Nigel Cooke

The Ambivalence of the Undead – Entropy, Duality and the Sublime as Perspectives on Contemporary Painting

Goldsmiths College, University of London

Phd Degree Thesis 2004

Abstract

It is well known that painting has died many deaths in the course of modernist history. But whilst *P*ainting dies, paintings keep getting made.

My thesis examines this question: Is the fact that paintings have the power to allegorize their own historical death a new 'fact' of painting's 'essence'?

Introduction – Painting's Perverse Body

Painting's death is investigated to see how painting's essence was first determined, then abandoned. These narratives are found to run counter to a notion of the essential. Instead, they become narratives of style.

Chapter 1 – Multilateral Displacement – Communication and Representation

A non-linear model of representation from the established context of modernist linearity is extracted in a close reading of visual concepts in Bataillean Surrealism. This elaborates a notion of death as a style into a constructive representational logic. This determines a non-terminal, death-aware idea of representation.

Chapter 2 – Visual Entropy and the Contagion of Death

Bataille's economics of death are expanded in connection with the logic of entropy within living systems. The close relationship between these ideas and the biomechanics of nature uncovers a visual-logical model manifest in the phenomena of insect mimesis. The 'reciprocal topography' between the organism and its context is understood as a system of information exchanges embodying Bataillean non-linearity in (something like) visual entropy.

Chapter 3 – Sublime Mimesis

This chapter investigates the American landscape painters of the 18th century and the relationship between the desiring author-painter and the 'sublime' objective vista.

The anxiety recorded in the style changes of these paintings is read as reactions to an unrepresentable 'terrifying (sublime) beauty' in nature. Painting becomes not a sovereign site on the fringe of the world, but as one crystallisation stage in the matrix of information exchanges in nature. This implies a concordant relocation of the sublime.

Conclusion – Painting as Anoriginal Illustration

Painting comes to be seen as Anoriginal Illustration – it describes the 'primary text' of the natural world by always 'coming after' and being reassuringly communicative in its resolution. On the other hand, and at the same time, painting is evidence of all that threatens such resolution.

Painting's essence then becomes anoriginal illustration, the mirror that reflects the energetic interdependency of reassurance and anxiety in its oscillating, multi-temporal basic (dead) nature.

Table of Contents

Introduction – Painting's Perverse Body

1.The End

The history of painting (1), from around the middle of the 19th century, is littered with many theoretical attempts to dispose of it. Painting – the old-world business of smearing coloured mud across a flat surface - became the obvious target for the progressive and industrial narratives of modernity, with its new forms such as photography. From around the time of Paul Delaroche's famous comment on the first photographs that 'From today, painting is dead' (2), the interpretative and illusionistic functions of painting were increasingly problematised, ultimately finding themselves variously scrapped as the 'objectionable relics of European art' (3). So the painter's touch or 'the gesture' had to constantly re-evaluate or re-thematize this position as modernity progressed.

Mechanical reproduction impacted dramatically upon the notions of uniqueness and authenticity that had dominated painting before photography. Hence the result of painting's re-evaluation of itself was the creation of the self-reflexive tendency of modernism - breaking painting down into more or less ***'essential'*** components. This essentialism amounted to an affirmation (that painting was still worth bothering with), located in an outlining of the formal features that supposedly constituted a painting historically, and making them the sole line of enquiry (4).

In this way, the industrialisation (5) of the visual, acted out by photography, was instrumental in the subsequent industrialisation of the 'touch' acted out by the course of modernist painting (6). The often-emphasised historical drift from Manet and Courbet to Malevich's monochromes, from Cezanne's fracturing of the pictorial to Pollock's hands-off production values, shows this systematising, analytical process clearly. This trajectory, the deconstructive (7) aim towards a pure painting expressive only of its own presence and manufacture as expressed by the

monochrome, appears to us as a stage by stage disassembling of painting's encyclopaedic past. Decorative, illusionistic, allegorical (8) or pictorial qualities come to be seen as extraneous to painting's essence and are done away with, one by one, in post-war modernity. This project can then be seen like this: as a working towards THE END – painting's own historical death (9).

This is the familiar story line of modern painting. That is, it reflects the dominant art historical narratives of modernity from the 20th century. More specifically, it views painting from the perspective of Greenbergian modernism (10). There are, of course, many sub-plots of modernism and the avant-garde, spanning continents and cultures, an analysis of which is far beyond the limits of this study. Yet despite the proliferating metanarratives of modernism, there is one visual manifestation of the logic of both the modernisation of the visual, *and* the death of painting that approaches a universal sign. That is, the monochrome. Paulo Herkenhoff writes:

> The monochrome in the postwar years is an extraordinary paradigm. The singularity emerges as extreme at precisely the moment when there seems to have been the greatest similitude in its use. Commenting on the monochromatic inventions of Yves Klein, Rauschenberg, and Ellsworth Kelly, Benjamin Buchloh observes how "the coincidence as well as the simultaneity and repetitions of other avant-garde paradigms, substantiates the hypothesis that the discursive formation of modernism generated its own historical and evolutionary dynamic. If we assume that the visual paradigms operate analogously to linguistic paradigms, then the 'langue' of modernism would constitute the neo-avant-garde 'speakers' and continuously replicate and modify their 'paroles'". White monochromes created in just more than a decade by artists from all over the world point to the dispersion of the idea of centre in art history. This occurs when there is an artist who questions the gaze, whether in Brazil, Venezuela, Italy, France, the United States, or Japan. (11).

The monochrome's importance for a discussion about painting is in its being emblematic, in several cultures, of both the end-game logic of modernism, and by extension, the end – or death - of painting. And it is the impact of this death that forms the background for my main area of

interest – the ways in which post-linearity – in other words, the life of painting after its death - constructs models for painting. But more about that later.

2. The Mourning After (12)

Let us return to the scene of this historical death, in order to sketch out the background a little further.

Yve-Alain Bois' essay 'Painting: The Task of Mourning' (13), takes this narrative as its focus, with a view to describing its effect on, and a future for, contemporary painting. This is perhaps one of the most influential essays to tackle the problem of how to paint after the death of painting. But one look at the title suggests to us that all is not well after painting has been laid to rest. Already there is a clue to Bois' position. If painting is in mourning, then what has been lost, and why was it so precious? Is this nostalgia for some sort of 'golden age'?

Bois begins by recalling the aforementioned impact of industrialisation on painting. The verdict of death is pronounced. Indeed, as predicted, it makes up the very point of his version of the modernist painting trajectory. However, this process of modernity is described in a different way: as a *repression* of the industrial by the handcrafted, a view based upon Thierry deDuve's perception of the relationship between painting and mass production (14). DeDuve argues that the early modernism of pleinair painting was based on the artist's awareness, through the employment of manufactured tubes of paint, that they could not technically compete with the industries that were flourishing all around them. The psychoanalytic analogy of the return of the repressed for painting is then, for Bois, a gradual and inevitable resurgence of the industrial. Duchamp's disgust for paintings is helpful here; it is seen as a reaction to this internalisation of the industrial. This internalisation can be found in the use of manufactured – hence readymade – tubes of paint, which for Duchamp deny the artist the honour of being an original author. Seurat's flashy, techniquey art, on the other hand, recognises it and welcomes it as a new condition of painting. With these two in mind, the lineage from Seurat to Pollock is seen as a gradual return of

the repressed, a slow 'coming out' of the truth of industrialisation until the point when – at last - no brush touches the canvas and the end of painting can finally be worked through.

By nature, this process of industrialisation moved in accord with the commodification of art's special status. Bois cites Baudelaire as the instigator of the modernist historicist reaction to this threat, which in turn became the teleology that generated Greenberg's essentialism (15). Baudelaire saw history as a chain along which individual art forms approached their essence, a view that can be clearly seen in the ontological procedures of Greenberg's high modernism.

Yet this essentialism is problematic. As Douglas Crimp asks: 'what makes it possible to look at the paleolithic markings on the wall of a cave, a seventeenth-century portrait, and an abstract expressionist canvas and say that they are all *the same thing*? That they all belong to the same category of knowledge?' (16). It is apparent that the ontological view of painting (that 'it has an origin and an essence' (17)) reduces the history of the medium to a description of style evolution (18). Visual strategies disclose, announce, reveal different characteristics of the continuous painting 'gene'. The 'essence' of painting is sometimes more, sometimes less successfully disclosed. In other words, the 'essence' stays the same, but the outward look of this essence, - the style - changes.

3. Death as Style

In these terms, does the death of painting, or The End, become just another style change?

It would appear so. Once painting had to deal with the threat of industrialisation, the features that made painting different from other modes of production had to be defined to preserve its value. In modernist terms, value emanated from painting's autonomy from other forms of production, rather than its similarity to them. Greenberg's ideal was that no medium shared specific features of its makeup with other art forms (19). The elected specifics of painting were then the handcrafted element of the surface working in harmony with the historical pedigree of the materials. These

then had to be thematised and qualified in the face of mass production, to show how historically viable, and therefore progressive, painting could be. So 'images' on a painting's surface were not pictures as such, but were at once reductive pictorial tropes that simultaneously 'revealed' the 'truth' of the materials.

So a Barnett Newman stripe had to be all this: first and foremost, a signifier of the fact that painting was taking place (sincere deployment of colour, tone, composition).

Then, a *denial* of any allegorical content in these 'facts' (a story is too much like a novel, space is too theatrical/ architectural etc).

Then, ultimately, a revelation of the material factuality (thus truth) of the object, as a categorical necessity, following these two demands. And in this uncovering the materials would be finally seen as the carrier of historical continuity and value.

