuses the totality of the post-structural argument that the self merely consists of a ‘reified technique’ or ‘comodified desire’. His ethical self stems from the idea of Walter Benjamin’s political agent who engages in the new dilemma of art-making and creativity. Kearney denotes the ‘narrative self’ as a project that constantly re-interprets itself:

Ethics, in other words, presupposes the existence of a certain narrative identity: a self which remembers its commitments to an other (both in its personal and collective history)...this narrative self is not some permanently subsisting substance (*idem*). It is to be understood as a perpetually self-rectifying identity (*ipse*) that knows its story like the imagination narrating it, is never complete. It is because it is inseparable from a poetical-critical imagination which sustains it, that the self’s commitment to the other – the other who addresses me at each moment and asks me who I am and where I stand – is never exhausted (Kearney 395) .

Hal Foster, in his 1997 text The Return of the Real, posits a neo-avant-garde genealogy of skepticism that greets a dominant ideology with suspicion when manufacturing its own illusionism or realism. An attitude of skepticism toward the image has a long and varied history, but one which I address here only in terms of tangential prerogatives issuing forth from Modernism. Foster notes that within all sign-manufacture exists a real–illusory conflict. Within the notions of what Foster

terms 'minimalist' and 'pop' genealogies, he illuminates a dichotomy of meaning that perforce revalues the parameters of the signs that artists create. Foster states:

Our two basic models of representation miss the point of this pop genealogy almost entirely: that images are attached to referents, to iconographic themes or real things in the world, or, alternately, that all images can do is represent other images, that all forms of representation (including realism) are auto-referential codes. Most accounts of post-war art based in photography divide somewhere along this line: the image as referential or as simulacral. This reductive either/or constrains such readings of this art, especially in the case of pop – a thesis that I will test initially against the “Death in America” images of Andy Warhol from the early 1960s, images that inaugurate the pop genealogy (Foster 128) .

Foster depicts Barthes' post-structural reading of Warholian pop as an attempt to “de-symbolize” the object. The art object is a vehicle for the commodified culture, valuable in multiples, but without intrinsic meaning; a simulacral surface where the artist does not stand behind his work, as Barthes testifies. The artist is a mere simulation without intention, signification, or interior ‘meaning’. Foster continues: “this simulacral reading of Warhol is performed by Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze and Jean Baudrillard, for whom referential depth and subjective interiority are also victims of the superficiality of pop....but where Barthes and others see the avant-gardist disruption of representation, Baudrillard sees an ‘end of subversion’, a total integration of the commodity-sign” (Foster 128) .

Foucault's concept of the structural unconscious touches upon refashioning the Rembrandt self-portrait. No longer situated within the modern arena of ‘creative consciousness’, but situated instead within the ‘structure’ of an epistemological unconscious, the human imagination falters. Foucault's critique instigates a call for the real to be subverted by the imaginary (illusory), and vice-versa, in a heterotopic

expose of thought. No longer do the real and 'unreal' codify definitive grounds, but both notions become unfixed. In accordance with Foucault's call for the end of the brief project of 'man', or humankind, Jacques Derrida concurs that there exists no primordial 'presence', no point from which to ascend to a similar plateau of non-presence (from point zero to point zero). Without the original (in the form of 'truth', 'reality', 'idea', etc.), there can be no "re-presentation" in the sense of recasting or remaking the original (Kearney 281 – 2) .

In the project of this book, the handbook for *Self Portrait in Scarf and Grey Coat*, the Rembrandt self-portrait is the copy of the mirror into which the painter peers in the process of creating his own likeness. Yet, even here there is another turn: this self-portrait from 1659 does not portray the usual right cheek of the sitter, but the left; generally an anomaly in self-portraiture, and especially within the inventory of Rembrandt's fully realized self-portraits. The photographic representation of my own self-portrait is a popular cultural presentation of the self, but also simulacral in its famous positioning of the figure (the Titian model, itself based on a historical lineage in painting). The simulation indeed follows in a Derridean model of 'mimesis without origin', or 'mime without end'. Through the deconstruction of both representations I derive a common structural element: the colour palettes, as determined by Adobe Photoshop's colour-reduction algorithm. This structural denominator posits both images within the same field of materiality and language. The high art icon of painting, the pinnacle of autonomous selfhood, finds itself subsumed into the repeatable paradigm of contemporary portraiture. The

images trade only colour palettes, while the underlying grid which comprises their bitmap imaging remains essentially unchanged.

Hal Foster offers several ways of reading images that deals with the notion of the subject, or artist, behind the work. He cites Barthes' reading of the Warholian "de-symbolizing" of the symbol, arguing that by corrupting the bond between the real and the sign, Warhol drains meaning from his work, connoting that *this differs from meaning by having none*. *Self Portrait in Scarf and Grey Coat* relies on a reading of the duality of the image as both an allusion to past and present notions of 'self', and the possibility of a meaningful subject through overlaying and juxtaposing the iconic humanist painting with the contemporary photographic portrait.

The poster of the Rembrandt painting is translated back into the unique medium of paint – unique in the sense that reproduction in paint does not normally reside among contemporary technologies of replication. Hal Foster conjectures that the author is reborn through the traumatic discourse of art while the subject retains its position of post-structuralist critique (as a missing person, since no one resides at the moment of trauma), popular culture reifies the subject as 'witness, testifier, survivor' (Foster 130) . He states:

In trauma discourse, then, the subject is evacuated and elevated at once. And in this way trauma discourse magically resolves two contradictory imperatives in culture today: deconstructive analyses and identity politics. Here the return of the real converges with the return of the referential...(Foster 168)

Self Portrait in Scarf and Grey Coat removes the artist's responsibility for the aesthetics of the resultant image, however involved the artist may be in the initial

conception of the project. I have intended at least initially, to allow the gaze – the window through which we conceive ourselves – to determine the properties of the process, assigning a role to technology and aesthetics, and removing the hand of the artist from a crucial stage of the operation (the algorithmic determination of palette colour and uploading of palettes into decisive files). I plan to re-institute the manual operation of the painter's enterprise in the final stage when I repaint the resultant photographs on canvas in my own hand.

Science Agrees: Ain't Got No Soul

If it is the historical evolution of subjectivity explored in thought from the Enlightenment until the present, one question persists throughout: what comprises consciousness? How does the mind create the entity *sensed as*, or *perceived* to be the 'I' of mind? How does the mind identify, enable, or invent the spatio-temporal horizon in which the 'I' congregates to deliberate the questions *how* and *what* am I? As we move from authors of a linguistic enterprise to a philosophy based in biology and neuroscience, we may find the 'self' in a similar "illusory" predicament.

