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Pictures of the Body: Painting as Praxis

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

PhD
Fine Arts

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Statement of Original Authorship

The work submitted for this thesis has not been previously submitted to meet the requirements for an award at this or any other higher education institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except as where due reference is made.

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Abstract

This thesis uses the painting / photography nexus to investigate painting's viability as a decisive means of activating reflexivity and interpretation. The artwork tests painting's agency by presenting simplified abstracted paintings which critique selected news media images documenting conflict between the citizenry and institutional authorities. The paintings thwart the resort to the normalised (non)-understanding engendered by the ubiquity and information excess of the news photograph. They invite the viewer instead to fill out and resolve the incomplete figuration through 'experiencing' the narratives pictured. In this way the audience can interpret and expand on the minimal information contained within the paintings by extrapolating from their own experience. This reduces the need to employ the restrictive, hidden and historically entrenched discourses that are commonly used to read both photography and painting.

The narrative content and simplified figuration of the artwork assists in creating a relationship with the viewer that enables an exchange of experience comparable to that achieved through dialogue. The simple presentation and understatement of the paintings aims to forge a link with the viewer that implies a joint struggle to understand. This commonality is augmented by the paintings' muted, unassertive authorial 'performance' and through the invitation to engage in the (joint) work of interpretation. The images have been chosen on the basis of their capacity to promote empathy and imaginative experience. To emphasise the 'joint witness' of the artist and viewer the paintings are of a size, and installed in a manner that maximises their correspondence with the body of the viewer.

Acknowledgements

The decision to undertake post graduate study, especially a PhD, is likely often made in ignorance and innocence. It certainly was in my case. Throughout this period of research I have tried to continually remind myself that this work was being undertaken for the pleasure in learning and understanding it afforded me. It was, however, impossible to avoid the occasional lapse into panic provoked by an all-pervading dread that a very serious mistake had been made and that I was responsible for making it. At those times my partner Frances and sons Daniel and Joseph were able to deliver a therapeutic admonishment. Nevertheless, a PhD will always be a very lonely undertaking. I am very much indebted to all three supervisors but most particularly to my main supervisor Associate Professor David Cross, who continuously gave me encouragement. He has carefully read this, and previous drafts, many times and made extensive suggestions about direction and focus that have improved my understanding, and thus the document itself, immeasurably. The task of moving me and my writing towards the clarity and precision required in an academic work called for the patience, and forbearance, of a 'natural-born' supervisor. I am very grateful and appreciative of David's support.

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Finally I acknowledge the enormous debt I owe to the philosopher Jacques Rancière whose discussions of aesthetics, democracy, pedagogy and the politics of power were crucial to my understanding of the role of artworks.

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Preface



Fig.1. Detail from **Pictures of the Body** (from a news photo depicting tear gas use in Thailand)

“But Kafka’s about your life!” Avery said. “Not to take anything away from your admiration of Rilke, but I’ll tell you right now, Kafka’s a lot more about your life than Rilke is. Kafka was like us. All of these writers, they were human beings trying to make sense of their lives. But Kafka above all! Kafka was afraid of death, he had problems with sex, he had problems with women, he had problems with his job, he had problems with his parents. And he was writing fiction to try to figure these things out. That’s what this book is about. That’s what all of these books are about. Actual living human beings trying to make sense of death and the modern world and the mess of their lives.”

*Avery then called our attention to the book’s title in German, *Der Prozess*, which means both “the case” and “the process.” Citing a text from our secondary reading list he began to mumble about three different “universes of interpretation” in which the text of *The Trial* could be read: one universe in which K. is an innocent man falsely accused, another universe in which K.’s guilt is undecidable...I was only half listening. The windows were darkening, and it was a point of pride for me never to read secondary literature. But when Avery arrived at the third universe of interpretation, in which K. is guilty, he stopped and looked at us expectantly, as if waiting for us to get some joke; and I felt my blood pressure spike. I was offended by the mere mention of the possibility that K. was guilty. It made me feel frustrated, cheated, injured. I was outraged that a critic was allowed even to suggest a thing like that.*

(Jonathan Franzen, **The Discomfort Zone**¹)



Fig. 2. Detail from **Pictures of the Body** (taken from a news photo of crowds under attack by police in Iran)

Introduction

The key research question addressed by **Pictures of the Body** asks how painting can appropriately produce reflexivity in an audience. The vehicle used is the examination of political power structures. The research involved exploring painting's ability to produce empathy to open the viewer to the experience of the other. Empathy is a prime method of incorporating communicated experience. Reflexivity – the incorporation of new understandings – is a direct result of this experience of alterity through a communicated experience. **Pictures of the Body** uses the painting / photography nexus to investigate this relation through examining its viability as a decisive means of activating reflexivity and interpretation. The artwork is a variable installation of up to forty five paintings each of which is 76 cm x 76 cm, oil on canvas. The paintings re-present news media images of the violence and conflict that lies at the interstice between repressive government forces enforcing law and order and individuals expressing dissent. The paintings are not contextualised in the installation through caption or date.

It is a central claim of the research that the relationship established by the form of the communication is crucial to its ability to encourage this possibility of reflexive understanding. The attitude taken by the speaker to the power relationship with the audience is particularly important in creating the circumstances that allow empathy and then reflexivity to flourish. Horizon linking is a key component of the research. An exchange of experience about life occurs most commonly through ordinary conversation, often between friends. In a conversational exchange, a relationship between interlocutors is established both through the manner of address and through the subject matter referred to. Each embodies a critique. What is said, and how it is said, are equally instrumental parts of the communication.

This research was focused on producing a body of artwork, which as explicitly as possible, manipulated and combined the various established discourses from the fictive traditions of painting and those from the documentary traditions of news photography. My object was to explore the extent to which painting could augment the understanding that my source news images offered. The photographs I used in these paintings were selected on the basis of their potential to convey a powerful narrative while retaining a quality of vacancy that can motivate the work of imagining, deciphering and reconstructing that narrative. Painting mediates the

relational framework within which the subject matter is encountered, and has some ability to replicate the intimacy of an interpersonal conversational exchange. My research proposes that the relational environment indicated by the text/painting is what conditions the possibilities for the subject matter to produce empathy and reflexivity.

The paintings in the installation offer a multilayered and quite complex amalgam of potentially stimulating prompts around the everyday – the body, narrative, alterity, authority, violence and political change – as well as a range of prompts for consideration that concern the medium itself like the ideas around fiction, documentary, abstraction, representation, reflection, understatement, distancing and context. All of these can be productive of consideration. The paintings achieve this consideration and interpretation because of the way they are constructed between the various discourses of photography, news documentary, painting, representation, abstraction, installation and minimalism. The prime vehicle for this agency is what I call the optical blur and the removal of informational detail that together require the viewer to work in order to reconstruct the narrative presented.

The initial encounter with the paintings, on entering the gallery space, is a long view of the paintings on the far wall that shows their photographic derivation. The second view at a much closer range is of a more confused abstract and unstable image. This immediately sets up a push / pull dynamic which locates the viewer in a situation of uncertainty. As the viewer encounters the paintings from a close range, he has to locate himself physically in order to undertake the reconstruction of the narrative from a position of instability.

The paintings refer to specific actual events that have occurred within the past two years. One of the first questions asked is about the familiarity of the context. What is happening here? How aware has the viewer been of these recent historical events? What is their context? Where did they occur? Are they fiction or documentary? The viewer can then engage in unraveling the detail of the narrative and in this process begin to identify with the predicament of the figures through imaginative identification. The key to this identification is the work the viewer engages in and their awareness of the political structures they live within.

It is worth emphasising that this work is offered but not demanded. This is key to the relation the work creates with the viewer. I cite many examples in my exegesis where the authorial position is claimed as definitive. In these cases, a fixed view is offered which invites simple acceptance or rejection and the viewer is not given the opportunity to reconstruct the text in his or her own

way. My reason for adopting a reduced format is my conviction that information is in fact still available. With familiarity and work, it is possible to see, quite subtle information. An example is in one of the paintings of the aftermath of a bombing in Iraq where two figures are holding hands. These details are not initially obvious.

The paintings offer a range of narratives each of which requires its own reconstruction. Each explores a different aspect of the confrontation between the individual and the forces of repression, but do not prompt a simple analysis. It is possible to identify and empathise with both sides of the site of conflict. The ostensive critique is not of institutional power and repression itself – it is more appropriately seen as a critique of power relations generally. A side observation is that almost all of these sites of confrontation are those occurring between members of the same state. The images conflate the distinction between First and Third World countries by including images from London, Chicago, Greece and New Zealand. Only the last painting of the series features international repressive intervention. That painting is of the dead body of one of the brothers killed by United States forces during the capture and assassination of Osama Bin Laden.

The research creates new knowledge by incorporating a range of contemporary art discourses that have not previously been incorporated into painting. The most important of these is Relational Aesthetics and Horizon Linking. Relational Aesthetics has a founding assumption that the relation established with the viewer stands for the text of the communication. In doing so, it recognizes that the ability to enable the viewer to undertake reflexivity is determined by the scope given to experience subject matter as though it were their own experience. This is facilitated by avoiding the pedagogic devices implied by the imposition of authority.

This research uses the absence of the usual tokens of authority – like those of mimetic painterly virtuosity, the oversupply of information and description, and substitutes instead a virtuosity of understatement and withdrawal, because of the understanding that this openness is more conducive to reception and reflexivity.

That the events pictured in **Pictures of the Body** are recent, feature diverse locations and have been widely published through the news media is not prefaced. If the viewer had an interest in such events, however, it is very likely that they would be able to identify the time and place of at least some of the incidents. The aim of the artwork is not to present a moral or political viewpoint of these sites of conflict. The object is to encourage a reflexive encounter with the

narratives in order to afford the viewer some practice at independent interpretation that is free from the restrictions of conventional ways of looking.

The written part of this research concentrates on refining the ways painting can become instrumental in everyday praxis. Jonathan Franzen's comparison of Kafka and Rilke in my Preface makes the point that an artwork is partially comprised of the maker's own investment in the medium as praxis. While this investment, of itself, does not activate the agency of an artwork in praxis, it is one of a number of necessary ingredients that contribute to 'making sense of life' for both the author and reader.

Chapter 1 presents the theoretical underpinnings that are most critical in the exchange of experience from the maker to the reader / viewer. A large part of my theoretical explanation revolves around the relationship that the paintings try to establish with the audience. The notion of dialogue is central to my argument. 'Dialogue'² (as I use the word) stands for a particular 'relation in communication' that recognises the interdependent nature of the artist / viewer engagement. I make the point that the artist or painter is in a reciprocal relation with the viewer since communication is constructed through the relation of reception rather than being pre-existing or independent of it. Recognition of this interconnectedness has implications for the way the artist formulates the communicative relation. I show that many forms of publication and expression fail to recognise the equal authority of the viewer and try to dominate through privileging the author's viewpoint. Any communication is inevitably framed by signs indicating the author's context and attitude and are contained as (sometimes hidden) discourses within the work. **Pictures of the Body** is a deliberate attempt to frame those factors governing the relationship with the viewer in a way that recognises the role these hidden discourses play in directing the way meaning can be constructed through the work. The artwork operates by presenting the subject matter in some isolation from the discourses that usually surround it. The paintings emphasise the process of interpretation and attempt to balance the need for comprehensibility with the interpretive work of visual translation.

The theoretical notions that are central to my discussion, like those around hermeneutics or the conditions of reception, dialogue and relation, are descriptions of the mechanics of human interaction. They describe how the encounter with the pictured narratives through the fictive modes of painting can become constitutive for the viewer in a way that is not possible when they are presented as photographic news. My emphasis on the dialogic mode recognises the fact

that in order to communicate we require a common language. This involves a crucial range of commonalities. The most obvious of these is the ability to read the offered script or text and gain the intended and particular impressions from the communicative symbols used. The idea of 'horizon linking'³ articulates a valuable meditation on commonality and serves as a central rubric of this research. Horizon linking allows the possibility of communication through the articulation of a recognisable world view. 'Horizon' describes a location in and of the world, including psychological location. Just as with the specifics of agreement in language, this shared 'location' *permits* dialogue. While the linking of world view stems in part from the cultural history and traditions that are shared with the interlocutor, a fundamental determinant is the psychological situation of the artist. Without a modicum of agreement about ideas such as identity, relation, certainty / doubt, self regard and relation to community, communication again falters. Beliefs like these both determine and limit what can be thought. A large part of my discussion is concerned with using pre-existing beliefs to open up less familiar ways of seeing. **Pictures of the Body** attempts to create a shared perception that allows the audience to venture outside the limitations of inherited strictures. The theoretical discussion of this makes an analogy with friendship. I suggest that we are all prepared to be more experimental within a framework of companionability than we are to respond to a didactic bludgeoning or persuasion.

Chapter 2 characterises the painting / photography nexus as an interaction between separate elements that invites the viewer to select a fictive (painterly) reading mode to assimilate information that is most familiar as photographic and most often read as given fact. The combination of the news source material and the presentation of its narrative action as painting is described as a hybrid. **Pictures of the Body** uses this hybridity to encourage the viewer to negotiate the unfamiliar territory of 'difference'. The hybrid⁴ of (familiar) painting and (familiar) news photography can make experience available in a way that is not possible through either mode separately. This places the viewer in a situation without recourse to an easy, given path of understanding. To come to some resolution of the artwork the viewer has to forge their own understanding through reference to their own experience. Reception Theory points towards ways in which the audience can be encouraged to bypass these normal modes of understanding and implement their own interpretation.

Painting and (news) photography each suggest different ways of understanding the visual information they present. **Pictures of the Body** uses ways of reading from each to critique the other through juxtaposition. The truth that photography claims is examined through presenting

its information, much reduced, through the fictive mode of painting. Painting's uniqueness and distinction discourses are challenged through the presentation of 'mundane' news images as constitutive experience. The uniqueness discourse⁵ defines value in painting as being determined by its 'aura' (Walter Benjamin's expression) where the object is venerated for an intrinsic quality embedded in that uniqueness. News photographs, however, are largely devoid of aura since they are mass produced and designed for mass consumption. The distinction discourse refers to the social consequences and *class* distinctions that result from the acquisition and knowledge of this aura. It creates and amplifies those class distinctions through the reification of a cultural competency that is disassociated from everyday praxis. Both of these discourses tend to emphasise differences rather than commonalities and restrict dialogue by making it one sided.

The idea of painting as information is explored in the third Chapter. In reducing photographic information, the paintings focus attention and supply implicit information about the painter. The reductive visual economy of the paintings has the effect of concentrating attention on the narrative action. The paintings are, in part, an investigation of our adaptation to the Information Age presented as the push-pull between information paucity in the individual paintings and overabundance of narrative in the group as a whole.

The paintings do not resolve into a particular, stable narrative since they employ a variety of 'blur' which renders the image unstable. The blur is a feature of photography (as unfocused) and equally, a feature of painting (as, among other tropes, gestural). The blur echoes some features of ordinary vision in directing attention to focus and in representing detail the eye can focus on at various distances. The distribution of focused and blurred areas in painting (and photographic) traditions are usually directed, towards indicating visual depth, and background / foreground issues, to signify required areas of attention. A traditional blur in painting, like, for example, the impressionist blur, requires the viewer to locate themselves in physical relation to focal length. Often, the further distance away from the work the more it will appear to achieve mimesis. The optical blur I use derives from Bridget Riley's work. The flat undifferentiated treatment fails to provide visual cues as to where attention should be directed. It tends instead to disperse attention by giving equal weight to all aspects of the painting. Pictorial depth is sometimes almost eliminated. As with Riley's work, the most notable continuing effect of this blur is to manufacture (visual) instability. There is a tension here between obfuscation and

clarity. Too much difficulty becomes a frustrating disincentive; too easy and the exercise of imagination is not initiated.

A lack of detailed figuration does not leave the viewer free to decide their own interpretive path. In the absence of direction, attention will almost invariably be concentrated on unravelling the narrative because of the identification it is possible to make with the pictured bodies. The fact that these paintings are about other people provides one of the important links of commonality that encourages viewer engagement. The instinct to immediately investigate the situation of the (other) bodies is instrumental in beginning the process of interpretation.

This third Chapter documents the various installation formats that were tested in order to arrive at a presentation that optimised the paintings' critical impact. The installation and configuration of the work was difficult to resolve. Many arrangements were tested⁶. The 'abundance' of some installations, such as the spectacular grid arrangement at the **Aratoi Museum of Art and History** in Masterton, New Zealand, became an 'overabundance' that overwhelmed the tension that was set up with figurative restraint. A further distraction (of trying to make narrative connections) occurred when the paintings were too close together, as was the case in the second **Aratoi** installation. At the other extreme too much space allocated to each painting had the potential to suggest that the work was intended to be read only *as painting*⁷.

My final Chapter looks at particular artworks of selected artists whose work and critical modalities clarify the stance I have chosen. Many alternative examples of artists' work could have been used and this chapter makes no attempt to provide a survey of critique in painting generally. The artists whose work I have chosen to discuss have a direct relation to my paintings either through contrast, similarity of purpose, or device.

As implied in my Preface, artwork that functions as praxis for the maker has a particular energy and attraction because of its engagement with the everyday human need to understand. Finding a personal basis for understanding within an environment of information overload, mass consumption, and defined specialist understandings is very difficult. **Pictures of the Body** negotiates some of the difficulties of processing mass media information about the world by encouraging the viewer to come to a position through their own imaginative and empathetic work. This provides an antidote to the dominance of the totalising codes for understanding assumed by global news organisations and often by artists who use more spectacular strategies to convey a singular world view.

CHAPTER 1.

The Theoretical Background



Fig. 3. The full image from **Pictures of the Body** (from a news photo depicting tear gas use in Thailand).

A key aim of the research (the exploration of painting's dialogic potential) is underpinned by the continuing philosophical discussion that derives from hermeneutics. Formulating a response to the questions raised by hermeneutics about the nature and process of understanding is, for me, a key function of contemporary artwork⁹.

Recent discussions of art – as 'Politics' (Jacques Rancière), 'Relation' (Nicolas Bourriaud), 'Dialogue' (Grant Kester) or 'Alterity politics' (Jeffery Nealon) – all rely on a foundation in hermeneutics developed over time by, amongst others, Gadamer, Paul Ricoeur and Richard Rorty. Similarly, Reception Theory, as developed by Wolfgang Iser, Hans Robert Jauss and

Robert Holub (also amongst others) is underpinned by hermeneutics. Both of these lines of research contribute to the more recent discussions of Jacques Rancière, Nicolas Bourriaud, Grant Kester et al. Similar claims can be made about the debt owed to hermeneutics by those philosophers and psychologists who have developed Simulation Theory and Theory of Mind¹⁰. The work of all these thinkers provides a way of understanding the activity of art making and locate it within a formulation of knowledge and relation describing the function of art as communicative and political. Having a clear theoretical location, and working with an awareness of the implications of that location, is a helpful pre-condition for a serious practice in art.

Pictures of the Body is purposeful in aspiring to open up particular subjects for contemplation and reflection. To achieve the communication that this work attempts, without the deliberate incorporation of a functional theoretical methodology, would be impossible. Normal modes, because of their entrenched history, imply habitual ways of thinking. It is exactly these habits that the work tries to disrupt. The emphasis of this research on theory is an acknowledgement that 'history' (the author's cultural inheritance) is always part of the primary narrative presented in any artwork. It is therefore impossible to make a distinction between the artwork and the theoretical position it derives from. **Pictures of the Body** tries to acknowledge that by making those theoretical underpinnings more explicit.

Dialogue

Painting utilises the advantage that static visual media has in opening dialogue with the audience on a number of fronts simultaneously¹¹. In quoting news photographs, the installation refers the viewer to a series of recent historical events, to the news media as a mode of information exchange and to the tension between documentary and fictive forms. The presentation of the paintings in this research – as subdued and emotionally distant (they are painted with pastel colours), symmetrical (all the paintings are square and of the same size) and cumulative (in that the repetition as a series opens the possibility of a relation between the images and the narratives they contain) – is at odds with normalised encounters with the

viscerality and violence of the news material presented. The disjunction between the presentation and the subject matter, and the disjunction between the subject matter and its usual contextualisation as 'news', offers the different 'way of looking' that is one of the features of affective dialogue.

While the interaction characterised as dialogue is not normally associated with painting, a painting can initiate certain aspects of the relation. As I have previously indicated, this analysis does depend on the acceptance of the equivalence of linguistic and visual modes of communication. The linguist Per Linell quotes Russian Marxist Valentin Voloshinov in describing the inevitably two-sided nature of any communication:

*[the] word is a two sided act. It is determined equally by whose word it is and for whom it is meant. As a word, it is precisely the product of the reciprocal relationship between speaker and listener, addresser and addressee. [...] A word is a bridge thrown between myself and another. If one end of the bridge depends on me, then the other depends on my addressee. A word is territory shared by both addresser and addressee, by the speaker and his interlocutor (italics in original).*¹²

If a painting is regarded as being communicative, the analogy with language is functional. Voloshinov's point here is that the simple presentation of a word requires a reciprocal response. If a painting can be seen as a multiplicity of words (communicative devices) which are unravelled as a relation of communicative devices, then the analogy as an exchange of language is even more positively validated. My emphasis, however, is on the sort of dialogue that also creates the psychological conditions that are conducive to reflexivity. The condition of reception that encourages reflexivity is forged by the willingness of the listener to engage with the communication as if it were their own experience through empathy or imaginative simulation. As I said earlier this will not inevitably result through simply telling a story. A bond of commonality and identification must be established between speaker and listener. In **Pictures of the Body**, this invitation and bond is contained within the simplicity and directness of its presentation of subject matter, in its withdrawal from moral or political judgment and in its subdued but seductive pictorial quality¹³. A more active engagement in experience is offered through the invitation (and need) to unravel the codified representation through observation, deduction and finding a suitable location to view the work. The reward is contained through some resolution of context which has often deliberately been removed from the picture. The incentive to engage in the work of visual interpretation lies in the disturbing content the process reveals.

Narrative

The type of communication that is most conducive to empathetic and imaginative experience by the listener/viewer/reader is narrative. Siri Hustvedt used a narrative format to describe and explore her own psychological condition in **The Shaking Woman**. She quotes Rita Charon (and introduces a theoretical assertion) when making a distinction between narrative and nonnarrative knowledge:

*Nonnarrative knowledge attempts to illuminate the universal by transcending the particular; narrative knowledge, by looking closely at individual human beings grappling with the conditions of life, attempts to illuminate the universals of the human condition by revealing the particular.*¹⁴

The difference between the two is described by the way in which they are understood. Although it is possible to experience sensation in response to an abstract thought (a revelation or epiphany is such a response), sensation is much more directly tied to the meaning of a narrative than is the case in nonnarrative¹⁵. However, as Charon claims, the objective of both forms is to 'illuminate the universals of the human condition'. Part of the reason for the tendency of narrative to induce affect is that it involves a performative element which provides information enabling the identification with the author that initiates empathetic processes of understanding¹⁶.

Performance

The communication implied by the performative information in **Pictures of the Body** is instrumental in inducing the affect that becomes the experience which can precipitate reflexivity. Performance¹⁷ gives information about the author. It provides important clues about the basis on which the dialogue is conducted. I will describe some specifics of different relationship-framing performances in my case studies later. The performative (autobiographical) aspects of **Pictures of the Body** describe the author's own relationship with the material as subdued, detached and conflicted. The subjection and detachment are indicated by the insipid pastel

colours that dilute the viscerality of the narratives. This points to a reluctance to embrace the violence they present. An attempt to water down this viscerality is also evident in the removal of detail which presents the action in terms of abstract, codified, comic figures. The authorial response of withdrawal and alienation does offer the viewer one way of responding, but this response is complicated by different aspects of those same features. As well as expressing withdrawal, they also show signs of enjoyment and playfulness that might indicate that the alienation has become non-standard.



Fig.4. **Pictures of the Body** (Philippines)



Fig. 5. **Pictures of the Body** (Vanak Square Teheran)

The painting above, (Fig.4), is taken from a photograph documenting the assassination of a political candidate and his supporters by the henchmen of a rival candidate in the southern Philippines. The bodies in this image are almost playfully rendered and are surrounded by quite distracting shapes used as a notation for grass. The effect of this equalisation of significance in notation is to invite the audience to countermand such apparent lack of empathy by supplying it in their own reading. The painting above right, (Fig.5), derives from a photograph of a panicked demonstration (in Vanak Square, Teheran) retreating in the face of an attack by baton wielding police. In this painting the heavily armoured contrasting black figures of the police have not been shown, providing a vacancy for the viewer to fill. This painting invites the unravelling of a complex jigsaw pattern to see the figure on the ground who is about to be trampled.

The performative information embedded in the artwork is deliberately designed to counter the stereotypical romantic views of the artist that frame the maker as representing the distinction and uniqueness discourses. This is a deliberate attempt to prioritise the textual reading over the performative, to direct focus towards content. A reading of the text where the author simply provides the platform for viewing enables a link to be made with an alternative viewpoint¹⁸. It is

important to understand that this link is not with the psyche of the writer, it is with the text. The link with the writer / painter is a link of commonality and solidarity in sharing the view. Paul Ricoeur makes this crucial distinction in arguing:

In this way we are as far away as possible from the Romanticist ideal of coinciding with a foreign psyche. If we may be said to coincide with anything, it is not the inner life of another ego, but the disclosure of a possible way of looking at things, which is the genuine referential power of the text.¹⁹

Ricoeur's distinction is important because it stresses the role of the text – external to both writer and reader – as the method by which this link of solidarity is achieved. At the same time it rejects the fallacious romanticism inherent in the idea of identity as separable, stable or communicable that forms the basis of individualism.

History and Traditions

Hans Georg Gadamer points out that the interpreter (of the text, conversation, art work or perception of the real world) operates from an already partial or prejudiced standpoint. That prejudice is the inherited historical understandings bequeathed to her/him by the tradition s/he operates within. This understanding is embodied as an inheritance within language²⁰.

According to Gadamer then, the viewer will approach **Pictures of the Body** from the perspective of the most common standard encounter with these images – the news media. As I elaborate later in my discussion of photography, the encounter through the news media is characterised by features which conspire against identification or imaginative engagement with the documented events. In locating the narrative within the fictive medium of painting (that often normalises imaginative engagement), **Pictures of the Body** provides a different environment within which the material can be interpreted. Gadamer also describes the relation between our inclination to engage in interpretation – the process of understanding – and our proximity to the narrative. Georgia Warnke describes his position as follows:

The texts we most fundamentally need to understand, in one way or another, are the narratives in which we find ourselves. The interpretations we project onto these texts are not our own

autonomous creations, however, but are rather bequeathed to us as part of the narratives themselves.²¹

The difficulty with reported narrative action, like that in a remote place concerning people we will never know, is that it has no first (or second) hand immediacy for the audience. This is a basic condition of news reportage. News narratives are first observed (rather than participated in) by an (anonymous) photographer, selected and then edited for publication on a basis which includes commercial imperatives, then published within a context which encompasses the political interests of the publishing agent. As if this was not enough, when transformed into paintings, the image is then subject to a further round of interested aesthetic mediation by the painter, and in the case of **Pictures of the Body** further modified by digital manipulation using Photoshop. The criteria used to decide what makes a useful news photograph are not the same as those used to comprise a useful painting²². As Warnke intimates in the second sentence of the above quote, the selection and editorial process the text (picture) is subject to, determines the interpretation we can project onto the text.

The aim of the re- (and de-) contextualisation of the images used in **Pictures of the Body** is to activate the images, paradoxically by rendering them as 'pattern' or 'design' without identifying detail and context. The absence of context requires the instigation of imagination to fill the blanks. Those blanks will be filled by the viewer in terms of their own experience, not that of the author. It is the engagement in their own imaginative reconstruction which allows the narrative to become the 'experience' of the viewer.

Commonality

The political nature of the imaginative extrapolation into the narrative of another is stressed by Richard Rorty in describing the way the commonality of the suffering body allows us to make connections with strangers. He calls this connection 'solidarity':

It is to be achieved not by enquiry but by imagination, the imaginative ability to see strange people as fellow sufferers. Solidarity is not discovered by reflection but created. It is created by increasing our sensitivity to the particular details of the pain and humiliation of other, unfamiliar sorts of

people. Such increased sensitivity makes it more difficult to marginalise people different from ourselves...

...This process of coming to see other human beings as “one of us” rather than as “them” is a matter of detailed description of what unfamiliar people are like and of redescription of what we ourselves are like.²³

The ability “to see strange people as fellow sufferers”, is, as Rorty suggests, achieved through practice. To offer a forum where this practice can be achieved is one aim of the research. This practice, which acknowledges the validity of the other’s imaginative capacity and its concomitant ‘trust’ in (a shared) history, makes Gadamer’s and Rorty’s politics progressive rather than revolutionary. Politics for them becomes an ethics of work and practice at ‘redescription of what we ourselves are like’.