4. Essence

This interrelationship became the logic of modernism's idea of painting's essence. The 'paintingness' of painting resided in the materials strictly deployed only *as themselves*, free of any extraneous baggage from other forms. So the selected features of painting that made up its so-called essence were *formal.* But as this formalism was based on the dissolving of the distinction between picturing and making – materials are image, image is material - in a sense the essence was industrial – about making. This logically meant that the essence had to become more and more refined to compete with other industries of image making. In other words, the 'essence' ironically moved away from the specifics of painting and became more about utility and efficiency – extrinsic economics, part of the economic world at large. *Not* an essence, then, which would imply an intrinsic, continuous and sovereign value. This meant that the painter's body had to become more and more like a machine - and this machine was not very cost effective and, comparative to new technologies, technically inefficient. It is worth noting, though, that this 'industrialising' of painting was not about accelerating a painter's output; it was intended to purify and concentrate it. So painting's essence thus became the *style* of an essence by judging the

painting process in terms of industrial efficiency at the formal level of production, thus contradicting the notion of the essential. The essence, being formal, was first sized-up then ultimately rubbished as antiquated by more sophisticated formal procedures. In turn, 'essence as flawed industry' confirmed the arbitrary nature of the value of historical continuity. And once this is acknowledged, then the polarities of birth and death – the ontological belief in an origin and an essence – become issues of style also.

So the fact that painting persists in some form or other today is troublesome to the discipline of art history that created this narrative. Painting's death has a historical reality in that it became a consequence of the subjugating of painting's essence to utility. Yet in this subjugation, the notion of the essential is undermined. So the essence that is killed off by the industrial cannot be an essence at all. It is just another style.

Therefore: ***THE END of painting is the allegory of the death of painting, in the face of industrialisation, acted out as style***.

So painting cannot achieve death in a finite way, as this involves identifying a core character of painting that is under threat. A character, moreover, that states once and for all what a painting *is*. Yet once this feature is identified as threatened, then its status as an essence is undermined, in that it is being asked to subjugate its sovereignty to the utility of competition. The notion of competition could be seen as based upon linearity – ideas competing in the name of progress, to a realistic conclusion, from this state to that.

The death of painting then becomes a style that can be referenced, just like classicism, primitivism, cubism, futurism, surrealism, neo-plasticism.... Painting continues ***and*** its essence is dead... dead essentialism.

It is now clear to see that Greenbergian essentialism was not essentialism at all. In imposing extrinsically determined values of historicity on painting, Greenbergian modernism failed to discern the complex oscillations between histories and languages that have defined painting's character(s). Defining a singular essence of painting is about taking painting away from its

complexity and consolidating ideologies for painting in the realm of style. That is externally, or 'after painting'. History is not merely a case of linear evolution, and, it could be argued, this is painting's very point. Andrew Blauvelt elaborates:

> Not surprisingly, this drive to reduce the definition of painting to a set of characteristics with which to limit and thus differentiate it as a specific medium would foreclose an understanding of painting as intrinsically plural. To expand notions of painting beyond these delimited essences would be to acknowledge the aggregative and complex conditions that constitute painting's heterogeneity. In other words, it would not be simply enough to ask what makes a painting a painting, but rather to understand the ways in which painting differs from itself (20).

Furthermore, so long as death is founded upon Greenbergian essentialism, then it cannot take place as an end to the ***medium***. It can only take place as the end of a ***style***.

So where is the essence?

I will return to the idea of pluralism, which I believe is critical for any idea of the essential in painting, at a later point. But for now, let us return to Bois. How does he perceive the role of painting after modernism?

5. Bois and Essentialism

Bois' conception of the future of painting seems to be predicated exactly upon a belief in Greenberg's essentialism.

Whilst he breaks down the project of modern painting into three groups each represented by an artist, (Duchamp (the imaginary), Rodchenko (the real), and Mondrian (the symbolic)), the 'project' of painting today is still seen as pledged to the aims of these deconstructive archetypes. Painting can only be valued if it takes on the task of its own deconstruction. That which lies outside this singular conception of modernism is seen as 'artifacts created for the market and by the market (21)'. However, Bois *does* accept that the problem of contemporary painting lies in the

need to avoid the modernist teleology that continuously approaches the end, whilst at the same time asserting the importance of this level of self-reflexive inquiry. In other words, painting has to be about the end, but it must not think of achieving it. So, following, the above logic, Bois would like a painting styled on its own death.

What would that kind of painting look like?

Bois' example is Robert Ryman: 'In his art the feeling of an end is worked through in the most resolved way. Although he is claimed by some as a postmodernist, I would say he is more accurately the guardian of the tomb of modernist painting, at once knowing of the end and also knowing the impossibility of arriving at it without working it through' (22).

Does *this* not sound like the work of a 'manic mourner' (23)? The knowledge of loss, the grieving for the mode so cherished yet the awareness of absence? There seems to be a contradiction here. Critical of Peter Halley's conduit paintings, and Ross Bleckner's 'failed op art' paintings, Bois instead calls *these* artists 'manic mourners' (24). Yet in their appropriation of the 'look' of various strains of modernism, whilst maintaining an industrialised system of production (stencilling, masking) and pictorialising abstraction (picturing things that look like abstract paintings), could they not be said to satisfy Bois agenda? That is, the need to accept the end whilst not trying to make it happen in a total way? Is not the pictorialisng of abstraction a strategy for avoidance of termination, an example of non-pathological, non-manic, straightforward mourning? In other words, do they not do 'dead essentialism'- the style of the death of painting?

6. Abstraction and Pluralism

Bois still envisions a site removed from both historicism and the economics of the art market, where a cogent modernism can be worked over at a distance from the socio-economic climate. Despite accepting that 'reproducibility and fetishization have permeated all aspects of life: have become our "natural" world' (25), Bois somehow retains a central belief in the ideals of autonomy typical of Greenbergian modernism:

Yet mourning has been the activity of painting throughout this century. "To be modern is to know *that which is not possible any more*," Roland Barthes once wrote. But the work of mourning does not necessarily become pathological: the feeling of the end, after all, did produce a cogent history of painting, modernist painting, which we have probably been too prompt to bury. Painting might not be dead. Its vitality will only be tested once we are

> cured of our mania and our melancholy, and we believe again in our ability to act in history: accepting our project of working through the end again, rather than evading it through increasingly elaborate mechanisms of defense (this is what mania and melancholy are about) and settling our historical task: the difficult task of mourning (26).

Bois' vision of a kind of exalted afterlife for painting (where the end can constantly be approached without danger) represents a conservative ambition that accepts that the logic of The End yet cannot survive without the artificial autonomy of formalism. This 'retirement home' for painting fails to account for the ways in which the death of painting as a style has influenced the culture of painting since modernism, and how this in turn has impacted upon painting today. A sanctuary where painting can allegorise 'the good old days' ignores the recent assertion of pluralism in culture, now that linear history is seen as a 20th century fiction (27). This new pluralism could be found in the fact that, for instance, abstraction is more likely to flourish in the world of interior design than in a gallery (28). And it is in fact the actual collapse of abstraction that has been taken up by some painters and used as a sign for the end of linear progress in painting. Artists such as Bleckner and Halley, named 'manic mourners' by Bois, could instead be seen as embracing the demise of abstraction as an expression in itself. Indeed the 1980's (the decade in which Bois' *Painting as Model* was published) was largely characterised by widespread ironic pluralism in both Europe and America. Abstraction became merely one ideological sign that was up for grabs amongst a teeming array of simulacra. Whilst the criticism of the time suffered 'an astonishing lack of differentiation' (29) between practices, there was nevertheless a climate of 'visual sarcasm' in painting in general that flourished alongside the rise of appropriation art. In America the works of Sherrie Levine and Mike Kelly used abstraction as a degraded language within abstract

paintings that were themselves a critique of abstraction. In Germany it was expression that was appropriated as an outmoded feature of painting. Isabelle Graw describes the scene:

> Inside Cologne there were two 'packs': The Mulheimer Freiheit, a group that played with calculated regression; and the more interesting, loose formation of artists around Galerie Max Hetzler, including Albert Oehlen, Werner Buttner, and Martin Kippenberger. The latter were highly aware of painting's overdetermination, and used it as a tool while benefiting from its authority – yet their work turned out to be, as often as not, rather painterly. Neither Oehlen nor Kippenberger was interested in authentic expression, however; the expressive subject is at most, a retroactive effect of these deliberate expressive gestures (30).

This reanimation of old values in response to painting's 'overdetermination' acknowledges the failure of painting's past ideologies as an expression in itself. In this way, the climate of pluralism enabled these artists to reference the death of painting, one way or another, as a ***style.***

More recent examples would be artists such as Laura Owens, Carroll Dunham and Monique Prieto, who produce superficially vapid and lighthearted 'abstract' paintings that appear to allegorize the emptying out, over time, of abstraction's sovereignty and gravitas as the 'sign' of modernist triumph. It could be argued that the 'heritage' of this stance could be traced to Sherrie Levine's 'capturing and recycling (of) male abstraction' in the 1980's, 'an act of insertion into a male-dominated painting tradition' (31). This is surely the kind of ideological reversal enabled by the pluralism of the death of painting, where authorial histories can be ironically and critically re-deployed (32). The perversity of this kind of reversal could now be seen as the widespread appeal of painting. Carroll Dunham: 'The distrust of painting by "smart people" made painting more attractive to me as I thought about the implications' (33). Monique Prieto: 'We had to address the gravity of the resistance to our practice with a sort of giddiness, like when you fall for the wrong person' (34).

If the language of abstraction is the real casualty of the end of painting, and painters see this as no obstacle in utilising the casualty as a style of nihilistic expression, then it seems we are culturally beyond the point proposed by Bois. That is, the defining of a site where we might work over the end of painting seriously and in peace. In their investment in a very up-to-date view of abstraction (as cartoonish, perhaps dumb, certainly hysterically idealistic), there is clearly no pining for lost utopias in the work of these artists. There is instead a liberal acceptance of an open field of activity, an awareness of the collapse of specialised artistic boundaries.

However, let us return to an earlier point:

Greenbergian essentialism was not essentialism at all.

And to Blauvelt's point:

'This drive to reduce the definition of painting to a set of characteristics with which to limit and thus differentiate it as a specific medium would foreclose an understanding of painting as intrinsically plural.'

Intrinsically plural... If Greenberg's essentialism is anything but essentialism, then Blauvelt seems to be suggesting that there is a more fugitive essence nevertheless in place. Does Blauvelt propose a kind of 'essence of pluralism'?