We can address consciousness from a contemporary philosopher who has written extensively on mind studies, consciousness, child (mind) development, cognitive ethnology, artificial intelligence and evolutionary theory, to name a few. Daniel C. Dennett, author of the widely popular Consciousness Explained, and Darwin's Dangerous Idea, combines social science, evolutionism and neuroscience in his

approach to concepts of mind. Dennett's approach to human agency and intentionality within his discourse, had made him a key figure in what has been deemed the Cognitivist Revolution – a theoretical turn spanning fifty years which, as Andrew Brook imparts, "...demolished empiricism and put in its stead a view of human action as requiring interpretation in terms of a rich reservoir of cognitive resources, and, many argue, evolutionary history." (Brooks 3)

Author Andy Clark elucidates the dualism in Dennett's account of "intentional stance", and the 'something special' about human minds that move our cognition to levels other animals cannot achieve. Intentional stance is privy to animals and insects, who are capable of *desiring*, and *believing in* a similar theoretical stance. Humans, on the other hand, exhibit an "informational organization" which allows them to produce consciousness, purpose, self-control, and what Dennett terms "significant suffering". What makes Dennett's account of the human 'special something' of consciousness interesting in this context, is that it too is based in language: human language and our immersion in the 'sea of culture' differentiates our internal structuring; it follows an evolution of cognitive innovations which emerge as "moral agency" and "selfhood". (Brook 187-89)

Dennett's intentional stance can be illuminated to determine what differentiates the human mind from others. There are four kinds of creatures: Darwinian, Skinnerian, Popperian and Gregorian (all based on theorists who have contributed to the milieu). The Darwinian creature's primary form is fixed by evolution as an ecologically adjustable, "survival-enhanced" machine. The next level, the Skinnerian, is capable of adopting new strategies through behaviours which

ultimately bring it “reward”. Popperians exhibit an additional trait: the capacity to envision an “inner world” in which they can allow their ‘imagination’ to attempt actions without the repercussions of damaging their bodies in a previous trial and error, or ‘reinforcement’ paradigm of the Skinnerian. Finally, the human falls into the special category of Gregorian. This is reserved for the creature that utilizes all the ‘tricks’ of the above creatures, but is endowed with a special function: the use of tools. With a ‘tool’, the cognitive space which confronts the outer world is,”...radically transformed and often simplified.” (Brooks 188) Richard Gregory, for which the Gregorian creature derives its name, determines words to be “mind tools”, which are designed (and culturally inherited) to aid problem solving in the mental, inner world, where this type of creature deploys its virtual environment to deal with the ‘real’ in the space exterior to it. Language is the most important tool in that it confers on the creature the accumulation of culturally-derived concepts, labels and datum that allow it to make a ‘cognitive leap’, as Dennett implies. While the Skinnerian creature, as Brooks imparts:

...is able to learn new behaviours, and the Popperian is able in addition to try out new behaviours in mental simulation, the Gregorian creature becomes able to actively think about its own thinking. By turning the communicative and co-operative resources of public exchange and discussion in on themselves, such creatures are able to concern themselves with such questions as “What is my reason for believing such and such?” “Is it a good reason?” “How sound is the evidence upon which I am about to act?”, and so on. Such self-questioning becomes an option, Dennett believes, only when the agent’s rationales can become objects for the agent: only when the agent has available a ‘representation of the reason [which may be] composed, designed, edited, revised, manipulated, endorsed’ (Dennett 1996, 133). And the inherited mind-tools of public linguistic expression, it is argued, provide natural support for such objectification (Brooks 188-89).

The capabilities of the Gregorian to utilize language improves their ability to think, and provide scenarios for the future through a kind of mental 'invention'. The creature requires a language of 'self-description', for what Dennett sees as a 'radical self-evaluation'; it is from the set of mind-tools which human consciousness necessarily evolves. The tools confer on the creature the capacity to engage the values and ideals embodied in the actions it assumes, through the agency of this self-evaluation. The mental 'linguiform resources' that allow for objectification of reasons, provide a strategy of the mind to accord meaning, or value through a mental processing. It is not a simple manner of hard-wiring in the brain, but a condition of the continual program of minds operating in a public matrix of language, through which it perpetually self-evaluates its own embodiment of mental content, reflects, and refines its machinery. Dennett's own feelings on the nature of the mind is best described through his commentary in *Brainchildren*:

The first stable conclusion I reached ... was that the only thing brains could do was to approximate the responsiveness to meanings that we presuppose in our everyday mentalistic discourse. When mechanical push comes to shove, a brain was always going to do what it was caused to do by current, local, mechanical circumstances, whatever it ought to do, whatever a God's-eye view might reveal about the actual meaning of its current states. But over the long haul, brains could be designed - by evolutionary processes - to do the right thing (from the point of view of meaning) with high reliability. ... [B]rains are syntactic engines that can mimic the competence of semantic engines. ... The appreciation of meanings - their discrimination and delectation - is central to our vision of consciousness, but this conviction that I, on the inside, deal directly with meanings turns out to be something rather like a benign 'user-illusion' (Dennett, *Brainchildren*, 32) .

The Artist without Genius

Richard Kearney outlines a history of the “imagination” in his Wake of Imagination that leaves the artist in a precarious situation. How can one create without imagination? Several reasons for appraising methodology emerge, not as mere non sequitur for the production of artwork, but to identify the difficulties of producing ‘meaning’. Three concepts from divergent areas fuel the necessity of considering method as intrinsic to the meaning of a work of art – the why of any creation: the death of the avant-garde, Late Capitalism as a system in which all transgression sublimates market need, and the elusive self as a vehicle for *original* production. I will address these topics only as they relate to the route I have taken towards the creation of “Preparing the Body for Ascension in the Belly of the Whale”.

Evident in the previous discussions on the Rembrandt project I completed in 2005, the notion of ‘self’ opens the way for questions concerning any given artistic enterprise. If one cannot think of a different way of creating (art/music, etc.), devising a polis, or behaving as a social being (beyond the notions of these things already conceived), “creation” itself becomes an inoperable paradigm. It is no longer a creative action, but one of repetition. Gilles Deleuze discussed repetition as a necessity in devising something, or becoming, truly ‘New’. This Deleuzian paradox is addressed following examples of artists who attempt to utilize methods of creation which do not rely on the identity of a free autonomous, and particularly ‘inspired genius’ to formulate a method for producing art.