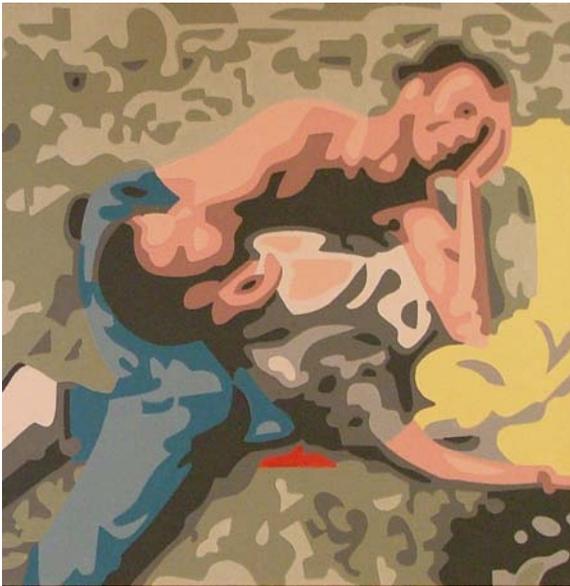


Fig. 6. Pictures of the Body. (Georgia)



Fig. 7. Pictures of the Body. (Gaza)

Left, after the Russian invasion of Georgia, right, after the Israeli invasion of Gaza. Both these images can be the object of considerable conjecture. For example, the (in fact dead) status of the ‘comforted’ figure in the arms of the other is not clear. The reason for the other’s naked torso is not clear. Is the yellow shape his shirt? Is the expression of the figure in jeans laughing or crying? In the Gaza picture the figures offer alternative interpretations of body language. Is the figure in a scarf jumping over a dead body? The foreground needs to be unravelled as representing numerous bodies, the ‘w’ shaped object in the centre foreground must be deliberately interpreted as a hat. In both cases the red colour can be interpreted as indicating blood. And red therefore becomes the sign for death.

Horizon Linking

Gadamer and Ricoeur use the notion of 'horizon' (from Husserl's phenomenology) to denote that fluid range of perceptions and understandings that is used to make new understandings. Horizon is the word that stands for our 'situation' in the world. That situatedness is important for two reasons: most obviously, it locates the subject in understanding within the world; secondly, it provides the commonality that allows communication²⁴. Developing a shared horizon is thus particularly relevant to artwork that spans cultural and historical difference, but also to communicate across different experience of different subjects within a culture.

The shared horizons can be seen in relation to Gadamer's idea of history or prejudice. They provide the framework for shared understanding in establishing the subject matter and frame of reference of a communication. The provision of a 'basis for understanding' occurs in a painting through presenting a particular style, form or genre, but also through the manner and place of presentation²⁵. Without some framework of familiarity or comparison, no external reference can be made since the work is unrecognizable. The hearer 'will be unable to reconstruct in his own consciousness the idea expressed by the words he hears'.²⁶ It might appear that this establishment of a joint horizon of expectation unnecessarily restricts communication to the delineation and articulation of commonality. In fact, the commonality that must be established is an acknowledgement of the historical and cultural location of both speaker and listener operating within the limits of their own experience. The experience of each of the interlocutors in dialogue is of situatedness within the norms of genre, relation and other cultural surroundings, and within the relation between fiction and reality, imagination and practicality.²⁷

Pictures of the Body creates several shared horizons, or paths for reading, through the familiar (standard) formal references the work makes – to painting, to news photography, to comics, to unravelling deciphering games and through the subject matter of the body, suffering and the physicality of confrontation. These shared understandings are used to make possible the interpretation which can lead the viewer towards less familiar ways of understanding. The mechanism for transforming the familiar to the less familiar, in this artwork, is through the hybrid of those familiar ways of understanding.

I have suggested previously that the viability of horizon-linking through dialogue depends on the authenticity of the text as a 'possible way of looking'. This 'authenticity' is articulated by the speaker and is expressed through the formal structures of his/her text. In dialogue, the (often subliminally) articulated situation of the author/artist/interlocutor in representing both commonality and otherness is a key ingredient in the willingness of the reader to interpret the text. The embodiment of the author as authentically engaged within the text (through the performative evidence provided) is both a necessary facilitation of understanding and an incentive to do so.²⁸

The Body of the Author / Maker

The instigation of empathy is by no means an automatic response to new narrative. The circumstances under which it is activated are determined by a complex mixture of seduction (sometimes through the attraction of opposites) and the identification of commonality. I use the idea of 'authenticity' both as a descriptor of the viability of that empathetic 'transfer of ourselves into another's psyche', and as the sign of the invitation to do so. Eventually this process of empathy, interpretation and understanding is summarized in the hermeneutic notion of the 'fusion of horizons'. My emphasis is on the fact that the possibility of instigating a fusion of horizons is decided by the author. The means through which it is invited are, however, many and varied. As I suggested previously, the theoretical location of the author (with regard, for example, to the expressed psychological relation with un/certainty manifested through performance) is an ingredient in the invitation to look at the 'view' through this mindset. The performative aspect of the artwork is that which communicates the author's fusion of theoretical location and inheritance of personal narrative.

The authorial position which most dominates the invitation to identify and engage with **Pictures of the Body** is slightly perverse in embracing violent subject matter in the first place, but also in then codifying it. The way of looking offered, is founded in emotional withdrawal. That offer at least invites the possibility of activating rejection, agreement or a combination of these. Any of these must be chosen rather than adopted automatically as occurs with the entertainment of

sensationalism. The invitation to interpret, if taken up by the viewer involves the implicit rejection of sensationalism and the substitution of an alternative way of looking.



Fig. 8. **45 Pictures of the Body**. Greece 2010.

This painting abstracts everything except the police helmet, the young woman's face and the upside down Greek writing. The claustrophobia of the female figure in being surrounded by such aggressive robot-like police is not articulated through her expression which is quite passive. It must be imagined by the viewer empathetically from their own experience. The arbitrary, and harsh black formations in the centre of the painting, provide a cue of alarm.

Difference

This thesis assumes that the purpose of art is to make a difference, and that that difference is made through the presentation of difference. This is not the difference that is at the core of discourses around individualism; it is the difference contained within commonality in the act of sharing new horizons. The offer of difference is made through the presentation of a worldview, offered as a critique to the receiving subject. Reception of this different view is initially provisional. This provision is expressed within the idea of 'the suspension of disbelief'. Part of this deliberate and experimental suspension of disbelief involves a willingness to enter the understanding of this difference, to taste the new experience. If the understanding, the taste,

works, it can be incorporated, as part of a new horizon. I must emphasise here that this 'tasting' is the experience of the receiving subject not the author. What has been communicated is not the experience itself but the experience of the experience. It requires the receiving subject to engage in an imaginative temporary acceptance and understanding of the 'other' horizons; this, at the same time, involves a reflexive examination of their own relationship with the world.

The writings of Jacques Rancière offer some compelling insights into the way art functions in this sort of critique. His considerable contribution to contemporary understandings is to reformulate the conception of art in terms of social and personal praxis. His definition of the political broadens the notion to include rejection of the authority of institutionalised (normalised) ways of looking and thinking. He focuses art's role on changing norms, particularly through unfolding new ways of seeing and being, which supplant more stultifying ways. He sees this change occurring through mechanisms of disruption, the enlargement of spaces for perception, and transformation by redescription:

The police is that which says that here, on this street, there is nothing to see and so nothing to do but move along. It asserts that the place for circulating is nothing but the space for circulation. Politics by contrast, consists in transforming this space of 'moving along', of circulation, into a space for the appearance of a subject: the people, the workers, the citizens. It consists in reconfiguring space, that is, in what is to be done, to be seen and to be named in it.²⁹

This redefinition describes politics as a matter of being heard, and as participation in the political forum, rather than in terms of exploitation, distributions of power, or structures of domination / subjection. Important to this idea is the presumption Rancière makes of the capacity of all citizenry to assume an equality of expectation which is based on an ethics of respect for the subject's indebtedness to the other for the constitution of self. This emphasis on the role of the other, and dialogue, is common to all the philosophers I discuss. Steven Corcoran in his introduction to **Dissensus** says:

Like Rancière, Derrida set forth an alternate idea of democracy – his much discussed *democracy-to-come* – to the hegemonic attempts of the new 1900s world order to institutionalize it or usurp its name. Where Rancière does so by emphasizing political subjectivisation, however, Derrida tries to open up this gap through the category of the Other. He thus ends up tying emancipation not to the activity of a subject enacting the egalitarian trait *here and now*, i.e. to political *activity*, but to an ethical attitude of infinite respect for otherness.³⁰

Rancière argues that art is an important agent for the expansion of possible ways of looking at things through the experience of participation in aesthetic discourse as an active engagement.

This is to say that the activity of art is not a matter involving the acquisition of a communicated end, but rather a matter of participation in the making real of that which was not previously apparent.

For Rancière, the tie between politics and aesthetics arises out of the contest for what it is possible to say. The saying creates new ways of thinking and thus determines politics. The saying is the domain of the aesthetic. The aesthetic field includes all those spaces where dialogue occurs. As he points out in the following passage, modern techniques of production, reproduction and transmission, institutional methods of 'saying', that are normalised in the contemporary environment, have expanded the areas of the aesthetic regime simply because of their currency as modes of 'saying'. The intervention of the aesthetic, however, happens not simply as an alternative mode of speech, but also in terms of its intent. The intent is to facilitate emancipation from oppressive normalised perceptions. It arises out of the re-naming of the anonymous as subject matter:

That is to say that they [the mechanical arts – photography and film] first need to be put into practice and recognized as something other than techniques of reproduction or transmission. It is thus the same principle that confers visibility on absolutely anyone and allows for photography and film to become arts. We can even reverse the formula: it is because the anonymous became the subject matter of art that the act of recording such a subject matter can become an art. The fact that what is anonymous is not only susceptible to becoming the subject of art but also conveys a specific beauty is an exclusive characteristic of the aesthetic regime of the arts. Not only did the aesthetic regime begin well before the arts of mechanical reproduction, but it is actually this regime that made them possible by its new way of thinking art and its subject matter.³¹

Newspaper reportage and photography is such anonymous subject matter. In colonising these photographs as the subjects of art, **Pictures of the Body** is opening up new areas of aesthetic discussion. Because of its distance from the commonplace news media way of seeing political protest and police repression, the artwork invites a re-evaluation of the meaning of these events and the news media itself. It is most often thought that the site 'demonstration' is an interface where the different interests negotiate power and influence through confrontation. I describe it instead, as an interstice, a gap between contestants. The gap is between two institutionalised and contesting bordered horizons where dialogue and understanding do not occur. Violence often occupies the space between competing totalising ideologies. The violence featured in **Pictures of the Body** is therefore evidence of the opposite of what the artwork itself is trying to achieve. The narrative is about the confrontation between fixed positions in a so-called 'political struggle'. What the contestants are in fact doing, is trying to impose their different ways of

looking as yet another perceptive hegemony. The viewer of **Pictures of the Body** also encounters a gap, a different one, in their ability to reconcile the clash of violent action and subdued presentation of the paintings. This softening, de-invests the violence of its hegemony over the audience, pointing towards the accommodation that could take place between contestants. Each side depicted in the news media images demands a polarised audience response. The paintings try to take that polarisation off the table through refusing to paint it that way and instead offer the moderation of composite pastel colour.



Fig. 9. Three images from Sophie Ristelhueber's WB [West Bank] 2005 series

My installation has a corollary in the cool reserve and quiet observation of Sophie Ristelhueber's photography. The aesthetic pleasure found in the images above, provides a counterpoint to the political observation, as also occurs in **Pictures of the Body**. Rancière uses Sophie Ristelhueber's work as an example of both appropriate subject-matter and methodology in undermining the certainties represented by 'the false obviousness of strategic schemata':

'Sophie Ristelhueber has in fact refused to photograph the great separation wall that embodies the policy of a state and is the media icon of the 'Middle East problem' ... In this way, she perhaps effects a displacement of the exhausted affect of indignation to a more discreet affect, an affect of indeterminate effect – curiosity, the desire to see closer up. I speak here of curiosity, and above I spoke of attention. These are in fact affects that blur the false obviousness of strategic schemata; they are dispositions of the body and the mind where the eye does not know in advance what it sees and thought does not know what it should make of it.³²

Ristelhueber achieves this subversion of certainties through oblique example more than by direct reference. As Rancière states here, the conventional image of separation in the Israel / Palestinian conflict is the high concrete wall separating zones. While images of the wall do remain a viable vehicle for some expressions of the apartheid like separation, their very

omnipresence induces the dismissal that comes with tired repetition. (A more useful reference to the wall is made when Banksy paints a peace dove in a flak jacket or a scene of tropical paradise as though through a gap, in an act of humorous irreverent graffiti.)

As images establish themselves as a 'way of seeing', they create the need for yet another disruption of themselves as a standardized viewpoint. Standardised viewpoints, exemplified by the separation wall in Israel, impose particular understandings. The wall, for example, invokes the tragedy of the separation of economies, people and families on the one hand and the idea of Israel under the threat of attack, on the other. The difficulty with these associations is that they are polarising and can easily become clichéd, that is, yet another institutional categorizing mechanism. This closes the subject off as already decided, so avoiding the need for any further exploration or discussion. What is important in the presentation of a new way of seeing is not its currency as a marker or sign, but its value as regenerative of the act of seeing itself. Some evidence of the way **Pictures of the Body** has changed audience views has been provided for me by the number of people who have referred me to images because they thought they would be good images to paint. Many other people, who have seen the works exhibited, have commented on the way that the documentary photographs they have encountered through news sources have triggered some recall of the paintings.

Ristelhueber's photographic series and **Pictures of the Body** both compromise a stereotypical response to the subject matter, by presenting it in a way that makes a stereotypical response incomplete or inappropriate. Any message, and there is one in both her and my series, is subservient to an acknowledgement of the viewer's role in self-determination. The viewer's autonomy is suggested by the way the subject is raised without recourse to standard (conventional) terms of reference.

It is also interesting to observe the formal elements in the **West Bank** series that consolidate the rupture of the separation through compositional phenomenological devices. The use of strong symmetrical diagonal emphasis – the road splitting each image – creates visual instability that operates, metaphorically and phenomenologically. The diagonal split of the image is an oblique sign of the separation wall and has very strong visual impact. The method of reframing the political confrontation of **Pictures of the Body** is different. My paintings reconfigure the material in a number of ways to upset normalised modes and use the 'optical blur'³³ to replicate the feeling of unease and insecurity. Affect can be the result of a synchronicity between subject matter and formal elements as in the case of Ristelhueber's photographs. It can also be

produced through disjunction as **Pictures of the Body** attempts. The aim in both cases is to engage the viewer's curiosity.

Avoiding the Message

Rancière's emphasis on the oblique derives from his emancipation project.³⁴ A direct approach to an issue unavoidably becomes polemic. On the other hand, the circumspection of an indirect approach, allows space for the audience to navigate the issue in their own way. While such a position still maintains some control over the reader's reception, this is not directed towards imposing a predetermined way of thinking. It is, however, still determinative and does encourage the idea of a 'right' way of conducting interpretation and communication. The ethical justification is contained within the communication as a concession of 'ignorance' of the 'Ignorant School Master', that is, the stance of not knowing, uncertainty, humility and pedagogic innocence. This denial of authority gives space for uncertainty and respect to the audience, but is also a political stance offering a model for the conduct of relations between interlocutors.

Pictures of the Body explores some of the disjunctions and inconsistencies between categorisations through, for example, finding beauty in unexpected places, humour in situations of stress, irony and other mechanisms of disruption. It makes no direct attempt to activate the audience politically through inducing a 'shop-worn affect of indignation'³⁵. Moral indignation is itself a mechanism of institutional social control which reinforces the norms that stultify and inhibit direct engagement and interpretation. In presenting the commonplace field of political contest for scrutiny, without too much stress on an authorial political or moral position, the pictorial representation becomes a question. The engagement with a question is always active and demanding of participation.



Fig. 10. **Pictures of the Body** (From left: Greece, Brazil, Thailand, London)

All of the above paintings from the installation ask some sort of question either about the narrative, its relevance to the cycle or its derivation and the recollection it might trigger.

When the question becomes rhetorical, because the answer is contained within the formulation, the respondent's possible engagement is limited to consent:

For example, one condition thought necessary for the politicization of art is the becoming-active of the spectator. This way of thinking already implies a judgment – namely, that to be a spectator means to be passive. But to look and to listen requires the work of attention, selection, reappropriation, a way of making one's own film, one's own text, one's own installation out of what the artist has presented.³⁶

In emphasising that reception is not passive – i.e. not (necessarily) 'the configuration of domination and subjection'³⁷ – Rancière's politics become progressive: interpreting the world is a means of transforming it, of reconfiguring it³⁸. The idea here is that stability, in the form of 'dead certainty', immediately initiates a hierarchical order which limits and categorises, and so divides the world into specialisms which become areas of expertise, thus separate from the citizenry. The categorisations and distinctions made to separate the various parts of human experience (like the normally accepted definitions of artist and teacher) are devices designed to confine and organise according to normalised value systems. Entrenched ways of seeing and knowing assume that validation is conferred by past precedent and thus discourages any experimental questioning of experience which might cast doubt on those established ways of knowing. Rancière's democratisation of both art and politics through this emphasis on the work of 'making one's own film' redistributes power to the citizenry.³⁹

Standard and Nonstandard Presentations

This research originates in the desire to investigate ways in which painting can provide new critical ways of thinking and understanding the world. I use the phrase 'new ways of thinking' to denote both new ways of thinking in detail, about specific subjects, but also to denote new *methods* of thinking. If the hermeneutic model is accepted, we are dependent on dialogue – the exchange of views with others – to extend both specific understandings and methods of thinking. Hermeneutics raises the problem that thinking is not possible without a method of thinking, but that these methods are always limited by their history and character. This suggests that thinking would not be possible outside the limitations of traditional understandings were it not for the fact that new technologies, like photography, and artists, provide new modes. History is the process of developing those initially uncertain methodologies until they are fully revealed over time. New technologies, however, also (eventually) suffer from the limitations deriving from their particular features or ways of operation. While they are useful in providing new ways of understanding for a time, they are always constrained by the inherent limitations of their make-up. A problem with systems generally is that they tend to be oriented towards the creation of certainties and thus neglect the potentially productive liminal ground that doubt and enquiry inhabit. Their advantage is that they establish the clear familiar common language (the mutually understood cultural conventions) that facilitates dialogue. Familiar paths are needed to explore those that remain unknown.

The paintings in **Pictures of the Body** attempt to negotiate a path between familiar and new ways of looking. They attempt to maintain the possibility of dialogue by referencing traditions but simultaneously liberate the viewer from the limitations of each, by offering two alternative ways of looking simultaneously through the painting / photography hybrid. Because this hybrid is not yet fully independent or articulated, and because the two ways of looking are so different, and each separately so useful, the ground between them is fertile territory for exploration. Hybrids are most importantly hybrids of the discourses that constitute the way of thinking that each separate discipline utilises. The notion of the photograph as index is one such attendant discourse which introduces the possibility of documentary. The idea of fiction is, again, only one

discourse amongst the many contained within the tradition of painting. All these primary adjectival discourses are, in turn, dependent on many more ancillary discourses that derive from the history that precedes the new technology. The advantage of new hybrids is that they are not yet automatically inhabited by already defined discourses which have become ideologies. The reader cannot find standardised precedents that enable easy, formularised, ways of (not) processing the subject matter. The combination of modes and the conflicting discourses they invoke, not only widen the vocabulary able to be applied to the subject matter, it also places reliance on the reader's experience and locates the subject within their own horizons.

My use of the general terms 'norms' and 'standard' apply to modes of communication and understanding both inside and outside specialist areas of thinking and practice. Grant Kester (in **Conversation Pieces**) develops the idea of established or traditional ways of thinking in saying:

We are constantly framing our experience of the world through representational systems. To interact with others we require a shared language, and even our visual experience involves a kind of literacy as we learn to interpret the conventions associated with photographs, cinema, paintings, street signs, and so on. These systems are necessary but also dangerous. They lead us to believe that the world is a fixed and orderly place and that we occupy a privileged position of stability and coherence within it.⁴⁰

Even specialist knowledge such as that applying to painting comes in the form of particular modes or genres through which particular meanings can be communicated. The genre painting of the 17th century allowed the subject of bourgeois life to be both examined and celebrated – similarly cubism, expressionism, abstraction, minimalism, collage and many other painting modes allow and open particular conversations. 'Painting' is a very broad category incorporating innumerable 'dialects' and has a tradition of colonising new areas of conversation. This requires new modes. **Pictures of the Body** is just such an attempt to wrest from photography the exclusive right to discuss such issues as current affairs.

The normal channel for communication about the site that **Pictures of the Body** explores is news media photography. Direct reference to current affairs is not yet standard in painting. Previously, Collage allowed a contemporary and political reference through incorporating contemporary traces but it makes documentary reference directly by using photographs. This corroborates the particular authority that photography claims.

Grant Kester points out that the role of art is to upset conventional modes of expression and 'understanding'. Referring to the challenge of the avant-garde he says:

This tendency is based on the assumption that the shared discursive systems (linguistic, visual, etc.) on which we rely for our knowledge of the world are dangerously abstract and violently objectifying. Art's role is to shock us out of this visual complacency, to force us to see the world anew.⁴¹

While the avant-garde of the early Twentieth Century saw its role to '...frustrate the existing norms and expectations so completely, as to render it utterly unpalatable to the appropriative powers of consumer culture'.⁴² My research aims to frustrate expectations within the framework of horizon linking.

A carefully fashioned hybrid can become the sort of nonstandard⁴³ mode that has the capacity to surprise and give a jolt to the viewer. This helps to precipitate the 'fresh look' I talked about previously. In keeping with its subject matter **Pictures of the Body** is not simply a subtle variation on a standard form. It is nonstandard as painting, photography, documentary, fiction, figuration and abstraction. It also offers different modes of perception from those of the originating discourses. In painting, modular repetition, aggregation as an installation and systematised manufacture, are all nonstandard. The research highlights hybrid spaces between dexterity and the rudimentary. It is nonstandard to photography in being mediated by hand rather than machine, and it rejects the authority paradoxically granted by (entropic) detail. It is also nonstandard even as a conventional photograph / painting hybrid in that it refuses, as a painting, to *resemble* a photograph⁴⁴. The installation does, however, identify itself as an installation of *paintings*. In doing so it gives clear direction as to the (imaginative) mode of thinking it advocates when considering this particular subject matter. The source news photographs should induce an empathetic response directly since they are stories about significant trauma, but they do not. **Pictures of the Body** challenges photography's place as the leading documentary medium by making a counter claim that painting can tell us much more about ourselves, and the stories around us, by presenting less detailed information.

The intention of the artwork is to promote interpretation, through encouraging a fresh look at the subject matter presented. Interpretation is partially instigated is through the activation of delay. Delay is the suspension of the resort to formularised (non) cognition. In **Pictures of the Body** this inability to find resolution is first created by the multiple hybrids operating, then, by the lack of those features that confer the authority that each mode relies on – the absence of usual signs

of painterly virtuosity and the lack of visual information of the photograph. The installation also undermines conventions through the juxtapositions of enjoyment and grim subject matter, of figuration and abstraction and the orderliness of hard edged divisions with the instability of optical confusion. A further volatility derives from the fact that the pictures become like photographs from a distance but become abstractions with proximity.

The point should also be made that interpretation itself is a nonstandard perceptual response. As I have intimated, the narratives presented are not the only subject of the work. More important is the capacity of the work to instigate interpretation as a response to an environment of increasingly dominating and totalising discourses that over-simplify the complexity of global existence exemplified by the tendency of increasing alienation from the other and polarisation around competing discourses. Some news media images of conflict and violence do increase our exposure to others, but often also inure us against any imaginative identification with their particular plight. We are required to be very selective about our instigation of interpretation simply because we are provided with too many situations when it might be applied. Through the practise of delay, interpretation enacts (Rancière's) ideas of emancipation from 'the visible, the thinkable, and the possible' as defined by 'the Police'. 'The Police' (I repeat) are those 'forces [that] conspire to maintain things as they are – maintaining the boundaries between disciplines, maintaining the order of the 'known'...'⁴⁵

A further departure from normal formats occurs through the way these paintings are hung to manipulate spatial features of the gallery through repetition. Each of a series of hangings tried to make different meanings available, both through the impact of the collective as an installation within the architectural space and through the differing associations between individual paintings. Two different, but equally affective hangings were presented during the public exhibition at **Aratoi Museum of Art and History** in 2010 under the title **45 Pictures of the Body**. All 45 paintings of the series appeared at some time during a suite of constantly changing arrangements. Since the hangings were formularised it was possible to remove and replace individual works in order to change the associations between them. Each arrangement was able to be seen as provisional (40 displayed at one time in the grid arrangement and 37 in the linear format), emphasising the continuing fluidity of the subject matter and the unpredictability of the historical events the exhibition focuses on. This experimentation with presentation was carried further in arrangements explored at **The Engine Room** at Massey, Wellington, in December 2010.

Reception, Comprehensibility and Pleasure

In Praxis

If artwork is to contribute to a viewer's ability to make productive adaptations to the continuously changing circumstances of contemporary life, it must embody particular features. My emphasis in this research has been to establish ways in which art can fulfil this role. One key component in this set of conditions is that the form of communication art adopts should be enjoyable. As Robert Holub says, the aesthetic experience is based in the 'primary unity of understanding enjoyment and enjoying understanding', or, to put it another way, in 'self enjoyment in the enjoyment of something other'⁴⁶. An emphasis on pleasure in comprehension through both production and reception locates the art work firmly within the praxis of everyday life⁴⁷. A particular point, however, should be made to clearly establish that the basis of enjoyment described here is not the enjoyment of aesthetic resolution that is often contained within romantic concepts of beauty; it is the enjoyment in the labour of coming to a (temporary) place of understanding, of becoming situated. This single assumption, of the need of all the citizenry to engage in a process of understanding, and that art can assist this understanding, is central to this research's justification of art's utility. That unity, between the need of the citizenry to forge understandings, and the ability of art to contribute to the project, establishes a further commonality of purpose between the artist and its audience.

Four central assumptions underpin this aspect of the research:

1. That painting is an effective mode of critique and is therefore a useful part of everyday praxis.
2. That painting has utility as an effective and articulate communicative mode in modifying cultural and social norms.
3. That painting can access a wide audience and does not need to evoke the distinction discourse.
4. That painting can affirm commonality and solidarity as a characteristic of its communicative mode.

There are some general rules in making politically infused art. I refer to some of these in my general discussion of hermeneutics as it relates to what we know and how we come to understandings. Rancière is useful in delineating the potential effect of oblique reference and of reference that avoids using the terms of a message. A description of a functional attitude for the artist, as teacher / companion, to adopt in relation to the audience, still needs some clarification. Through these paintings I want to make more evident the cooperative and interdependent nature of the artist / audience relationship in creating understanding. To make this clear it is useful to outline some aspects of reception theory that are relevant to **Pictures of the Body**.

Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer's Critical Theory (which formed a key plank in the philosophical basis for the mid 20th Century avant-garde) rejected the possibility of any gesture of horizon linking⁴⁸ on the basis that it located art within, and as a part of, bourgeois society. Their dismissal of bourgeois life, values and capacity was so extreme that obscurity was valorised as an act of revolutionary rejection. Such a position suffers from the shortfalls of any revolutionary impulse, in that it is not only totalising itself, but also simply advocates for the substitution of one hierarchical power structure with another. Robert Holub explores this:

What bothers Jauss about Adorno's theory is that it allows a positive social function for art only when the artwork negates the specific society in which it is produced. It thereby leaves no room for an affirmative and progressive literature, since literature is defined by its opposition to social practices, by its 'ascetic' character. Moreover, such a theory tends to promote an elitist, avant-garde concept of art through its valorisation of the non communicative function of genuine culture. Only art that stubbornly affirms its autonomy in the face of a reified culture, that becomes a "scheme of social praxis" by removing itself from that praxis, and that severs its ties with "normal" language and images, can be, according to Adorno, authentic art.⁴⁹

The aesthetics of negativity perversely precludes social change through its rejection of horizon linking as a founding principle. In doing so, it not only restricts its audience to those familiar with the language it uses, it also eschews a whole range of possible aesthetic modes that have an affinity with seduction, enjoyment, juxtaposition, counterpoint or persuasion.⁵⁰ The normal dialogic communicative mode is rejected because the integrity, authority and the equality of the (bourgeois) interlocutor is denied. The function of art as a critique in this scenario is confined to the 'shocking' gesture of total rejection. The denial of the idea of shared horizons as a first encounter with a critique is not conducive to reception. It makes no accommodation or recognition of the possible viability or validity of the viewer's position. Negativity deliberately inhibits engagement with the audience on the basis that shock is therapy for a desensitised, alienated and generally moribund bourgeoisie⁵¹. The measure of success becomes the

impenetrability and obscurity of the work within a grandiose assumption of its importance. As Grant Kester implies in **Conversation Pieces**, this does not allow the artist's contribution to be tested by comprehensibility:

Barnett Newman expresses a similar sentiment [emphasising the gap in horizons between the artist and receiving subject] in an interview with Dorothy Sackler in 1962: "Harold Rosenberg challenged me to explain what one of my paintings could possibly mean to the world. My answer was that if he and others could read it properly, it would mean the end of all state capitalism and totalitarianism."⁵²

That an artwork operates within established traditions or conventions does not, of itself, render it the 'confectionery' disparaged by the avant-garde. As I have shown previously, tradition provides a language without which, communication, let alone critique, is not possible. The contribution of the avant-garde to critical art work should not, however, be underestimated. The avant-garde demonstrated that art does indeed have power to change the norms governing the traditions within which it operated. Contemporary art is also indebted to the avant-garde for its redefinition of art as defined by its capacity for re-presentation, exploration, investigation and reformulation as part of, and as a contributor to, an understanding of the fluidity and transience of social and cultural organisation.