Whilst it seems clear that to impose ideological narratives externally would be to redirect painting in arbitrary ideological terms, it is also clear that a descriptive model of painting's contemporary function needs to be derived *from within painting* itself. There seems to be an intrinsic appeal to painting's strange status. In this case, what is required is an investigation into what painting is *as an intellectual experience* of that position.

In the spirit of perversity, is there perhaps a need for a *new essentialism* for contemporary painting?

Since death – the ultimate end – was derailed and displaced as another style within a super abundance of styles, it then becomes important to work out a model for this clustering of effects.

Where is *painting* amongst all these styles? Like petals on a flower, could these styles be seen as radiating from a single host organism, that is, Painting's 'essence' – Painting, with a capital P? What would characterise this new essence?

7. Painting's Perverse Body

So to begin with, what state is contemporary painting in, exactly? It is certainly left in a strange position. It exists, or persists, in the afterglow of the old linear trajectory (that put it to death) as a zombie. It's very much dead, we have already been told - killed by mass production, the photograph, the readymade and the rest. Yet it is still kicking around the margins, helping itself to whatever styles (including, perversely, the one of its own death), it sees fit to parody, contradict, critique or emulate. Not surprisingly, it is this paradoxical status that has become central to contemporary discussions on painting.

Douglas Fogle, in his catalogue introduction to the recent painting survey exhibition *Painting at the Edge of the World*, likens painting to the dead body in Alfred Hitchcock's 1955 movie *The Trouble with Harry* (35). In the film, the body of Harry Worp carries the momentum of Hitchcock's storyline as it is haplessly buried, unearthed and buried over and over again. Finally, after the final exhumation, the cleaned-up body is replaced at the original spot where it was first found. Fogle uses this image metaphorically to describe the tendency of painting to be dug up every once in a while: 'With the precision of a finely tuned clock, painting has appeared at the hospital emergency room "dead on arrival". But like the inert body of Harry, painting lies there in plain sight, dead yet very much present, and strangely lacking the rigor mortis that is characteristic of cadavers as we know them' (36). In other words, the death evoked is artificial (no rigor mortis), theatrical (lack of internment keeps it unrealistically and comically in sight for an audience to consider) and satirical (it mocks the follies of the living). Here, the constant retrieval of Harry's body in *The Trouble with Harry* makes a farce of the cast's desire for a conclusive narrative in the face of mystery. Following Fogle's suggestive text, the picture of painting's body mocking a cast

of art historians in their attempt to bury it is not hard to imagine. All this pandemonium gives the body, in the banal New England setting of the film, a bizarre kind of extra 'life'.

Might painting's non-conclusive 'death' also be in fact a kind of perverse yet life-giving energy? If the body in the film can mobilise a community to actions so far outside its ethical identity through its lumpen incongruity, then might the perverse body of painting do the same to the culture of visual art?

And is there some evidence of this in the way it has imprinted the question of its life-or-death into the very fabric of our perceptions of it as a cultural phenomenon?

Despite its aptness, Fogle's analogy between painting and a dead man is also typical of contemporary (yet mainly pejorative) views of painting's complexity. Having run the gauntlet of all those historical attacks, it is largely seen as some sort of traumatised personality or dysfunctional body, as Bois' 'manic mourner' analogy testifies. Painting could indeed be any kind of miserable soul: a repressed loner, a vampire, a perpetual mourner, a moaner, a frankenstein's monster, a shrieking hysteric, a romantic fantasist. Today's pluralism is seen as a kind of disorder; we are still sufficiently in the grasp of modernist teleologies for this condition to be viewed as negative. Whereas in the past, narratives of painting's 'state' focused on what was required from it for the purposes of progressive ideologies, presently we lack a convincing narrative to describe the plural other than with recourse to these theatrical labels. Whilst these pet names say a lot about our fascination with what painting became after it lost its essence, they also do nothing to help us describe what painting might have, in place of an essence, that keeps it hanging on. They metaphorically remind us that painting is still *around* after its death, yet they don't help to pin down why its physical health is something we should care so much about.

If a new essentialism is required, then it is the essentialism of this scenario, painting's perverse body. Painting and its context have become indistinguishable. This state of perversity is a description of painting's omnivorous pluralism. Rather than letting go of

styles as they die and politely moving on, it gorges itself on them, retaining them in a kind of vast memory bank of failures that are regurgitated as self-deprecating asides.

What needs to be determined is how this all-consuming state can be discerned as an intrinsic (ESSENTIAL) characteristic of painting.

It is this question that forms the central enquiry of this essay.

To foreground this enquiry, we need to take a brief look at some evidence of the state of painting today. A particularly ubiquitous piece of evidence would be painting's tendency to reference outmoded conventions from the past. Or to follow the bodily analogy, to regurgitate them from the vaults of its labyrinthine memory. This to me shows the pluralistic perversity of painting most comprehensively – free of its arbitrary essence, we find painting ransacking history for whatever styles it sees fit for expressing its mobile agendas.

However, if, say, the political earnestness of high modernism can be quoted mercilessly by a new ironic pluralism where everything is up for grabs, then the question becomes: what is the *constructive* function of that return to the past?
Is this repetition merely self-deprecating irony, the mischievous actions of a mode of thought free of its historical responsibilities?

Again: Is this intrinsic to painting?

Daniel Birnbaum addresses this, or an aspect of this, in his essay 'Late Arrivals' (37). Importantly, Birnbaum's questions of art's returns to the past are also tied in with the question of a work of art's temporality. Are the two related?

Belatedness is the term used to describe the return of historical forms later in time. This Freudian perspective is also offered by Birnbaum as a suggestion for how the temporality of art works might operate. Using the example of 'traumatic childhood events, which acquire their full significance postfactually' (38), the Freudian model is used to describe events within the avant-garde – such as the monochrome – as traumas which are then acted out in the art works of subsequent generations. Citing Hal Foster's similar employment of psychological models to describe cultural movements (39), Birnbaum details the psychoanalytic theory of *delay* to describe the temporality of subjective experience in general.

There is, in this endeavour, the danger of imposing a system of thought from outside the frame of the artwork's logic (40). As we have already established, this is problematic in that it takes us away from an analysis of what painting is in itself – not as something separate from its context but as something specific within it. Significantly though, and unlike Foster (41), Birnbaum emphasises the problematic nature of employing these theories of subjectivity for collective cultural events. He asks 'Is there such a thing as a *Nachtraglichkeit* (deferred action) of collective processes, i.e., can the Freudian model, developed to explain the curious life of the mind, be applied to history?' (42). Despite this question, however, he cannot deny the tempting Freudian logic that so convincingly describes the repetitions, delays and returns found in art history. Reminding us that this endeavour is by no means new, Birnbaum cites its application by numerous writers (including Foster) regarding the concept of the avant-garde. For example, the many analyses taking the view that the 1960's avant-garde was a 'productive' repetition of the 'original' avant-garde (43). For Birnbaum, this begs the question: 'must we not assume that such repetitions occur as well today? (44).' After all, in terms of the artwork's internal logic, it is read, re-read, misread over and over again, gets recreated, reanimated, reformed continuously as the circumstances of its reception and interpretation develop. So the works of Carroll Dunham and Monique Prieto, for instance, could be re-evaluated now that the 'death-of-painting's-essence' story has been spun out. The works can now be read as referring to the death of abstract painting as much as to cartoons such as *The Ren and Stimpy Show* (45). The need for a linear or hierarchical conception of these works – the idea of *'which came first?'* or '*what's more important?'* gets lost for a significant reason. That

is, it is external to the flux of the artwork's circulating, unfixed temporality. The collapse of the ontological view (that tried to tell us that formal qualities were painting's essence) means that the temporality of the artwork dominates and cancels out the possibility of painting becoming hijacked by ideologies. Its ability to move in time is a by-product of the long-exposed arbitrariness of such utilitarian demands.

This temporal mobility is Birnbaum's main point. He cites two primary examples of this. Beethoven' C Minor Sonata, Opus 111, which contains a passage sounding inexplicably like ragtime music (46). The ragtime passage only appears as such accidentally, due to the developments in music since Beethoven's death which condition the process of re-identification.

In a different way, the work of Swedish painter Cecilia Edefalk (fig. 1) provides Birnbaum's other example. These self-portraits stretch the temporality of their status as paintings of an original image by deviating from a now absent source (a photograph of the artist) during a protracted time span of production. Paintings emulate prior paintings in sequence until any sense of origin becomes elusive and at the same time, in its absence, highly insistent. Edefalk's works evaporate the sense of self usually aimed at in self-portraiture by creating portraits of the previous painting in the sequence of works, rather than by returning to a 'source' image. Aiming for repetition, the representation of herself becomes located in the minor *differences* between one painting and the next, rather than in the iconic representation of her appearance. As the paintings are superficially all the same at first glance, the eye is drawn to detecting the differences between each work. These details subtly index the presence of the artist while simultaneously questioning the reliability of the likeness in the picture.

As in both Foster's and Benjamin Buchloh's view of the repetition of the avant-garde, this retroactive effect is constructive (47). The backward look is not from a position of inferiority – the present as a bad replica of the past – but from a position that confers original status on the thing replicated. 'To be an origin, the Freudian model teaches us, is to be repeated and "produced" retroactively as a point of departure' (48). Birnbaum extends this point through Derrida's reading of Freud: 'It is always too late, never now...*the present is never present*. Or rather, the *consciousness* of what is present is never *self*-present, but always delayed' (49). Through Freud's

notion of the temporality of experience, Birnbaum suggests a model for the temporality of both history and artworks based upon deferral and repetition. In Edefalk's work the representation of the self as another questions the notion of a stable self but also confirms this scenario, in its instability, as a point of departure. In its marginal status, existing at the fringe of representation in the differences between images, the self exists not as a force of expression but as a trace.

The consequences of this idea of repetition and delay for painting can then be determined at the level of the ***image*** and its internal dynamic (as evidenced by Edefalk), and at the level of the ***object*** in relation to its context (The Beethoven sonata).

Birnbaum reminds us that 'painting no longer appears as a strictly circumscribed mode of expression, but as a zone of contagion, constantly branching out and widening its scope. Painterly practices emerge in other genres, such as photography, video, sculpture, printmaking, and installation' (50). The importance of Birnbaum's essay for me is in the locating of the historical relay between past and present in the artworks themselves, as well as in the make-up of individual consciousness. This suggests an interconnectedness, one that confirms the circularity of culture and the totality of style.