One artist whose early work forced change within the work itself is Mathew Barney. While utilizing a similar schemata in the later widely celebrated *Cremaster* cycle, the artist devises a set of rules in which form is targeted as a passive condition. As Nancy Spector imparts, “The first and most fundamental of these rules involves the proposition that form cannot materialize or mutate unless it struggles against resistance in the process.” (Cremaster 4) Sport, athleticism and human drive figure in the conception of the *Drawing Restraint* series, from which a feature film production (2006) has been adopted by the artist himself. The early *Drawing Restraint* performances (between 1988 and 1993) utilized ‘restraint’ as a mode of eventuating the most base of artistic actions: the mark on paper that ignites a drawing. In the performance situations, Barney used his body to expend energy against cumbersome, difficult, and weighty apparatuses that served to disrupt the ease with which one could approach a surface to draw upon. As Spector illuminates, “...Barney climbed ramps, swung from rings, strained against tethers, jumped on a mini-trampoline, and pushed blocking sleds in an effort to record the lines of a sketch, a self-portrait, a diagram. Employing tools that further complicated the process by their unwieldiness in scale, weight, or rigidity, he produced images that functioned as both indices of the energy expended to complete them and as representational markings (Cremaster 5) .” This treatment of form is culled from a biological emprise: hypertrophic muscle development. In this technique, the muscle is torn down and built up again through the stress of using weights. The tissue repairs itself and enlarges the specific area where the stress is applied. It is the threshold that interests Barney; the repetitive stress-induction

provokes new formations, and the act of restraint reins and exacts upon form to coerce both its internal and external thresholds to bear on its new state. Examples of artists and writers using various techniques to create new work abounds. Tristan Tzara of the Dadaists used an aleatoric device to devise poetry in the early 20th Century. He would cut and paste words from various texts to create new texts without assembling words in a conscious manner. William Burroughs used similar techniques in his writing. Visual artists used a multitude of techniques along these lines to create ‘new’ images and artwork, but I will offer one example of constraint-based artwork from a group of artists dedicated to language games, tests, experiments and the ‘New’: the group Oulipo.

The group Oulipo was formed in 1960 by ten founding members of diverse backgrounds. Their disciplinary breadth stretches from mathematics to literature to pataphysics. Operating in obscurity for the first decade as an entity, Oulipo (whose name stems from *Ouvroir de Litterature Potentielle*) conducted research to procure an inventory of “experiments in form”. Two modes of their work exist in ‘analysis’, the retrieval of numerous, even ancient forms (intentional and non-intentional), and ‘synthesis’, the invention of new forms. The *First Manifesto*, by Francois Le Lionnais, regards ‘anoulipism’ as the dynamic of the group devoted to discovery, while ‘synthoulipism’ is devoted to invention. (Motte, Jr. 1-2) This group which produced largely a body of literary works engaged in suspending, restraining, pinioning and determining obstacles for language. The Oulipian mandate prefabricates the channels through which language is plunged, and fishes out its inchoate mutation. The strategy of formal constraint objectively disavows

subjective inspiration. The potential for the new emerges from the formal positioning of content and language, but as Deleuze imparts, the *only* way to the ‘New’ is through *repeating* what has gone before. (Motte, Jr. 10)

New Under the Sun

In Zizek’s book on the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze, Organs without Bodies: On Deleuze and Consequences, Zizek describes Deleuze as a philosopher of the Virtual. The virtual is not the ‘miserable’ artificial medium through which reality is duplicated, but the ‘reality of the virtual’. Engaging Deleuze on his philosophy of becoming, and the notion of time as, not as eternity’s image, but what we make contact with through experience – the ‘real’ of time exists in itself; we do not experience history or the flow of evolution through a medium of time. Zizek argues that in Deleuzian philosophy, “...time is the striving of eternity to reach itself.” (Zizek 11) In regards to the notion of the truly ‘new’ emerging from time, Zizek imparts:

Becoming is strictly correlative to the concept of REPETITION: far from being opposed to the emergence of the New, the proper Deleuzian paradox is that something truly New can *only* emerge through repetition. What repetition repeats is not the way the past “effectively was” but the virtuality inherent to the past and betrayed by its past actualization (Zizek 12).

The old adage that there is nothing new under the sun is contested by a betrayed past – a past that can never be touched upon, and in its repetition is mutated, deranged, contorted, and made ‘New’.

These concerns of methodology, and the practice of devising a work of art were a large part of the discoveries I made during the two years of the Masters program. Yet, as I worked through projects such as the *Self Portrait* (2005), I began to need a more personal project to work on, despite, paradoxically, the work I had completed on the nature of the self. I had come to see the benefits of constraint-based work, methods of creation that could yield unknown results, while frustrating thought or implementing unrecognizable systems. Outright repetition would not be the sole approach; it seemed more a matter of assemblage, perhaps even ‘*bricolage*’. The new approach I assumed for the creation of the thesis exhibition was one in which parts were assembled (perhaps in some cases repeated), where the viewer entered to complete the piece by producing ‘meaning’ in a process which seemed to mimic thinking itself: Narrative.

Multiple Draft Consciousness and the Burning Ring of Fire

In discussing the potential for future human minds in a discourse readily titled post-humanism by its proponents, the notion of personalities, and ‘societies of mind’ are often topics of discussion, as they are in Christopher Dewdney’s chapter on “Transhuman Psychology: Identity and Media”, from Last Flesh. Here Dewdney illuminates a notion of consciousness as derived from an ancient sermon, verified

in contemporary cognitive studies. This idea is derived from a sermon given by Buddha, in which the 'single personality', and hence singular person (self) at the center of experience, is an illusion which eliminates perceivable 'sub-personalities'. As Dewdney recounts:

One evening, just after the sun had set, a disciple asked the Buddha to explain the riddle of human identity. The Buddha answered without words. He seized a length of rope and plunged one end into the fire. Then, when the end of the rope had ignited, he whirled the rope in a great circle above his head. In the darkness there was a glowing ring of fire (Dewdney 156) .

The Buddha's sermon alluded to the image of a ring of fire that resembles a continuous flow, yet also a complete object; a thing in itself. What the glowing object is comprised of, however, is a multitude of points of light. The mind operates to connect the points of fire into a singularity; a kind of 'narrative' structure that provides a totality. This sermon offers a context in which to place a more contemporary account of human consciousness as a 'narration' of sorts. In determining that Cartesian dualism is 'hopelessly wrong', Daniel C. Dennett proposes a new model of consciousness called Multiple Drafts that attempts to fill in the void left in the traditional model of Cartesian Theatre. Dennett claims:

While materialism of one sort or another is a received opinion approaching unanimity, even the most sophisticated materialists today forget that once Descartes' ghostly *res cogitans* is discarded, there is no longer a role for a centralized gateway, or indeed any functional center to the brain. The pineal gland is not only not the fax machine to the Soul, it is also not the Oval Office to the brain, and neither are any other portions of the brain. The brain is Headquarters, the place where the ultimate observer is, but there is no reason to believe that the brain itself has any deeper headquarters, any inner sanctum, arrival at which is the necessary or sufficient condition for conscious experience. In short, there is no observer inside the brain (Dennett 106) .