This research takes the view that art functions within, as well as against, prevailing societal norms, and that it functions as an institutionally sanctioned instrument in the interests of its member subjects and society at large. Its utility lies in its ability to question and provoke reflexivity at both a collective and individual level, thus encouraging creative change and avoiding forms of stagnation. Since capitalist systems require the constant adjustment brought about by change, art has a role in provoking that transformation⁵³. The value of the artwork, according to this research, depends on the relevance and communicability of its presentation of difference as critique within the framework of the norms of a contemporary situation.

If an artwork is to be comprehensible, and I argue this is crucial, then an understanding of the process of reception is at least as important as the understanding that lies behind the critique⁵⁴. The establishment of horizons of expectations are the first step in establishing a basis for comprehension. This is achieved through delineating the subject area being referred to, and in utilising a particular mode or language appropriate to the discussion of that subject area. If art is considered to be inherently political, then it will most effectively operate within a framework

which links understanding with enjoyment. The work of comprehension is the basis and instigation of that enjoyment⁵⁵. Gerhard Richter points out that this linking, in presenting, seeing and understanding creates a bond of solidarity with the audience.

What counts isn't being able to do a thing, its seeing what it is. Seeing is the decisive act, and ultimately it places the maker and the viewer on the same level.⁵⁶

The relationship between reception and reflexivity is direct. To emphasize the connections here I define the agency of an artwork in terms of its concurrent offer of communication and communicability; its encapsulation as a coherent (published⁵⁷) work; its necessary embodiment of difference in the form of critique; its acknowledgement of the role of authorship in reception, and its agency in facilitating the imaginative 'surrender of disbelief', which in turn, allows the reflexive reframing of subjectivity through encountering the experience of the other. Holub quotes Wolfgang Iser on this point:

When we appropriate an alien experience foregrounded in the text, we simultaneously background our own previous experiences. In assimilating the other, we alienate part of ourselves. "The division, then, is not between subject and object, but between subject and himself" (Iser p155). Since we bring forth this "alien" meaning, however, it should be more accurately viewed as part of our hitherto unrecognised consciousness. Understood in this way, reading really effects a "heightening self-awareness which develops in the reading process" (Iser p157). And it is this therapeutic, almost psychoanalytic consequence of our encounter with texts that Iser deems significant as meaning production.⁵⁸

Iser makes a similar point to Ricoeur's about making meaning through the text, but stresses its constitutional (therapeutic) potential. The reception of the text requires more than the simple offer of a communicable horizon. Any complexity needs time to assimilate. The reader/viewer needs reflective space which acknowledges their authorial requirements in making the aesthetic act. In **Pictures of the Body**, this space is provided by intervals, blanks or areas of indeterminacy where pattern, areas of flat colour or associations of colour predominate over representation. These spots of play are a necessary punctuation which allows the reader time to pause and reflect in the process of constituting meaning. They are spaces which form a gap that needs to be filled by the reader and, as such, are part of the invitation the work depends on.

Providing spaces within the work not only respects the role of reception and thus the reader, it also allows for the development of complexity in analysing juxtapositions, associations or even diversions that need to be unravelled constructively. The pause is a reflective one involving time. It interrupts the continuous assimilation of the text. In visual imagery, where all

information is presented at once, pause is incorporated within the structure through devices like: flatness, absence of detail, blurring, simplicity, limitation of palette, areas of emptiness or symmetricality. An installation of paintings also offers the possibility that gaps continue not only as empty spaces within, but also as gaps between paintings⁵⁹. Even though the following two paintings from the installation depict visceral action they are made up of, sometimes, quite large areas of flat colour and shapes that can be regarded separately from the action. These shapes and blocks of colour, taken in isolation, do not constitute meaning on their own. They can be seen as abstract patterning that provides a pause of distraction and enjoyment away from the narrative.



Fig.11. **Pictures of the Body** (Moscow Underground)

Fig.12. **Pictures of the Body** (ASB bank in Auckland)

Two images featuring a bombing on the Moscow Underground (left) and a hold-up at an ASB bank in Auckland. In **Pictures of the Body**, space for the viewer is provided through the simple presentation, areas of flat unmodulated colour and in the restricted palette. These same features contribute to the work the viewer must undertake. The optical blur, particularly, is a counterpoint to the comic simplicity in that it creates a need for interpretation and introduces instability. Some aspects of colour relationships can create either spaces for aesthetic engagement and enjoyment or act to further destabilise the image. The combination of pink, olive green and grey in the Auckland painting is disturbing, whereas the pink, blue, grey tan combination is much less jarring.

While it is understood that the viewer is responsible for their interpretive actions as I have pointed out previously, the author both limits and cues those actions. The cues are in themselves important elements of the work in that they model a way to encounter the difference presented. The function of the pastel colours of **45 Pictures of the Body**, and the job they do to confuse the like / dislike response, for example, is to encourage acceptance of irresolution.

The meaningful / vacuous jigsaw pattern of shapes and colours serves the same purpose. Such devices disrupt the viewer's normal spectatorial relations and categorisations, forcing them into new considerations that deviate from standard norms. Hans-Robert Jauss describes the interpretive work required of the viewer:

The juncture of two or more segments, in turn, constitutes a "field of vision for the wandering viewpoint" (p197⁶⁰). This referential field, the minimal organisational unit in the process of comprehension, contains segments that are structurally of equal value, and their confrontation produces a tension that must be resolved by the reader's ideation. One segment must become dominant, while the others recede temporarily in importance. Iser conceives of the resolution of this tension as the filling of a blank as well, since the reader must complete an abstract framework in order to accomplish this ordering of segments.⁶¹

It is devices like these that locate the series (and individual paintings) within a framework of work and playfulness in unravelling inconsistencies and contradictions. The paintings do not demand interpretation; instead they offer the possibility of it. Ricoeur suggests that it may be painting's imprecision that engenders interpretation, fusion (identification with the other as experiencing subject) and thus understanding.

Far from yielding less than the original, pictorial activity may be characterised in terms of an 'iconic augmentation' where the strategy of painting, for example, is to reconstruct reality on the basis of a limited optic alphabet. This strategy of contraction and miniaturization yields more by handling less. In this way the effect of painting is to resist the entropic tendency of ordinary vision....⁶²

And:

In this respect the techniques of engraving and etching are equally instructive. Whereas photography- at least unskilled photography- grasps everything but holds nothing, the magic of engraving, celebrated by Baudelaire, may exhibit the essential. This is because engraving, as with painting, although through other means, relies on the invention of an alphabet, i.e., a set of minimal signs, consisting of syncope points, strokes, and white patches, which enhance the trait and surround it with absence.⁶³

It can be argued from this that abbreviation and a limited optic alphabet may produce more by offering less, just as absence or vacancy may be more instrumental than description and detail. If this is the case then its basis lies in the authorial affirmation of imaginative capacity in the audience expressed through the reductive aesthetic strategy. If this is coupled with an awareness of the connection between experience through imagination / empathy and understanding, then the tactic can be seen as an attempt to instigate (hermeneutic) interpretation.

CHAPTER 2.

The Painting / Photography Nexus: The Hybrid



Left, Fig.13. Gerhard Richter, **Ema Descending the Stairs**, oil on canvas, 200 x 130 cm, 1966; Right, Fig.14. Gerhard Richter, **Ema Descending the Stairs**, Cibachrome, made for the Biennale of Sydney, 227 x 153cm, 1992.⁶⁴

Although the photograph on the right is of a painting – not of Ema – this pair illustrate where the boundaries of painting and photography do become confused. Richter's blur technique which produces a sheer (photographic) surface involves using a wide brush to eliminate any individual marks while the paint is still wet. There is a much closer relationship in terms of resemblance between the blurred painting and the out of focus photograph than between focused photography and super-realist painting. Most of Richter's 'photographic' works use this (lack of focus) resemblance rather than the entropy / abundance of information resemblance of super-realist painters. Uta Barth and Thomas Ruff use the out of focus resemblance. (The Cibachrome image is larger than the painting emphasizing that one historic limitation of photography – size – no longer gives painting any advantage.)

Photography is a very convenient means of referencing everyday life but is less useful in conveying experience.

Painting and photography have engaged in a conversational contest for more than a hundred and fifty years. I do not intend to describe those engagements in any detail even though **Pictures of the Body** is clearly informed by the dialogue between the two. The central hybrid

between painting and photography that the artwork presents is crucial to its success. The amalgam of the two modes makes a truth claim (through photography) at the same time as asking for some imaginative identification with the maker (and his relationship with the subject matter) that is a feature of relation with painting. The principle interest of this research is in both the generalities of hybridisation (as a method of presenting new ways of thinking), and in the specifics of this particular one especially in relation to the effect of photography's truth claim as index. The hermeneutic understanding of history, tradition and prejudice assists in understanding the ways the discourses (traditions) of each medium interact. One element of this is the understanding that ways of thinking / understanding presented within the mode determine the outcome of that consideration, since each relies on a set of assumptions that are productive of particular outcomes. Three differences between the painting / photography modes are utilised in the hybrid of **Pictures of the Body**. The first concerns the relationship of each to the idea of truth; the second focuses on the relationship each has with the embodiment of the author in the work; the third is to do with the extent to which the textual content is bound within its object-hood⁶⁵. A further matter that arises from these differences involves the extent to which each mode instigates (or fails to instigate) the resort to an imaginative response in order to locate meaning. In further consideration of the photography / painting nexus I will make brief reference to the historical inhibition of painting traditions to use the photographic quotation as an indication that actual events or circumstances are being discussed.

The photography theorist Kendall Walton⁶⁶ sees photography and painting as producing quite separate sorts of images. Photography being 'transparent', in the sense that we 'see' through them, and painting as opaque, in that we do not 'see' the referred-to object, but are required to imagine that we see it. He uses the examples of the child riding a stick 'as' a horse⁶⁷, we see a stick not a horse, but we are confronted nevertheless with the idea of horse riding. With regard to the photograph of a child on a horse, we do in fact see a child riding a horse. Although there is an imaginative component in both of these acts of reception, there is a substantive distinction between them in that painting requires an active initiation of imagination to create meaning. For the moment, it is only necessary to focus on the difference in the imaginative responses required to interpret a painting as opposed to a photograph, and the implications of the different references each mode instigates. The author, then, induces different responses and discourses when s/he employs different media.

An image presents information to the viewer both through providing detail and through the form of the presentation. The vast information content contained within a photograph is one of its defining features. In the past, this abundant content was contained within the photograph regardless, through the act of taking the picture⁶⁸. Informational content is a major constituent in the direction, or lack of it, given to the viewer as to the appropriate way of interpreting the image. This is especially the case where the intention is to refer to real life. The informational content of a photograph to some extent replicates that of ordinary vision. Since photography is defined by features that it has in common with sight – the lack of discrimination in its information presentation and its quantity – the viewer reacts to that information in a similar way to that of ordinary everyday sight. The difficulty is that sight does not imply understanding, whereas photographs do. A communication is a directed form of observation and perception. The quantity of information and lack of discrimination in the photograph can tend to restrict the medium's capacity to direct attention. On the other hand, the equation with vision encourages attention to be directed towards real life. It is this direct association with lived experience and normal visual perception that makes photography a useful structure from which to conduct observation and comment about the everyday.

The Index

Pictures of the Body utilises photography's ability to reference real events as part of its instigation of the affect which prompts interpretation. A narrative reference tied to a truth claim instigates a particular variety of response that is distinct from that instigated by fiction. The hybrid in the artwork attempts to combine this (truth claim) affect with the imaginative and contemplative experience normally associated with painting as fiction.

As I will show later, photography's claim to represent truth is founded in a tradition that has been undermined by advances in technology. The approach taken by this research, however, is that the history of beliefs surrounding any medium leaves a residue which persists whatever the efficacy of the disputation around them. The idea that the Photograph has a direct connection with the object it pictures derives from the process of its manufacture – the chemical effect of

light reflected by the object on sensitized photo paper. This relationship is held to be indexical in that the sign and the object have a direct causal relation in much the same way as exists, between say, fire and smoke or dust and time. This close connection, and the supposed minimal third party mediation between the sign and object, now includes the idea of the photographs 'scientific objectivity'. This feature is unique to photography amongst all visual representation systems. Also attached to the idea of index is its record, not only of the object, but the time (always past) that it recorded.⁶⁹

Rosalind Krauss provides a convenient starting point in making the initial description:

The Photograph is thus a type of icon or visual likeness which bears an indexical relationship to its object.⁷⁰

Barry Schwabsky confirms and expands on this a little:

The real attraction of the photograph – beyond simple economics: a photographic portrait cost considerably less than one in oils – lay not in its capacity for iconic representation but rather in what has been called its indexical quality, that is, the apparent causal connection between an object and its image.⁷¹

The description of the photograph as having that direct indexical relationship with its referent simply makes an assertion of connection, without any examination of its validity⁷². My position does not depend on an agreement about what photography actually does, because like other media it does many things. Rather, it is prepared to utilise the index concept even if a too literal acceptance of the idea of it is erroneous. I accept that the photograph can function if not 'as', at least in reference to, a truth claim. The idea that photography stands for, or is a stand-in for, reality, is culturally embedded as a convention. The strength of that relation will only weaken over time through the experience of photography misrepresenting reality. Changes in its status as an assertion of truth will only result from a traumatic rending, for no other reason than that its use 'as' truth functions well as an easy and economical reference mechanism not available elsewhere within visual or other media.

Documentary in a Lightbox



Fig.15. Jeff Wall, **View from an Apartment**, Transparency and Lightbox, 167 x 244 cm, 2005.⁷³

When the intention of the work is to invite a conceptual response (that is, a response which requires the viewer to enact a particular set of ideas through imaginative, empathetic or cognitive responses) the form of presentation must be appropriate to that aim. Jeff Wall's work requires the viewer to abandon standard forms. His large format photographic works are not about the presentation of (photographic) information, narrative, the arrested moment, beauty or any other of the normal photographic discourses. His work, if anything, is more about the compositional and narrative artifice of painting⁷⁴. His photographs are very carefully 'composed' and arranged. They are works of fiction. **View from an Apartment** recalls the family snapshot, the record of place and time that triggers nostalgia. In fact the image recalls no specific nostalgia because it is entirely fictional. What it does bring to mind are the reader's own associations with nostalgia, intimacy and domesticity. The apartment that this image was staged in was carefully chosen because of its view, and the juxtaposition of the messy domesticity with the messy city outside. Wall makes full use of the advantage of compositional discretion that painting has at its disposal. All his work uses this freedom to arrange compositional values according to his intent in directing his audience towards particular (painterly) interpretations.

In contrast, **Pictures of the Body** accepts the predetermined compositional information supplied through the process of (standard) photography and prefers to undermine its conformity

to this standard by substituting an abstract approximation for the (superfluous) information revealed. The similarity of the photograph and ordinary vision is substantiated by the information surplus of both, but also by the arbitrary composure of the visual perception of everyday life. A photographer may value the chance of a balanced or, say, tense composition but composition is a cultural construct and not consistent with everyday vision. The choice has been made in **Pictures of the Body** to avoid repositioning people or objects for compositional reasons because that would undermine the paintings' (photographic) truth claim. **View from an Apartment** on the other hand uses both (contrived) detail and deliberate composition to move perception towards painterly discourses. It is interesting to note one of these: the slight clumsiness of the woman in the left of the image. She has an awkwardness similar to Golub's figures but for slightly different reasons. Wall chooses to leave the artificiality (read staged nature) of his methods of image construction evident. Golub on the other hand gives his figures a Frankenstein ungainliness to augment the grotesquery of violence. The effect is similar in presenting an unease that creates a pause and a question for the viewer⁷⁵.



Fig. 16. Jeff Wall, **Dead Troops Talk**, (A vision after an ambush of a Red Army patrol, near Moqor, Afghanistan), 1986, Lightbox, 229 x 417cm, 1992.

Jeff Wall's work **Dead Troops Talk** (Fig.16) plays more directly with the truth claim in inducing affect, as if the work represented a truth, at the same time as formatting it in a way that is

manifestly a dramatic and fanciful simulation. (In the 'photograph', the soldiers are presented as interacting in a very lively and jovial fashion after death.) As with all of Wall's work this photograph is the product of months of work, hundreds of digital shots and the amalgamation of a selection of these multiple takes, through computer technology. I also note the sumptuous production, miniscule detail and huge scale of Wall's works, which confuse the documentary reference, and the surreal and macabre humour of the simulated wounds and play.



Fig. 17. Jeff Wall, details from **Dead Troops Talk**

While the association of the photograph with the idea of index carries a past acceptance, works such as Wall's undermine the efficacy of that connection through playing with our (false) understanding. It is important to note that Wall's imagery relies totally on that false indexical association to convey the complex levels of meaning that can be constructed from the work. But it should be noted that part of his comment does relate to the real and actual events of the Afghan war⁷⁶. The images still invoke narrative documentary as part of their emotional impact and affect. The referential potential of the indexical relationship (as icon, imprint, transfer, clue or trace⁷⁷) is useful, because it is lacking as an 'apparently intrinsic' quality, in other media. It is perfectly possible to make a presentation 'as true' through fictive media – novel, painting, print or poem say. The difference with photography is that the claim in photography has been seen as intrinsic rather than as artifice⁷⁸. 'Reality' must stay in inverted commas when equated with photography because even if the indexical relationship is accepted, the idea that the photograph signifies truth is still contestable⁷⁹.

The investigation into if how and why a truth claim, even a dubious one, invests imagery with an increased impact, is difficult to resolve in terms other than that of generalised cultural precedent. We treat 'actual' experience as being qualitatively different from fiction when in fact it is not.⁸⁰ The most rewarding avenue for resolution is to consider the visual truth claim as though it were true

for the purposes of that reference, while knowing that it is in fact not true. Alan Sekula disputes the notion of a photograph's status as a neutral notation of event and emphasises this functional aspect, in terms of the representational task required:

A photographic discourse is a system within which the culture harnesses photographs to various representational tasks...Every photographic image is a sign, above all, of someone's investment in the sending of a message.⁸¹

Sekula's idea still recognises the habit of photography's long connection with 'objectivity' science and 'truth'. He is saying that one of photography's tasks is to point to an actual event in / as time. This argument avoids any idea that intrinsic qualities make the photographic message distinct. He simply asserts that cultural conventions and history determine that the photograph is to be treated as a sign and that this representational mode is an indicator that the subject of reference is the 'real world'⁸².

The habit of photography's historical association with scientific 'objective' discourse has created a sort of branding that is hard to dislodge even through good argument. Susan Sontag implies that attitudes about photography are not responsive to logical examination and that the way we perceive a photograph is not justified by intrinsic qualities:

Photography implies that we know about the world if we accept it as the camera records it. But this is the opposite of understanding, which starts from *not* accepting the world as it looks...The knowledge gained through still photographs will always be some kind of sentimentalism, whether cynical or humanist. It will be knowledge at bargain prices – a semblance of knowledge, a semblance of wisdom,⁸³

Sontag raises questions about the way knowledge or 'wisdom' is achieved through the perceptive mechanism of looking. Her implication, that photographs do not in themselves provide any basis for understanding, could probably be extended reasonably to the act of looking generally. Just as the image itself is mute, so looking is also mute. Understanding predates looking in all its forms.⁸⁴ The implication of this is that formatting, other than that generated by the narrative content or detail of the picture, is necessary in order to constitute the communication. The picture is contextualised by discourses that are external to it.

The Documentary Mode

A key question that arises from this investigation is whether the presentation of a photographic truth claim induces affect or reflexivity more powerfully because the communicated events are seen as closer to actual experience. The plethora of painting referencing real everyday life, through quoting aspects of photography (as in the work of Gerhard Richter, Luc Tuymans and Yishai Jusidman amongst many others) indicates the utility of the device. Indeed, the abandonment of any painterly embarrassment in referring to the real, and the ease with which painting can now simply say ‘this is about real life – look I am making a photographic reference’, has opened up the possibility of commentary and critique to painting in a way that has not existed since photography’s invention⁸⁵.



Fig. 18. (Left), Yishai Jusidman, from **The Economist Shuffle**, Oil and egg tempera on wood, 72.3 x 77.5 cm, 2006. (One of a series of 16 paintings derived from thumbnail photos in the **Economist**).

Fig. 19. (Right), a news photo about recent demonstrations in Greece from the **Guardian** web-site.

I make a more detailed analysis of Jusidman’s work later. I make this comparison to emphasize the equivalence of the two images. I will show later that Jusidman uses the equivalence to normal news images as one element of his purpose.

Photography generally, but particularly documentary news imagery, presents visual information within a strongly contextualised framework. Its claim as the trace of an event located within time and space locks the viewer into a passive relationship of acceptance of a mediated, published, view of the world. News is after all commodified as a compression of reality. It is retrospective, consumable and condensed. The situation of the narrative action is separated from the site of consumption which takes place most frequently within the domestic environment of the home. The news image refers to the ‘aberrant’ through the notion of ‘newsworthiness’, meaning ‘that which is most likely to constitute interest and / or entertainment for a majority of consumers’.

Most often, this 'newsworthy' information is presented as spectacle, in a manner that is devoid of critique, as an isolated event, to be received in the manner prescribed by the corporate interest of the publication. Only very recently has the news image become corroborative in the sense that, say, tooth marks might be on Tolstoy's boy. Photograph and video capable cellular phones do now present images that witness participation in the narrative. Most often reportage is several times removed from direct experience and is used to locate an opinion or idea quite independent of that of the participating, pictured subject. The ability of a viewer to experience the image as though it were their own is arbitrated by this given, partisan and most often corporate context.

Ubiquity, Entropy, Information

Both news media photography and the domestic snapshot pose further problems in inducing constitutive dialogue because of their ubiquity. We encounter too great a number of photographic images to automatically initiate the time-consuming process of contemplation that constitutive experiencing requires. Ubiquity in and of itself creates a problem for photography in that too much exposure, of all the numerous forms of photograph we encounter, automatically inures us against engagement. Only if the photograph is particularised by a personal interest, known narrative, familiar context, or its opposite as a surprising presentation that extends norms (through the offer of, say, a hybrid like Wall's or through transgression like those of Robert Mapplethorpe⁸⁶), does it easily engage the viewer in interpretive process. Most photographic images are immediately subsumed into the normality of everyday non-interpretation.

As I have previously pointed out, because it contains superfluous information, the photograph (as a potentially constitutive⁸⁷ documentary record) often fails to clearly delineate the subject of the conversation or the interpretive path it is offering⁸⁸.

If photographs are viewed as indexical, it is their non-selectivity which bequeaths their evidential status. The more information presented the more substantiated is its claim as index because of its equivalence to ordinary visual perception. This entropic (disorder) of superabundance

induces the same reflex of filtering that is exercised by the eye in our everyday seeing. Just as in conversation too much attention to detail can be the mark of a bore, so with photography too much information can frustrate a viewer.

An overabundance of information does offer some possibilities for subjective engagement through focus on particular sites of poignancy for the viewer, like Barthes punctum⁸⁹. The uncut, however, is by definition not inter-subjective or communicative, since it is incidental to the author's intent. The abbreviation of detail that characterises **Pictures of the Body** implies that the information retained in the reduced format represents an object of sufficient size and importance to 'hold its place' in the painting. While some information selected by the viewer can 'stand for' the content of an image in the way the punctum does⁹⁰, the general rule is that too much information reduces the need for imaginative enquiry to fill gaps of uncertainty. Imagining and contemplation, which pave the way for reflexivity, most often respond to vacancy. Vacancy prompts curiosity thereby initiating the imaginative surrender of self required to accommodate the otherness which, in its turn, leads to reflexivity. The use of imagination is oriented towards solving problems, not in response to a set of claims presented as fact. The photographic document can easily become an authoritative or one-sided assertion, rather than a vehicle for imaginative exploration and experience. Barthes describes this proscription in describing his response to a portrait of himself:

[He is] troubled by an image of himself, suffers when he is named. He finds the perfection of a human relationship in the vacancy of an image: to abolish – in oneself, between oneself and others – adjectives; a relationship which adjectivises is on the side of the image, the side of domination, of death.⁹¹

The externally sourced description of oneself provides a poignant example of the difficulties of the attempt at representation. While the subject may recognise themselves, it would be a very rare portrait that would be considered comprehensive by the pictured subject. If a subject views themselves as being in a continuous state of change and development, then even the static nature of the presentation as a portrait would render it inadequate. Barthes is appalled by the proscriptive and frozen nature of the image and of the resultant adjectives, which leave no space for doubt, alternative interpretation or imaginative appropriation of the image or text. Adjectives elucidate through elimination as well as by providing imaginative cues, thus they often dominate the listener by imposing the speaker's view. An over-adjectivised image is a totalising claim, not only of a singular viewpoint, but also of the primacy of the author. To be

constituted through experience requires that the experience be one's own, even when that is achieved through the proxy of the author. In order for this to happen, the author must provide space for the reader to constitute the text according to their own history. This space recognises the validity and necessity of the reader's perceptive separateness. To repeat my previous emphasis: the reader can only interpret through the understanding they have gleaned from their own historical experience. The offer of a shared horizon, which accommodates the viewer's perceptive experience, is a necessary ingredient of communication⁹².

Painting as a Truth Reference

When painting's makes a truth reference, an instability occurs because of the historical, modernist rejection of art's social function through the 'art for art's sake' (self sufficiency) argument which restricted painting's documentary, commentary and narrative capacity. Traditional painting conventions have inhibited referential practice. As Benjamin Buchloh has outlined, a reality reference was only permitted when it was stripped of any meaning:

While it was possible for pop art of the sixties and seventies to integrate quotations from these [journalistic] photographic practices as "indexes" of common conditions of everyday life or as 'traces' of the "real"..... the inclusion of photographic quotation was permitted only on condition that it was extracted from its narrative, that it remained suspended in the play between referentiality and the subversion of formal convention, and that it ultimately - as a result of this suspension – appeared transformed into a purely aesthetic object according to the specific parameters of modernism⁹³

Buchloh suggests that the inclusion of photographic reference must exclude the reference to experienced reality (narrative) as a condition of its inclusion as Art. Although photographic reference in painting has become very common nowadays it remains 'non standard', not because it is not an accepted feature of painting, but because narrative is not yet a fully accepted feature of contemporary painting.

The co-option of photography's truth reference into painting was openly manifest in the work of Gerhard Richter who 'made photographs' with paint and frequently re-created news photographs as paintings⁹⁴. Two series of Richter paintings utilised photography's reputation as a representation of truth to augment the seriousness with which his subject matter was viewed. The first was the series **48 Portraits** of 1971-2, but most influential was the **October 18 1977** series detailing the capture and death of the Baader Meinhoff gang. Richter pioneered new ground in both his reference to real events through summoning photographic imagery, and in his reference to sensitive and contentious issues of the time. His truth claim is dependent on resemblance to harness believability. Whilst knowing that such believability was artificial he has said:

Of course, a long time ago I thought a picture was a picture only if it was painted. Later on I found to my great surprise that I could see a photograph as a picture – and in my enthusiasm I often saw it as the better picture of the two. It functions the same way: it shows the appearance of something that is not itself – and it does it much faster and more accurately. That certainly influenced my way of seeing, and also my attitude to fabrication: for instance, the fact that it doesn't matter at all *who* took the photograph. (p217) (Italic emphasis in the text)

And:

I meant the pictures to have this likeness to photography – if only for the sake of credibility that photographs have, especially black-and-white ones. There's something documentary about them. More than any other kind of depiction, you believe in them.

Isn't that a false faith?

It can be, of course. The only true reality is always the reality that we see and experience directly.⁹⁵ (Italics here are the words of Sabine Schultz)

Richter's work correlates with two claims I have made previously: that pictures function primarily referentially, and that the precision and gravity of that reference is enhanced by the appropriation of photography's history as index. Richter's evocation of photography is direct.



Fig. 20. Gerhard Richter, **Dead (Tote)**, from the **October 18 1977** series 1988, oil on canvas, 62 x 73 cm.

He effectively replicates the photographic 'look' even whilst undermining some of the features of precision and detail that the photographic truth claim depends on. Richter achieves this through his softening and blurring of the image to the point where some paintings are almost devoid of information – such as the 2nd and 3rd of the **October 18** series (**Arrest 1** and **Arrest 2**).