Does this circularity approach an idea of what the essence of painting might be?

How is this logic to be explored?

I do this in painting itself in my studio practice, where the internal dynamic of the painting is stretched to accommodate temporal delays between regions of detail. A small section of the image can be viewed as an autonomous painting at close range, yet its status is modified or even disappears when the painting is viewed at a distance. But as said above, this activity cannot be removed or separated from its context and (now, non-linear) historical situation, which is what this written part of the thesis elaborates.

What needs to be determined is a new non-linear model of representation that can account for the free-range pluralism of painting as it is seen today. My thesis will approach this over three Chapters. The structure of the thesis develops along these lines:

Chapter One will firstly attempt to establish a non-linear model of representation, as a response to the findings in this introduction, regarding painting's pluralism. This is to elaborate the notion of death as a style into a constructive representational logic. The aim here is to determine a non-terminal and death-aware idea of representation that can be built upon to pursue a conception of painting's new essence. This logic is found in Georges Bataille's 'The Language of Flowers'. In this text, Bataille details a conception of the linear visual sign (a flower's growth) that features a non-linear and contrary body of symbolic information. Here, Bataille's notion of non-linearity is negotiated alongside his economics of death and language. This helps to bring the abstract notions of symbolism and death back into proximity with materiality, which in turn interfaces with the extension of this dimension of the visual in Chapter Two. This routes the thesis towards a new conception of the essential in painting.

These findings will thus be investigated in Chapter Two in terms of materiality and information. The model of non-linearity established in Chapter One will be examined as a process of information economics. The terms of information theory will guide this study to establish a model of non-linearity that operates as both a visual and material logic. The world of living systems becomes the site for exploring the dynamics of the continuous flow of matter and information in nature, outlined by theories of communication and information (derived from a thermodynamic paradigm). As this flow conceives of information as a property of all systems, a painting comes to be seen as a 'crystallisation point' within this flux. In this way it can be connected with other information systems in the world at large. The example of the mimetic insect is thus utilised as a system that both advances Bataille's model of non-linearity in 'The Language of Flowers', and also reflects the logic of painting that thematises its own death. This is through conceptions of

visual organisation and visual entropy that stem directly from the principles of thermodynamics (that construct communications theory), and insect mimicry (a paradigm of visual duality).

This look towards nature from the perspective of painting, circumscribing an organic model, is enabled by the continuity of matter and information.

Chapter Three inverts this look; painting is regarded from the position of nature to see how this relationship impacts on the organisation of a painting as a specific information system. The narrative of the sublime, often connected with the aesthetics of nature painting, comes to be understood as a logic of horror that impacts variously on paintings as psychologically projected information systems. The visual organisation of a painting of nature is understood under the light of the findings in Chapters One and Two.

Through the investigations of these chapters, an 'internally realised' non-linear history of painting is unearthed that challenges the traps of essentialism and style set up by Greenberg, Bois and Buchloh, amongst others. By investigating 19th Century paintings in terms of contemporary debates around information theory, painting is understood as a continuous essence regulated by the plural agencies acting upon the conditions of the object as an information system amongst and within others in the natural world. This gives us a sense of what painting can do now that extends beyond the analogy of the 'sick figure' given to us by the theories of the 20th Century. What is instead proposed is a multitemporal conception of painting's essence predicated upon its contingent role as a natural system. 'System Painting' is as dependent on its context (surrounding flux of greater systems) as an illustration is on its primary text. Hierarchies of value (illustration vs high art) and style (modernism, academicism) are thus abolished in the pluralism of painting's omnivorous basic nature – its essence.

Chapter 1

Multilateral Displacement – Communication and Representation

To begin to approach a notion of painting's 'new essence', we need to define the level at which this essence operates. Already the question sounds extremely complex. Where is such an essence to be found?

As we have seen, the site of Greenbergian essentialism was formal. It was also artificially linear and continuous. It seems clear from this that the formal level is not the place to start determining the essential.

As already established, the termination of this trajectory became the termination of a style – that of painting's death. And in the contemporary climate of pluralism, that style – the end of painting – can be picked up and referenced as a functioning 'look'. So the termination *of* a style took place *as* a style. A painting can then be contemporary and 'dead-esque'.

If the old – or the dead – essence can now become a look of painting, a style of painting, then we are dealing with a paradigm of representation.

This Chapter aims to approach a model of representation that will account for the presence of this kind of death in its logic, without recourse to the sentimental or terminal narratives that affirm historical death as an absolute category. Yve-Alain Bois's *Painting as Model* (1), proposing a progressive account of the essential qualities of painting (the painter's touch, the surface), could be said to represent the former in its reclothing of Greenbergian accounts of modernism. Douglas Crimp's 'The End of Painting', which proposes that the 'pure idiocy' of painting today must be 'finally acknowledged' (2), plans to terminate painting for its outmoded bourgeois ideology. These accounts locate the historical death of painting as an absolute that we must come to terms with as part of a linear history in which progress counts for everything.

However, to reiterate, the practice of painting began to recognise the death of painting as a paradigm for making painting. For example the Belgian artist Luc Tuymans embarked on a series

of works where the conventional semiotic strategy of picture making was rearranged and undermined (3). This 'good bad painting' was deployed as both a critique of the aforementioned linearity and as an analogy for the destruction and horror of the Twentieth Century (4). So this paradigm for making painting after painting's death became a paradigm of painting as style.

With the knowledge of this, the present Chapter aims to discover if there is a possible 'movement' within the acknowledgement of historical death that avoids the aforementioned absolutes that create the falsehood of linear history. What needs to be discovered is a foundation for a non-linear movement that can account for the complexity of a historical narrative that can neither affirm nor deny its end as an absolute.

For me, a suitable point of departure would be a return to modernism, the story that brought 'The End' to the surface of painting's 'consciousness'.

As mentioned in the introduction, this Baudelaire-Greenberg-centred storyline, although dominant, was but one version of events amongst many in the course of 20th century modernity. There were of course alternative histories developing within and around this trajectory, and art history has attempted to describe them with various images. The accelerating proliferation of psychoanalytical analogies in the post-war era produced some accounts where mainstream modernism, in its ubiquity, came to be seen as a consciousness, lavishly endowed with an unconscious all of its own. Surrealism, the unconscious 'wild card' of European modernism, became emblematic of manifold repressed counter-narratves of modernity and thus came to be understood as an effective critique of the status quo. Notable amongst these accounts are Rosalind Krauss' *The Optical Unconscious* (5) and Hal Foster's *Compulsive Beauty* (6).

If surrealism can be seen as the unconscious of the high modernism that brought about 'The End', then why not pursue this terrain to begin to formulate a counter-essence to the flawed essentialism of Greenberg? After all, if the political singularity of this modernism repressed other, less idealistic versions, then it is surely possible that these other stories represent the antithesis of Greenberg's linearity. This opposition then has the potential to contain alternative visual models. In taking this starting point the following questions arise:

Is there a counter-model of the visual proposed by surrealism?

Is it then a non-linear model that accounts for pluralism?

Might this lead us into a more contemporary picture of both history and painting's essence?

However, as surrealism was a diverse collection of often-conflicting impulses and ambitions, it would be appropriate to focus on the faction of surrealism that was most vociferously critical of the dominant linear ideology (7). Without attempting to set up a binary opposition, it nevertheless seems worthwhile to pursue a non-linear conception of representation in the thinking that most dramatically differed from the linear thinking that generated the End of Painting. This tendency is represented most significantly by Bataillean surrealism (8). With its anthropological bias, this body of thought may also help to ground a visual model amongst wider phenomena. This should limit the danger of imposing a model from an ideological distance. Furthermore, developments in surrealist writing were conspicuously indexed to the rapid growth of the discipline of psychoanalysis. With the paradigms of anthropology and psychoanalysis as the engines of surrealist thought, it is possible that a conception of innate – thus essential – procedures in representation will be achieved.

My intention, then, is to start with an expansion of Bataille's critique of rational goals (linearity). The model for this position is to be explored through his essay 'The Language of Flowers' (9). Based upon my own reading of Bataille, this essay encapsulates most effectively Bataille's notion of non-linear representation.

'The Language of Flowers'

How are flowers connected with language, and how are they non-linear? Heliotropic organisms such as flowers grow towards the light. This sounds like a linear movement...

Perhaps not. Bataille describes a non-linear universe where appearances are deceptive. Nothing is straightforward, nothing has authority, and nothing carries the comfortable 'meanings' projected onto objects and experience by society. Nothing could be further from Greenberg's rationality. In

this place, even death is re-determined. In discussing flowers, the symbolism of love and affection you might expect is bizarrely turned on its head. These plants communicate something very different to Bataille: 'What strikes human eyes determines not only the knowledge of the relations between various objects, but also a given decisive and inexplicable state of mind' (10). What kind of state of mind is this? The perversity of Bataille's thought is clear in this sentence, and gives us a sense of his conception of death. For what more than death could be described as both decisive and inexplicable? For Bataille, death is signified as default rather than an absence, and this can be grasped in looking at Bataille's vision of the flower's components.

Succumbing to neither total symbolism (flower = love) or linear language ("I love you"), Bataille finds the 'meaning' ascribed to flowers elsewhere: in the habitual substitution of juxtaposed elements for essential elements. In other words the 'meaning' of flowers is a *displacement* of the symbolism of love from the reproductive organs (something like the truth of love?) of the plant to the surrounding corolla of petals (the ideal of love). Regarding this displacement as familiar to us from our amorous human relations (where we love the person, not their sexual organs), Bataille is critical of this superficial hierarchy in which the petals emerge as conforming to an ideal of beauty. But here a gross failure of this ideal is identified. The delicacy and quick decay of the corolla betrays the truth of the flower – that it signifies death. The development from soil to this perfect state can only be followed by the inevitable collapse of beauty into the soil it came from. Or that a perfect state of refinement carries within it the truth of its ultimate ruin. This is further emphasised by the flower-roots relation. Whereas the flower spectacularly breaks the monotony of the general thrust of nature from earth to sky, it is quickly betrayed by 'the impossible and fantastic vision of roots swarming under the surface of the soil, nauseating and naked like vermin' (11).