The Cartesian Theatre is a location in the brain that assimilates content in a centralized, precise 'place'. This central locus, however, provides a void similar to the one proposed in linguistic models of post-structuralist thought, discussed previously in this paper.

While dualism proper has been abandoned within scientific discourse, the Cartesian Theatre remains enigmatic. Dennett refers to ideas surrounding the numinous central brain as Cartesian materialism; there's no Soul, but there remains a material center. "The pineal gland would be one candidate for Cartesian Theatre, Dennett surmises," but there are others that have been suggested – the anterior cingulate, the reticular formation, various places in the frontal lobes." (Dennett 107)

Considerations of Narrative

The question seems to arise whether to utilize a methodology that mimics a consciousness of 'multiple drafts', an affectively bereft 'human' at the heart of the subject, by treating form and content in exacting ways. By utilizing constraints, games, riddles, and stress in order to configure ultimately 'new' data, an artist mimes the machine. Yet consciousness is not a solely mechanistic action, nor machinic, unless the overarching program is one that interpolates definitive external stimuli: namely the drive to immortality, and the will to survivorship. It is possible that within these concepts desire and knowledge reside, and consciousness operates as an assimilating enterprise.

Narrative itself is the process of constraining particulars of data in a similar venture that empirical observationalism determines. It repeats the mind. In contemporary cognitivism, predominantly in Daniel Dennett's stream of philosophy, it proceeds in an identical affectedness as the multiple drafts of consciousness.

Is it not the condition of the Gregorian creature to ensure evolution through the continued project of evaluation and refinement, to use Dennettian terminology? Would not the attainment of otherworldly habitation follow in the evolutionary course set off by the first technology of language? In this sense, a reiteration of narratives functions as mental content subjected to the will of the mind's cognitive resources of evaluation. Value, desire, and belief are thus bound up in the machinery of the operational 'self's' prerogative of reification and reform.

Part Two

"Preparing the Body For Ascension in the Belly of the Whale"

The Thesis Exhibition involves the installation entitled *Preparing the Body for Ascension in the Belly of the Whale*. It is comprised of a large-scale sculptural installation, with visual components. It is the culmination of two years of graduate study and analysis, and invokes research undertaken in that framework, while it is a different kind of project from those that I have previously constructed. The project

assembles elements of myth, cognition, and history. It attempts to reconfigure parts of religious content, pop culture, and data culled from the artist's 'resources for belief' as a lineage of his own mental content, while repeating in the place of the exhibition a site where art contemplates, and utilizes similar content to regard *desire* and *belief* sustained through a new narrative. The thesis exhibition will be discussed through allegory, metaphor, psychology, consciousness and art production, and the work's political engagement, while highlighting the artist's methodology and contrasting the approach with several contemporary artists.

The large installation literally embodies a whale's internal structure in both design and scale. It describes the 'place' of the whale's belly through the representation of the rib cage bones which descend on airline cables from the ceiling. The 'body' of the whale has several manifestations, and offers several readings. It is derivative of a lineage of what I could determine as whale-topoi; the installation is a site where several stories come together, where they overlap, to provide a new form of narrative. Each level of meaning might offer a different interpretation, but the object's primary concern is to encapsulate the viewer in a psychological space in the gallery, in which the bones of the whale hover over the entrant. Particular to the whale's body is the Biblical story of Jonah and the Whale, in which the occupant, Jonah, becomes aware of the necessity of belief through the darkened days in the monster's belly. The whale itself is a metaphorical embodiment of the quest for knowledge, and enlightenment, which in the biblical rendition requires an act of faith to sustain. It is a place removed from all materialist determinations. No experiment can occur from inside the prison of the

whale's body. It is only through the constrained condition of the enclosure that the character Jonah must turn *internally* to ascertain enlightenment. This notion of the quest for knowledge is repeated in the installation. The whale's body serves as a mythical counterpart to the real "vessel" of the art-installation. Under the whale's bones is a table which intimates both an altar, and a surgical table. Here the characters from the whale stories hover in a projection where they each alternate between images of Pinocchio, Jonah, a shrouded body, and a vacant table.

The video component is a selection of the piece entitled the Death of the Sun. It contemplates the potential of the sun's demise, as discussed through scientific understandings of its fate. Without the sun, all human life would cease, and in its forecasted fulmination as a red giant through an inevitable stellar lifespan, the earth itself will be destroyed. From epics of floods, to the horrifying possibility of a nuclear holocaust, belief has been structured around the potential of all-assuming death. The new parable of the sun repeats what in Christianity is the revelation of its text.

The whale installation in an architectural site which intends to reveal both its mythological 'place' of garnering knowledge, as derived from the historical context of the religious text. Surrounding the installation will be the printed "death masks" of fish which represent the 'many'. These prints recount the parable of Jonah directly through Walt Disney's animated movie adaptation of Pinocchio, in which Geppetto is swallowed by Monstro the whale. Geppetto is resigned to his own fate after spending many days in the belly of the whale without any food to eat. He is waiting for the whale to feed so that he can fish from his boat. The whale

seemingly does not need food for some time, and the character is beginning to starve. Pinocchio, the inanimate materiality-made flesh mimics not only the Christ-as-God-Incarnate figure, but the saviour, as the one who forces the whale to open up and allow fish to freely reach the suffering Geppetto. The fish in this installation are situated to the outside of the “vessel”.

Here, the vessel, the whale’s body, becomes a kind of ‘Noah’s Ark’. It offers the human subject the possibility of escaping its own fate (death) through its safe passage; through the technology to transpose it. The fish remain on the outside of the project of species’ survivorship. They will be left behind on the dying planet. They operate as metaphor for the approaching era of the post-human life-force; technology may present the option to overcome death, in several scenarios (biogenetics revolutions, the solution to the dilemma of aging, and the stream of technological prosthetics to the human as it assumes a new post-body embodiment). The fish are the portion of the population left behind in the race to the victory of survivorship.

It is the modified human’s quest to procure a suitable place for sustainable life. The immortal project of procreation, in light of catastrophic death, most poignantly detailed in the ‘death of the sun’, that comprises a new narrative to adopt as a system for belief, while the installation attempts to provide its construction as a repetition of already-existing mythologies. The quest for knowledge becomes a faith in the exploits of science through which one body of many can redeem, and procure life’s propagation. The body, in its technological “ascension” is at the core of belief: as much a securing of survivorship as a utopian, and promised territory.