The potential problem for me with this device is that softening and blurring can introduce a sentimental element which overrides the subject matter⁹⁶. Many of Richter's blurred painting/photographs, especially his colour images, have a sensual sleepy quality which is seductive and makes them very easy to look at. The phenomenological encounter with the 'blur' painting often brings pleasure to the fore rather than the interpretation response. **Pictures of the Body** disposes of the abundance of photographic detail while still maintaining the phenomenology of the chaotic entropy that excess furnishes. The entropy in **Pictures of the Body** however, is referred to in a way that is more akin to Bridget Riley's work. It replicates the instability of information excess by substituting the optical instability of the hard edged interface between colours and shapes. These hard edges disguise disorder as order.

The Body of the Maker

*The human body lives in the mind of one who possesses a human body, and to live inside the human body possessed of the mind that perceives another human body is to live in a world of others.*⁹⁷

Throughout this thesis, I have argued that the role of the artist in establishing clear avenues of horizon linking is an important prelude to communication about a particular subject area. I also argue that avenues of horizon linking contribute to the ability and willingness of the audience to engage in interpretation with the offered text. One way in which this connection is achieved is through identification with the body of the author. As Ricoeur suggests, this is not a romantic encounter with a foreign psyche, it approximates more closely Tolstoy's encounter with the boy telling his story (see note 15). The 'proximity' of the body of the maker does two things: it allows the establishment of a link of commonality necessary for dialogue through physical presence, and makes evident the context from which the text derives presenting additional evidence for consideration, the human mediation processes of the work. Painting's obsolete technology –

that it is 'handmade' – is, in fact, its strength. It is through 'mediation of the hand' that painting provides evidence of the constitutive processes of the maker and becomes a mode that allows Ricoeur's 'horizon linking'⁹⁸.

The maker's embodiment in the text/painting, is an important distinguishing element between photography and painting. While the many decisions of subject and intention could be equivalent in both media, painting furnishes evidence of many more decisions of process. The difference is a matter of quantity and variety. **Pictures of the Body** provides unusual evidence of the hand of the maker since the paintings' initial presentation emphasises computer generated simplifications⁹⁹. The maker's hand is evident in the modification of these simplifications to culturally recognisable 'decorative' motifs.

A dominant flavour of the author in **Pictures of the Body** comes as a sense of obsessional preoccupation with both the subject matter and process. This develops from the number of works describing the same sort of social or political chaos, and their formularised, repetitive production. The body of the maker is embodied in the text as form. It becomes an entity not just in terms of the physical manufacture of the work, (brushstrokes, finger marks on the sides etc) but also as psychological position. The process of interpretation for the listener, as in conversation, starts with the interpretation of the situation of the speaker. The second step, of encountering the content, is conditional on first establishing where the speaker is 'coming from'. The body of the maker is contained in the text of a painting as performance. In photography, although this performance is present, reading it is made difficult by the degree of its technological mediation.

Traces of the process employed in making the paintings are evident on close inspection of the paintings. The detail of the paintings will reveal a careful, consistent application of paint to the point it has become opaque. The paintings are layered – sometimes up to three times – but not to utilize oil paint's transparent virtues. Instead, the layering expresses a rejection of the (emotionally loaded) gesture of the brush with its expressionist connotations. The brush marks are evident and express an obsessional preoccupation with the attempt to impose systemic pictorial order on the chaos of oppositional political interactions. Countering and balancing this 'obsession' are ridges of paint that create the borders between colours and occasional small spots or lumps of paint that disturb the surface uniformity. The surfaces of the paintings appear to be sheer from a distance but at close range become a complex testimony to the maker's

shaking hand and impatience with fine detail. They also show affection for the soft and sensuous matt presentation, the understatement of subdued colour and seem determined to perform a transformative act of subversion on the violent subject matter. The curiosity which draws the viewer to examine the detail of the surface and facture of the work locates them outside the optical zone for narrative comprehension and leaves them free to concentrate on abstract values of colour relations and composition.

The paintings can be seen as simple Photoshop reproductions screened onto canvas and simply filled in using a 'paint by numbers' formula, they do involve a much more complicated process of consideration and change. Although the image is screened directly onto the canvas enabling outlines to be drawn these often varied markedly from the contours indicated by the projection. The initially allocated colours were also frequently altered after the first coat was applied. A crucial decision making process involved the range and tonal graduations of the various limited range of these colours. The relatively narrow spread of overall tonal range (each end of the spectrum – 'blacks' and 'whites' are highly modified) and the evenly stepped orderly graduations between each colour contribute to the 'considered' mood the individual painting's manufacture suggests.



Fig. 21. Goya, Francisco, **The Shootings of May 3rd in Madrid 1808**, oil on canvas, 266 x 345 cm. 1814.

This painting serves as a reminder of the affective potential of painting as a commentary on historical events but clearly does not attempt to invoke the indexical reference in that it does not attempt to mimic everyday sight. There is no doubt where Goya stands personally in relation to the narrative presented by this image. A photograph, because of its inherent qualities cannot convey the authorial presence either as directly or with the subtlety of painting.

CHAPTER 3.

Simplified Imagery: Removing Information

The following illustrations show the ways in which an original news photograph has been altered through simplification, the elimination of tone and detail, reduction to 13 unmodulated colours and focused through cropping¹⁰⁰.



Fig. 22. **Pictures of the Body**, showing the aftermath of a bomb blast in Lahore.



Fig. 23. Above, painting as a thumbnail.



Fig. 24. photograph, cropped and reduced to thumbnail.

The first two views (large and small) of the painting gives an approximate demonstration of the difference that distance from the work makes in referencing a narrative (small) and in the way the image breaks up when viewed close (large). The second small image (Fig. 24) is the original cropped. Following is the full photograph:



Fig. 25. The original photograph from which the above painting was made.

As the comparison between these images reveals, many identifying details are lost through the simplification of the image into selected areas of flat colour. Further change of emphasis arises from the cropping decision which concentrates identification around the two standing figures. The information that the dead bodies are soldiers / police is also de-emphasised, thus recasting the bodies simply as 'victims'. The figure on the left turns out to be holding two rifles, providing an interesting but distracting piece of information. The upturned motorbike is almost absent from the painted image. The connection between the dead police and the standing figures is represented simply by same colour referencing.

An interesting aspect of the Photoshop simplification processes I have employed through the series is that it is just as indiscriminate in eliminating detail as photography is in recording it. Narrative action, which is largely preserved in the image, is more important in inviting empathy than contextual detail is. If this is the case, it would substantiate my suggestion throughout this exegesis that there is an inverse relationship between informational quantity and the interpretation that empathy implies. While it is certainly possible to spend time with the original photograph examining detail and (punctum) inconsistencies – like the colourful road marker on the right – the multiplicity of detail is filled with potential meaning and speculation but is very difficult to read conclusively and so fails as communication. The inevitable, but not apparent, evidence of authorship is a lack in the original photograph. The focus of the painting (like the Gaza painting) is the emotional plight of being surrounded by the bodies of your companions. It exposes an authorial position in the same way that Goya's painting does.

Lack of interpretive direction limits photography's capacity as meaningful dialogue. Dialogue needs two authors. As painter, I have become an author in my interpretation of the Lahore image and have presented one aspect of it for discussion. The central question I am asking the viewer in this particular painting is: what would you feel like if you were in the situation of these two figures? My direction as author is not restrictive of the viewer's authorship. General direction of focus is not only a feature of dialogue; it is also a feature of the intimacy established through commonality. My question, asked in the subdued tone that it has been couched in, is the sort of question that might be asked of a very close friend. Somehow it assumes commonality through the specificity of its focus and its request to imagine.

While the reduction of visual information down to abstract shapes serves to withhold detail and hone the focus on narrative, it also offers an optical instability which is hard to reconcile with the static (and meaningless but easy) constituent shapes. The eye is caught between the need to withdraw, to get away from the meaningless interaction of the abstract shapes at close range, and the desire to get a sense of the figurative content of the painting from a distance. At the same time some pleasure (and pause) is to be found in that same meaninglessness of the jigsaw of 'condensed' detail. The pastel colours used consistently throughout the series also provoke an uncertain and ambiguous response in offering both attraction and repulsion concurrently. The context offered to the viewer is not the two rifles, the motorbike, the road markers; it is the anxiety and uncertainty of the imagining author¹⁰¹.

Digital Modes of Modification

Invented in 1915 by Max Fleischer, 'rotoscoping' was a manual method of converting a screened photographic image to a cartoon format. More recently the technique has become computerised. The intent of its use, as in Adobe Flash animation and Photoshop's posterising, is to create divisions between the tones and colours of an originating photograph in order to reduce complexity by eliminating gradations between those colours and tones. A useful analogy for the simplification can be seen in the contour lines indicating altitude in mapping. The choice of gradation gives the cartographer control over the degree of detail presented. In the same way, the artist is able to choose a level of detail in encoding shapes and colours. It is possible to select the number of colours / tones that make up the image from just black and white, right through to the innumerable combinations that constitute any pixelated colour image. My painting uses Photoshop's 'posterising' to very quickly and simply achieve a 'map' of this reductive, cartoon-like codification.

I have previously characterised particular media as having unique features which (like any language) both allow and restrict meaning construction. I have called these characteristics 'standard' features. Cartoons and comics have a longstanding history which have bequeathed particular standard features to their mode. I am most concerned here with two of those features. The first is the cartoon's traditional concentration on narrative deriving from its history of providing simple entertainment for children. The second is its use as a diagrammatic device in the scientific explanation of mechanical interactions and relations, such as those between body parts, cells interacting, or even landmasses. The overriding aesthetic of the cartoon is the simplicity and directedness of its communication about its selected subject.

As a simplified diagrammatic exposition of a situation or dynamic, the cartoon focuses on basic interactional, mostly narrative connections at a level of abstract principle, without emphasising subtlety or detail. As such, it attempts a generalised and abstract (non-specific) depiction, which relies on the readers' imagination to fill in the gaps from their existing knowledge. Comics and cartoons are a codified¹⁰² visual system. Although cartoons do have the capacity to refer to specific characters and thus differentiate between them, **Pictures of the Body** removes such particulars to record the figures as more generic. My codification distinguishes the figures from

each other, but not to the point of recognisability. This concentrates attention on the narrative action as generalised human behaviour, rather than as that of a specific individual. This abstraction (the non-specified protestor, victim, aggressor etc) requires an imaginative extrapolation from the viewer to substantiate the veracity of the narrative claim. When the truth reference is suggested, the viewer is invited to test the narrative on the basis that it did / could have actually happened. The news photograph does not require the viewer to go through this empathetic corroboration simply because the indexical association already implies truth.

As I have suggested, the comic / cartoon mode has two distinct areas of utility – simple entertainment and scientific exposition – making a combination of enjoyment and pedagogy that are useful constituents of artistic practice. The capacity of cartoon to open up philosophical discussion is illustrated by the feature films **Waking Life** (Richard Linklater 2001)¹⁰³ and **Waltz with Bashir** (Ari Folman 2007)¹⁰⁴. The rotoscoping¹⁰⁵ technique of **Waking Life** and the Adobe Flash animation of **Waltz with Bashir** have been referred to as ‘semi real’ in that they offer a visual format containing traces of the originating index of photography, while appearing in a format most commonly associated with fantasy. The simplified, scientific, diagrammatic tradition combines with photography’s history of indexical association with the real, to compound the association with believability that I referred to earlier in relation to Gerhard Richter.



Fig. 26. Two stills from the movie **Waltz with Bashir**: Left Tanks invading Beirut and Right, Execution of Muslim civilians by Christian militia as seen by the ‘narrator’ through binoculars. It is of interest that the small size of these images consolidates their perception as ‘photographs’, whereas the size of presentation on a movie screen emphasises their cartoon character.

Presenting historical information in a fictional format locates the textual content in a mode where normalised, (non)-reflexive responses are contraindicated. The effect of this is to circumvent the connections we make with conventional formatting by placing the normal response at one remove. This check of the normal patterns used to process information is one of those delays I

have referred to as being necessary to institute interpretation. This particular delay invites the 'norm' to be replaced by a considered, distanced and experimental standpoint, which might encourage freer and more abstract contemplation. Some equivalence exists here between Wall's **Dead Troops Talk** (fiction in the form of photography) and Ari Folman's use of a fictional format – animation – to present documentary, in **Waltz with Bashir**¹⁰⁶.

Waltz with Bashir and **Waking Life** present abstract concepts for consideration. Both are set in a contemporary time frame and involve introspective conversations about reality and its relation to memory and dream. In both films, the maker features as a character speaking in the first person. **Waltz with Bashir** presents a series of related issues: Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and the patterns of obsessional dream and nightmare that are symptomatic of it, therapeutic methods for the recovery of memory, and a narrative account of the context in which this symptomatology originated. The narrative describes massacres by Christian militiamen at the muslim Shatila and Sabra refugee camps. Linklater's **Waking Life** is a more general and fanciful existential discussion of the possibility of life itself being an illusion, and of the uncertainty of normalised modes of perception.



Fig. 27. Four stills from **Waking Life**, a film about talking, thinking, making sense of dreams, and free will.

The rotoscoping translation of recorded film footage into animation is a major factor in the two films' ability to engage attention when discussing political and psychological subject matter. A large part of the reason this is possible can be attributed to the non-standard form of the discussion's presentation. Other aspects, such as the lack of distracting photographic detail, and the aesthetic interest of the 'limited optic alphabet' (which encourages aesthetic enjoyment), also contribute to the ability of these works to provide a critical viewpoint in investigating problems in praxis. Like **Pictures of the Body**, these films employ a subdued palate in an attempt to remove emotive content from the subject matter and thereby provide an environment for reception that is conducive to thoughtful scrutiny. If the images were 'exciting' in the way that, say, pop images try to be through using primary colours, the 'excitement' would be counterproductive to the interpretation the author is indicating.

Installation: Paintings in Space

Several arrangements of **Pictures of the Body** have been tested. The group of paintings, as **45 Pictures of the Body**, was installed in two different configurations at the Masterton gallery **Aratoi** (see Figs. 28, 29, 34). In both of these arrangements at Aratoi the position of the paintings were regularly changed. Later, at **The Engine Room** at Massey, Wellington, a flexible (hanging) grid pattern was installed which allowed a series of hangings to be tested through simple rearrangement (see Figs. 31, 32,). The greater architectural complexity of **The Engine Room** prohibited the visual simplicity achieved with the two different **Aratoi** arrangements. Two further hangings for **The Engine Room**, are considered. The first is a single line with equal gaps between works covering three walls (as in Fig. 30 at my studio). The second would also use a linear format but have the paintings much closer together (Fig. 33). Both of these alternatives would allow individual paintings to be re-placed, and could replicate the fluidity of the installation as occurred in **Aratoi**.

The objective in any final arrangement is to achieve a balance between the affect of the paintings as individual documents, and the collective effect of the group in modifying the impact of the traumatic narratives.



Fig. 28. Linear arrangement of **45 Pictures of the Body** at Aratoi, Masterton. July 2010.

Minimalist Installation

The exhibition of paintings **Pictures of the Body** is described in this research as ‘installation’ and as ‘minimalist’. The reason for the latter (as Michael Fried would say¹⁰⁷) is the work’s emphasis on theatricality. The work is concerned with affect and the effect of this in producing consideration and reflexivity about the subject matter. The creation of a relationship with the viewer, which engages him / her in a self-aware encounter with the narratives presented and the questions they ask, is central to the work’s intent. As the previous and following illustrations attest, the installation, as an arrangement of the paintings on the walls, is an important element in creating an environment which provides cues to the audience about how the work can be read. Aspects of this context are conveyed through the minimalist modes of repetition and modularity and also through simplicity of expression and layout. Although the number of

paintings in the set might be seen to contradict the assertion, a key component in the artwork is that 'less is more'. This 'less' of the individual painting's detail is counterpoised by the large number of paintings. The repetition of the theme becomes a chorus adding to the significance of each constituent part by augmenting the cumulative impact. The 'less' is expressed through the simplicity of the pictorial representation and through the modular repetition that provides imaginative and reflective space.



Fig. 29. Arrangement of **45 Pictures of the Body** on one wall, 700 x 300 cm. **Aratoi**, Masterton. June 2010.

The **Aratoi** gallery space was square and the two installations there utilised the dimensions in different ways. Being surrounded by the paintings (Fig. 28) invoked a sense of claustrophobia and inhibited resolution because the arrangement avoided a beginning or an end. Facing them as one spectacular wall (Fig. 29) was overwhelming as a totality and provided an unwanted resolution through the very fact of its size. That resolution – that the work was an impressive amalgam of images of confrontation and violence – was easily achieved by the viewer and provided a conclusion that avoided the more time consuming and difficult task of unravelling the representational and narrative complexities of individual works. The large grid arrangement undermined another feature of the individual works. It dominated the viewer's decisions about their location in relation to each painting by requiring them to find a place where all of the paintings could be taken in as one view. In both the **Aratoi** arrangements, the viewer's need to move either closer or further away from an individual painting to achieve a viewing distance was

lessened by the lack of a (gap) distinction between them. Since variation of viewpoint occurs between the works (from close to distant, from flat relief to engagement in more pictorial space), the need to change distance in relation to each image is a useful augmentation of the insecurity that engagement with the narrative in each can encourage.

I have stressed throughout this exegesis that my intent with the work was to provide a set of narratives which involved questions that could not be easily deciphered or assimilated. An aim has been to allow the viewer to enter the liminality of theatrical suspension and uncertainty and to find it comfortable enough to stay there. To achieve this, the viewer has to be engaged in a response which incorporates both attraction through formal structures and some degree of shock in coming to grips with the subject matter. The aim is to allow the viewer to spend the time with the subject matter in a way that is not available through normal modes. To maintain this 'bounce', and time for consideration, it is important that the installation does not encourage easy resolution.

The way the work was installed has a significant impact on the way the individual paintings are read. Three installation factors (numbers, space, repetition,) have important effects. The number of works displayed at the same time makes for impact. Numbers can be seen in terms of (noise) volume. A large number of paintings counteracts the quietness of the individual painting's 'withdrawal'. The space between paintings is a more complex issue. Proximity tends to encourage the attempt to establish narrative or visual connections; distance tends to favour a reading of each painting as separate. Repetition of the same size, shape, theme and treatment makes a claim about the paintings as a collective, but proximity (as in the linear **Aratoi** arrangement) describes that collective as a whole constituted by parts instead of distinct (and independent) entities that modify each individual by reaffirmation. As a general rule, the closer each painting is to its neighbour the less the viewer will spend time with each in the attempt to engage with its particularity. The psychological and emotional scenario each image presents is de-emphasised by proximity. At the same time the emotional impact of the violence presented is augmented by both proximity and quantity. The claustrophobia of the arrangement in Fig. 28, and the oppression of the size and scale of Fig. 29 both, to some extent, compound affect. My intent, however, is to test painting's ability to do more than simply induce an (entertaining) emotional response. It is useful to emphasise again here that the mere instigation of an emotional response will not necessarily prompt the reflection or interpretation that I have described earlier. My intention is to encourage a disengagement from norms, rather than

confirming them through instigating a standard response by 'sensational' stimulation. The aim is to invite a more active but detached engagement by the viewer. As Paul Auster alludes to in this generalisation from **Man in the Dark**, audience participation forms a continuum from passive to very active even within the overall context of enjoyment:

Escaping into a film is not the same thing as escaping into a book. Books force you to give something back to them, to exercise your intelligence and imagination, whereas you can watch a film – and even enjoy it – in a state of mindless passivity.¹⁰⁸

While the relationship of the narratives to each other is important, so also are the temporal considerations of delay (within and between the images) and the permission and scope for the play of imaginative and interpretive subtlety. Intervals that vary thematic consistency serve to interrupt an easy reading and cast doubt on an obvious interpretation. Variations between paintings, in the ease with which the translation task can be undertaken, provide both cues and obstructions for the viewer. The intervals of differing subject matter – the scenes of institutional violence, those of police caring for victims, or Muslim figures in shock and despair, as well as those prompting humour – are oriented towards undermining the resort to stereotyping. My intention at **Aratoi** was to augment this instability of subject matter relation through arbitrary changes by altering the arrangements within both the large grid and the linear frameworks. The disjunction between the title (**45 Pictures of the Body**) and the number of paintings presented – 40 in the grid and 37 in the linear arrangement – was intended to allude to this instability. This device was, however, entirely counterproductive in that many viewers did achieve a completely irrelevant resolution by counting the number of images and focussing on the discrepancy as incomprehensible. The final installation at Massey will be called more simply: **Pictures of the Body**.

My emphasis throughout this text has been on the ability of painting to locate the viewer in a space of dialogue which is productive of the empathy, reflexivity and uncertainty that provides some liberation from normal modes. It can be seen from the experimental installations I have documented that this was quite a difficult understanding to come to, since, in effect, space around each painting reduced the number I could present in the gallery space. My 'theoretical ideal' weights the painting and gap equally (Fig. 30). The further ideal would present at least forty paintings but would require sixty metres of wall space.

As can be seen in Fig. 31, (and several other arrangements) I made serious attempts to have a large number of paintings with maximised space around each painting. Each of these arrangements served only to impose a distracting visual structure which once again undermined the concentration that could be given to each painting. Fig. 32 illustrates a compromise arrangement that comes between the two **Aratoi** arrangements and in so doing it inherits the problems of both, without having the virtue of either.



Fig.30. Experimental hanging with equal spacing between paintings in my studio, Wairarapa, June 2011.



Fig.31. Experimental arrangement in checker board fashion. **Engine Room**, 2010.



Fig.32. Experimental arrangement as a two high linear arrangement. **Engine Room**, 2010.



Fig.33. The arrangement and spacing that will be used for the resolved hanging at **The Engine Room**, Massey, tested in my studio, Wairarapa, June 2011.

The alternative arrangements of the installation (as outlined previously) did realize affective outcomes, but only the final one (Fig. 33) implements the tension between the diverse elements and discourses I required. One of these elements concerns painting itself. A traditional discourse around painting defines the medium in terms of its ability to achieve fulfilment solely within the spacial boundaries of a single canvas as a complete 'statement' in and of itself¹⁰⁹. That a painting should even aspire to embody such resolution is a grand claim about itself. **Pictures of the Body** tries to thwart this assumption by challenging the validity and viability of the idea of 'resolution' from the outset. One of the methods through which the negation of such traits can be made is through frustrating the primary discourse – that it is possible to make a complete statement. This is attempted in **Pictures of the Body** by adding nuance through the series, by stressing the provisional nature of each single canvas, by relying on the viewer's memory, knowledge and understanding to contextualise the content of the image, and by making the sum of the parts reflect on and augment the totality. The tension between the module and the totality is a very important ingredient in the installation. This tension probably would be optimally activated if the paintings were arranged in a simple single linear format with spaces between, equal to the width of each painting. But, as I suggested previously this would take up sixty metres of wall space. **The Engine Room** is a complex and small architectural space and is suited to a much more condensed arrangement. The arrangement of Fig. 33 adapts to this size and arrives at a solution which incorporates the tensions the work needs. The 12 to 13 centimetre separation allows a pause between paintings but also allows a sufficient number to be presented to accentuate the modular formatting.

This very simple arrangement emphasises repetition but at the same time highlights the blank or space between each painting. It presents some of minimalism's references to reductive geometry, repetition and denial of expressionism while being figurative, externally referencing and narrative. It also conjures up the blank neutrality of minimalism but then embodies that as the psychological stance of the author.

Pictures of the Body becomes an installation by representing photography's ubiquity through presenting a large number of works, at the same time as requiring the viewer to read the works using the imaginative contemplation asked for by painting. The installation problem to some degree coalesces around the way the presentation affects the viewer. It becomes in large part a question of scale.

Scale



Fig. 34. **45 Pictures of the Body** arranged as a grid, showing the scale.

Scale has been an important factor in all the decisions made in relation to the artwork. The first aim – to establish a basis of commonality and dialogue through horizon linking – is articulated through the way the individual paintings, and the collective group, negotiate the physical relationship with the audience. From the initial decision about the size of each module (75 cm square), through to the height the paintings will be hung, considerations of phenomenological affect have been paramount. That is not to say that I understood this from the outset. While that initial decision about the size of the canvases was deliberate, many subsequent arrangements failed to synchronise with that first intuitive decision. The first presentation of the work (Figs. 29, 34) was as a grid almost 7 metres long by 3 metres high. This was an attempt to combine impressive scale, to make an overall impact, with the subdivision marked by each module compensating for grandiosity by dissolving into individual narratives. It was an attempt to have my cake and eat it. I had hoped it would be possible to stand at various points in front of the conglomeration and read the individual stories separately from the effect of the totality. In the end this was not possible. The cumulative impact of the whole overpowered the ability to spend time in contemplation of individual paintings. The scale and the eye's tendency to elide from

one image to another without unpicking the individual narrative did not allow attention to be given to particular paintings. It was spectacular and because of this the critique did not predominate. The effect was a reduction in the encouragement to contemplate, an increase of the impassioned argument and a domination of the physical body of the viewer. The accumulation as a grid negated the modest size of the individual paintings. In finally making the decision to space paintings a little and present them as a line, their size, accentuated by the slightly low hanging, articulates a relation of companionability that is most conducive to dialogue.

Other questions of scale operate within the paintings themselves. One concerns the proximity to the work. The figuration in the paintings changes from abstract to almost photographic depending on the distance from the work. The need to find a place to view each painting requires the viewer to actively engage in negotiating a physical relationship with each painting. The looking, changing, instability, and the need to unpick each image because of its slightly different viewpoint or content is an important aspect of the work. This operation involves the viewer in the process of hermeneutic interpretation. As each view allows a different reading, so the viewer collects more readings, which feed back in creating a changed reading of the whole. At close proximity the images change from violent narrative to offer the possibility of almost vacant observation of abstract relationships. Because of the abrupt transition between the colours / shapes they can become independent of the narrative and exist as Brancusi-like profiles. This provides some respite from the domination of narrative.



Fig. 35. Detail from **Pictures of the Body** showing the simple figuration and the way some blocks of colour can become independent of the narrative and figuration.

While the critique of photography, the media and our objectification of the dismal plight of others' suffering are constituents of the work, they are just that. The ambition of the work is to offer a way of seeing this pictured world of catastrophe that avoids normal responses and encourages a more measured and contemplative response. The work is concerned with the suspension of judgement and the modification of ways of understanding this 'news'.

CHAPTER 4.

Case Studies, Modes of Documentary and Disruption



Fig. 36. Pieter Bruegel, **Battle between Carnival and Lent**, oil on panel 118 x 164.5 cm. 1559.

Battle between Carnival and Lent work addresses an abstract polarity – hedonism or religious restraint – without necessarily taking sides. It simply posits the polarity for the purposes of consideration. It provides a 16th Century example of the sort of critique that is presented in the more recent work I cite later.

This thesis attempts to locate a suite of paintings as part of a contemporary practice based in critique and commentary that continues a tradition started in the 16th Century. In this section I analyse a number of contemporary artists whose work depends on the critique of 'big, social' themes¹¹⁰. A particular area of interest in this research has been the way the mode of critique fits with the substance of the critique, that is, the attempt to present a critique that remains

consistent in what it attempts to say and in how that was said. The reason for this preoccupation is my observation that often the mode chosen, or aspects of it, present discourses that tend to nullify the ostensive critique. This tendency for the mode to subvert the message is exemplified clearly by neo-avant-garde work that uses impenetrability as a device of shock, confusion and control, at the same time as supposedly presenting anti-authoritarian critiques¹¹¹.

The critique that I favour does not attempt to persuade or coerce, but instead affirms a view of the world that emphasises acknowledgement of the validity of individual experience without judgement or the need to impose a particular view. **Pictures of the Body** avoids the ethical or moral claims that, say, Leon Golub or Adrian Piper¹¹² make. It tries to present specific human behaviours as neutral. The critical component comes through exposure not judgement. The repeated, indifferent gaze of the author about the pictured narrative does not supply or demand a specified response of moral outrage or political engagement; it simply creates an opportunity for the reassessment of institutionalised political violence.

The critical intent of **Pictures of the Body** is defined by a complex matrix of related aspirations. First it aims to bring a matter of social and political organisation to the fore. A second objective is to present this subject matter in a way that requires the viewer to come to their own, rather than a standardised view, of the subject matter. The third objective is to advocate for the viability of non-standard, non-defined viewpoints by normalising such de-positioning as part of the enjoyment of the free exchange of dialogue. These objectives are focussed and precisely directed, but, in making the critique, utilise a complex and disparate, often conflicting, mix of discourses from the three dominant modes: photography, painting and the diagram or comic. An important aspect of the research has been to make use of contrasting ancillary discourses entrained by the modes referred to, to undermine the certainties entertained by each. This highlights the limitations of any particular ideology or system. Any system of praxis – painting, photography or comics – claims efficacy in terms of its ability to project its own authority, authenticity and utility as a way of seeing the world. Systems entrain unspoken discourses of certainty and efficacy to substantiate their methodology. I needed to avoid or countermand these tokens of authority, at the same time as invoking other discourses embedded within the same mode. This variety of differentiated discourses constitutes the vocabulary of the hybrid I have adopted. Any hybridisation requires an awareness of the discourses implicit in each

medium. My intent is to undermine the idea of authority itself by opposing each competing discourse with another. This has the additional impact of increasing awareness of these discourses by making them more explicit, rather than implicit, aspects of the mode and consequently, the meaning.