The movement of desire to death, then, is symbolised in the flower: 'The most admirable flower ... would not be represented ... as the faded expression of an angelic ideal, but ... as an indecent and glaring sacrilege' (12). Death disturbs the order of the flowers superficial symbolism obscurely yet decisively. Beyond the language imposed upon it, the flowers symbolism is that of death.

So we can see here that Bataille's conception of rational or linear movements (in the case of the flower from earth to sky) involves a fundamental *duality*. Beauty contains hideousness, thus success contains failure, etc. But most importantly, these dualities don't exist together in a way that is constructive of linear thought. Instead, it is exactly this duality that undermines the linearity itself. The extension of this is that death speaks through the life of an organism. The look of a thing contains the truth of its future disappearance. So when we proffer flowers to a loved one, we are at the same time presenting a *memento mori*, a *vanitas tableau*, a sign of The End. The message, the point 'spoken' by the sign of flowers, says "love" and equally "death". In other words, we now have a model of representation in which death becomes *language.*

Yet this is clearly a complex assertion. Following on from this duality of representation, it now becomes important to do the following:

To define more exactly how death and language come to be intertwined in this way.

To further describe this coupling alongside a more detailed account of the *territory* of Bataille's displacement. The purpose of this is to follow the implications of the action of displacement as seen in 'The Language of Flowers'. Questions raised by this model are:

How is this space to be measured, located or otherwise described?

Is the rationalisation of this space useful, or possible, for an understanding of representation? Is it perhaps an outright contradiction, given Bataille's rejection of Utility?

If death is a language, then what defines the relationship between the impulse to speak and the resulting utterance? In other words, how do communication and representation relate?

And if displacement becomes the law of signification, how can 'location' be possible?

To approach these convoluted questions it is necessary to work through the implications of Bataille's concept of representation, and by necessity the notions of utility, uselessness, prohibition and communication that are associated with it. For if a bunch of flowers says "love/death" in a simultaneous moment, then, again, we are dealing with representation.

Language represents the flowers in terms of both these realities. But how do we talk about such an abstract event as this? A sense of where representation 'comes from' will help to do two things:

1. Define how death becomes language.

2. Resolve the contradiction implied by attempting to engage Bataille's thought as a tool for the further understanding of the visual, i.e. that it may return its critique of linearity back to a model of linearity.

Introduction to Utility and Uselessness

By trying to turn Bataille's texts into valuable models for our own purposes we make use of them. They are utilities, tools. If flowers mean death, then exporting ideas to shed light on other things would certainly be equally vain and linear, and would be rejected by Bataille.

We are also superficially trying to attach them to alien concerns. This is not my objective. Any new conception of essentialism has to come from within a system. So any deployment of Bataille's logic has to be based on the implicitness of that logic in a system that we cannot fail to recognise as our area of concern.

What has Bataille got against making use of things?

For Bataille, utility opposes eroticism (13). Utility involves a fundamental denial – a denial that rationalises production with the aim of sheltering the individual from the reality of death (14). Michael Richardson asserts that Bataille traces this rationalisation of production, of work, back to Christianity (15), which relies on this denial for its concept of heaven, which would be undermined by any acknowledgement of death as rupture. Richardson notes that this rupture is fundamentally represented, in Bataille's view, in sexual intercourse. According to Bataille, in the sexual act, there is an affirmation of both life and death and the dissolving of the distinction between nature and culture (16). Sex in Christianity then becomes a utility, permissible only for the purpose of the continuation of the species, in order to suppress the sense of this rupture. It becomes de-eroticised. Thus eroticism is complicit with the reality of death in its desire to surpass limits and

unite with an otherness that is both feared and desired (17). Death threatens utility, which shields the individual from this disorder and violence by giving life the status of a task (18). Thus in Christianity, the taboo of eroticism becomes an object (19).

However for Bataille, the relationship between utility and eroticism is not simply this binary opposition between which a choice could be made. Bataille states that Civilisation is only possible when taboos are constructed to protect us from the prodigality of unchecked life, which annihilates what it creates (20). Similarly, work (or utility) is the activity that defines the condition of humankind in its negation of death (21), which reinforces our independence and enables us to survive and nurture children. For Bataille, this structure is nourished and completed by the presence of death, which is accorded recognition in the form of *unproductive expenditure* at times of transgression. This in turn supports rather than subverts the taboo in its very recognition of it as its antithesis (22). So society becomes possible in the interplay, not the conflict, of these relations.

This is not the social structure that Christianity supports, however, as its morality is founded on exactly the conflict between life and death, work and eroticism that Bataille rejects (23). The insistence on the primacy of useful production typical of Christianity is for Bataille a social sickness (24) that involves the destruction of communication. But why?

In Bataille's thought, communication is founded upon death through a being's desire to unite with an otherness from which it perceives its own separation (25). Separateness is what ignites communication – a stranger can become a friend or ally once separateness is bridged by contact, communication. Yet this also shows us our difference from the new friend: we don't then become the same person just because contact has been established. We need to connect, communicate, with that which is outside ourselves in order to underline our distinctness as individuals, yet in this communication there is a desire to merge with another and thus risk our distinctness, our individuality. Thus death is present in communication in a similar way to the language of flowers. Merging with an otherness, the loss of individuality, is a sign of death – which is, of course, the ultimate loss of individuality. It is then the consciousness of our separation from others that makes communities a possibility, yet this is founded on the presence of death.

Society then becomes regulated by the relationship between the sacred and profane (or utility and excess), whereas personal life is regulated between taboo and transgression (26). In its strict adherence to taboo at the expense of that which completes and supports it (the transgression), Christianity for Bataille denies the sacred, that is, the sacred as the duality between the thing worshiped and the thing that threatens the worshipper. By extension this denial of that which is non-utilitarian becomes a denial of the human. The emphasis on utility alone is therefore animalistic, in that sexuality is limited to reproduction in the task of the continuation of the species, in the same way as animals mate for survival alone (27). For Bataille, it is then essential to have useless values to enable human civilisation (28).

Homogeneity, Heterogeneity and Communication.

In summary: for Bataille, excess, transgression or uselessness is the way in which humanity avoids the delusion and impotence in the face of death that utility represents, whilst relying on exactly this utility to consider itself human. Communication is founded on death, the loss of individuality, which gives rise to communities, which in turn work to preserve life by constructing taboos. These taboos recognise and regulate the presence of death through festivity. Hence the importance of communication: life, with this unbearable paradox, is founded on impossibility and anguish.

However, this model of a *heterogeneous* society incorporating sovereignty, excess and sacrifice remains equally incongruous with today's capitalist exchange values, which in Bataille's terms extend the logic of utilitarianism or *homogeneity* familiar from Christianity to its most servile conclusion:

> Homogeneity signifies here the commensurability of elements and the awareness of this commensurability.... Production is the basis of social homogeneity.... The common denominator, the foundation of social homogeneity and of the activity arising from it, is money (29).

In other words, in the capitalist world of abstract labour, nothing escapes commodification, as homogeneity reduces all activity to the level of utility. The possibility of a heterogeneous society is then denied, lacking the hierarchical structure of myth that would allow for the free play of transgression (30). For Bataille, however, the notion of heterogeneity acquires new significance within the homogeneous structure; homogeneity is not perceived as self-sufficient: 'As a rule, homogeneity is a precarious form, at the mercy of violence and even of internal dissent.' (31). Steven Shaviro clarifies this point: 'The reduction to homogeneity always also involves a certain reference to processes which *at the same time* cannot be adequated to or included within this reduction' (32).

Bataille insists on the inherent presence of *unproductive expenditure* within a homogeneous structure of utility. This 'useless' activity becomes the *heterogeneous* ***element*** within a social structure, rather than a viable alternative facing it. Homogeneous social existence entails the play of heterogeneous elements which cannot be assimilated, but in their urgency allow the reduction to homogeneity to take place: 'Human activity is not *entirely* reducible to processes of production and conservation.' (33). There is inter-dependency, as well as a distinction, then, between utility and useless expenditure. Heterogeneous elements both refuse and participate in homogenous reduction; they surpass limits, but at the same time can only be 'comprehended' within those limits, lacking representation as entities in themselves.

Unproductive expenditure or heterogeneous activity are therefore 'crucially, and irreducibly ambiguous.' (34). This is owing to the unique status of the heterogeneous event – its elements do not escape reification or commodification, but rather have a mobility that prevents them from possessing value or meaning within the conventions of homogeneity. It is, however, their reduction to homogeneity that provides them with their status: that of 'remainders and exceptions.' (35). The relation of these heterogeneous elements to *representation* (in that homogeneity enables signification by constructing shared systems of meaning) is therefore the crux of this 'crucial ambiguity'. Heterogeneous elements are, by nature, 'other to' the order of representation, which utilises forces for the purpose of reflection. Their relation to homogeneity is not open to a dialectical resolution that would enable such reflection:

If definition, like expression in terms of exchange value, is what makes disparate objects or concepts interchangeable, then heterogeneous elements necessarily escape definition. Their radical alterity means that they can be characterised only by their *'nonlogical difference'* from commodities, or from objects possessing an intelligible signification and susceptible to pragmatic manipulation. They are *exceptions* to the values and constraints of rationalised social existence, which is to say that they are in a radical sense meaningless and useless (36).

The inevitability of this expenditure within homogeneity, this surplus or waste, precludes signification or recognition, as this would immediately accord it a useful and productive value. Contrastingly, the value of such uselessness exists only as the force of a rupture. Subject and object lose their separate existences; in this breach there is *communication*, but not between the subject and object (37).

This lack of conceptual characterisation or signified opposition is what makes production and conservation *necessary*. Stability is regulated by that which threatens it, the force *against* security that reinforces the *need for* security. Additionally, the threat itself negates its own utility in the construction of that security. By extension the ordering task of representation is therefore erected on that which threatens to undermine it - an 'unthinkable and irreducible *outside*' (38). That outside is the heterogeneous activity or the useless expenditure that becomes communication which, as we have seen, is founded upon death, the ultimate threat to stability. In the logic of the language of flowers, we have also seen that death is not signified, but instead exists as a language (39). What the example of the heterogeneous / homogeneous relation shows us is that this point requires a modification: Death is more specifically *communication*. Communication enables representation without itself becoming prone to that representation.