Jonah and Pinocchio and the Darkness of their Whales

The Belly of the Whale is a place of darkness. It is a metaphor repeated in this installation from the Biblical references to the 'Great Fish' (whale) in the parable of Jonah. Jonah gains illumination through the darkness by obtaining faith, and his three days in the whale's belly are a precursor to the days following Christ's crucifixion, in which the world, awaiting the Saviour, is a place of darkness – a place without redemption. As the Evangelist Mathew describes in the New Testament: "For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." (Mathew 12:40) Darkness is also referenced in the story of Pinocchio, as both he and Geppetto are swallowed by the sea monster, called the dreaded Dogfish. When Pinocchio is initially swallowed by the fish, Collodi describes his frightful awakening: "All around him it was quite dark, and the darkness was so black and so profound that it seemed to him that he had fallen head downward into an inkstand full of ink." (Collodi, 153) The darkness is a place without hope, and through the heroic acts of Jonah to accept faith, Christ to redeem humankind, and Pinocchio to accept a righteous and moral path, they each move towards the light. This notion of "enlightenment" is at the heart of this installation. The body projected onto the screen at the center of the whale's belly, which is slightly

darkened to better reveal the video image, and also to reflect the darkness in its metaphor, is the subject of the question of “enlightenment”. If the human is to procure a perfected and immortal body, what does it stand to lose in the bargain of experimentation? What part of “humanness” could be lost, or replaced?

The *body* that the puppet Pinocchio so yearns for is the flesh and blood of a little ‘real’ boy. He uses language, talks, thinks (at least enough to give the impression that he is a human being) utilizes all the faculties of the senses. His thoughts, and actions, though necessarily dictated through Collodi’s narrative structure of “moralizing journey”, are seen to be equivalent of a young boy’s – quite possibly a morally corrupt ‘artificial’ Golem character, or perhaps an analogy for the necessity of all children to learn ‘correct’ and moral behaviour in society. Pinocchio is a disobedient, disrespectful puppet who causes his Master, Geppetto, a great deal of consternation. The stage is set for misfortune and adventure, when Collodi introduces his Talking Cricket character in Chapter Four, the voice of wisdom and guidance which the mischievous Pinocchio literally brushes aside to ‘escape the fate of all other little boys’. The Cricket advises the newborn puppet, “Woe to those boys who rebel against their parents and run away capriciously from home. They will never come to any good in the world and sooner or later they will repent bitterly.” Pinocchio heeds no advice from the ancient orthopteron, declaring he will run away and spend his life eating and drinking and amusing himself.

(Collodi 14-5)

As a puppet who comes alive (before he becomes a “real boy” in the story’s conclusion) he is artificial intelligence incarnate: a desiring machine of wood and

cloth. He intimates conscious being, but it is only through his desire to *be human*, and hence to *be like us*, that we recognize his potential consciousness, and therefore ‘humanness’. His desire mimics our own will to know the horizon of the Real. Is the new genetically-transformed human, which is discussed here in the chapter on the Body, a new puppet to the creator-character Geppetto, who sculpts the inanimate wood into the ‘real boy’?

The Whale

The whale sculpture hangs above the heads of the visitors, and acts as the covering of the vessel, or “ark”. It is intended to envelope the viewer in an environ that feels as though a whale’s body could encompass the space. While the whale’s upright suspension allows the viewer to perceive the body in its once-living form, it is not an abandoned corpse. It has been collected and reassembled for preservation, and study. The implications of its overhead hanging permits a desire to comprehend the structure of a once-living being, as the skeleton mimics a museum-style display – the categorizing, observational, and empirical gathering of knowledge. The body projection, conversely, fades, and remains unclear. It is the body of longing that remains untouched by human knowledge.

This skeletal reference underscores the contention between mythology and scientific determinants, as the ancient parable of Jonah and the Whale is embodied in the bones of the large mammal, while the body of the nameless space-traveler is one of genetic manipulation and demarcates the transference from external Creator-

God to the human itself. The whale's body then, completes the vessel as "ark", contingent upon the occupant: the new hero. It becomes the site from which future knowledge can obtain, and a *faith* in human-technological potential for longevity can be established. As Jonah in the Biblical story "sees the light" within the dark hull of the whale, the human evolves blindly towards its technological future.

Fish Prints as Small Shrouds

Fish sculptures surround the whale structure, laying on either side of the large body. They are constructed of paper, and treated with linseed oil to make the paper transparent. This allows for the print to be seen from inside the hollow shape. The prints are inked from the heads of salmon, and other kinds of fish from a local market. The black ink prints are "death masks" for the fish who have provided sustenance for the human benefactor who purchases their bodies. The inking of the body repeats a similar recording of the body in Christian doctrine: the Shroud of Turin, which is believed to be a record of the crucified Christ's body as it was laid to rest in the tomb.

Marx forecasted the widening gap between the power elite and its workers in the 19th Century. It is this discrepancy of wealth and access to health, and other considerations of the rights attributed to the individual in Western ideology, that persists through the history of capital. Technology itself has the intrinsic properties through their use of control. Within the fish sculptures, the repetition of the heads is symbolic of the masses –particularly those left behind in the global strata of capital

– the animals excluded by Noah in the catastrophe of the Flood. The allegorical fish also allude to another Biblical and historical event: the Exodus. It ties in the updated hero figure, forecasting the eventual exodus of the species from the planet, and the chosen ones who will repopulate the cosmos.

Body on the Surgical Table, and Altar

For as long as history has recorded images and ideas about past human civilizations, recurring themes surrounding the body include the alteration, metamorphoses, mutation and ‘perfection’ of its form. The subversive artist Orlan’s plastic-surgery performances offers her body as the site from which discourse surrounding the inevitable fusion of biological organism with the mechanical/ technological occurs. DNA, as Orlan herself exclaims, will no longer be the sole determinant of a body’s physical construction and character in the future. Francesca Alfano Miglietti (FAM) promulgates, “...evolution will no longer be a matter of chance, but will in all likelihood be programmed, or at least managed, by knowledge, by the discoveries that are being made in the fields of genetics, robotics, prosthetics and culture. A body that can be decided as a reversible decision. But also a mutant identity, the fruit of the tension that is established between the human and the technological, an identity not given or imposed, but planned out and constructed, not unique but multiple.” (FAM, 174)

From idealized Egyptian sculptures of Pharaohs to ceremonial tribal markings and piercings, the history of bodily alteration has been established as a continuum

through evolution. In his technologically-oriented Last Flesh, Christopher Dewdney extols the advantages of genetic engineering as DNA's equal in determining our biological 'destiny'. As the species approaches 'post-humanism', where our bodies are precisely in our control, Dewdney imparts:

Our visions, historically documented in our mythologies, are proof that we always knew our potential. Fundamental among these visions are the ideas of immortality and the notion of an immaterial soul. Supernatural powers, telepathy, and transmigration also seem strongly plausible to us. Our intuitive sense of these latent potentials of consciousness, which are nascent in our technology, has informed our religions and philosophies for thousands of years (Dewdney 4) .