If painting has an ability to operate to modify political attitudes, that will only occur if it escapes from some of its traditional presentations and adopts new methods. One such outmoded referential method is mimesis. Film and television use a domineeringly mimetic method of reference in both documentary and fictive genres. This acceptance of mimesis, and the great currency film and television give it to substantiate their reference, fails to include the understanding Susan Sontag makes clear that resemblance to real life does not equate with understanding¹¹³.

I have previously suggested that an important aspect of the tradition of critique is its implicit dependence on creating a relationship with the viewer that allows for at least the possibility of consensus about the subject being addressed. Some of the issues that are highlighted in **Pictures of the Body** are themes that occur throughout the four-hundred year tradition of critical painting. However, the work articulates a different approach to normal critiques through synchronising a common subject for critique (violence), with a contemporary understanding of the way relationships, which are always the subject of scrutiny, are created and modelled. The aim in this work is to present a critique which offers an open question and models the theoretical detachment that might offer a way of understanding otherness. The aim is not to offer an answer, since uncertainty is seen as a place for permanent, rather than temporary, occupation. The offer of sociability and commonality, required by the implicit appeal for agreement contained within any critique, is seen as central to both the idea of critique and to a contemporary awareness of ways of understanding relation.

This thesis attempts to activate sociability through acknowledging the separate integrity of the viewer, and his/her position, by not prefacing an oppositional position. The requirement to unravel the visual information, in order to achieve clarity about the situation being addressed, places both maker and viewer as participants in the game of unravelling the puzzle presented. The reductive presentation, the modular repetitive formatting and the quiet pastel coloration all contribute towards a presentation of the subject matter stripped of the emotional visceral content, thereby helping to delay or defer the stereotyping that comprises a normal polemic. In

avoiding a conventional attitude to the violence presented, the work undermines the resort to normed responses and in doing so attempts to provide the viewer an opportunity to find their own position outside standard discourses.

Hidden discourses

Critical exposition is almost invariably based in comparison. If two examples are juxtaposed, at least a tentative comparison takes place. When a more than two sided comparison takes place, say if three or more options are featured, the critique becomes more open. The more open a proposition is, the more it recognises the reader/viewer's autonomy. As I have claimed repeatedly, my purpose is not so much to give attention to a particular subject it is to focus on the critical position itself. The critical process is what grants the thinking subject autonomy.

I have previously said the field of my critique is not confined to historical or political events and practices. Underlying events and practices are abstract concepts concerning, for example, relation, understanding, perception and communication. Ways of looking and the normative beliefs that prompt actions are constructive of the events I highlight. My discussion is complicated by the huge variety of modes of critique. Each of these communicates different meaning through the use of the particular mode chosen. Irony¹¹⁴ for example contains humour that is focussed as ridicule. Ridicule denotes, justifies and reinforces objectifying attitudes to its subject, and thereby subliminally advocates for intolerance. Sloganeering¹¹⁵ simply posits the virtue of a fixed position; it brooks no debate and thus takes a totalising stance even when it is critiquing totalitarianism! Shock¹¹⁶ has been used as an avant-garde tactic but similarly corrals its audience into passive acceptance or rejection. The presentation of a duality, a juxtaposition, has some utility in drawing attention to sites of division and possible compromise, but remains over-simplified and two dimensional when we operate, and think, multidimensionally. Negation is useful in highlighting problems, but becomes restricted in its ability to invoke change, because of its own pessimism.

The use of a particular mode or form, as a way of directing attention to a subject area, can overshadow any criticality through the dominance of the normalised discourse the form entrains. Examples of this are multiple, but most have a common characteristic in that they are a mode of address which also serves as a branding of the artist and artist's work. Josephine Meckseper's CDU-CSU series (Fig. 37) is firmly embedded in and reflective of fashion discourses. This confuses her critique because she is adopting the same methodology as the politicians she is critiquing. It is hard to separate her politics of fashion from the fashion politics of the politicians. It can be claimed that the work is ironic in the same way that some of Damian Hirst's artworks are, however, while Hirst's **For the Love of God**, for example, does satirise whoever owns the work by associating wealth with a death's head, it still affirms, rather than critiques, wealth and power because it flaunts the ability to make such an expensive object for sale¹¹⁷. A further example of a problem area is offered by work attempting to critique pornography. The subject is so loaded it often overpowers the critique and becomes yet another method of participation. Thomas Ruff's **Nudes**¹¹⁸ series retain aspects of the essence, and thus legitimise the pornography they are taken from, in spite of his claims that his blurring defers consummation. The same cannot be said about, say, Marlene Dumas' discussion of sexuality, partly because of its contextualisation within her overall exploration of the rawness and physicality of bodily function. Once the dragon (of form or genre) has been awoken, it is often hard to subjugate because it immediately invokes the baggage of its previous discussions and origins.

The artists I discuss in this section have been chosen because they offer differing ways of rethinking critique. Most offer models I would rather avoid. If the aim of critique is to expose normalised discourses to scrutiny, my preference is to subject these discourses to the pale light of early morning rather than the brutal glare of full sunlight. The way this 'light' is directed, is an important context for the subject, as well as being important for the way it influences reception. Consideration must be given to the way referential devices impinge on the discussion's strategy. A dragon, for example, as an abstract notion, is a different subject as a drowsy, a fully awake or a rampant beast. The meaning of the critique is invoked by reference¹¹⁹, but also by the phenomenology of the method of reference, which invokes its own sites of meaning. Many of the artists I discuss seem to subscribe to the discourses contained within the modes of reference they use, or at least participate in very longstanding (normed) discussions. Normalised modes carry and implicitly promote discourses that occasionally contribute to, but most often conflict with, the critique that forms the basis of the work.

This exegesis also stresses the importance of aesthetic critique as part of everyday praxis, and of praxis as a crucial arena of art work. It is impossible to achieve political ends without a sophisticated engagement with aesthetics. The two are symbiotic modes. My concern is for the critique that offers scrutiny of cultural or social practices encountered in the course of everyday life, from the standpoint of a participant in observation and understanding, like Kafka, on an equal footing with the viewer. I am interested in the immediacy and relevance of the critique to a general audience and in the relevance of the ways it deals with life-affecting, day-to-day issues.

Changing the Lens: Politics through Fashion Photography

Josephine Meckseper

The artist Josephine Meckseper makes political comment using a high fashion photographic mode to achieve ironic comment about both politics and to a lesser extent about fashion. Meckseper asks the viewer to look at politics as fashion. The location of her work between standard modes is only evident when looking at her oeuvre as a whole. This is quite obvious in **CDU-CSU** which comments on the complicit similarity of the two main German political parties (The Christian Democratic Union and the Christian Socialist Union). The title suggests that the work is to be read as allegory. Political comment is not usually associated with this sort of slick fashion. The combination of the associations forged here: advertising, fashion, wealth, the surreal and same-sex desire, produce a critique by imposing these identities on German politics. The critique is activated entirely by the title. Without that title, the image would be interpreted simply in terms of the play of internal associations without the politics.



Fig. 37. **CDU-CSU**, Josephine Meckseper, C Print, 106 x 165.5 cm, 2001.

Note the figure of a maid in the background raising issues of class (and, incidentally, evocative of Vermeer). Meckseper stages her photographs in much the same way as Jeff Wall; however her imagery makes no truth reference to speak of. Her staging is, instead, a method of creating playful symbolic references.

Two other photographs by Meckseper serve as a comparison with the more simplified images of **Waltz with Bashir** and **45 Pictures of the Body**. If these images were taken as standard documentary news photographs (which they are not) they could be examples of the intrinsic blandness of news photographs of crisis. They become critique by adding to her oeuvre-wide portrayal of governing parties as framed by the use of force. The interpretation offered is still Meckseper's. They do not rely on much input from the viewer since the meaning is clearly pointed out. It is shaped by the information presented within the images of the police as anonymous helmeted instruments of enforcement and contrasted with the curious, unprotected citizenry.



Fig. 38. Josephine Meckseper, (Left), **Untitled**, (Berlin Demonstration, Fire, Cops.) 2002.
Fig 39. (Right), **Untitled**, (Berlin Demonstration, Police Brigade) 2002. Both are C Prints, 76 x 101 cm.

When these two images are seen in the context of her references to high advertising and the CDU / CSU, they do start to function as opening up spaces for speculation and contemplation. They do not introduce the strong narrative

element of **Pictures of the Body** below. The 'hands in the pockets' and 'hovering around' of both these photographs, of, maybe, the aftermath of demonstrations, are ambiguous.



Fig . 40. Two images from **45 Pictures of the Body** each 75cm x 75cm, 2010.¹²⁰ These can be compared to Josephine Meckseper's of roughly similar subject matter. Left, Urumqi. Right, Greece.

Meckseper makes her critique using the mode rather than the subject matter. This can become problematic if the critique is subverted by the mode. Like the example of Hirst, the work can be construed as operating within the discourses it critiques rather than through attempting to reframe them. Ironic self deprecation within a mode like fashion often supports the discourse or power relationship rather than encouraging examination or reframing of it.

The Mundane as Precious

Yishai Jusidman

The Mexican painter Yishai Jusidman's **The Economist Shuffle** is a collection of news photos, 'painstakingly rendered,' with the lushness of oil and egg tempera. He uses gold framing to contextualise the images as precious. The reason for this, and its 'relevance to praxis', according to the publicity material of the Yvonne Lambert New York Project Space, lies in the transformation of 'the transient quality of news images ... collapsed into the timeless quality of painting'¹²¹. The claim is that he nullifies politics as a subject of the works and instead emphasises his alchemic (aesthetic) powers of transformation. Another way of seeing the work is

that Jusidman's practice makes valid and interesting critical observations through the contrast he makes with the classical work (of Caravaggio, Corot, Monet and Friedrich) because his painting of mundane images dignify the ordinary. Gerhard Richter's end-point was similar. Richter went to great lengths to deny any political activism in his work, claiming that his photographic reference was a means of avoiding the difficulty of finding subject matter. Jusidman's rebrands the mundane as significant. While Jusidman appears to use documentary photographs without any interest in them as signs of social and political narrative, his oeuvre indicates otherwise. As well as this series taken from the **Economist**, other exhibitions have featured clowns¹²², Sumo wrestling, social outcasts¹²³ and experiments playing with the relationship of the viewer to the work.

The wry humour of **Pintoresz trabajando** (Fig. 41) contained within the juxtaposition of the toilet rolls and the paint brush, and the tentative gestures of the almost life size pictured subjects in their regard of the audience, is more than enough to qualify as critique. These figures confront the viewer very directly through the returned gaze of the painting. As with John Currin's nudes (which I discuss later) the engagement is with an affective idea rather than a narrative. The narrative occurs entirely outside the painting as a response to the gaze.



Fig. 41. Two works from Yishai Jusidman's **Pintoresz trabajando** series shown at the 49th Venice Biennale 2001.



Fig. 42. From Yishai Jusidman's **The Economist Shuffle**, 9 paintings. Oil and egg tempera on wood, each 72.3 x 77.5cm, 2006. From a series of 16. Derived from thumbnails from 'The World this Week', **Economist**.

Jusidman's **Bajo tratamiento** series (Fig. 66) uses mimesis and scale to institute a confrontation between the figures, the audience and the figures' predicament as diagnosed mental patients. The viewer is disarmed by the proximity and objectification of the callous display, next to the portrait, of a tablet containing the diagnosis.

Taking Jusidman's work as a whole, it can be concluded that social commentary is occurring. **The Economist Shuffle** utilises installation / aggregation of a themed series to make a thought provoking totality that could not occur through a single image. As with **Pictures of the Body**,

the fact that the group is a collective is more important to the work than the particular arrangement of that collective. Jusidman's series of sixteen, bound by their identical size and framing, have such a strong relation to each other that the comparison with, say, Caravaggio is made irrelevant.

My arrangement of **The Economist Shuffle** paintings (above) as a grid of nine creates one dynamic relation. Equally, if they were imagined as a linear arrangement, with spaces for contemplation between them, a distance to be travelled over time to encounter them all, and if the whole series of 16 were presented in this way, it is possible to see how a critique might operate. The delay he is employing is activated by the seduction and fascination the viewer has with the paintwork which unavoidably transforms into time spent contemplating the textual reference.

The critique is also embodied in the interaction between the individual paintings and the group as a whole. The various intervals of subject matter become evident when the images are grouped together. Their differing associations provide a break and delay that requires the viewer to construct relationships between them. Three works are particularly important to this rupture: the image of the middle class man's belly, the fiery image of the sun and the image of an African mother and child. All disrupt the 'hard news' pattern and reading. The contribution these three images make is to redirect attention away from the aesthetic of fine painting, back to the question of why they have been grouped together, thus prompting consideration of the narrative each presents. Jusidman employs delay through his emphasis on technique and gilding but the subject matter bounces back strongly to confuse that purely aesthetic enjoyment.

Irony and Caricature

John Currin

Two groupings of American painter John Currin's paintings illuminate the influence of narrative, irony, caricature and the tradition of virtuosity through mimesis. Like Jusidman, he incorporates intervals and delays and makes paintings which refer to the 'aestheticist argument', by making reference to Renaissance and Mannerist painting whilst also commenting on contemporary

living. In Currin's work, the dissonance between the classical and the contemporary, and between the sensuality (of the paintwork) and the grotesquery of the (initially) sensuous and erotic bodies he pictures, is also purposeful in provoking a double take¹²⁴. The second scrutiny dislodges the initial spell of aesthetic discourse and replaces it with the disharmony of a push/pull of attraction and repulsion. He critiques vanity, the sexualisation of the female body by both the male and female gaze, elegance, and the vacuous world these tropes represent. The pleasure derived from Currin's painting prowess fulfils the same destabilising purpose as Jusidman's. The show of prowess that sophisticated traditional mimetic painting denotes confers the 'authority' of proficiency on the painter. However, the pleasure it affords is counterpoised, in Currin's case, with the grotesquery of the picturing and the behaviours it refers to. Currin is not referring to the modernist aesthetics / utility debate referred to by the publicity material around Jusidman. Instead, he is juxtaposing belief in the traditional idea of beauty (represented by the mannerist painting style) with the repulsion felt in response to the deformity self obsession and vanity of the nudes. It must be noted that Currin is dealing with caricatures. His critique comes through the ridicule of society's obsession with sexuality, appearance and the niceties of affluent living. The basis of this critique is irony.



Fig. 43. John Currin's **The Go See**, 1999. 111 x 86cm o/c. **The old Fence**, 1999, 193 x 102cm. o/c **Nice 'N Easy**, 1999 118 x 86.4cm.o /c

The three nudes (Fig. 43), when compared to his contemporary domestic scenes (Fig. 44), serve to illustrate the difference the instigation of narrative induces. It is hard to see the nudes in terms of a lived (documentary) narrative. They may have some fanciful narrative content but,

because of the artificiality of their pose this emerges as an arranged (abstract) idea rather than as event. Courbet's **Sleep**¹²⁵ conjures lesbian ease in a way Currin's nudes do not, because the pose for the audience predominates as playacting, and unlike **Sleep** the space they inhabit is unrealised. Our engagement is with a series of conflicting ideas. We are confronted by the tension between our unashamed enjoyment of the idea of nakedness, and our irrelevance through the pictured bodies' assertion of defiance in self sufficient enjoyment and intimacy.

The mechanism of critique here involves engaging the viewer, who then reflects on the surprise of that engagement. The second series, below, does instigate everyday narrative and utilises different mechanisms of connection that become commentary on everyday life. The behaviours in the clothed series are imaginable in a way that the nudes' behaviours are not. The viewer is observing commonly experienced human behaviour in the clothed series. The identification with the figures comes through the familiarity of recognition. To emphasise this, it can be noted how fully expressed is the physical environment surrounding these figures. In spite of this, the substance of the observation being made through these paintings is not much more complex



Fig. 44. John Currin, **Park City Grill**, 2000, 97x76cm o/c. **Homemade Pasta**, 1999, o/c 127x106.7cm. **Stamford After Brunch**, 2000, o/c 101.6x152.4 cm

than could be made through a cartoon. The paintings are a parody of manners. The nudes are more complicated and less direct because of their intellectual engagement with the audience, but both groups of paintings employ a similar caricature.

Currin's work is dependent on exaggeration for its critique. That is how it becomes ironic. Jusidman's painting, on the other hand, sustains irony because of the juxtaposition of finesse with its opposites: the mundane of the news tragedy, the unimportant street protest, clowns, and the mentally ill. The pictures of the mundane are presented with such a matter of fact

directness and respect that Jusidman's technique honours the oppressed rather than contrasts with it. Currin offers a critique explicitly as a proclamation. Jusidman offers his critique implicitly in that the viewer confronts it only after some reflection.

Reduction of Visual Information

Gary Hume

Gary Hume was a useful case study for my research because of the way he uses abstraction, and reduction of detail, to engage the viewer in unravelling the reference. He also confuses the referential and decorative function. While Hume claims his work **American Tan** has critical intent, this series exhibits a tension between advocacy and analysis, which, perhaps unintentionally, becomes a promotion of what he intends to critique. The series is a response to 'Americana' as represented by cheerleading, but Hume's enjoyment of the occasion and display seems to predominate over any critique of the vacuity and gender description that the behaviour and the culture represents. He has said of the work:

Yeah. They're all my responses to America and how we're all being tanned by American policy and culture, the war and simple, complicated stuff like that. It started off with cheerleaders. The form of them is absolutely fantastic. They're athletic. They're super-gymnasts. They're sexual, though you're not allowed to admit that, otherwise you're a paedophile or some dirty old dad. You just have to admire their skill, but really you're thinking quietly to yourself, look at her! The prizes for the top athletes, for the warrior classes, are the cheerleaders. I can use them, I can have the form, I can have the sex and have the prize...and that thing about innocence actually being corrupt, well, we have to lie constantly about how fantastic they are when really we just want to fuck them.¹²⁶

Although Hume does point to some radical inconsistencies in American attitudes to life, the statement above is a more coherent critique than he makes through his paintings. His attempted methodology, however, has proved useful for me in providing modes of presentation that deconstruct the image. This deconstruction invites a reciprocal reconstruction by the viewer. I have employed some of Hume's strategic devices in **Pictures of the Body**. Like me, Hume concentrates, simplifies and decontextualises his figuration. This requires the viewer to reconfigure the image in order to make sense of it. Interestingly Hume retains an awareness of the need to operate close to normal modes to allow recognition. He puts it this way:

One of the weird things is that if you make something absolutely brand new, which I guess if I could, I would, it would be invisible, because no-one's got a reference for what it is. Everything has to relate to something for us to be able to see what it is.¹²⁷

This hovering between figurative reference and abstraction results, in part, from his use of flat colour (gloss paint poured into the space defined by sealing tape until it sets) and from the truncation of the bodies he pictures. His figures, like Currin's nudes, are removed from a context and placed against a single colour background. His means of delaying immediate recognition is confined to removing the heads of his figures, concentrating on the junction between the legs (or arms) and torso, plus some deliberate confusion between negative and figurative blocks of colour. He is aware of the need for normalised modes of looking and the need to unsettle the viewer by moving away, but not too far, from recognizable forms. He achieves his figurative /abstract balance by playing with the degree of his zooming in on parts of the body. This accomplishes some delay in recognition of the nubile female dancer, which, when consummated by recognition, evokes the sexual desire he refers to in the quote above. He references cheerleaders, sexuality, decadence (and fun) as well as abstraction and visual enjoyment. In all these references he employs irony about the subject (through over-statement) and about his own (perhaps conflicted) enjoyment of the subject area.

The use of flat pastel colour acts as a distancing device as it does in **Pictures of the Body**. Distancing in this way encourages an encounter with the work as an 'abstract' idea (both figuratively and metaphorically) through reducing the directness of the pictorial representation. As noted previously, mimetic representation tends to prompt normalised standard figurative perception, while abstraction elicits a much wider, less focussed response. The disorientation caused by not being able to adopt a normalised way of looking can facilitate the 'fresh look' I have advocated, however, while Hume employs devices to discombobulate the viewer, no 'fresh look' eventuates. The audience is most certainly already aware of the attraction of pretty colours and nubile young people.



Fig. 45. **American Tan XXIV**, 2006-7
200 x 160 cm



American Tan XXVI, 2006-7
182.3 x 144 cm
All gloss enamel on aluminium.



American Tan XVI, 2006-7
147.4 x 117 cm.

The level of mimesis of the three paintings above (Fig. 45) can be compared with another from the same series, which at first presents the subject less mimetically. Although the subject matter in **American Tan XI** (Fig.46) is different – the group activity rather than an individual subject – the abstraction of the bodies creates a more open image because it fits less easily into a previously experienced codified mode. My re-contextualisation (by tipping the painting into a horizontal presentation), shows simply, how mimesis immediately directs and restricts visual interpretation.



Fig. 46. **American Tan XI** 2006-7, 254 x 165.2 cm. Gloss on aluminium. Left, as presented in the catalogue, right, rotated to resume mimetic reference.

Hume employs more obviously abstract devices in other paintings within the series like those where the incomplete image and confusing geometric blocks of colour interrupt an immediate reading (Fig. 47). The viewer must work to make a reference, but is also held in something of a state of suspension between reference and abstraction. While this does allow some delay and a suspension of resolution for a period, the delay is focussed not on critique (what Hume is communicating about his observation of American life), it is focussed on the interpretation and the play between representation and abstraction.



Fig. 47. **American Tan VIII** 182.8 x 144.8cm. **Cheerleader I**, 2005.121.9 x 99.1cm. **American Tan XV** 99.5 x 73.5cm.
All gloss on aluminium, 2006-7.

Pictures of the Body plays with reference and abstraction in a similar manner but with a different end result because of the tension coming from the violence of the subject matter. While it is possible to enjoy the frivolity of colour and the awareness of sexual response with unconflicted delight, the same cannot be said of the frivolity of colour and violence. In one case the viewer is consuming a strawberry, in the other, a rat. Hume's thwarted easy reading does not function in the same way as the intervals of **Pictures of the Body** or **The Economist Shuffle**, to augment and further the critique, instead it serves the pleasure of simply looking good. There is a match between the gloss of the body-beautiful occasion and the seductive attraction Hume's presentation. Gloss paint on aluminium is in sympathy with the slick, seductive, fashionable subject, and fits easily into prevailing contemporary American cultural values. Hume, like Josephine Meckseper, allows the discourses contained within the form of presentation to predominate. This contrasts with the work of both Currin and Jusidman (in spite of their equally slick production) because their mode and content create a much more balanced tension. Hume utilises a stylish mode to make a critique of stylishness. Waking the dragon, as

I have suggested previously, is always a difficult way of critiquing the dragon discourse. The problem with such discourses, as with dragons, is that they have a life of their own.

The lack of any overt substantive discussion about the fluidity and enjoyability of paint, his idea of it setting rather than drying,¹²⁸ and his intention vis à vis Pollock¹²⁹ tend to indicate that Hume's work is in fact flirting with the aestheticist eye candy that he disclaims, rather than having critical intent towards either American society or Pollock. Although Hume claims to be making a critique with these works, I suspect that his critique is confined to his, and our, reflection on our seduction with both his paint and his subject matter. Any further critique fails. The paintings can be seen to succeed as pleasant expressions of the physicality of the paint and the body, but present a sugar coated picture of the brutal and carnal inhibited mediocrity of institutionalised American celebration.

Story Telling, External Contextualisation

Luc Tuymans

'For someone to reflect consciously on visual experience, he or she has to recode the experience into words'. Language appears to be vital to self-reflexive awareness...¹³⁰

Luc Tuymans gives considerable commentary on his own work in order to direct the way it is interpreted. Writing, both tied to the paintings through exhibition or work titles, or more externally through given commentary, makes a vital contribution to the way his paintings are interpreted. This acknowledgement of the indispensability of language in understanding visual imagery is one of many innovations Tuymans introduces into contemporary painting¹³¹. Like most innovative painters, his is a fusion cuisine including elements from popular culture, tradition, film, print media, expressionism, lyricism, and the uncanny, all presented with variations of scale, context and layout. Tuymans' early work was very effective in raising issues of concern for examination and reappraisal¹³². He has been a pioneer in developing new modes of critique particularly those which use narrative formats to refer to historical events.

It could be argued that his work incorporates a very sophisticated understanding of the referential function of representation.¹³³ He knows that his work is functional and dependent on understandings that are external to it. He uses images as conceptual markers through filling their inherent vacancy with linguistic content, and innumerable cases in his early work provide examples of this. The way his early work uses external text and narrative acknowledges that meaning creation depends on his paintings' ability to evoke, refer to, and/or modify, pre-existing understandings¹³⁴. At the same time his work avoids promoting any particular polemic or didactic position preferring to simply focus attention on significant social and cultural themes.

If a consistent topic is uppermost in Tuymans' work it is the exploration of the unknown and unknowable of the pain and disaster of social and political catastrophe. His work moves between the concentration camps of the Second World War, hospitals and sickness, Belgian colonialism, loneliness and isolation, and recently, as part of the series exploring virtual reality: religion, in **Les Revenants**, (2007), Disney, in **Forever. The Management of Magic** (2008) and reality TV, in **Against the Day** (2009). His recent exhibition at the David Zwirner Gallery in New York (2010) under the title **Corporate**, attempted to address the very complex issue of corporate power. Three aspects of Tuymans work have been of particular interest for my research. The first is his emphasis on narrative and his use of it to examine even subjects like the concept of corporate power. The second is his use of a (very) limited range of colour and pictorial technique. (This restrained use of paint is evident throughout his career, in all the images I use to illustrate his work and needs no further elucidation, except to underline Ricoeur's comments about the use of a limited optic alphabet¹³⁵). The third aspect also only needs a short discussion, and concerns the change over time in the way he uses size to provide emphasis in his work.

Most important is Tuymans use of narrative. His use of narrative is more complex, than say, Tolstoy's story of the boy and the wolf, since the narrative acts as a 'stand in' for an abstract or conceptual idea. In his later work Tuymans tries to extend the narrative device further. He tries to invoke a narrative engagement with an abstract concept through naming or symbolism. The narrative connections in the later work, and the conversation he tries to raise with them, are a lot more tenuous, and in my view much less successful, because they over-reach narrative's potential.

Schwarzheide (Fig. 48) provokes a narrative understanding / compassion through the painting's reference, but the detail, to substantiate the narrative, comes through an externally provided text. Without this explanation, the painting would be virtually meaningless. The painting's function then is not to explicate a narrative but to stand as a visual marker of it.



Fig. 48. Luc Tuymans, **Schwarzheide**, oil on canvas, 60 x 70 cm, 1986

Schwarzheide pictures what can be seen by someone inside the Schwarzheide concentration camp, of outside the wall. The verticals stand for prison bars but are also indications of the picture being reduced to torn strips, a method used by prisoners to disperse and hide their documents. Tuymans is making a complex and diverse narrative reference here: first in framing the work as that of an inmate, thus conjuring up the image of the context of longing and privation; then in requiring the circumstances of the picture's manufacture to be contemplated. Subsequent to this are the ideas contained within the vertical lines which indicate cooperation by inmates against the oppression of the authorities and the existence of a counter-culture which preserves and values this sort of notation by distributing it amongst members. This is all associated with a side claim about the importance of creative visual expression even in the most extreme privation adding a further element of desperate pathos. I have previously talked about the dangers of 'raising the dragon'; it could be argued Tuymans early work does exactly this.

The Holocaust is certainly an impressive dragon but Tuymans' early work especially, raises it so quietly, with such reserve and on a very modest scale / size that the understatement unexpectedly matches the ferocity of the beast by acknowledging the inadequacy of the invocation. The understatement becomes a speaking voice which provides enough information to render the experience 'horizon linking'. The Holocaust text is invoked through the testament of both the inmate and Tuymans himself. The dragon being raised is not in fact the Holocaust itself; it is resurrected through the trace – one scale that has fallen off the beast. The Holocaust is represented only by a (not very good) drawing of the dream of nature outside the bars, a glimmer of hope, presented as evidence.

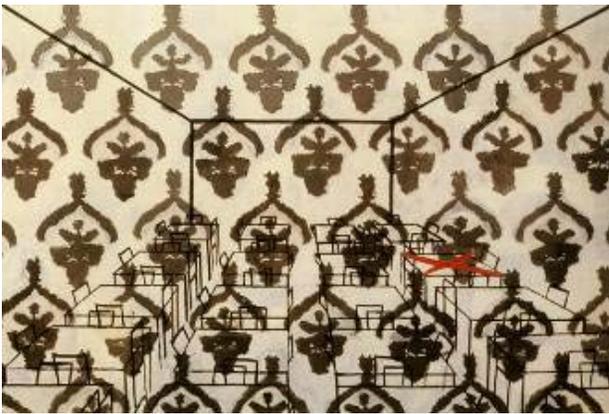


Fig. 49. **The Correspondence**, o/c, 80 x 120 cm, 1985.