Communication that cannot be represented? How do we give form to this abstract definition? Well, it seems there is one example of this relationship that will appear familiar. If representation is the homogeneous surface of appearances, like speech, then the thing that mobilises this yet

cannot be 'spoken', is silence. To notice that someone is speaking we need an awareness that once there was silence, just as life only makes sense as a concept once we have the awareness of death.

Therefore, in Bataille's paradoxical system of meanings, communication is *silent*. As a perversion, this 'silence' is exactly what invests representation with the power to communicate just as it threatens it with catastrophe. (40): 'It is already, as I have said, the abolition of sound that the word is; among all words it is the most perverse, or the most poetic: it is the token of its own death.... Silence is a word which is not a word.' (41). Silence can give life to speech, but it can also take it away.

What is captured here is representation containing its own death. The 'totality' and economy of representation is founded on the 'contagion' (42) and expenditure of communication:

The word *silence* also reveals language's power to deny even as it affirms, since a perfect negation of language, a perfect silence, is inconsistent with the use of the word. In the same way the *absence* of a word is a delusion, it is nothing but a series of words (43).

Words are mobilised by silence. But this is not the same as words being understood through silence; understanding itself is representation (reflection) which, to recap, is threatened and undone by that which mobilises it. Silence avoids assuming the status of both something and nothing.

Bataille has a name for all this – more specifically, a place: the unthinkable outside that delivers communication for Bataille is ***the accursed domain*** – the space of unproductive expenditure and excess, that which cannot be incorporated into conceivable humanity (44).

So this then becomes an elaborate description of how annihilation is ever present in progressive projects - just as painting's death was always present in the perfect completeness of the monochrome. Yet this death is still elusive. If death is communication, and is present in all linear projects, then is it the essence of a plural project such as painting today? We have some way to go before this logic can be understood as somehow relating to painting's essence in total. For

now, let us return to Bataille's accursed domain. Here we will begin to see how such notions can be seen as connected.

To repeat: 'The unthinkable outside that delivers communication for Bataille is ***the accursed domain*** – the space of unproductive expenditure and excess, that which cannot be incorporated into conceivable humanity .' Yet with Bataille this view of communication and representation is not a view imposed upon a system from a position of an external ideology. This is almost like a universal perspective on the interconnectedness of all systems, from speech to the formation of cultures. What occurs in Bataille's notion of communication is, importantly, an *involution,* a turning-inwards of the values of heterogeneous society. The communication/ representation logic of the speaking person is a small-scale version of the social dynamics of the wider community. Instead of a free play between the sacred and profane, the reification of experience performed by homogeneity disrupts and displaces the 'scale' of this logic. In the making of the taboo into an *object*, the interrelation between eroticism and utility becomes involuted within this object; it becomes the *outside within*, composed of the ambiguous pact between representation and communication. This ambiguity is a silence. Yet the incidence of this silence withdraws from representation, which relates to it as a surface reflecting at the same time both the absence and inevitability of the essential communication.

To return to an earlier point – it is eroticism that connects the community to the individual, in the interdependency between taboo and transgression, utility and eroticism. Bataille asserts that it is this relationship that makes communities a possibility.

From the perspective of the 'eroticism of silence' (the relationship between communication and representation), the surface of *representation* takes on one part of the twofold function of eroticism. That is, the *negation* of nature. *Communication,* on the other hand, necessarily embodies the second function of eroticism – the *return* to nature. We have seen that communication is founded upon sexuality and death – in the same way, representation involves

the utility and ordering of these natural phenomena to allow civilisation to be established and survival to be possible.

The negation of nature therefore becomes a task that enables representation: 'In particular, *thought* is compelled by the morality implied in the prohibitions; further, it let itself be formed in the world devoid of sensuality, which the prohibitions marked off.' (45) Thought, as representation, is then mobilised by the arbitrariness of morality. By extension, it prohibits sensuality in the obligation to negate nature that the morality implies.

However, the two sides of eroticism must remain as alien yet *related* worlds, exclusive and at the same time mutually involved. For Bataille, thought, or representation, cannot integrate successfully the 'foul or shady' (46), yet knows it from the outside, 'the way medicine regards the diseases' (47).

If communication and representation are involutions of the functions of society, what is the location of the two sides of eroticism? Where are these interrelationships fundamentally – essentially – situated?

The site of the involution of these functions is certainly familiar. If the communication functions of the individual consciousness *and* the structure of vast civilisations are interconnected, then there is one location that is the apex of both phenomena, an area that could reasonably be described as an original site. It is the *human mind*, or in a more specifically Bataillean sense, it is the 'reflection of the universe in the mind' (48). The scale of heterogeneity is *homogenised* in an involution of affects that becomes a determinate world: the human mind. This space is the necessary separation between eroticism and thought (or communication and representation) becoming an object. Necessary, that is, for the formation of societies and the survival of the individual.

A further affirmation of the status of these two impulses is required, however, to determine more clearly the mechanics of their relationship.

The Contagion of Communication.

It is the 'accursed domain' that enables communication. Homogenisation locates this 'outside' as the space of the human mind. Representation cannot order this domain; it is threatened from beyond signification by the silence of this space. What needs to be investigated then is the 'range' and 'scale' of this silent domain. Put differently, the ways in which this space can become 'useful' for a discourse on representation need to be explored more thoroughly, given the expressly 'useless' nature of Bataille's texts and their explicit resistance to neat, rational argument. The problem of returning Bataille's critique of rationalism back to a rational reflection thus arises. With this in mind, it is, however, worth remembering the paradoxical nature of Bataille's assertion against utility: it is paradoxical in that:

Firstly - utility is a 'narcotic' (49) that enables us to survive the impossibility of life and continue to develop the human species.

Secondly, and most importantly, this assertion is made from within the utilitarian structure or institution of a theoretical text.

So for Bataille, the 'silence' of communication and the rise of representation are necessary conditions in the transition from animal to human. Bataille illustrates this with the example of the prohibition on nudity found in the Bible, in which representation regulates the threat of death presented by the sexual instinct. This process of rationalising nature goes on to fail for Bataille, however, in the human horror of excreta, which inundates representation with the reality of death:

> So there exists a mode of the transition from animal to man so radically negative that it is not even spoken of. It is not even regarded as one of man's religious reactions, whereas the most insignificant taboos are so regarded. The negation is so completely successful on this point that merely to note and affirm that something is there is deemed less than human (50).

Here is an instance of communication prior to representation, of a material that is raw, unmodified and disruptive, and, it would seem, so remote from language that it is mobilised as a diabolical silence.

However, the term 'silence' here implies a completeness and finality that is alien to Bataille's system of concerns. The silence in the face of excreta and decay is different to the silence that is 'before' speech and enables words.

What kind of silence is this? What needs to be remembered is Bataille's duality. If silence can enable speech then it follows in Bataille's universe that it performs, at the same time, the *opposite* function. It removes signification. It negates the 'reality' of the radically negative – of shit – and it becomes 'representation by default', by negation. It is the unmentionable. Keep quiet, and we can ignore the horror of the foul and abject. Yet this kind of silence is a kind of inverted recognition – representation without signification. To pretend something is not there is perhaps to assert its presence even more forcefully. With the collapse of standard oppositions already familiar in Bataille's logic, a negation like this is a form of economy that allows life to be lived - it performs 'with sufficient strength the imperative act of excluding' (51); in other words, negation is prohibition. In turn, as we have seen, this gives recognition to the excluded in the very necessity of the negation. In this way, this recognition that silence gives to the excluded becomes 'a word which is not a word'. It becomes representation by default.

But now we are talking about radical materiality – filth, rot, squalor and dung. Ok, language accords recognition to this by saying nothing, thus preserving human manners. But there is still a material presence outside of this that won't go away. What does Bataille do with this stuff in his displaced universe?

Where is the *material* dimension (that generates this duality) located for Bataille?

Communication issues from the unspeakable wastes, from the abjection that gives rise to representation, like the death communication of the flower as it displaces its origin of compost: 'The nature of excrement is analogous to that of corpses' (52) – Bataille suggests that the human struggle for autonomy from nature is a product of a disgust for nature, and that therefore language, that which marks us from animals (order), finds its origin in the loathing of decay (disorder). If representation is mobilised by communication, and if through prohibition silence in

the face of excrement becomes representation by default, it then follows that communication is equally founded on the *materiality* of death: faecal matter, decay, the 'radically negative'. It is not the word 'shit' that we are recoiling from when we exclude (not in this case at least), but its materiality. Whilst locating the absence of speech from this convulsion as representation by default, it is important to regard the *material* dimension of this convulsion, to determine what remains of its relation to communication. It is not the void of death alone that gives rise to expression, communication. It is also the material death communicates *through*. Steven Shaviro connects this materiality of communication with Foucault's, and 'his description of Jean-Pierre Brisset's schizophrenic insistence on the multiplicity of discourse' (53):

> Phonetic repetition does not mark the total liberation of language with respect to things, thoughts, and bodies; it does not reveal in discourse a state of absolute weightlessness; to the contrary, it thrusts syllables into the body, it gives them back the functions of cries and gestures; it rediscovers the great plastic power which vociferates and gesticulates; it puts words back into the mouth and around the sexual organs; in a time faster than any thought it gives birth to and effaces a whirlwind of frantic, savage, or exultant scenes, from which words arise and which words call forth (54).

So communication becomes inseparable from the body in a paroxysm of affects. It is connected to *things*. Thought becomes affect, not the representation of affect. But to reiterate, this is not fixed signification, but a lawless circulation of exchanges. For Bataille there is no fixed state from which materiality can be reflected upon. A logical teleology from the void of death to excreta and ultimately to prohibition in representation is rejected – that would site a *sovereign consciousness* which 'worked toward' revealing that sovereignty for its own utility (55). Sovereignty, for Bataille, is 'in no way subordinate to or revealed through discourse, but rather arises at the moment of its rupture' (56). In this rupture, the rupture of communication based upon the horror of decay, the 'interior experience' becomes, at the same time, exterior experience. There is no reaction to the world of objects, but a materialism that is base and exterior, whilst *equally* constituting the fabric

of interior reflection. This excremental waste is what *invests and invades* being. *Base materiality* is not cognition but communication, that which precedes language and subjectivity (57).