Dewdney himself provides a transhuman-era belief that derives from the sources described in the above quotation: religion and mythology. This way of approaching bio-genetic science, computers, and the advancement of all forms of technology provides access to the jumping-off point for post-humanity which will take the form of 'uploading consciousness'. This 'pre-destiny' is determined by the mind and computer hybrid or another form of biotic longevity which culminates in a destined operation: the achievement of immortality. In the thesis exhibition, the body's "ascension" addresses this precise belief. In various religions, the soul is necessary to leave an obviously inadequate bodily decrepitude to the earthly realm, while beyond the surface of this realm lies the possibility of "forever", of the infinite embodiment of the 'self'. The "ascension" addresses not the death and rebirth of "resurrection" which punctures through an external 'heaven', but the gradual evolution of human technology to bypass death altogether, and ascend seamlessly to its destined earthly paradise.

Genome and the Object of the Body

In gauging the body from perspectives of “cyberspace reason” to the genomic entity operating in a machinic contingency-play of neuronal drives, Slavoj Žižek asks how, if the body is reduced to absolute objectification, would self-awareness be affected. If by genetic information we are capable of determining our IQ potentials, or of the body’s diseases before any symptoms reveal themselves – who, ultimately, is making the decisions if, “ ‘I’, my self-awareness, is also a superficial “screen”, behind which there is only a “blind” complex neuronal circuit?” (Žižek 48)

It is through Lacan, and a reading of popular culture that Žižek attempts to broach the predicament posed by the lack in cultural studies and theoretical trends deriving of the genome’s significant place in our current perception of the body, the human as an ‘object in the Real’. He refers to the challenges arising through cognitive evolutionist’s (such as Dennett) production of a ‘naturalized’ body: a human subject of purely empirical rationale. In *Gattaca*, a film by Andrew Niccol from 1998, the status of a human being can be garnered from direct contact with their genetic makeup. The future world presented is an authoritarian class-based society determined empirically by genetic ‘quality’ in which, “...we no longer have symbolic authority proper, since authority is directly grounded in the real of the genome.” (Žižek 102) In *Gattaca* (note the letters of the movie’s title are derived from abbreviations of DNA base pairs which make up the genetic code), the ‘artificial’ forms that construct the ‘status’ of an individual in society, and thus

position him/her for a privileged existence (power/culture) are replaced by a purely biological qualification: the genetic code is the new hierarchical model upon which all class and privilege are articulated. Zizek ponders ideas surrounding the ethical debate of genetic manipulation and engineering, and beliefs that ultimately underlie perceptions of the dispute. On the side of the prohibition of biogenetic manipulation, he portrays the argument as one that contains a fundamental paradox. Prohibitionists claim that we cannot alter the human being because we cannot possibly *know* the subject, its ego or psyche, and such scientific modifications would clearly never *get at* these utterly human manifestations. Zizek attempts to elucidate the position of one prohibitionist entity, the Catholic Church's:

If conservative Catholics effectively believe in the immortality of the human soul and the uniqueness of human personality, if they insist we are not simply the result of the interaction between our genetic code and our environs, then why do they oppose cloning and genetic manipulations? In other words, it is not that *these Christian opponents of cloning themselves secretly believe in the power of scientific manipulation, in its capacity to stir up the very core of our personality?* (Zizek 103)

It would seem in the conception of the human as dualistic entity, the body's manipulation would not alter an 'immortal soul' and would fall outside the jurisdiction of a faith which invests so heavily in the 'afterlife'. It is through the problematic identification of the *utterly human* constitution that Zizek weaves notions of the ontological gap; the failure at in the midst of the subject's phenomenal self-experience.

The Hero and Denial of Death:

A major theme of this thesis exhibition installation is heroism. In Ernest Becker's Pulitzer Prize-winning Denial of Death, he touches upon the drives at work behind human desire and longing, through a psychoanalytic reading of human behaviours and beliefs, as his opening statement confers:

The first thing we have to do with heroism is to lay bare its underside, show what gives human heroics its specific nature and impetus. Here we introduce directly one of the great discoveries of modern thought: that of all things that move man, one of the principle ones is the terror of death. (Becker 11)

He assesses heroism as a reflexive condition activated through terror discovered in the awareness of death. It is this deep-seeded primal “fear of annihilation” that determines a great deal of human action. The “hero” at the center of the thesis exhibition installation has several identities, each becoming the other through the viewing of the art work. One notion at the heart of the character within the work – the body who will ‘ascend’ to a higher plateau – is a body of genetic manipulation and design, as well as the body of “cyberspace reason”, as discussed earlier by Slavoj Zizek. In this sense the heroic, and sacrificial act is to give one's body for the continued research into the “perfecting”, and prolonging of human life. In the case of planet Earth's ultimate survival, and therefore the species', the hero is the experiment in exploratory space travel. What Becker hints at in the first chapter of his book, but does not elaborate on is heroism as

the first act of intruding upon immortality: “When we see a man bravely facing his own extinction we rehearse the greatest victory we can imagine.”

(Becker 12)

In light of the Sun’s death, a new hero will arise from the necessity of human survivorship. This narrative within the installation is hinted at through the title of the piece, and the Death of the Sun component which ties the Whale structure and video body together. This untold story repeats narratives of previous catastrophes and stories of heroes. This new hero is the body of genetic manipulation, and of technological alteration. It is in its primitive form, derivative of Nasa’s research on the necessity of genetic modifications to the human form, to streamline its ‘deliverer’ to some foreign destination in the universe, to more adequately survive the harsh conditions. It is through this degree of difficulty and sacrifice that the new body is deduced as the hero of the new mythology. This hero figure follows in the topos of Christ as redeemer of humankind’s potential, himself a repetition of Jonah. The hero is symbol of the technology’s evolution from language (the font of all technology, as Marshal McLuhan once stated) to procure survival: its biogenetic design offers the potential of hope in the formulation of a new saviour.