The Walk, o/c, 37 x 48 cm, 1993.

The Correspondence (Fig. 49) is another example of the presentation of an ostensive 'trace' since the painting is a representation of a postcard:

Every day for five years, the Dutch author van Oudshoorn, who worked as an official at the Dutch Embassy in Berlin from 1905, bought a postcard of the restaurant where he had had his lunch, and with a red pencil marked with a cross the table where he had sat. The Correspondence is the picture of constant presence arising out of constant homesickness. A kind of complete hopelessness.¹³⁶

The work refers to a particular historical occasion (it doesn't matter whether the incident or postcard is fiction or fact) in order to invoke (or even illustrate) 'A kind of complete hopelessness'. As with **Schwarzheide**, it is the external narrative that provides the informational and empathetic material. Some tonal claustrophobia is added in the painting through the way the restaurant is masked by the dominant wallpaper pattern, introducing a

dated cultural context. Apart from this, the visual image contains very little information. **The Walk** (Fig. 49) is also contextualised by a story. In **Luc Tuymans** (p118), after making reference to Caspar David Friedrich, the dazzling nature of the light on snow, and the 'essential mood', Tuymans goes on to say:

Then the picture is in relation to a picture of Hitler, leaving his house in Berchtesgaden and setting off for a walk with his escort. I was interested in the expression of the everyday, the boredom in the photograph. This is linked with the idea of snow-blindness, when you only see something in patches.¹³⁷

The Architect (Fig. 50) is even simpler in its use of narrative. The story is meant to pluck the fangs of the dragon (in this case Speer) by juxtaposing Speer the Nazi, with Speer the poor human who falls over whilst skiing¹³⁸. A comparison is worthwhile here between **The Architect** and Gerhard Richter's **Uncle Rudi** (Fig. 50) which provides a much more subtle re-contextualisation of the Nazi as human because of its inflection of relation through the word 'uncle'.



Fig. 50. Tuymans, **The Architect**, o/c, 113 x 144.5 cm. 1997.

Richter, **Uncle Rudi**, o/c, 87 x 50 cm. 1965.

Uncle Rudi posed a particular dilemma for many Germans at the time it was painted, because of the need to come to some reconciliation with, not the figure of Hitler in the 'ordinary' landscape of **Walk**, but the figure of the (Nazi) uncle with an affectionate and ordinary smile for the viewer. Richter's painting also had considerably more political immediacy than Tuymans' because of the proximity of the issues he was addressing. This is certainly the case with the **October 18** series because it was painted before Germany had fully come to terms with the

Nazi terrorism of the past and the more recent terrorism of the Red Brigade. There is a great difference between critiquing historical matters which have consolidated as abstract, distant problems and finding solutions as part of an urgent contemporary debate.

Tuymans has tried to discuss more urgent contemporary issues recently. The paintings I have reviewed so far date from the period 1985 through to 1997. Like his previous work, Tuymans' recent painting depends on entraining narrative but fails to entrench it as strongly. The result is that the main focus of the work returns to normal painting regimes like size and style.

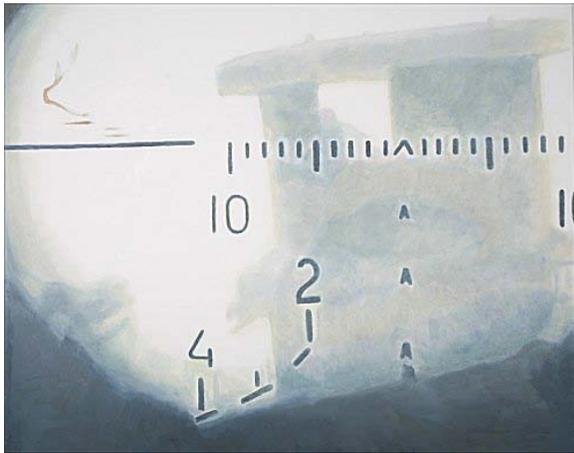
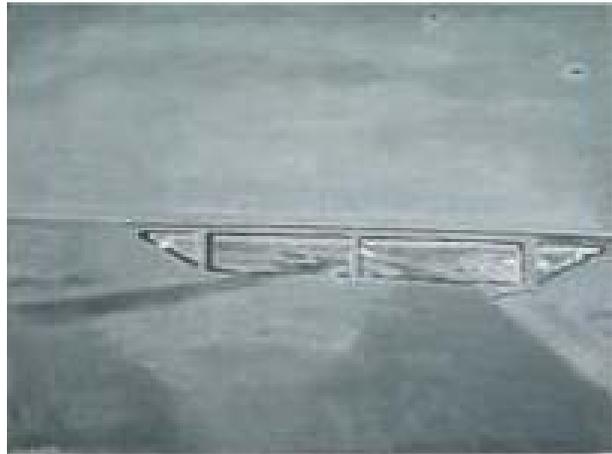


Fig. 51. **Sniper**, o/c, 186 x 233cm. 2009.



Bridge, o/c, 127 x 171 cm. 2009.

Bridge and **Sniper** (Fig. 51) evoke modern warfare and the Iraq conflict by referring the viewer to night-vision and the idea of target through telescopic sights. Neither painting provides much more than the media documentary it purportedly comments on as part of the group **Against the Day**. Other examples from the series (**Big Brother** and **Turtle**, Fig. 53) contribute to a base of diverse references to virtual reality, but the accumulation does not significantly add to, or focus, the critique, except as a recollection of the arbitrary senselessness and meaninglessness of the 'reality' of Reality TV enacted as paintings. The problem is that if the audience is not already fully aware of this senselessness, the insight is not likely to be any more accessible through the replay by painting.

The title paintings, **Against the Day I** and **II**, (Fig. 52) make a more direct reference to pointlessness by picturing a man digging for no apparent reason, but the connection with reality TV (or any other tangential observation) here too, is tenuous. While some coherent order may

have been more evident and compelling on the occasion of the installation, this is hardly accessible as an accumulation in each image, in the way that occurred with his earlier work.



Fig. 52. **Against the Day I**, o/c, 224 x 174 cm, 2008.



Against the Day II, o/c, 231 x 171 cm, 2008.



Fig. 53. **Big Brother**, (dimensions unknown), o/c, 2008 and **Turtle**, o/c, 368 x 509, cm, 2007.

Corporate (Figs. 54) makes the same sorts of generalised reference on the assumption that directly invoking the outward markers of corporate culture – the board table and a sailing ship of (perhaps) the East India Company – casts an insight into one of the most entrenched and problematic aspects of capitalism. Even the context available from a diverse range of contrasting or interacting images does not further the discussion very far. The grandeur of the

works, however, and their size and probable cost, poses a real question about Tuymans' own connections to the corporate market.



Fig. 54. **Conference Room**, o/c, 99 x 147 cm, 2010.



Corporate, o/c, 267.7 x 188 cm, 2010.

The following is part of the press statement released by Zwirner Gallery about **Corporate**:

The works in the present exhibition, *Corporate*, examine the phenomenon of the corporation. Influenced, in part, by the work of American media theorist Douglas Rushkoff, which looks at the roots of modern-day corporate culture, the exhibition continues Tuymans' interest in power structures and collective history. Rushkoff observes how the purpose of corporatism from the onset was to suppress lateral interactions between people or small companies, instead redirecting any created revenue to a select group of investors. Yet most people, even corporate leaders, have little awareness of these underlying motivations or how automatically they are compelled by them. They identify with corporations and ultimately surrender their free agency in the process. <http://www.davidzwirner.com/exhibitions/226/> (press release)

The subjects of the suppression of lateral interactions between people, and the continuing aggregation of wealth into fewer and fewer hands internationally, are both very appropriate subjects for critique. That this exhibition, or the visual mode, can accomplish that critique is doubtful. The subversion of media presentations achieved in **Against the Day** through 'beating them at their own game' (of pointlessness) is consistent with Tuymans interest in and insistence on affect, but simply disinterring what could be seen as vacuous discourses is not a useful tactic for an oeuvre focussed on raising questions about history, meaning and media. The danger is the same as I outlined for Hume and Meckseper: the scales tip quite quickly when the reference becomes the experience. Merely invoking the subject flirts with engaging the norms that form the foundations of the subject under scrutiny. The critique risks simply becoming a rehash of the clichéd mode. If this tactic is used repeatedly, as Tuymans has been doing recently, it wakes the dragon without leaving us any the wiser, and tends to consolidate the dragon

discourse by allowing it to colonise new 'critical' territory. I cite Thomas Ruff's **Nudes** again as a similar example of affect conjured up and then (supposedly) stifled as a critical tactic. If affect is fully suppressed the result is less likely to run the risk of consolidating the normed discourse.

A final note about Tuymans work is the observation that his painting mode has returned to the normal both in the way he uses gallery space (sparingly) to emphasise the gravitas of his work, and also in his adoption of size as a marker of significance for his paintings. Tuymans early work was marked by a much less formal approach to both display and presentation and characterised by the intimacy and 'proximity' of small sizes. The lack of ostentatious formal markers of accepted painting practice in his early work contributed to the fresh unfettered look because it claimed new ground. His current painting (Turtle is a good example of this) has become a 'new normal' on the foundation of his previous work. If Tuymans is still interested in genuine critique rather than its semblance, he will have to find ways of subverting the 'new normal' that he himself has established.



Fig. 55. **Corporate** as installed in David Zwirner Gallery New York, 2010.

Sloganeering through Affect

Leon Golub's painting.

Leon Golub's work combines a bald and sloganeering claim with very violent narrative imagery and powerful affect. These combine into what could be described as 'affect as critique'. Some

of the images he has selected are particularly nasty and transgressive and this is compounded by the large size of his works. Interestingly, as well as size, he employs a device that Tuymans also uses in that he avoids providing any background or context to concentrate the narrative. This decision is made (by both) to remove any distraction from the pictured incident or situation so that it gets undivided attention¹³⁹. If we go back to the discussion of how we come to new understandings through dialogue, we can see that this over-directed focus indicates a lack of confidence in the audiences' ability to pick up the message. The tactic removes from the viewer the work of making prioritising choices about what they are seeing and what is important to them. Such dialogue ceases to be a free exchange between interlocutors because the text does not depend for its meaning-making on both parties equally. An important conclusion of my theoretical research is that artwork functions most effectively if it disrupts 'the relationship between the visible, the sayable, and the thinkable without having to use the terms of a message as the vehicle'¹⁴⁰.

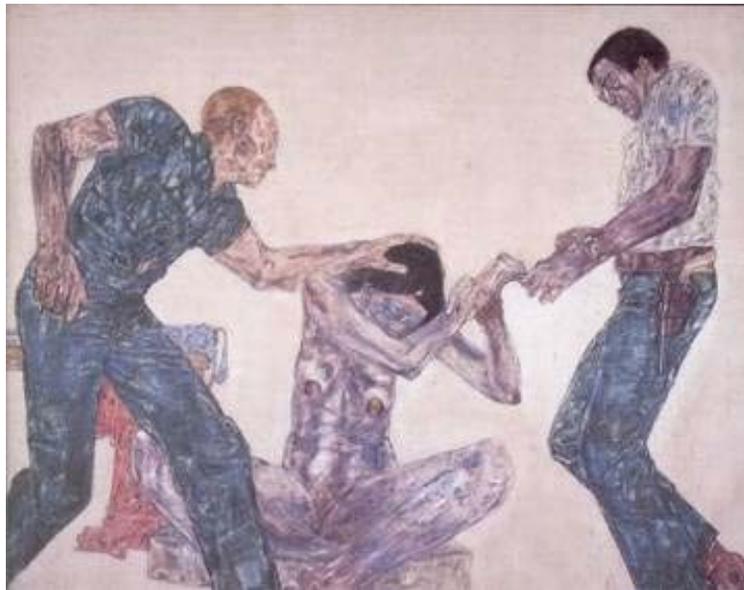


Fig. 56. Leon Golub, **Interrogation III**, 305 x 421.5 cm, 1981

There is very little ambiguity in **Interrogation III** (Fig. 56). There is no rupture between the sayable and the thinkable. The stilted and awkward almost choreographed disposition of the bodies – as though staged to mime action – gives Golub's work a strange sense of suspension in time which disrupts a normal mimetic reading. The pictured brutalisation of the woman, in itself, provides very little opportunity for anything other than the limited response of outrage and rejection. The lack of contextual information increases that emotional concentration through

focusing on the single line of information the viewer must process. The isolation of the stream of narrative, out of its context, is a deliberate strategy designed to limit the range of responses available to the audience. While this painting is didactic, like Goya's, it does carry the authenticity and conviction of its author in its cry of outrage and protest. This recognisably human response, of itself, invites the viewer's engagement through identification with the author. Context provides important ingredients for understanding, in part, through the way it obscures and complicates agreement. It is the ambiguity of contextual information that sets the stage and enables dialogic relation and debate. To the extent that this is not available, through whatever sources, the artist is manipulating the viewer and thereby undermining the interpretive capacity of his audience.

In provoking an immediate revulsion, the viewer is simply being asked to assent to the image by responding with the same emotion as that presented. The message is clear; two men are abusing a naked woman who is defenceless, sexually exposed and vulnerable. It is hard to find a reason for making the image, since anyone would already agree that this sort of situation was deplorable. No persuasion is needed. Some mitigation of this banality, as often occurs with critique, comes in the title. The word 'interrogation' introduces the idea that the two aggressors are representing the State. Golub is making a general claim, not about men, but about men as the representatives of (fascist) institutional power, and institutional power as having no bond to the laws of common humanity. This is still problematic however, since his critique of fascism is asserted but not substantiated. This painting is simply polemic because the simple association of inhuman behaviour with the authoritarian state is accomplished emotionally but without any argument. If the painting is to be regarded simply in terms of its emotional impact, it succeeds. It is the one of the most affective of all the paintings I cite in this research. To criticise its value as critique is not necessarily to criticise its impact as a painting. The work focuses on reminding the audience of the bonds of common humanity that are being violated.

Two Black Women and a White Man (Fig.57) offers a contrast with **Interrogation III**, it provides the potential for the reader to enact more interpretive nuance. This is, in part, the result of the way the bodies are distorted – the moment itself is poignant rather than violent – but it is also a result of the increased context provided and the scratchy rendering of both the figures and their background. In later work Golub used this confusion between figure and ground more fully¹⁴¹.



Fig.57. Leon Golub, **Two Black Women and a White Man**, 305 x 414 cm, 1986.

Some painters – notably Pierre Bonnard – have used this confusion between figure and context to force the viewer into a process of untangling and interpretation. Being required to create some perceptive order out of a complicated interwoven arrangement of information and distraction, is much more analogous to everyday living, than simplistic presentations that occur with too much focus.

The difference between these works (**Interrogation III** and **Two Black Women and a White Man**) arises from both Golub's subject matter and treatment. The scene he is presenting in the latter work is making a wry and gentle observation about cultural change. It is more subtle and as such creates the potential for a much more intimate engagement by the reader. The sloganeering of **Interrogation III** defines the solidarity between painter and viewer as a political and emotional bond. A more subtle observation, which anticipates reciprocity from the audience would indicate a different basis of solidarity. A format that presupposes the separate and discriminating integrity of the other forges a deeper affirmation of commonality. As Ricoeur has said, the remarkable quality of the text is its ability to reveal a 'possible way of looking at things' when the 'world horizon of the reader is fused with the world horizon of the writer'. The understandings that make this fusion possible are accessed by the viewer through the presentation of an artwork containing consideration and qualification that conveys a recognizably human mixture of certainty and uncertainty. This is the sort of indecision we might

expect from ourselves. It is difficult to recognize as a fellow, the person who doesn't present his critique as an enigma for him/herself also.

Two qualities in **Interrogation III** date the painting as of Golub's era but not our own. As I have claimed previously, good critique in painting, or any other medium, is characterised by its ability to enlighten a range of discourses at the same time. Both the emotionalism of the claim of conviction contained within the focus of the work, and its proselytizing, are not useful critical modes currently. This is partly to do with the contemporary over-use of such appeals to the self evidence of moral righteousness, but also to the over-use of modes which deliberately instigate emotional response as entertainment. What locates it historically most clearly, is its failure to place any reliance on the interpretive power of the viewer. By contrast this criticism does not apply to **Two Black Women and a White Man** because an active, interpretive engagement is possible on the basis of the expectation of the artist that the viewer has an equivalent interest in, and awareness of, the situation that Golub has so wryly observed.

A final observation about Golub is to do with his reference to the real. His paintings do not quote photography in the way Jusidman's, Hume's or Tuymans' do. Neither do they quote the tradition of painting from life that Currin's do. The paintings do make a reference to reality, but it is a literary reality of fiction as subliminally remembered folklore and legend. Golub's figures have some of the stilted awkwardness of the Frankenstein trope which augments the violence to the point where it becomes the 'fiction' of archetype. It may be this that allows his figuration such powerful affect. It is perhaps a confirmation of Buchloh's claim about the use of photography in the painting of the time that Golub hasn't employed a photographic truth claim to substantiate this image. **Interrogation III** could have entrained another compelling discourse had it included a reference to a time and place. The lack of such a reference is both an indication of the painting's era, and of the novelty of the truth claim in painting. Thankfully, as I have discussed previously, it is now available to substantiate and augment affect.

While the overt subject of **Interrogation III** could be said to overlap with my own overt subject matter in **Pictures of the Body** the differences between them could be expressed in terms of polarities. Golub emphasises and places his expectation of solidarity in emotion whereas mine is oriented more intellectually. Golub is assertive whereas **Pictures of the Body** is subdued.



Fig. 58. Showing the scale of Golub's painting **Prometheus II** (on the left) at 302.5 x 246.5 cm.

This expressionist commitment to grandeur was standard in Golub's era and is now a feature of Tuymans work. As a sign, when used regularly, size dominates the viewer/subject. The initial phenomenological encounter with this domination precludes the possibility of dialogue. The awe, inspired by overwhelming size, is more in keeping with religious observance than horizon fusion.

My paintings are small and his are large etc. This not only reflects the differences between authors and their personal history, it also reflects the politics of the era and the differing cultural contexts. One of the requirements and characteristics of critical art work is its response to contemporary local conversation even when discussing historical subjects.

All of the artists discussed here, and many others not discussed, here have contributed to this research through cooption or elimination. Even so, the vocabulary and grammar of critique is not a simply 'available formulation'; the vocabulary of each of these artists depends entirely on their own reflexive capacity, history and circumstance. I suggested at the beginning that their work has been most useful as examples of what not to do rather than the opposite. The reason for this is that critique is always required to find and express authentic difference. It was the difference between these artists and my own history that was their most positive contribution. Their cumulative affirmation of their own difference has assisted me in formulating the environment from which I aim to continue that same tradition of dialogue.

Conclusion

This research investigates painting's capacity to use empathy as a method of initiating reflexivity in an audience. Empathy is a learned response to a speaking subject which allows that other's experience to be received as though it were that of the listener. Empathy is an important method of becoming situated in relation and in understanding. Notions around the practice of empathy entrain multiple discourses about understanding, tolerance and reflexivity. In this thesis I have combined ideas that concern the offer of experience by proxy, within the relation of the ideas contained in the words 'critique' and 'dialogue'. 'Critique' is the marker for the textual encapsulation of the experience and 'dialogue' is a marker of the relational exchange when the text is passed from one to another.

Empathy is part of what happens within dialogue. It is engaged by a listener or viewer as a method of processing the experience being exchanged. Most often in daily life this exchange takes place through a narrative description of events that have taken place within a particular context. This simple spoken communicative mechanism locates experience within understanding as familiar and common. Empathy allows subjects who are proficient in it to assimilate and form a response to experience that has occurred outside their own. This exchange is purposeful. When operating at an interpersonal level it is directed towards fostering notions of solidarity in common understanding, and survival through exposure to experience that assists the understanding of the situation of others. In art, this offered expression of an individual's response to the world is directed to a wide and less specific audience through the 'publication' of the artwork. In this definition, the production of art establishes something of a library of human experiences which is accessible to a diverse range of experiencing subjects.

The objective of the research was to explore and describe the site of communicative relation represented by the hybrid of painting and photography. It became clear early on that the circumstances of this exchange are language based and that our behaviours 'in' language and 'in' communication are governed by a very complex set of conditions and conventions that evolve according to local cultural factors. One of the most important of these conditions is that which governs the ability to use what experience we have (our history) to understand the

experience of a different history. This extrapolation from 'A' to an understanding of 'B' demands a 'whole of body' engagement of the listening subject as though the experience were actually their own. In the case of a painting, since it is a conceptual construct, the viewing that constitutes the 'experience' is a long way removed from actual experience. Like everyday communication through speech, painting is highly mediated by cultural practice. Painting has its own history, just as do the participants in dialogue, the artist and the viewer. The use of painting, as the medium for the communication of experience about living in the world, makes a static object the linking agent between all these variables. That painting could be useful for the discussion of a subject that is also contingent, is not a foregone conclusion. That this static sign could be an effective medium for the presentation of a single (artist's) point of view, in communicating across a diverse cultural landscape, is also very much in doubt. These difficulties serve to underline my argument that painting must be specifically crafted to fulfil this function. This research points to ways that painting can become useful in praxis.

If my work was to be purposeful in communicating my critique of life, my politics, then it was necessary to unravel the ways these variables functioned, and then, to decide how to produce a text that situated those understandings as experience. Hermeneutics describes the acquisition and interpretation of communicated experience as a situation that evolves according to the circumstances of each engagement. This way of seeing the dialogue as dynamic, responsive and unstable makes it very evident that if the communication is to be effective, the initiator has to create and design the conditions of its delivery very carefully. Theoretical writing was very important to the research. The research is oriented around testing the assumption that painting can invite the use of empathy as a cognitive tool. Since empathy automatically incorporates understanding as a new 'situation' for the receiving subject, its instigation, in and of itself, is a sign of an affective exchange and therefore an indicator that painting can be a useful medium for critique.

Certain traits continue from the intimate everyday spoken interpersonal exchange to the more specific exchange between painter and viewer. The most important of these is the need of the speaker / painter to establish the basis for reception on which the exchange takes place. The viewer is responsible for bringing their own interpretive strategy to the discussion. The situation is one in which each participant depends on the other to contribute to the possibility of a mutually satisfying exchange. Some commonality of experience and purpose underpins the engagement. The painter must provide an assurance to the viewer that the exchange is likely to

be comprehensible, enjoyable and useful. The viewer's part of the bargain is to engage in the considerable work of information gathering and interpretation of the material presented. This sort of committed interaction is similar to that which occurs between friends. The establishment of this friendly relation of commonality with the viewer became one of my first tasks.

As I have suggested, critique requires the offer of alternative ways of looking. This job first requires the cultivation of some common ground of receptiveness but then involves using a language that avoids subverting the 'new' way through introducing normed discourses. Since a completely new language is not likely to be communicative, parts of available languages must be used. The language of photography is familiar to a very wide audience and has almost universal currency. It is also a young and energetic language since it has a tradition only one hundred and fifty years old. Furthermore, its rapid development and change over that time has meant that it contains unresolved contradictions like the index idea I have discussed. Establishing a common language so that the subject of conversation was clear became possible through the use of news media images. While it was not inevitable that all viewers would have encountered particular images, it was inevitable that they would have encountered some, since one of my choice criteria was the wide exposure the image had achieved. In any case most potential viewers are familiar with the news photo as a type and idea and with the way it comments and affects them. A broad cross-cultural, global language is established by the ubiquity of the news image and the news-worthy story.

News media images with their commonplace connotations of ubiquity, familiarity and documentary, and painting with its ties to fiction and the body of the maker are both highly developed channels of communication that together incorporate a very wide vocabulary of ideas and discourses. In spite of their differences as visual languages, an understanding of both of their ways of reference is pervasive in the audience. Most of the population is bilingual, at least to some extent, in these languages. The hybrid of the two is not only very rich in ideas it is also very accessible to a wide population but still remains a work of translation and interpretation because of its novelty. Through the use of this hybrid the research was able to refer to a very complex subject area that will remain of huge concern globally and personally. The hybrid also allowed the attempt to address the issue both objectively, as an external reference, and to couch that reference in a way that illuminated the argument in terms of personal relation. This particular hybrid is relatively unexplored one and provides enormous scope for future research.

Its unique value lies in the fact that it incorporates the ability to refer through objective external reference and in terms of subjective relation concurrently.

A critique is defined by its desire to prompt a fresh look at a subject. Since the human subject is stimulated by so many phenomena, the first response to any new material is to try to find a pre-existing categorisation that avoids the need for any further work in coming to an understanding. It is unlikely that the simple presentation of subject matter will prompt that fresh look unless the matter is presented in such a way that the receiving subject is not bombarded with the same arguments or discourses that formed their first view. Subject matter must be presented in a way that avoids or contradicts the old conversation that was formative for the listener previously. Since the mode of communication itself perpetuates particular discourses, it is also necessary to use the mode in a way that allows the listener to encounter the material in ways that avoid past associations. Non standard presentations preserve the possibility that the material they offer can be considered as new by asking the viewer to repeat the cataloguing question since the question appears to be different.

The capacity to look at matters anew or to instigate a fresh process of engaging empathy, rather than simply revisiting a familiar (catalogued) response, is a psychological position. It depends on inclination, proficiency and practice. The reason for presenting opportunities for a fresh look may, or may not be, anything to do with the subject raised. The exercise itself has its own value because proficiency, in revisiting seemingly resolved questions about the conditions of life, offers the subject agency and independence from norms and values that represent the interest of external institutional and cultural collectives. Liberation from unquestioning adherence to the norms established by institutional or linguistic structures can be facilitated either by proposing a new norm which lies outside established ones (Mapplethorpe's expansion of the visibility of gay sex is an example) or by casting doubt on a perceptive mode without proposing a new norm. **Pictures of the Body** comes into the second category since its content is not intended to be particularly contentious. It does challenge news media categorisations of the narratives they present as other, and it does attract attention to a universal principle through presenting images showing the tendency of institutional powers to oppress opposition with the use of force. The work clearly does not identify with either the use of force or the inclination to impose norms, its politics are more concerned with the negotiation with the other within an understanding of a mutual dependence in dialogue.

This research shows that painting can be an influential mode for the critical exploration of the conditions of life. Various discourses within the tradition of painting are conducive to critique, but many other discourses embedded in that tradition countermand it. Some difficulties arise from this, since conducive discourses, like those within the fictive tradition also entrain non-conducive discourses like those associated with the 'beauty', 'resolution' and 'virtuoso' discourses. These non-conducive discourses can impose an authoritarian subtext which automatically negates anti-normal projects by implicitly reinforcing the norm. In this sense Mapplethorpe's work, to the extent it does substitute one norm for another, still adheres to the 'normalising' principle. If norms are viewed as only expedient, even though convenient, standard ways of thinking or seeing, that always have a limited efficacy, then the habit of their authority can be undermined. Their utility lies in the fact that their currency establishes commonality with the audience. That commonality can be established through other mechanisms like the everyday narrative forms that take place in conversation. In painting as in conversation it is particularly important to pay attention to the situation of the interlocutor.

Notes

¹ Jonathan Franzen, **The Discomfort Zone**, A Personal History, Fourth Estate, London, 2006. 139-140.

² Dialogue implies communication within a relation of commonality in praxis. In interpersonal communication the idea of dialogue is predicated on a two way exchange which does not privilege either speaker. This cannot be replicated entirely in the painting / viewer exchange because the making and viewing do not coincide. It is, however, possible for the artist / maker to refrain from illocutionary, declamatory or testimonial gestures and declarations which are determinative of the viewer's response. The aim of the work is not to present a particular point of view about the confrontation between police and demonstrator but to use it to invite interpretation. The paintings therefore do imitate the dialogic occurrence where a scenario is described in order to elicit a response. The paintings ask a series of questions without obviously presupposing an answer in much the same way as might take place between subjects in the process of coming to a joint view. I should emphasise again that the point of the work is not arrival but the process of dialogic consideration and interpretation.

³ This term is defined and expanded in the main discussion.

⁴ The word 'hybridity' is used by Homi Bhabha and other post colonial and cultural theorists to describe identity in terms of racial and cultural mixing. While my use of the term is analogous to this, my emphasis is not on *mixing* of forms or discourses as much as on the invocation of both, more or less equally weighted, at the same time. This means that the resort to either set of reading practices proposed by each medium is, to some extent, thwarted. Each mode is embedded as a viable way of looking, yet each prioritises contradictory methods for utilising the information presented. The hybrid can present these contrary ideas simultaneously and provide a dichotomy.