So the reflection of the universe in the human mind, the involution of heterogeneity is not the separation of the mind from that which it perceives; cognition is not abstractly related to its object. There is no origin or conclusion; life passes rapidly between points, it has no fixed situation, 'like a current or like a sort of streaming electricity' (58). Base materiality, then, takes the role of a kind of 'silent festival'– communication becomes synonymous with expression, the violent excremental impulse that becomes representation: a scream, a cry, or vomit. The 'want' (59) on which this is based floods out from inner being just as it inundates being from without. Base materialism is radically separate from human aspirations, 'and it refuses to allow itself to be reduced to the great ontological machines resulting from these aspirations' (60). Therefore it is unproductive expenditure *par excellence*.

If both a teleological meaning and a dialectical resolution between communication and representation are rejected, and inner experience acts as a streaming of energy between points, then there can be no progressive journey between the points, no linear movement. This would be an aspiration towards representation that communication is radically separate from in Bataille's system. For Bataille, communication involves the loss of self; a physical-psychological portion of 'me' is given, but once communicated (given), is no longer 'me' (61). In the movement of communication, the categories of sender, receiver and message are excluded by this disarrangement of subjects that communication brings to bear. Communication becomes a gift generated in the displacement of selves, an exchange that is free of the power relations of giver and receiver.

So in the space of communication, there is no action, knowledge, or self, yet there is also no nothing; communication materialises death without providing the means of understanding it. The change that it brings about goes before representation, but, as we have seen, is incompatible with the knowledge of death at the same time. The explosive materiality of communication is

dependent on the impossibility of stripping away the essence of the world to a 'final nudity' that can be confronted in reflection (62).

Ecstatic Time

If teleological development is rejected, does this mean also that there is no calibration of time? The rupture of linear time seems imperative in the convulsion and diversion of energy implied by communication. This suddenness suggests lack of gaugeable duration. The homogenous passage from past to future would necessarily be disrupted by the heterogeneous compulsion of this communication. Yet, as we have seen, time implied here cannot be made static by an exclusion from linear time either. Rather, it must be remembered that heterogeneous elements are only recognised within a homogeneous structure. Additionally: 'Ecstatic time can only find itself in the vision of things that puerile chance causes brusquely to appear: cadavers, nudity, explosions, spilled blood, abysses, sunbursts and thunder.' (63). In this regard, communication becomes 'ecstatic time', 'projected' through the materiality of the abject. This is not linear, but instantaneous like lightening, or thunder; yet analogies such as these are unreliable, as the illuminating function of analogy is often in the service of greater clarity and knowledge. Instead, Bataille diverts the utility of analogical discourse and standard scientific reality. There is a nonlogical expression to this process that is involuntary and ungraspable, from which discourse as a tool for excavation is already banished.

This makes things very difficult. In what manner is this territory to be affirmed if discourse is precluded? If communication is excremental materiality unleashed in ecstatic time, then how is it to be accounted for other than as a moment before signification? There still remains the problem of relaying Bataille's disruptive concerns back to rational discourse. All this might help to say, yet again, why Greenberg got it all wrong, how in fact history is not linear and continuous at all but more like the instantaneous ecstatic time of spilled blood, abysses, nudity and horror....

But how can it help us to talk about our current concerns that come from the death of painting's essence?

Surface as Memory

To reiterate, it is important to remember the paradoxical nature of Bataille's thought, as well as his rejection of tidy categories. For whilst reflecting on the loss of knowledge and self within communication and disparaging the servility of economy, Bataille ***nevertheless resorts to the utility of theoretical language to rationalise this point*** (64). In this regard, there opens up a space for the representation of the 'accursed domain' within Bataille's ***texts themselves***, despite the threat that the contagion of communication poses to such representations. However: the process of representation is a perversion; threats such as this do not arise from a dialectical opposition, but rather from the antagonism that separates *and at the same time* collapses categories. What then takes place within Bataille's texts is that representation becomes *memory*. If communication involves a distance from calibration, rationality, representation and reflection, then Bataille sketches a site where, *perversely*, this action can be *remembered*. Representation becomes 'surface as memory', a dimension where the scale of the violence of communication can be recorded as a signified happening *and* that which both enables and annihilates the representation. Things fall apart here; pictures, signs, images become radically displaced and disrupted in their failure. In Bataille, representation is belated, like the museum of a disaster. The contagion of communication forces Bataille to distort and exaggerate the multi-temporality of his texts. The following passage from *Inner Experience* (65) captures the multiplicity of this predicament:

> I become irritated when I think of the time of 'activity' which I spent – during the last years of peacetime – in forcing myself to reach my fellow beings. I had to pay this price. Ecstasy itself is empty when envisaged as a private exercise, only mattering for a single individual.
>
> Even in preaching to the converted, there is, in its predication, a distressful element. Profound communication demands silence. In the end, action, which predication signifies,

is limited to this: closing one's door in order to stop discourse (the noise, the mechanics of the outside).

The door must remain open and shut at the same time. What I wanted: profound communication between beings to the exclusion of the links necessary to projects, which discourse forms. I became touchy, in the long run, each day wounded more intimately. If I took refuge in solitude, I was compelled to. It doesn't matter to me, now, that everything should be dead – or seem to be so.

The war put an end to my 'activity' and my life became all the less separated from the object of its search. A partition normally separates one from this object. In the end, I was able, I had the strength to do it: I made the partition fall. Nothing restful remained any longer which made the efforts seem illusory. Once, it became possible to become linked to the crystalline inexorable fragility of things – without the concern for responding to minds loaded with empty questions. Desert, doubtless not without mirages dissipated immediately thereafter...

Few circumstances were more favourable to ironic intoxication. Rarely did spring make me become better acquainted with the happiness of the sun. I dug my garden, not without ardour, while happily calculating opposite chances (they appeared numerous... but only became precise in May. I remember having sown seeds on the 20th – I provoked fate but without believing in it). Extreme anguish and melancholy, profound serenity free of illusions gave to life many different meanings (not easily reconcilable). The conditions lent themselves poorly to expression; however, my thought freed itself of its chains, reached maturity. I allowed myself to become intoxicated by a feeling of conquest, and the ruptured world stretched out before me like an open realm. These few pages seem to me today to be indecisive – impure, lyrical flights encumber them – but under the influence of the first vision, I believed that they revealed profound truth (66).

Here, 'ecstasy' is empty – it only means something when it is for others, in other words, communication. Ecstatic time becomes communication, but is therefore 'irritating' by becoming useful as activity.

So communication relies on its own failure to operate, as it then becomes representation or utility. In this odd text, Bataille now extends this: in speaking of a subject, in the predication of preaching to the converted, there is distress. Communication demands silence. There is distress over the 'action' of communication. Action demands representation, which Bataille describes analogously as closing a door to the *outside*, the noise of which is the accursed domain of communication, the 'unfathomable outside', or the 'outside within'.

Therefore, 'the door must remain open and shut at the same time': the surface of representation is at once stable *against* and open *to* communication.

Then Bataille adds another dimension. The anguish of desiring 'profound communication to the exclusion of the links necessary to projects' becomes overwhelming to the author's own discourse. It is the rupture that enables representation to take effect: 'I became touchy, in the long run, each day wounded more intimately.' Solitude becomes essential to the author to negotiate with the impossibility of communication and the inevitability of representation. What then occurs is the text thematizes the loss necessary for this representation to take place. Bataille details the breakdown of linearity in the absence of absolute categories, when duality takes effect and ideals collapse.

Now the fixed categories are displaced and circulating: 'Nothing restful remained any longer which made the efforts seem illusory.' The objective connection with things becomes a memory: 'Once, it became possible to become linked to the crystalline inexorable fragility of things'- the ecstasy of communication can only be preserved in a kind of archive of impossibility; what has been accepted is the inevitability of representation, and that this, in turn, does not *represent* communication. But in this acknowledgement, Bataille aims to express the *materiality* of communication in its necessary destination of representation. In the universal nature of base materiality, its origin of death and excrement, Bataille constructs the possibility for a form of displaced analogy that clears a space through which communication's absence may be felt, rather than as a tool for further understanding. The 'illusions' of representation lend themselves

'poorly to expression,' yet the 'rupture' of the world stretches out as the possibility of 'conquest' through the failure of that expression as a memory.

This is much like Daniel Birnbaum's notion of the temporality of the artwork outlined in the introduction which, in complicating the idea of an origin by repetition, makes the notion of an origin both obscure and insistent. The temporality of the artwork is then located in a multi-temporal oscillation. The backward look to the past by contemporary forms of art making is thus constructive. It confers original status on the thing replicated. This view is predicated on a Freudian analysis of infant traumas, which only find significance post factually. But how does this failure and delay, this representation as memory, take visual form in Bataille's texts?

Ornamental Anxiety: the Metonymy of the Accursed Domain

The rupture of Bataille's texts, their paradoxical attempts to define communication whilst describing the impossibility of this, lead to the generation of belated images that delimit a space where absence and presence become indistinguishable. This is the basis of Bataille's visual vocabulary. It is here that communication *once took hold*. To commemorate this event, Bataille erects an ornamental cosmography of displacement, a picture gallery of disruption and disorder. For whilst it remains futile in Bataille's logic to draw out a metaphysical discourse on the abstract nature of absence, Bataille's *material* universe allows for an organic, decorative corolla of effects which issue from the 'want' of communication. In this way, Bataille's language, as representation, becomes a mutational surface of excess, necessary for the meaning of (and only noticeable in conjunction with), communication. Bataille *illustrates* communication on an ornamental and disarranged landscape, possible only on the condition that the moment is lost: 'Movement is the figure of love, incapable of stopping at a particular being, and rapidly passing from one to another. But the forgetting that determines it in this way is only a subterfuge of memory' (67).