The Death of the Sun

The notion of the sun’s death is rooted in ancient mythologies. Carl Sagan depicts an ancient Aztec belief that the ‘seed of the Earth’ will have ended, and its lifespan

will come to close. The Sun, he recounts in his endeared Cosmos, will fall, for the Aztecs, and all stars will eventually be shaken from the heavens. (Sagan 231-32)

The Sun, however, as the prominent British astrophysicist John Gribbin delimits, “...is not destined to play a major part in seeding the Galaxy with heavy elements. Even though it is a relatively massive star, in the sense that at least 90 percent of all stars are less massive than the Sun, it is still not massive enough to cook up anything heavier than carbon, oxygen and a little nitrogen during its lifetime.” (Gribbin 126)

The Sun is not the direct source of the materials of our body; other more massive stars are the initiators of our material evolution. As Gribbin delineates, the Sun’s lifespan as a main-sequence star is approximated at ten billion years, at which point it will stop converting hydrogen to helium, which articulates the chemical furnace in the star’s core. Gribbin details how the star becomes a “red giant”, before achieving other stages in its lifecycle:

[As] is the sun has used up all the hydrogen in its core this way, the core itself has to collapse, slowly, under its own weight. This does two things. First, it makes the core itself hotter, as gravitational energy is released. Secondly, hydrogen from outside the core falls towards the core, where it is hot enough for this ‘new’ hydrogen to begin burning to make helium, by the CNO cycle in a shell around the core. Both processes generate extra heat, and this heat flowing outwards from the core makes the outer layers of the star expand, so that it becomes a red giant (Gribbin 126) .

The ‘Death of the Sun’ is a *type* which simulates, and contrasts the lineage of the Jonah-Christ-Pinocchio-Nameless One, as it follows a doomsday evolution through The Flood-Revelation-Nuclear Holocaust to a scientific scenario for the earth’s and ultimately its inhabitant’s fate: the stellar collapse of the Sun. The moral story of the Flood in the Bible recounts a Creator who has seen the wickedness of the

human species: “ Now the Earth was corrupt in God’s sight, and the earth was filled with violence. And God saw the earth, and behold it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth. And God said to Noah,” I have determined to make an end of all flesh; for the earth is filled with violence through them; behold I will destroy them with the earth.” (Genesis 6: 12-14) Its purpose is create a fear and anxiety in the believer, that the omnipotent force behind this earthly disaster is a consequence of immorality, or ‘wickedness’ – the “fear of annihilation”.

The area of the installation, beginning with the white box, contains opened books revealing ‘The Lives of Stars’ and four images with captions below which detail four stages of the sun dying, and its eventual destruction of the planet earth, from Sagan’s Cosmos. This is the intended entrance, although either entrance is available, as it is the point at which the installation provides the line through which its architecture can be discerned – through the columnar hall of bones to the terminating red-draped room. This tiny room is the vestibule, or ‘chapel’ space. Unlike a cathedral, which terminates in an altar with surrounding ambulatory, this ‘cathedral’ ends with the hidden room. Its red drapes are velvet, as in many churches, particularly the one I spent my youth in, and are reminiscent of draped-off confessional booths. It occupies the notion of a literal confessional booth, as a place where the artist actively replaces the images of the Christian triptych it houses inside, with a sign-like image of a 20th Century artist, and minimal coloured light boxes. On the floor there is an offering of the kneeler, in minimal black and white matching the remaining items of the installation’s furniture, and central

table/altarpiece. The viewer is presented with the choice of kneeling in reverence to the images presented in the light boxes, which are created to repeat the structure of the Ghent Altarpiece (1432). The space is intended to be claustrophobic, and private – a place of prayer, and of forced admiration. Its kneeler, as if a from a pew in a Christian church, presents a problematic choice for the viewer; there is no religious icon for his or her genuflection. No visible sign embodies a place to direct an act or sign of faith. It is a religious vestibule emptied of its symbols, and in its vacuum, the remaining signage of a blank storefront; a fluorescent set of boxes without language or function.

Desiring Machine Desireless

As mentioned in the chapter on the *Self Portrait with Scarf and Grey Coat*, Deleuze presented the body as a “desiring-machine”; an entity which, as Deleuze and Guattari describe:

...makes no distinction between man and nature: the human essence of nature and the natural essence of man become one within nature in the form of production or industry, just as they do within the life of a man as a species (Deleuze 4) .

One artist Gilles Deleuze utilized to express the fragmented, schizophrenic human desiring-machine, was Francis Bacon. Particularly in The Logic of Sense, about Bacon’s painting, Deleuze defines the human figure not so much as a body represented in paint, but as the ‘subject of a particular sensation’. Yet, it is the body, Miglietti contends, that is occupied, colonized, brutalized, subjected to the forces of the market, and ultimately deprived of power:

[Bacon] rebels against a media-driven vision of the real and reproduces the general alienation of a society that is increasingly

impenetrable to the desire for change and which the struggle for survival has become an impotence to live, passivity, anguish, and in the best cases boredom. Bacon presupposes a condition of art in which individuals can mirror themselves, artworks that become an appeal to the fragmentation of that identity destined to fail, artworks that are ranked against the aestheticization that is produced by the very civilization of the spectacle and market, artworks that oppose the emancipation of sensibility against the control of emotions.
(FAM 120)

Here we are confronted with a human condition as rendered through images that penetrate to the chaotic, anxious being who is a contemporary citizen. The body is an emptied machine; the one most suited to peer behind the drapery of the final room of the installation in “Preparing the Body for Ascension in the Belly of the Whale”.

Ghent Altarpiece with Hole

Behind the curtain of the enclosure entitled The Death of the Sun, there is a series of light boxes constructed from proportions of the Ghent Altarpiece, the oil painting triptych completed in 1432 by Jan Van Eyck. This is an iconic altarpiece, considered not only to be a masterpiece of religious iconography, but Van Eyck’s masterpiece – the greatest painting from the originator of “oil painting”. This mimics the decision to use the iconic painting of Rembrandt’s self-portrait in my earlier work. Here, the Ghent Altarpiece functions as a particularly important structure in the service of any Christian mass. It also as a the most acclaimed version of both the faith’s earthly existence as believers (the lower register portrays the liturgy, with the ‘Adoration of the Lamb’ – the symbol of the sacrificial Christ),

as well as the 'heavenly realm' (the upper register provides the images of the Christ in Glory, crowned in the Christian afterlife). The other art historical reference is Kurt Schwitters' piece "Immortality is not Everybody's Thing", from 1922, which occupies the central panel of the would-be triptych. The use of Schwitters' image intends to abstract the imagery in Christian allegory of Jan Van Eyck's masterpiece. Here, the contingencies of the Christian narrative are emptied of their symbolic value, and approach a minimalist reduction of form and colour. The Schwitters' image is stark and pointed – it is simply a dark mass of pigmentation suspended in the space of the page. For my allegory, the dark place functions on several levels. Firstly, it is the centerpiece of the Death of the Sun exhibit. Its simplified shape and colour dominates the central panel, and enacts an almost darkened 'sun'; a degenerate mass without sign of operation. The image also functions as the place at the center of the Ghent Altarpiece where once the seated God figure reigned; now a darkened shape which could represent a "hole" or "void" replaces him. As the image of the sun, the dark mass equivocates two narratives of human creation: the Christian God of Genesis who built the heavens, the earth, and humans in the first week, and the accepted progenitor of biological life on earth, who produced heavy elements to satisfy the inventory of our bodies – the sun.