The Jamaican cultural theorist Stuart Hall also uses the idea but develops it alongside his reception theory (Hall's Theory) which describes the audience either accepting the author's dominant preferred reading, opting for an oppositional one or constructing one which combines elements from both parties. My use of hybridity is not descriptive of identity as much as disruptive of the usual recourse to traditional ways of looking. Often an anti essentialist argument has been used to negate the idea of the defined originating cultures that compose the hybrid. In the case of my hybrid of photography and painting, the anti-essentialist argument is made by confronting the viewer with the essentialism implied by a particular cultural location. I should add here that I will also discuss later the need for clear methods of understanding in the form of 'shared horizons' in order to engage in dialogue. A balance must be achieved between offering a clear path for understanding and disrupting conventional ones through hybridity.

⁵ While aversion to discourses of distinction in art production and reception are a major motivation of this research, it is too large a subject to discuss with any critical precision within this exegesis. The following is a brutal and condensed summary of the issues for the purpose of definition, through the words of some of the key theorists:

Pierre Bourdieu in **Distinction** A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste (1984) contends that art assists the Capitalist enterprise by undermining notions of commonality through the manufacture of reified objects representing 'uniqueness' discourses. These distinguish art and its cognoscenti as separate from everyday life. That art accumulates specialised languages and discourses that are exclusive is no surprise. What does create problems for Marxist critics is the way that specialisation is used as a mark of (class) distinction and division:

Consumption is a stage in the process of communication, that is, an act of deciphering, decoding, which presupposes practical or explicit mastery of a cipher or code. In a sense, one can say that the capacity to see (voir) is a function of the knowledge (savoir), or concepts, that is, the words that are available to name visible things, and which are, as it were, programmes for perception. A work of art has meaning and interest only for someone who possesses the cultural competence, that is, the code, into which it is encoded.

(Bourdieu, Pierre, 1984, p.2)

This means that:

...art and cultural consumption are predisposed, consciously and deliberately or not, to fulfil a social function of legitimating social differences.

(Bourdieu, 1984,p.7)

Benjamin Buchloh develops the implications of Bourdieu's idea further in asserting that:

...visual culture functions increasingly not only as a social system of narcissistic distinction and the enforcement of class differences in cultural reception at large but - if at all involved with experiences of the "real"- as an ironic palliative of the universal condition of consumption and commodification.

(Buchloh, Benjamin, **Allen Sekula: Photography Between Discourse and Document**, in **Fish Story**, Allen Sekula, Richter Verlag, Rotterdam, 1995, p191)

The later part of this quote explains why photographic reference was rejected as a means of locating work in, and as, comment on everyday life. This reluctance persisted until comparatively recently. Even Gerhard Richter was very coy about acknowledging that his 'photographic' work had any relevance to commentary about life. His claim, even about his Baader Meinhof series, was rather that it was about photography. This inhibition in using photography as an indication that the work is to be taken as relating to lived experience is not quite so pervasive currently. The distinction discourse, the uniqueness discourse, and the discourse of artistic genius are all intertwined and all contribute to notions of separation between subjects. Boris Groys discusses this:

It is undeniable that the rhetoric of uniqueness, which evokes and glorifies an artistic masterpiece, determined traditional art-historical discourse for a long time and still determines it to a great extent.

(Groys, Boris, **The Promise of Photography**, in **Fresh Cream**, Phaidon, London, 2000, 32)

Groys makes the point that the aura of the unique is a status conferred on the object in inverse relation to its association with praxis:

[Artworks] are surrounded by a certain aura because they spring from the exceptional, unique, ingenious subjectivity of the relevant artist and thus differ radically from ordinary, everyday things.

(Groys, 2000, 31)

The uniqueness discourse is not simply a feature of modernism. Barry Schwabsky suggests it now precludes discussion of external or commonplace subject matter because of its preoccupation with a rather more focussed uniqueness discourse concerning artists' singular understanding and articulation of the medium. In this scenario the artist is not presenting an individualised interpretation and interaction with an external subject of common interest, s/he is preoccupied with presenting an internalised dialogue about their own relation with the medium in concert with many other individualised and internal dialogues about the medium:

Contemporary painting retains from its Modernist and Conceptualist background the belief that every artist's work should stake out a position – that a painting is not only a painting but also a representation about painting. That is one reason why there is so little contradiction now between abstract and representational painting: In both cases, the painting is there not to represent the image; the image exists in order to represent the painting (that is, the painting's idea of painting).

He goes on to say:

...every artist is called upon to invent a unique stance or position that differentiates him or her from other practitioners. But paradoxically, in such a situation, self-invention itself becomes the primary subject that unites all otherwise distinct and even contradictory projects.

(Schwabsky, Barry, **Vitamin P**, (ed. Valerie Breuvert), Phaidon, London, 2002, 007)

These discourses are some of those that I describe later as 'hidden' because they are implied rather than explicit. Even though supposedly hidden, they often overwhelm content to the point where it appears to be considered irrelevant to the value of the work. It is easy to see the ways in which the uniqueness and distinction discourses function hand in hand to undermine notions of commonality in anything other than the commonality between distinguished artist and connoisseur.

⁶ These tests were a continuous part of the process of making and involved the size of paintings, their level of detail, abstraction, the level of zoom on the narrative action, colour combinations, intensity of colour, their proximity to each other and the possibilities of narrative in combination. Installation tests in the gallery are described later. These involved a series of arrangements evaluating the implications of narrative, pictorial and colour sequence (mostly to avoid direct linear connections). The aim of these tests was, as I repeat the theme of the research, to delay

resolution. This was assisted by having a variety of paintings to work with incorporating the variables above. There was a balance to be achieved between difference and continuity. Too much difference or variation between images would establish a narrative of discontinuity.

⁷ The further apart each painting and the fewer of them displayed, the more the hybrid would be skewed towards painting discourses. Closer together and narrative connections would be suggested. My intention is that they should expose the viewer to separate but cumulative statements about the situation of others.

⁸ This painting is derived from a web image of a tear gas attack on demonstrators in Thailand in 2009. It becomes just possible to see some of these details from a distance or if the image is reduced. The yellow flag provides a clue that these are government supporters lying on the ground to avoid the tear gas and the crouching running figure gives some suggestion that there is a dissonance between the attractive reductive patterning and the narrative. This work is typical of the set in elimination of detail. This offers the possibility of an identification game in deciphering the narrative and the context. In this painting that narrative content is not fully decipherable. This image also provides a good example of the blur which creates instability. The conventional blur is exemplified in some of Gerhard Richter's work. The blur I use is more like Bridget Riley's (illustrated below and compared with Gerhard Richter's blur). Bridget Riley's 'optical blur' has a more energetic instability whereas the effect of Richter's tends towards the sporific.



Fig. 59. Bridget Riley, **Four Colours with Orange**, 2002, oil on linen, 108 x 251.8 cm.



Fig. 60. Gerhard Richter, **Demo**, 1997, oil on canvas, 62 x 62 cm.

⁹ Hermeneutics is primarily concerned with the circular consideration of the text in terms of its parts and then the whole. The vibration between each changes the interpretation as a continuing cycle. It also regards understanding as dynamic and fluid and discusses the relation of dialogue and understanding, the contingency of understanding, the dependence of communication on first establishing a relation of commonality, the role of norms in both allowing and limiting understanding, the playfulness and companionability of dialogue and the role of work, imagination and empathy in understanding through the encounter with alterity. These are all important aspects of **Pictures of the Body's** attempt to dislodge conventional ways of visual reading.

¹⁰ One of Rancière's many contributions to this discussion comes through his emphasis on oblique reference rather than polemic declaration as the most useful method of liberating the viewer from institutionalised ways of looking. Bourriaud places emphasis on sociability and companionability with the audience, Kester concentrates on the nature and mechanisms of dialogue. Simulation Theory attempts to explain how we understand others through imagination. Theory of Mind recognises that others occupy similar mental states to our own thus allowing for the possibility of extrapolating from our own experience to anticipate that of the other. All of these relations require the exercise of empathy.

¹¹ Static visual media (as opposed to time based media and written text) offer the various parts of their argument as a single presentation. One of the implications of this is that the author has limited ways of directing the sequence in which the elements are assimilated. This allows for a more independent constitution of meaning on the part of the viewer. At the same time it also allows for greater complexity since these same factors are presented as equal, although they may be given more or less emphasis. This requires the viewer – like the detective at a crime scene – to prioritise each constituent in terms of their own reading and history. The greater complexity arises from the unpredictability and variety of the viewer's possible response.

¹² Quote taken from: Linell, Per, **Rethinking Language, Mind and World Dialogically**, Interactional and Contextual Theories of Human Sense-Making, Information Age, NY. 2009. 10. (Voloshinov, 1986 [1973], 86).

¹³ The 20th Century philosopher R.G. Collingwood equates art and language in describing the presentation of an artwork as a conversational exchange:

Each of the two persons concerned [in a communicative exchange] is conscious of the other's personality as correlative to his own; each is conscious of himself as a person in a world of persons, and for the present this world consists of these two. The hearer, therefore, conscious that he is being addressed by another person like himself...takes what he hears exactly as if it were speech of his own: he speaks to himself with the words he hears addressed to him, and thus constructs in himself the idea these words express. At the same time, being conscious of the speaker as a person other than himself, he attributes that idea to this other person. Understanding what someone says to you is thus attributing to him the idea which his words arose in yourself; and this implies treating them as words of your own.

And:

The possibility of such understanding depends on the hearer's ability to reconstruct in his own consciousness the idea expressed by the words he hears. This reconstruction is an act of imagination; and it cannot be performed unless the hearer's experience has been such to equip him for it.
(Collingwood, R.G. **The Principles of Art** Oxford University Press, London, 1938, 250 and 251)

Collingwood makes several points here: that the exchange is interpersonal, that that involves recognition of a state of relation between the parties, that the interaction involves a 'language', some sort of code, in which each has a certain necessary fluency, that this process involves the use of imagination, and finally, he intimates that 'experience' is, in some ways, synonymous with 'language'.

¹⁴ Hustvedt, Siri, **The Shaking Woman or a History of My Nerves**, Sceptre, UK, 2010, 27. Quoting Charon, Rita **Narrative Medicine: Honoring the Stories of Illness**, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2006, 9.

¹⁵ The connection between (sensational) experience and narrative is direct. It would often be valid to claim that if no experiential response was forthcoming then the narrative was not understood. Narrative is the affective mode of communication.

¹⁶ Leo Tolstoy defines art as this combination of text and performance:

Thus, in the simplest case: a boy who once experienced fear, let us say, on encountering a wolf, tells us about this encounter and, to call up in others the feelings he experienced, describes himself, his state of mind before the encounter, the surroundings, the forest, his carelessness, and then the look of the wolf, its movements, the distance between the wolf and himself, and so on. All this – if as he tells the story the boy

relives the feeling he experienced, infects his listeners, makes them relive all that the narrator lived through – is art.

(Tolstoy, Leo, (**What is Art?** trans Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky) Penguin Books, London, 1995. 39. This work first appeared in Russian in 1898.)

Tolstoy, and Collingwood, (see note 11) develop their argument to conclude that art involves only this expression and reception of emotion, and mistakenly regard emotional and cognitive perception as separate. Two things are taking place in Tolstoy's storytelling. Firstly, the boy is offering a narrative to be assimilated and, secondly, he is creating an environment within which it is to be understood. The result is a collective feeling of solidarity amongst the group of speaker and listeners in developing a common understanding.

¹⁷ I am obviously not discussing performance art here. I am suggesting instead that all art contains information about the author's position which provides a context to frame whatever subject (or lack of it) is being addressed. The idea has some connection with Fried's idea of theatricality. Unlike Fried, however, I regard the response to, and understanding of, the maker, as a vital ingredient in the understanding of any communication, artistic or not.

¹⁸ The words are a bridge thrown between speaker and listener. The story, and the telling of it, links the teller and his audience in a dialogic exchange which has the potential to forge a new understanding. Paul Ricoeur describes this exchange of experience:

The world horizon of the reader is fused with the world horizon of the writer. And the ideality of the text is the mediating link in this process of horizon linking.

Ricoeur, Paul, **Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning**, Texas Christian University Press, Fort Worth, 1976, 93.

¹⁹ Ricoeur, 1976, 92.

²⁰ Language is the primary vehicle, although not the only vehicle, by which history exercises a series of effects on us. Gadamer calls these effects a *Wirkungsgeschichte* or a 'history of effects' to point out the aspect of causal conditioning in our relation to history. But these effects are taken up into human intentionality in that any historical influences, even those of physical, economic or political domination or oppression, are refracted through language. Their effects, while not reducible to language or to 'mere words' as it were, are partially constituted by the linguistic frameworks in which they are comprehended with more or less perspicacity. All such historical effects are refracted through language, even if they are not reducible to language.

(Dostal, Robert J, (ed.), **The Cambridge Companion to Gadamer**, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK, 2002. 65 / 66)

²¹ Warnke, Georgia, **Hermeneutics, Ethics and Politics**, in, **The Cambridge Companion to Gadamer**, Dostal, Robert J, (ed.), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK, 2002. 80.

²² One of these differences lies in the illustrative function of news photos as opposed to the intent of a painting which can be to activate imagination. An example is my editorial decision to concentrate, in the Vanak Square painting, on only the rush of the fleeing crowd rather than the explanation (of the baton wielding police). If I had included both I would have provided the opportunity of avoiding engagement by presenting the resolution of both reason and reaction. A painting is not primarily concerned with the presentation of factual historical evidence. Often it is more interested in presenting a dilemma or asking a question of the audience. In the case of the Vanak Square painting my interest lay in the fear and panic of the crowd that the edited image gives some insight into. Offering the reason for that very sensible panic, in the same document, would detract from the need to enter the exploration of what it might be like to experience that sort of panic oneself.

The newspaper photograph, on the other hand, in most cases needs to provide as full an explanation as possible through the image. A news photograph that fails to be fully explanatory (even with the assistance of a caption) would not be acceptable for publication because it does not facilitate closure. The aim of the newspaper is to offer a commodified product which implies closure. The aim of a painting can be exactly the opposite – to thwart resolution by posing questions.

²³ Rorty, Richard, **Contingency, Irony and Solidarity**, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1989 p xvi.

²⁴ I repeat the quote from note 11 in which Collingwood describes this connection:

Each of the two persons concerned [in a communicative exchange] is conscious of the other's personality as correlative to his own;Understanding what someone says to you is thus attributing to him the idea which his words arose in yourself; and this implies treating them as words of your own. (Collingwood 1938, 250)

The possibility of such understanding depends on the hearer's ability to reconstruct in his own consciousness the idea expressed by the words he hears.

(Collingwood 1938, 251)

²⁵ I am thinking here of the differing readings that would be applied to, say, Banksy's work were it located in a gallery. Multiple cases could be made demonstrating different readings of the same work in different environments.

²⁶ Collingwood, (1938), 251.

²⁷ For a full explanation of this see: Holub, Robert C. **Reception Theory** A Critical Introduction, Methuen, London and New York, 1984. 58-63.

²⁸ As Ricoeur suggests, the relationship between text and author is so intertwined as to be inseparable:

This priority given to the author's intention and to the original audience tended, in turn, to make dialogue the model of every situation of understanding, thereby imposing the framework of intersubjectivity on hermeneutics. Understanding a text, then, is only a particular case of the dialogical situation in which someone responds to someone else.

(Ricoeur, Paul, **Interpretation Theory**, Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning, Texas Christian University Press, Fort Worth, 1976. 22)

Ricoeur, like Rorty, stresses the importance of empathy not just for its political value (in becoming more tolerant), but as a crucial ingredient in understanding:

The necessity of interpreting these [*less direct*] signs proceeds directly from the indirectness of the way in which they convey such experiences. But there would be no problem of interpretation, taken as a derivative of understanding, if the indirect sources were not indirect expressions of a psychic life, homogenous to the immediate expressions of a foreign psychic life. This continuity between direct and indirect signs explains why 'empathy' as the transfer of ourselves into another's psychic life is the principle common to every kind of understanding, whether direct or indirect.

Ricoeur, Paul, 1976. 73.

²⁹ Rancière, Jacques, **Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics**, (ed Steven Corcoran), Continuum, London, New York, 2010. 37.

³⁰ Corcoran, Steve, (ed.) **Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics**, Continuum, London, New York, 2010. 10.

³¹ Rancière, Jacques, **The Politics of Aesthetics**, *The Distribution of the Sensible*, (trans Gabriel Rockhill), Continuum, London, 2004. 32.

³² Rancière, Jacques, **The Emancipated Spectator**, Verso, 2009. 104.

³³ See note 8.

³⁴ Rancière describes this emancipation in terms of the attitude to the audience the artwork presents:

aesthetic acts... [are] configurations of experience that create new modes of perception and induce novel forms of political subjectivity.

(Rancière, 2004. 9)

And:

The dream of a suitable political work of art is in fact the dream of disrupting the relationship between the visible, the sayable, and the thinkable without having to use the terms of a message as the vehicle. It is the dream of an art that would transmit meanings in the form of a rupture with the very logic of meaningful situations.

(Rancière, 2004, 63)

³⁵ Rancière's phrase

³⁶ Rancière, Jacques in conversation with Fulvia Carnevale and John Kelsey, **Art of the Possible** Artforum, March 2007. 264.

³⁷ Rancière, Jacques, **The Emancipated Spectator**, Artforum, March 2007. 277.

³⁸ Rancière, Artforum, March 2007, 277.

³⁹ Rancière claims:

Whatever forces conspire to maintain things as they are – maintaining the boundaries between disciplines, maintaining the order of the 'known' – 'the police' define the configuration of the visible, the thinkable, and the possible through a systematic production of the given, not through spectacular strategies of control and repression.

(Rancière, Artforum, March 2007. 264.)

⁴⁰ Kester, Grant, **Conversation Pieces** Community and Communication in Modern Art, University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles, 2004. 20.

⁴¹ Ibid, 12.

⁴² Ibid. 32.

⁴³ I will describe these 'nonstandard' presentations more later in the section discussing the painting / photography nexus. Kendall Walton describes these as deviations from a norm that confer disproportionate significance on the deviation. (His example is of a standard black and white painting with a little bit of colour, which, because of its aberrance in the overall order, attracts attention). Walton says that a slight (but fundamental) deviation from a normal form has special significance.

Painting does not universally accept this reforming role and even when it is assumed, it is often subverted by the conflicting and conforming discourses reifying individuality. (Refer back to Barry Schwabsky's comment in note 5). Often a painting trope incorporates elements that affirm contemporary values that are 'dangerously abstract and objectifying'. For the writer the simplicity of digital accuracy (which entertains only the variation of yes or no), the various virtuosity discourses promoting tropes of control and mastery, and the expressionist values that claim to embody Zen enlightenment are dangerous and romanticising.

The example I give in note 78 in relation to truth and fiction also provides some insight into this discussion of closed and exclusive modes of expression.

⁴⁴ This refusal contrasts with the work of the Super Realists like Richard Estes or Audrey Flack who try to out-do the photograph by presenting detail with surreal intensity. While super realism does introduce some conflict into discourses surrounding photography, the discourse that dominates concerns the extraordinary 'mastery' of a painter who can present so 'life like' an image through paint. The idea that the production of a lifelike image is indeed evidence of mastery is very longstanding within painting traditions when mimesis was regarded as a virtue. While this might have been useful to painting when, for example, photography was not able to produce very large prints, super realism is not seen as useful in my research because of its introduction of virtuosity discourse and its concentration on circumscribing imagination.

⁴⁵ Rancière, Artforum, March 2007. 264

⁴⁶ Holub, Robert C. **Reception Theory** A Critical Introduction, p75, both quotes from Jauss Hans Robert, **Aesthetic Experience and Literary Hermeneutics**, trans. Michael Shaw, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1982. 32.

⁴⁷ It is worth reiterating the Kafka / Rilke distinction again. As Franzen implies Kafka's writing has a particular relevance and gravitas for the life of the reader because he is using the creative process of production to explore, for his own understanding, the very issues he is writing about.

⁴⁸ As I have explained previously, 'horizon' is a term used to indicate location in the world. 'Horizon linking' refers to the relationship established with the audience where aspects of that location in the world are offered as common for both painter and viewer, thus enabling communication. This link inevitably implies a commonality with the audience, in being able to communicate. I would suggest that it is part of the role of artwork to further substantiate that link so that it can become an affirmation of solidarity as an encouraging gesture of companionability in the search for understanding. The idea of companionability is also allied to enjoyment.

⁴⁹ Holub, Robert C. **Reception Theory** A Critical Introduction, Methuen, London and New York, 1984. 70.

⁵⁰ Holub expands on this:

But just as important, basing this model on the variety of interactive patterns between art and audience again points to one of the chief deficiencies of the aesthetics of negativity. By excluding identification as a primary aesthetic experience and allowing for only the ironic breaking of norms or the banal, mass-cultural affirmation of expectations, theoreticians of negativity neglect an entire realm of aesthetic phenomena.' 79.

(Holub, 1984. 70)

⁵¹ This recalls frequently heard discourses around the punishment of criminals. Most research points towards the fact that re-traumatising the subject produces more desensitisation rather than being therapeutic.

⁵² Barnett Newman, **Frontiers of Space**, Interview with Dorothy Gees Sackler (1962) in **Barnett Newman Selected Writings and Interviews**, (ed.) by John P. O'Neill, University of California Press, 1990. 251. Cited by Kester, Grant in **Conversation Pieces** Community and Communication in Modern Art, University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles, 2004. 38.

⁵³ If art is understood in terms of its function, it would have to eventually condense down to this; that art is an effective mechanism for overcoming the inherent resistance of the individual subject, and the collective culture, to open up to the change that is implied by the encounter with alterity.

⁵⁴ This point perhaps needs some emphasis by pointing out that art modes become restrictive through their very success in defining the art project. It could be said that the success of an art mode or project defines its failure to the extent that it appears to be definitive.

⁵⁵ Robert Holub points to an aesthetics that connects the pleasure in reception and utility:

What Jauss opposes to this aesthetics of negativity is primary aesthetic experience. He reminds us of the simple fact that most contact with art has been occasioned by *Genuss*. This word has two meanings in German, and Jauss wants us to include both in his concept. In the most common usage today *Genuss* can be translated by pleasure or enjoyment; an older sense of the word, however, would bring it into the word field of use or utility. The verb form for the word, *geniessen*, as Jauss points out, was used commonly in the eighteenth century to designate "make use of something."

In both these senses, *Genuss* has been the seminal inspiration for interest in art, even if it has been virtually ignored by the aesthetic tradition. Perhaps most important is its decline in the past two centuries. While aesthetic experience was once considered to possess a legitimate cognitive and communicative function, more recent art and theory have stripped it of these roles and consigned pleasure to cultural attitudes associated with the narrow-minded, pretentious middle classes.

(Holub, 1984. 73)

⁵⁶ Richter, Gerhard in interview with Sabine Schutz in **Gerhard Richter, The Daily Practice of Painting**, Writings and Interviews 1962 – 1993, ed. Hans Ulrich Obrist, Thames and Hudson, London, 1998, 217.

⁵⁷ I am very interested in the nature of the artwork as a 'published' document. There is not scope to fully explore the implications of the differences between this sort of offer of communication and those offered directly through speech in everyday life. It is sufficient to note that the generalised and indiscriminate offer of communicability that publication implies suggests that horizon linking occurs at a more abstract and universal level. Also implied, is that the gesture of solidarity, as an abstract notion also, must be more overt in publication than in other communicative forms.

⁵⁸ Holub, Robert C. **Reception Theory** A Critical Introduction, p91, quoting (in speech marks): Iser, Wolfgang, **The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response**, John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London 1978. German original 1976.

⁵⁹ The section **Alternative Arrangements** addresses this more fully.

⁶⁰ Iser, Wolfgang, **The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response**, John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London 1978. German original 1976.

⁶¹ Jauss, Hans-Robert, **Aesthetic Experience and Literary Hermeneutics**, trans. Michael Shaw, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1982. 93.

⁶² Ricoeur, Paul, **Interpretation Theory**, Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning, Texas Christian University Press, Fort Worth, 1976. 40.

⁶³ Ibid. 41.

⁶⁴



Fig. 61. Marcel Duchamp, **Nu descendant un escalier** Gerhard Richter, **Woman Descending the Staircase**
Oil on canvas, 146 x 89 cm, 1912-14. Oil on canvas, 200.7 x 129.5 cm, 1965.

Richter's painting must also be seen in relation to the reference he is making to Duchamp's well known work. He is making a triple claim here about his own position as 'avant-garde' in breaking the boundaries between painting and photography, and through appropriation of both Duchamp's and his own painting. Richter's interpretation in his 1965 painting is another play with the subject matter but with very different emphasis.

⁶⁵ Thomas Ruff and Uta Barth provide examples of photography that has co-opted painting discourses in the sense that I am considering here. Both stress abstract qualities by reducing focus to the point where informational content is reduced, in much the same way that Gerhard Richter does with his blurred paintings. In Barth's case, the blur is often counterpoised with fore-grounded focused detail. This interplay between photography and painting provides an illustration of the fertile dynamic of exchange between the two mediums.



Fig. 62. Uta Barth, **Ground** (95.6) 1995.



Thomas Ruff, **W.H.S.05**, C Print, 2001.

The work of both of these photographers is concentrated around formal qualities. This conclusion arises out of the observation that neither is interested in conveying (photographic) information aside from that contained within the aesthetic statement. These photographs do not refer to the photograph as index. Ruff particularly reformats his work in terms of compositional considerations. The tree that provides a focal point in the example presented is most probably fictive and is used as a counterpoint to the industrial formation of the living quarters pictured. Barth's use of focus and lack of focus uses the device of juxtaposition in a similar way.

⁶⁶ Walton, Kendall, L. **Marvelous Images**, On Values in the Arts, Oxford University Press, Oxford, New York, 2008.

⁶⁷ Walton, Kendall, L. **Marvelous Images**, On Values in the Arts, Oxford University Press, Oxford, New York, 2008. **Transparent Pictures: On the Nature of Photographic Realism.**79-116.

⁶⁸ The presence of a superfluity of information is a continuing feature of the documentary photograph. It is not, however, a necessary feature of all photography as the work of Uta Barth and Thomas Ruff attest, but it should be noted that the removal of detail makes their work 'non-standard' photography and that requires the viewer to pay particular attention to this feature. The lack of pictorial detail in a painting, on the other hand, is a common feature of its recent history. Walton makes the point that deviation from standard forms has the effect of shock in forcing the viewer to adapt to a new form. Walton's idea of standard or non-standard can be thought of as consistent with Gadamer's about norms, horizons and history. An example Walton uses is: a black and white painting (which is a standard form) that introduces a tiny amount of colour, making it non standard and therefore attracting particular attention to that special feature. Refer to Walton, 2008, 210.

⁶⁹ The idea of the index is attributed to Charles Peirce and is a part of his system of semiology, although the ideas have been debated and developed by a number of philosophers subsequent to Peirce. The observation of, and emphasis on time, can be attributed to Roland Barthes.

⁷⁰ Kriebel, Sabine T.'s reference in **Theories of Photography, a Short History in Photography Theory** ed. James Elkins Routledge London New York 2007, 27. Quoting: Krauss, Rosalind, **The Originality of the Avant-garde and Other Modernist Myths**, MIT Press, Cambridge Mass, 1986, See **Notes on the Index** parts 1 & 2, 212.

⁷¹ Schwabsky, Barry, **The Triumph of Painting, An Art That Eats its Own Head**, Painting in the Age of the Image, Jonathon Cape in association with the Saatchi Gallery, Saatchi Gallery. 2005.8.

⁷² For the moment I will let it stand as a functional description, but note what I have previously pointed out concerning the limitations of pre-existing discourses that surround each medium. Schwabsky goes on to discuss the notion of the recorded image as distinct from the reality it presents. He refers to Kant's idea of the unknowability of things and our dependence on phenomena or appearances as a token for the real thing. He cites Henri Bergson who suggests that currently our equation of the photographic image with 'knowledge' arises out of the similarity of our own optical perceptive methods and the photographic image:

Henri Bergson declared that we are acquainted with the world not through mere appearances that are somehow different in kind from things in themselves, but through what he called, precisely, 'images', which

are part and parcel of the real. The mind, for Bergson, is less like a painter and more like a camera, its sampled images not fundamentally other but simply quantitatively more limited than the 'aggregate of "images"' that is reality. Our perceptual apparatus is touched by the thing it perceives as the photographic plate is touched by the light that comes from the object.

Schwabsky, 2005, 8.

The operational equivalence between the way the 'mind' works, and the way a camera works, is an interesting observation that may form the basis for the disinclination to challenge the idea of the photograph as index. An artist, in utilising a medium and the various discourses around it, draws on history, thus allowing the viewer to orientate their reading in terms of their own understanding of that history. In this way, the work itself provides in part, a reference to, and a discussion of, contemporary theoretical approaches to that history and set of beliefs. Independent of anything else, an artwork must occupy a theoretical position towards both the medium and its history. This is particularly the case in Photography since theoretical consensus is particularly elusive because of the rapid technological development of the medium. As Boris Groys says:

It is frequently lamented, and at some length, that the original promise of photography, like that of all other modern media, to depict reality truthfully is becoming increasingly unreliable with the passage of time. The technical possibilities of simulation and virtual reality no longer permit the traditional confidence in photography.

Groys, Boris, **The Promise of Photography 1998**, in **Fresh Cream**, Phaidon, London, 2000, 33.

⁷³ This work, like **Dead Troops Talk**, is the product of many photographs taken of paid actors in an apartment rented by Wall for the purpose of making this work. Wall not only destroys the notion of the index as visual trace (of what? one must ask), he also destroys the indexical relationship with time. At the same time, the work still refers to a perceived reality. He is making the same reference to reality that drama does, when it offers a proposition requiring the suspension of disbelief.

⁷⁴ Wall's work refers back to the history and traditions of visual image making. He cites well known paintings, woodcuts and photography in his work. His restatement and historical reference is a clear example of visual media being enlivened through their ability to refer back to past images. As I have mentioned in the section on hermeneutics, the ability to define new perceptions through reference to older ones, allows an expansion of vocabulary and a change in norms through re-definition of an already established and understood norm.

⁷⁵ Edward Hopper also uses this awkwardness in figuration to engender the unease in the viewer that underpins his critique of urban isolation.

⁷⁶ This truth claim is even more commonly undermined in fashion photography, where bodies are elongated and homogenised to conform to a fashion convention. Any even cursory examination of these bodies would reveal their untruth, yet we still retain the idea that the photograph presents something akin to truth.

⁷⁷ Kriebel, Sabine T.'s reference in **Theories of Photography, a Short History in Photography Theory** ed. James Elkins Routledge London New York 2007, 27. Quoting: Krauss, Rosalind, **The Originality of the Avant-garde and Other Modernist Myths**, MIT Press, Cambridge Mass, 1986, See **Notes on the Index** parts 1 & 2, 212. These are all words Rosalind Krauss uses to describe the relationship between the photograph and the world.

⁷⁸ The differing status of truth and fiction was played out in the glare of international attention in 2006, when it became known that the book **A Million Little Pieces** by James Frey, (Doubleday 2003) contained nonfactual material. Frey wrote the book about his experiences with drug use and recovery and tried to get various publishers to accept it for publication as a work of fiction. He was unsuccessful until he suggested it was in fact a memoir – a documentary of his own experience. Doubleday agreed to publish, after previously refusing to publish it as a fictional work. As a memoir, the book was on the New York Times bestseller list for fifteen consecutive weeks. When it was exposed as a work of fiction, it caused huge controversy that prompted the publishers to agree to buy back books from anyone who had been deceived by the book's marketing as memoir. This controversy demonstrates that for both the publisher and the reading audience, so called documentary is seemingly more affective. What those groups fail to understand is that the 'subjectivity' and intent of a documentary maker will always determine the 'facts' s/he chooses to reveal. This renders the two forms, if they are equally engaged in describing an historical circumstance, at least in principle, indistinguishable.

The history of fiction taking the guise of documentary, in order to tap into the affective potential of 'truth,' dates back to Hogarth and Cervantes. More recently, in the 1960's, the English TV docudramas **Cathy Come Home** (1966,

BBC, Director Ken Loach) and **Culloden** (1964, BBC, Director and Writer Peter Watkins) adopted this form. These were marketed as 'realistic drama documentary' and 'Docudrama in the form of TV war reporting'. Another outrage similar to that caused by James Frey was caused by Orson Well's presentation of H.G. Well's **War of the Worlds** on radio, as news bulletins, on October 30 1938. This presentation of fantasy as 'real' caused a huge upset and protest because the text was being read in standard documentary form. The fact that the furore around **A Million Little Pieces** took place as recently as 2006 indicates that this hybrid still retains some affective vitality. Most simple re-categorisations like this are assimilated into cultural practice very quickly and lose their power automatically with that assimilation. It is their conflict with acceptance that bequeaths power.

⁷⁹ Photography's claim cannot be accepted even though there used to be an historical a priori basis for it. Even so, after a successful contestation of the claim, photography retains a compelling ability to use the notion of truth to instigate a powerful version of Drama's 'suspension of disbelief'. This is because of the contribution documentary continues to make in providing witness to past or distant events in both scientific and news document formats. It is this similarity of format that invests film with its capacity to arouse emotional sensation.

⁸⁰ If his audience knows that Tolstoy's boy (see note 14) is a pathological liar, his story is unlikely to engage them in the way that I described earlier. It is more likely that attention will be redirected towards performance and motive, developing into an investigation of the boy. The story then becomes autobiographical (in becoming a description of the boy's tendency to lie) whether this is intended by him or not.

⁸¹ Kriebel, Sabine T's reference in *Theories of Photography, a short history in Photography Theory* ed. James Elkins Routledge London New York 2007, 29, to Sekula, Alan, **Photography Against the Grain: Essays and Photo Works 1973 – 1983**, Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, Halifax, 1984, 5-6.

⁸² A good argument can be made that this is even the case in Wall's **Dead Troops Talk** in spite of the evident fantasy of its fiction. Wall is referring the viewer directly to the recent war in Afghanistan and is undoubtedly sending a message about its *actual* brutality and folly.

⁸³ Kriebel, Sabine T's reference in **Theories of Photography, A short history in Photography Theory** ed. James Elkins Routledge London New York 2007, 19, to Sontag, Susan, **On Photography**, Farrar, Straus & Giroux, New York, 1977, from, **In Plato's Cave**, 24.

⁸⁴ Bourdieu sums this up nicely:

In a sense, one can say that the capacity to see (voir) is a function of the knowledge (savoir), or concepts, that is, the words that are available to name visible things, and which are, as it were, programmes for perception.

Bourdieu, Pierre, **Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste**, (trans Richard Nice), Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1984, 2.

⁸⁵ The interesting exception to this general rule is photo realist painting that tends to evoke surrealism rather than everyday vision because of its over-emphasis on the fastidious recording of detail. The overwhelming impact of most super-realism is of domination through mastery (a subset of the virtuosity discourse) which reflects an obsessive extreme of normal human capacity and endeavour. This is particularly the case when most often these images do not have a communicative purpose but are more often simply emblems of virtuosity like Faberge eggs. The Still Lives of Audrey Flack might be seen as an example of this.

⁸⁶ I am thinking here of Mapplethorpe's images of gay sex which were for some time described as pornographic.

⁸⁷ I use this word to denote a different usage from simple consumption, where the image or other information is instrumental in facilitating an experience that has the ability to change the viewer or reader.

⁸⁸ Josephine Meckseper's photographs shown on page 74 do not clearly indicate the conversation or the interpretive path being offered as part of the image itself. If her concern is the monopolistic power of the CDU/CSU then this is only clear in the context of her other work where captions are used.

⁸⁹ Kriebel, Sabine T, **Theories of Photography A Short History** in **Photography Theory**, Elkins, James (ed.), 2007, 20. Says:

‘...[the studium] contrasts with the punctum, a noncoded detail in a photograph that unexpectedly pricks or wounds the viewer. It is a subtle kind of *beyond* that the image permits us to see. Importantly the punctum, which disturbs the studium, is private and personal.

⁹⁰ An example of this is the hat I have referred to in the Gaza painting. The reduction of nuanced detail in the paintings serves primarily to focus the viewers’ reading on reconstructing their idea of the narrative action.

⁹¹ Barthes, Roland, **Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes**, (trans Richard Howard), Hill and Wang, New York, 1977, 43.

⁹² Sebastian Faulkes in his novel **Engleby** talks about this over-description through a character speaking to the reader, as ‘perfection’, which can be disrupted by the dissonance of the incongruent (the ugly pylon). Barthes’ punctum could also be thought of as a dissonance or incongruence, providing the jolt that instigates engaged experience.

*Inhale and hold the evening in your lungs. It needn’t have been a ‘perfect’ afternoon (by which people usually just mean very hot); it doesn’t have to be Midsummer’s Day. Better if it’s slightly early, slightly late, if the village has an ugly pylon, road works or a ruined telephone exchange. Sometimes you can get more easily to the universal through something that isn’t typical. Something that’s too representative can blind you with its own detail – like a painting by Canaletto – and stop you seeing through it.*⁹²

Faulks, Sebastian, **Engleby**, Hutchinson, London, 2007, 137.

Subject matter that is presented as a contextualised finality; Faulkes’ ‘perfection’ (the Canaletto), is, in the sense that Barthes uses the word, dead. It is dead because it is already complete and fully descriptive. It does not need or recognise the distinct and separate authority of the viewer.

⁹³ Buchloh, Benjamin, **Allen Sekula: Photography Between Discourse and Document**, in **Fish Story Allen Sekula**, Richter Verlag, Rotterdam, 1995, p192-3.

Examples of this are evident in the examples below:

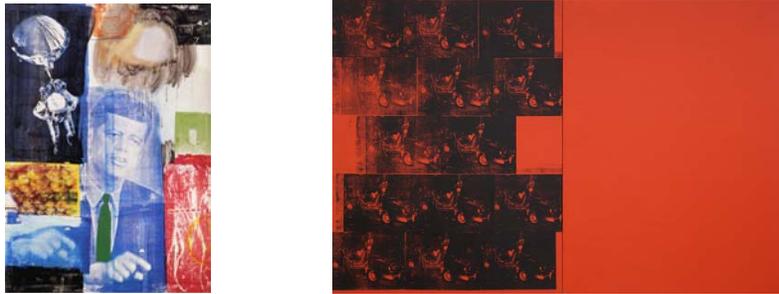


Fig. 63. Left, Robert Rauschenberg, **Retroactive 1**, Collage, 213.4 x 52.4, 1964. Right, Andy Warhol, **Orange Car Crash Fourteen Times**, Silkscreen ink on synthetic polymer paint on two canvases, 268.9 x 416.9 cm, 1963. Photography is used here as a commodity of meaningless iconography rather than for referential or critical purpose.

⁹⁴ Richter had a very extensive collection of news photographs, some of which, particularly early in his career, he replicated in ways that retained their narrative intensity. (see Storr 2002)

⁹⁵ Gerhard Richter, in interview with Sabine Schutz: **Gerhard Richter, The Daily Practice of Painting**, Writings and Interviews 1962 – 1993, Ed Hans Ulrich Obrist, Thames and Hudson, London, 1998, 218.

⁹⁶ Richter’s blur like that of the photographers Ruff and Barth involves a softening and melding of the junctions between shapes and colours. This elision from one part of the work to another is gentle. Although it can frustrate the desire for the clarity of consummation as Ruff claims it does in his **Nudes**, my response to it is as sensual rather than abrasive or abrupt. Richter also employs another blur where he draws a solid object in one direction across his wet paint to drag paint creating obscuring lines. This blur is more like a screening intervention akin to denial of the image and has a quite different impact to his ‘out of focus’ blur.

⁹⁷ Auster, Paul, **Sunset Park**, Faber and Faber, London, 2010, 216.

⁹⁸ Barry Schwabsky refers to this in his Introduction to the Catalogue **Vitamin P**:

But we should not overlook what gives painting its specific importance to art in general - its engagement, not so much with the eye as is sometimes thought, but with the body of both the maker and the viewer.⁹⁸
Schwabsky, Barry, (Introduction), **Vitamin P**, Phaidon Press Limited, London, New York, 2002, 005.

He elaborates this point further:

Although this personal investment in the activity of forming the object can no longer be part of the definition of art, the specific contribution that painting can make to artistic thought more generally is probably related to the value of this choice to enter a realm beyond mere choice. That is, it has to do with the tactile dimension of things; of a plastic relation to materials, that (because of the potential this relation offers for continual feedback between matter and sensation) is also a proprioceptive activity – to the indirect benefit of the viewer who partakes of this relation only imaginatively, though as vividly as possible.⁹⁸ For the viewer painting is a noun: the finished object we can see. For the painters it can also be a verb:⁹⁸
Schwabsky, 2002, 009.

⁹⁹ The computer generated simplification used in **Pictures of the Body** is oriented around reducing the numbers of tone and colour to a chosen number through 'posturising' on Photoshop. Just as with photographic processing and decision making, small changes in the variables available produce very different results. The point I emphasise here is that the intervention of the hand in the process of painting **Pictures of the Body** takes control over these decisions and renders them as culturally embedded.

¹⁰⁰ It is difficult to estimate the difficulty the translation task imposed on the viewer. My own familiarity with the images reduces my need to translate them. My 'post familiar' encounters with the work concentrate more on the playfulness and self sufficiency of abstract qualities. I was surprised that the following review printed in the local Wairarapa paper on June 29 2010 described the images as 'faintly recognisable media images'. The reviewer did, however, pick up some important elements of the work's construction:

In fact, by choosing an almost pop art ethos – one of the characteristics was to remove almost all meaning from any image it appropriated by repetition (Warhol's car accident prints being echoed in this show) – Melser has removed almost all the original context and meaning out of what will be faintly recognisable media images to most viewers.

However, I would not put *45 Pictures of the Body* in the same category as pop art as its concerns are quite different to that movement's reduction of any image to nothing more than consumerist iconography.

This one work, made out of many, is more like a meditation.

Famularo, David, **Wairarapa Times Age** 29.6.2010.

¹⁰¹ I identify the location of the events pictured to the reader of this document to emphasise the painting's documentary derivation. I do not name the events for the viewer in order to provide the challenge of firstly deciding whether it is actual events that are presented, then, further to provide the challenge of contextualising these in a particular time and place. One claim the work makes is that an awareness of news events can provide insights and that a lack of awareness of these events acts as a constraint on understanding. I must further note that these images were circulated widely and concerned very significant sites of conflict and disturbance. The failure of recognition could provide some insight for a viewer about their knowledge of the world.

¹⁰² It should be noted that this codification – what the visual signification means and how it works – is consistent within, but not necessarily across, different types of cartoon. Cartography has its own particular visual code as do children's comics. Scientific drawings often have a code that could be specific to each application.

¹⁰³ **Waking Life** is a philosophical ramble about everyday existential dilemmas from a range of different personal perspectives. This positioning, from several standpoints, is a device often used in the novel. One such is **The Slap** (Allen and Unwin 2008) by the Australian Christos Tsiolkas (Short listed for the Booker 2010). In **The Slap** each often conflicting, position is seen as understandable and authentic, thereby directly affirming the simultaneous validity

of multiple points of view and leaving the reader to find their own position through interpretation. This device is incorporated into **45 Pictures of the Body** to the extent that each individual painting has a separate integrity.

¹⁰⁴ **Waltz with Bashir** also advocates for a variety of authentic positions in confronting the dilemma of complicity, when it examines the post traumatic stress disorder of Israeli soldiers who were a party to the massacre of Palestinians by Christian Militia at the Shatila and Sabra refugee camps. These massacres occurred during the Israeli occupation of Lebanon after the assassination of the Lebanese President Bashir Gemayel in 1982. The story follows the film Director Ari Folman's attempt to recover his memory of the incident, in which he had participated, by contacting and talking to various fellow soldiers who were there with him. The narrative reveals the slow establishment of memory around events that had been expunged because of trauma. The film is both an historical account and an exposition of memory loss as a psychological response to the trauma of such conflict.

¹⁰⁵ Rotoscoping involves computerised methods of drawing or animating from real footage. **Waltz with Bashir** similarly uses computerised techniques; in its case Adobe Flash cut-outs converted a filmed image to animation.

¹⁰⁶ Both use narrative to address abstract principles. They directly address the specific barbarities of armed conflict in concentrating on the bloody wounds of **Dead Troops Talk**, and the psychological wounds of PTSD in **Waltz with Bashir**. In both cases contextual visual information is irrelevant and therefore not emphasised. Both concentrate on the instigation of the viewer's capacity to experience the issues presented imaginatively. Both provide a context, indicating that this imaginative exercise is to be undertaken through including 'truth claim' cues. Wall does this simply through resemblance to photography which entrains the truth reference; Folman does it through the authenticity of the authorial voice speaking as a character.

¹⁰⁷ The argument is contained in Fried's book **Art and Objecthood** 1967.

¹⁰⁸ Auster, Paul, **Man in the Dark**, Faber and Faber, London , 2008, 15.

¹⁰⁹ I am not simply thinking here about the modernist 'art for art's sake' argument of people like Greenberg, I am also thinking of the tendency of most painting to contain internally all the information the author thinks is needed for an appropriate interpretation or meaning. That this should be deemed a viable authorial or receptive position is disputed in **Pictures of the Body** since important contextual information is deliberately missing. While I have often given some of this information to the reader of this text, it is withheld from the viewer. As I will show later its absence in **Pictures of the Body** contrasts with its availability (externally) in Tuymans exhibitions. The decision on the part of the author to supply access to this 'meaning' or to withhold it is a contrasting position of relation and expectation towards the viewer. It is a decision about the assertion of authority. The second position recognises the need for the viewer to take responsibility for their own meaning making through either prior knowledge or interpretive work.

¹¹⁰ While it is possible to argue that all art is based within traditions of observation, comment and discussion that could be included within the idea of critique, my stress is on 'big' social issues of human conduct and relation. It is probably sufficient to define these as political issues since they are matters of power relations between people and communities rather than individual personal concerns. Obviously these two areas do overlap, and the work of Leon Golub provides such an example. Towards the end of his life his preoccupation was with his own old age and death. While this subject is not explicitly political, it is still a case of an abstract and universal issue, 'age', being directly addressed through painting. In the final analysis these distinctions will only be made clearer by other examples of art work that I use to discuss my own **Pictures of the Body**.

¹¹¹ As exemplified by Barnett Newman's statement in his interview with Dorothy Sackler quoted on page 30 (see note 47)

¹¹² I use these two only to provide recognisable examples of didactic critique.

¹¹³ See Sabine Kriebel's quote of Sontag on page 50 (note78)

¹¹⁴ John Currin's work is deeply indebted to irony and satire, but while initially it is effective in instigating a reflective self consciousness about sexuality and the games played around it, the continuing focus on a single issue handled through the same means does lead to some doubts about the author's critical intent. In the end it is the pleasure and fun of satire that becomes the inclination of the work.

¹¹⁵ Adrian Piper's art is centred on this sort of sloganeering advocacy which simply makes a claim without much space for disagreement. Sloganeering opposes other contrary slogans and cannot contribute much in the way of nuanced discussion. Tactically it is always useful to understand that political methods represent the ideology that is being advocated. It is therefore always better to avoid the promotional methods of opposing groups. Sloganeering is so entrenched as a device of totalitarian campaigning it can be concluded that it is a means of promoting totalitarianism. Piper's work uses a very limited range of artistic mechanisms for directing a particular way of looking. The **Mythic Being** series, for example, relies heavily on speech bubbles to make her critique. Her figuration does little more than fulfil a non-specific referential function. The same can be said of some of Leon Golub's work except where his imprecise figuration (reminiscent of Edward Hopper) and his use of a confused foreground / background relation introduces a hesitancy that modifies the certainty of the claim being made by the pictured narrative.

¹¹⁶ Shock as a standard device of the avant-garde was often in the guise of, or accompanied by, deliberate obscurity designed to fulfil the tendentious aim of denigrating or offending the bourgeois audience. As I have said, I regard the establishment of some measure of solidarity with the audience, as a necessary component of critique. Shock objectifies and alienates the audience to the point where it is hardly possible to make a concurrent affirmation of solidarity with them. In any event, shock denotes a patronising relationship which refuses to countenance anything but acquiescence in reaction and assumes a passivity which requires force to motivate the subject into consideration.

¹¹⁷ Quite apart from this confusion of adopting the means as a way of critiquing the same, the death's head is a cliché. It may have had some critical value in painting several centuries ago but it has very little power now.

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Fig. 64. Left. Thomas Ruff, **Nudes br 16**, C print with diasec face 110.2 x 153.7 cm. 2004. Right, Marlene Dumas, **Feather Stola** (medium not specified) 100 x 56 cm. 2000.

¹¹⁹ Reference need not be figurative or pictorial. References can also be made through the manner of address. Currin for example uses his painting technique as an important indicator of his area of interest. He thereby invokes the multitude of discourses that surround ideas of tradition, craftsmanship, virtuosity etc as well as Mannerist painting. On the other hand Marlene Dumas immediately directs the nature of her conversation through the expressive and emotional vigour of her painting style. Her Expressionism carries into the discussion assumptions about the communicative potential of gesture and our ability to read subliminal emotional signals through the artists mark that prioritise feeling as the way to access understanding. Gary Hume's American Tan series is ostensibly a critique of the role of the cheerleaders of American sports events and the institution as a reflection of American life. The seductive sexualised presentation he offers (simple, subdued in colour, graphic, shiny, poured paint on aluminium) continues to subscribe to the idea of spectacle because the works he makes subscribe to the spectacular consumerist ethos.

¹²⁰ Seeing the images in this (small) format, almost as thumbnails, has the effect of making them seem more photographic. When they are seen in the gallery they become more photographic from a distance but also become disturbingly abstract and optically confusing close up. The experience of this instability is not replicable other than with direct contact in the gallery space.

¹²¹ oneartworld.com/Yvon.../The+Economist+Shuffle.html. This review describes the work:

Yet also in them, the transient quality of news images is collapsed into the timeless quality of painting, where we might find snippets of Caravaggio, Corot, Monet, Friedrich, as well as an implicit wink to newsprint inspired painters such as Warhol and Richter. Thus, instead of foregrounding a politicized agenda, Jusidman aims to subjugate politically minded art to his own aesthetic terms. The pieces in *The Economist Shuffle* are layered concoctions of mediation and information calculated to activate “an abrasive merging of otherwise incompatible predispositions in the viewer”. The artist refers, of course, to the age-old artistic dichotomy of purposiveness/aestheticism. The purposive aspect of these paintings derives from the artist’s deliberate sourcing of the images, and the aestheticist aspect is articulated by their softened oil and egg tempera technique. Gilded frames in turn crown the display by giving a purpose — as in commercial packaging to their aestheticism, while further aesthetizing the pictures’ purposiveness.

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Fig. 65. Installation view of Jusidman’s exhibition of portraits of clowns at Museo Amparo in the early 1990’s. Jusidman describes his tactics in producing these works in conversation with Sofia Hernandez Chong Cuy as:

...to fuse the debased clown-icon with as elegant and seductive a painterly manner as I could. Elegance would be staged by way of the minimalist ideal— a flat, square, human-proportioned format. Seductiveness would be articulated through a luscious layered technique reminiscent of Venetian portraiture.

blog.sideshow.org/2009/08/yishai-jusidman-interview

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Fig. 66. Jusidman, from the **Bajo tratamiento** series (mentally ill outcasts) and showing the accompanying plaques that contain a written psychological diagnosis of each figure.

¹²⁴ Staci Boris quotes Peter Schjeldahl in **John Currin** (Catalogue) Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, 2003, 51: ‘Currin unites extremes of low-down grotesquerie and classical elegance’

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Fig. 67. Gustave Courbet, **Sleep**, 135 x 200 cm. Oil on canvas, 1866.

It is useful to point out that because of its contextualisation as 'real' Sleep invokes narrative strongly.

¹²⁶ Gary Hume in conversation with Ulrich Loock in **Gary Hume** (Catalogue) Published by Jay Jopling / White Cube (London) 2007, 83.

This declaration of Hume's can be contrasted with David Anfam's comment (in the same publication p11) that:

When de Kooning mixed his pigments into an unstable emulsion of safflower oil, water and various solvents, he achieved what Hume has achieved with the erstwhile taboo one of household enamel. Taboo, that is, until another Abstract Expressionist brought it from beyond the pale into the dominion of 'high' art. The allusions to Pollock in 'American Tan' denote that here is no mere replay of Pop Art's brash icons. On the contrary this is as much a critique as a celebration. Something may be amiss in this American dreamland. After all, the metaphorical silences of 'American Tan' address a raucous subject.

The critique is however, not just of American life, it is also a critique of Pollock and aestheticism. As Hume explains to Anfam:

"Pollock represents that all-American hope in the future. But I wanted to neuter him by taking the direction out of his work"....Moreover, Pollock's methods suggest to Hume that 'you fall in love with your materials', then 'aestheticize' them and it becomes 'masturbatory aestheticism'

¹²⁷ Ibid. 96.

¹²⁸ Ibid. 103:

When you're painting it, you have to love it. You have to love to paint. You've got to love the stuff coming off the end of the brush and then you move that stuff around, not just colouring in. And then it sets; it doesn't dry, it sets.

¹²⁹ David Anfam quotes Hume (in conversation 4 May 2007) in **Gary Hume** (Catalogue) Published by Jay Jopling / White Cube (London) 2007,11:

'Pollock represents that all-American hope in the future. But I wanted to neuter him by taking direction out of his work.' In other words, these patterns go nowhere. Moreover, Pollock's methods suggest to Hume that "you fall in love with your materials', then, 'aestheticize' them and it becomes 'masturbatory aestheticism'

¹³⁰ Hustveldt, Siri, (quoting Mark Solms and Oliver Turnbull, **The Brain and the Inner World** (Other Press, New York, 2002, 82) in: **The Shaking Woman or History of My Nerves**, Sceptre, London, 2010. 53.

¹³¹ Jesus Fuenmayor in **Luc Tuymans**, (eds. Emma Dexter and Julian Heynen, Tate Publishing , London,2004,117.):

This testifies to one of the works major features: the interdependence of Tuymans paintings and his statements. The artist himself has precisely emphasised this point with reference to the titles both of his works and exhibitions.

¹³² Examples of this are his work exploring the holocaust and that discussing Belgian colonialism.

¹³³ Jesus Fuenmayor in **Luc Tuymans**, (eds. Emma Dexter and Julian Heynen, Tate Publishing , London,2004,117.) says:

It has been noted by many critics, and stressed in an essay by Ulrich Loock, that Tuymans work is suspended, caught – anachronistically – at a point prior to one of the most crucial projects in modernist art: the break with representation. As Loock points out :'[Tuymans] begins where modernist painting made its fundamental gestures of destruction...His mourning recommences with painterly representation itself, setting about to bring it to an end, constructing its failure.

Tuymans acknowledges that representation through painting has no autonomy outside its referential function. This is supported by his insistence on the need for language and narrative as necessary ingredients in the construction of the totality that the painting becomes. Rather than abandoning representation however, Tuymans uses a limited mimesis as a referral method and supports this visual reference with other associations deriving from the devices and discourses his methodology conjures up. Often his visual references fail on their own account and need support from language to make any sense at all.

¹³⁴ Jesus Fuenmayor in **Luc Tuymans**, (eds. Emma Dexter and Julian Heynen, Tate Publishing , London,2004, 118) points to the location of Tuymans work as being firmly bedded in praxis:

I feel that this essay is justified in charting the systems of relationships established in Tuymans work. In doing so, it is impossible to escape two issues raised by literary theorist and Marxist philosopher Christopher Caudwell (1907-3): 'What is the function of Art? Any artist such as (D.H.) Lawrence, who aims to be "more than" an artist, necessarily poses such questions'; and the further consideration that: 'What is important to art...is the question: what social function is art playing?'

¹³⁵ See page 42.

¹³⁶ Tuymans, Luc, in **Luc Tuymans** Ulrich Loock, Juan Vicente Aliaga, Nancy Spector, (eds.), Phaidon, London, 1996,118:

¹³⁷ Tuymans, Luc, in **Luc Tuymans** Ulrich Loock, Juan Vicente Aliaga, Nancy Spector, (eds.), Phaidon, London, 1996,118.

¹³⁸ **The Architect** is discussed in an interview on <http://www.tate.org.uk/tateetc/issue1/article3.htm> From a conversation between Peter Doig, Chris Ofili, Adrian Searle, Paulina Olowksa, on Luc Tuymans. TATE ETC Issue 1. Summer 2004:

PETER DOIG. In terms of his content though, I like the way he can sometimes bring the sinister to something that appears quite innocuous. I remember seeing this painting *The Architect* (1997). There is an image of a man with a mask-like face on his, lying on a massive field of white. It was painted from a still taken from home film footage of Albert Speer while on a skiing holiday in the Alps. It was made to connect with other paintings it was exhibited with - paintings of prison camps among them. There was something in the text for the exhibition about a telegram from Speer to Himmler complaining that the prisoners had too much space.

¹³⁹ It is also worth observing that this tactic of isolating the narrative from a 'live' context has the same effect as was observed with John Currin's nudes. The isolation from context emphasises the abstract and conceptual nature of the subject matter being proposed.

¹⁴⁰ Rancière, Jacques, **The Politics of Aesthetics**, *the Distribution of the Sensible*, (trans Gabriel Rockhill), Continuum, London, 2004. 63.

¹⁴¹ **The Prisoner**, 244 x 460 cm (1989), **Night Scene II**, 269 x 216 cm, (1989), and **The Arrest II**, 301 x 283 cm (1992) are all good examples of this. All of these require quite concentrated looking to understand the figuration. This process takes time which starts to provide the conditions necessary for the contemplative and interpretive processes to take hold. I have given the sizes of these to emphasise the immense scale of most of his work.

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