The Sublime Failure, the Silent Lamb

Several themes discussed here through Slavoj Žižek's interpretations of the sublime object touches upon subject matter in The Death of the Sun component of the installation, and the notion of desire that runs through the exhibition. Žižek determines that the 'sublime' ultimately fails as a symbolic venture. Against a 'moral law' enforced through religious piety, or ethical rule within society, he provides an example of the paradox at the heart of the 'Kantian autonomy' – the "self" as defined through its 'free' and 'autonomous' subjectivity, precisely as that which is cognizant of its self-esteem through the 'humiliating pressure of the moral law'. As Žižek imparts:

The fear of raging nature and of the pain other men can inflict on me converts into sublime peace not simply by my becoming aware of the suprasensible nature in me out of reach of the forces of nature but by my taking cognizance of how the pressure of the moral law is stronger than even the mightiest exercise of the forces of nature. The unavoidable conclusion to be drawn from all this is that Beauty is the symbol of the Good, the Sublime is the symbol of ... Here, already the homology gets stuck. The problem with the sublime object (more precisely, the object that arouses in us the feeling of the sublime) is that it *fails* as a symbol – it evokes the Beyond by the very failure of its symbolic representation.
(Interrogating the Real 158)

The 'sublime' evokes what the Good lacks, in a sense; what eludes it: Evil. A pop culture example that Žižek provides to highlight our fascination with 'evil as an ethical attitude' is the character Hannibal Lecter from the popular 1990s thriller The Silence of the Lambs. Žižek intends to illuminate how a popular character such

as Lecter is a sublime figure (in the Kantian sense) which is a failed attempt to represent the 'Lacanian analyst'. He makes the comparison between Lecter and the Lacanian analyst to the Kantian 'dynamic sublime' in which the wild, feral chaos of nature shares a similar relation to the 'Idea of Reason' which lies beyond nature itself. Žižek continues:

True, Lecter's evil... strains to its limits our capacity to imagine the horrors we can inflict on our fellow creatures; yet even the utmost effort to represent Lecter's cruelty to ourselves fails to capture the true dimension of the act of the analyst: by bringing about *la traverse du fantasme* (the going through of our fundamental fantasy), he literally 'steals the kernel of our being', the *object a*, the secret treasure, *agalma*, what we consider the most precious in ourselves, denouncing it as mere semblance. Lacan defines the *object a* as the fantasmatic "stuff" of the "I" as that which confers on ... the fissure in the symbolic order, on the ontological void we call the 'subject', the ontological consistency of a 'person', the semblance of a fullness of being. And it is precisely this 'stuff' that the analyst 'swallows', pulverizes. (Interrogation the Real 159)

It is the terror in the notion that at the center of our self-aware minds that the act of analysis, or indeed any prodding into the essential nature of the body/self, could 'eat us whole'; leave us with only the surface, the illusion of things. This fear of the utterly 'surface', the illusory without depth, speaks to the potential of the Pinocchio character to never achieve the 'Real' of the 'real boy' he desires to be; to avoid learning his moral lessons, and therefore abandon his role to save Geppetto from the whale's belly; the potential for the human to avoid its own cognizance of its humanness or the 'lack' that constructs our very humanness, in the evolution to a plateau of 'unhumanness' (through alterations to the body), or the ideal of the post-humanists (where Dewdney's fulfilled destiny triumphs).

What the “hole” at the heart of The Death of the Sun image points towards is this ultimate failure within representation, and art as a system of objects. Yet it is also within the framework of this failure that the questions of the ‘real’ (‘boy’ of Pinocchio, etc.), the ‘real’ of the mind and self-aware identity, the ‘real’ of the potential other beyond, exists. The interrogation of the “evil ethical” is what points back at the viewer from the ‘emptied’ place of the altarpiece iconography. Though the comparison is both unintentional and an afterthought, the ‘adoration of the lamb’ of the lower register in the fifteenth century Ghent Altarpiece, is here rendered silent; it maintains its secret by existing on its surface, in the minimalized coloured squares of an almost Modernist artistic venture of deconstructing form and content to a simplified, emptied shape. As Žižek imparts about Lecter’s ‘cannibalism’ towards the FBI agent Clarice Starling character in the film, which itself has the potential to ‘deconstruct her away’:

Lecter is truly cannibalistic not in relation to his victims but in relation to Clarice...their relationship is a mocking imitation of the analytic situation, since in exchange for his helping her to capture “Buffalo Bill”, he wants her to confide in him – what? Precisely what the analysand confides in the analyst, the kernel of her being, her fundamental fantasy (the crying of the lambs).
(Interrogating the Real 159)

Conclusions

The void I felt since my departure from structural religion forced me to examine empirical, science-based revelations of the world, the body, and the universe at large. Empiricism lacked the interpretation of its datum – the narration in which it could be fully realized. I have a compulsion to know and understand the world around me, and I have come to understand this necessity stems from an inherent and learned (both nature and nurture) compulsion to know. This necessity to know would enable certain protections and controls in life, especially within the context of any social environ. Within the need for understanding, is both the concepts of “the mastery of nature”, as discussed by Adorno, born of fear and embodied through larger structural systems such as organized religion, or political parties. The “fear of annihilation” is also bound up in the desire for “truth”, a way of making contact with the Real of reality. Within these concepts resides the a condition ripe for “belief”. There is a constant *desiring* at play in the body, and the self, which is continually in flux, ever re-imagining itself. It is desiring desire, as Deleuze posits. It is the body repeating a primal program, reforming, as Dennett implies, and reifying.

The characters in the parable of Jonah and the Whale, and Pinocchio perform heroic acts which call for a future hero in the story, and forecast, of the sun’s death. The installation points to questions surrounding the body’s future. The darkness of the whale’s belly provides a metaphorical place wherein various forms of enlightenment can occur. The method of presenting parts of things – myth, story,

history, and allowing the viewer to complete the narrative of the installation, and therefore its 'new' meaning - will continue to be an approach I will explore through future projects. Perhaps this thesis exhibition, with its constellations outward from the center-stage table, and its assemblage of repeating particles, can be described in one of Adorno's musings on the idea of myth: "False clarity is another name for myth. Myth was always obscure and luminous at once. It has always been distinguished by its familiarity and its exemption from the work of concepts."

(Adorno, xvii)

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