This convolution suggests that forgetting mobilises the pulsion of communication, which is a trick of memory. Put differently, forgetting defines the oscillation of communication, yet does not represent it, as it has been forgotten. Yet memory remembers that something has been forgotten,

so it holds the vacancy as a memory. Almost the sense of a thought but no picture, the feeling of missing something but not knowing what that might be.

The gap of communication is thus traversed obscurely and paradoxically in representation. Representation, then, is a memory.

Leslie Anne Boldt-Irons has connected this traversing action with the blind spot in the human eye, in relation to Bataille's frequent use/abuse of the eye as an image in this representational landscape:

> In the appropriation of an image during the course of normal vision, the blind spot where the rays of light intersect is of little consequence. It is both a place of non-being (on its own, it can generate no image) and the site where the power of vision is consolidated (where the elements of image are condensed). It is of great consequence, however, at the moment of fusion: when the stores of knowledge are released, the blind spot of the eye is dilated. In it, knowledge is absorbed into the NIGHT of non-knowledge – the intersection of rays opens violently in a moment of catastrophe (68).

Here, Boldt-Irons identifies the displacement of the instrumentality of the eye from its function as a tool for enlightenment to a non-place that is mapped out by the energy of representation.

This traversing of the unsignified (the blind spot) with metonymical representation is further and more excessively embellished by Bataille:

> An abandoned shoe, a rotten tooth, a snub nose, the cook spitting in the soup of his masters are to love what a battle flag is to nationality.
>
> An umbrella, a sexagenarian, a seminarian, the smell of rotten eggs, the hollow eyes of judges are the roots that nourish love.
>
> A dog devouring the stomach of a goose, a drunken vomiting woman, a sobbing accountant, a jar of mustard represent the confusion that serves as the vehicle of love (69).

This displacement betrays an anguish of metonymy that becomes surreal in its need to describe not merely a dual (bilateral) purpose of representation, but a ***multilateral materiality of communication*** that facilitates the bilateral surface of memory that is representation. Furthermore, as we have seen, it is the regulating tendency of this surface that civilisation

develops and prevents total animal annihilation. This materiality of communication, the plenum of Bataille's universe, inundates representation with the scandal of communication, which in its totality cannot differentiate between the copulation of terms and the copulation of bodies, one being from another. Unlike metaphor or analogy, Bataille's metonymy, the metonymy of the accursed domain that enables communication, is claustrophobic, perverse and volatile. Gaps between meanings develop a lack. As the images proliferate, this lack becomes the site where the unrepresentable takes presence. Thus communication comes into question in the metonymical relation between eggs and eyes (70) or a slashed throat and the sun (71).

Yet there is a further dimension to this metonymical interplay:

> Everyone is aware that life is parodic and that it lacks an interpretation.
>
> Thus lead is the parody of gold.
>
> Air is the parody of water.
>
> The brain is the parody of the equator.
>
> Coitus is the parody of crime (72).

So metonymy is not only volatile; it is also dramatic. The drama and laughter of parody is critical to the notion that representation must fail. For whilst Bataille discharges metonymy as ornamental representation, the purpose of this is to disrupt the conventional Platonic hierarchy of rational understanding: the ascent from darkness to light. Representation must forget in order for the pyramid of utility, the journey from dark to light, (or earth to God) to be deconstructed. In this way the sun, the traditional symbol of enlightenment for Bataille, assumes *duality*. At once it is 'the most elevated conception' - 'the most abstract object, since it is impossible to look at it fixedly at that time of day. ...That sun must be said to have the poetic meaning of mathematical serenity and spiritual elevation' (73) - *and*, once scrutinized, it 'can be identified with a mental ejaculation, foam on the lips, and an epileptic crisis... (it) can be considered horribly ugly.' (74). The duality of Bataille's writing undermines the notion of 'the wise man' (75) in the relentless insistence that every successful project betrays the base materiality of its origin. Thus the thrust from earth to sky characteristic of flowers merely affirms the necessity of the manure that fosters this

development (76). The lovely monochrome painting howls of the mud and dung that make up its pigmentation, its materiality, and ultimately that of its maker. The myriad tiny insect bodies, prehistoric plant remains and billion microscopic traces of effluvia and excreta that are invisible to the naked eye are there in the paint and made present in the painting in their very invisibility.

In Bataille, the sun is deconstructed similarly: 'The sun, situated at the bottom of the sky like a cadaver at the bottom of a pit, answers [this] inhuman cry with the spectral attraction of decomposition' (77). And elsewhere: 'The fecal eye of the sun has also torn itself from (these) volcanic entrails, and the pain of a man who tears out his own eyes with his fingers is no more absurd than this anal maternity of the sun' (78). Bataille further illustrates this ornamental landscape of metonymy as a critique of the verticality of rationalism: 'The intolerable cry of cocks has a solar significance because of the pride and feeling of triumph of the man perceiving his own dejecta under the open sky' (79).

The drama or theatricality of this metonymic/ parodic deconstruction is deployed as a critique of the rationalism of *verticality.* Like flowers, the origin of the project always derails the linearity of that project.

Theatrical Mutilation

If representation is memory that must forget, and this involves the drama of parody, which disperses the possibility of achievement, then what must occur in this forgetting is a mutilation of the body in representation. For as we have seen, the base materiality of communication locates the intolerable (heterogeneous) outside of excreta in the human mind to the same extent as it is located in the outside world, or the universe. Communication, thus base materiality, is everywhere. That this occurs in 'ecstatic time' inundates representation with the multilateral materiality of communication. This materiality is inseparable from the body (80), as communication is physical and prior to signification. Also, communication in this regard involves the loss of self. Whilst this suggests a fragmentation of the body through communication, the metonymical

landscape that critiques the verticality of rational goals also implicates the body in this deconstruction. Bataille continuously undermines the verticality of man with the reference to the eye, which 'continue(s) to fetter him tightly to vulgar things, in the midst of which necessity has determined his steps' (81).

The fragmentation of the body goes further, however. To risk repetition:

The impossibility of total understanding involves the 'forgetfulness' of representation in the displacement of the possibility of success. Parody traverses the accursed domain as ornamental representation.

If communication is heterogeneous expenditure, synonymous with excreta, and this collapses the distinction between interior and exterior, then the body becomes the *homogeneous* element that regulates this expenditure.

If the multilateral materiality of communication (heterogeneous) inundates the bilateralism of representation (homogeneous), but at the same time relies on the regulatory nature of the latter to prevent *total* annihilation, then in this logic the bilateral purpose of representation becomes both a body *and* a non-body, signifying *partial* destruction. It becomes *mutilated.* In turn, the theatricality of the mutilation implicit to the bilateralism of representation parodies the linearity of rationalism.

To follow this logic further: if representation cannot achieve, it auto-mutilates. If communication is mobilised by death, then representation must forget its ordering principle to be able to do this reality justice. Yet it must retain its status as exactly that voice of order. Bataille explores this paradox in two ways. Firstly, in the analysis of 'external phenomena' (82), citing the case of Vincent Van Gogh and his habit of staring at the sun, which was said at the time to have led to the mental illness that caused him to sever his ear from his head (83). This literal example illustrates neatly the duality of the sun and the violence of representation that perceives the failure of verticality. Secondly, Bataille's texts themselves illustrate the relation between mutilation and communication. If this relation is that of the human organism, then Bataille's texts, as

representations, are memorials to this paradox; they scatter the body to the four winds of a theatrical metonymical landscape: in other words, theatrical ornamental representation, as both evidence and a memory of communication, must auto-mutilate under the implication of this memory.

This gives us a model for the visual that issues from an unrepresentable source. Visualising then becomes memory acted out belatedly. Images fall apart to relay the failure of themselves as vessels of meaning.

Does this mutilated, theatrical, metonymical model of the visual feed into other forms of the visual, or does it merely provide outlandish metaphors for how representation functions in a recently post-war, non-linear, nihilistic epoch?

In its referencing of the past, is the stylisation of painting's death this perverse? Comparable, perhaps, to some other bizarre metaphor, something like Van Gogh making a portrait of his own severed ear, at night, from memory?

The abstract quality of Bataille's texts needs to be redirected, and in this endeavor we need only recall that representation for Bataille was memory. For in this regard, Bataille is confirming the inevitability of style in relation to an origin. Death is both the origin of communication and the uncommunicable. Representation cannot order this domain or control it otherwise. Thus representation becomes theatrical, and thus style, in order to speak of this lack of control. The style here is surrealism. Could it not just as easily have been described as 'dead essentialism'?

Is this not what we see in painting post the death of its essence? Is the death of essentialism not the origin of some sort of immense satire, a paradigm of irony infecting all painting can ever say now that essentialism has been done away with for good? And if Bataille is right and death is present in all communication and representation, is this irony not something perversely akin to a new essence of painting?

We now have a non-linear model for the visual. The linguistic analogy for this is metonymy. Yet does this mean that all visual styles have to be metonymical to be non-linear?

We need to retain the fact that Bataille was working at the extreme nihilistic edge of the visual, where failure was the only possible message for a visual term. Also, that these are theoretical texts, not paintings. Bataille may generate wild and compulsive images, but they are nevertheless described, not embodied, as visual.

But what happens if a new paradigm has been interpreted here? If this confirms style as multitemporal and non-linear, then what are the visual limits of this? What would a painting look like that followed Bataille's lead and thematised the ever-presence of death?

In other words, what are the effects on the artistic mind that forms aesthetics around failure? What might an awareness of this situation produce in terms of style and aesthetics?

This scenario will be addressed in Chapter Three, when we will return to painting as visual phenomena in relation to the natural world. Before that, however, I intend to extend Bataille's non-linearity onto a physical and visual plane still adjacent to painting. This will elaborate the interconnectedness of Bataille's universe and also lay the groundwork for an understanding of what a painting is in these terms. For if Bataille's non-linearity penetrates all levels of existence, then an extension of this into the natural world of organisms will help to confirm its validity. Furthermore, by taking these concepts towards an understanding of the natural world, we may begin to understand what an 'essence' might in fact be.

Next, then, ideas of death within natural systems will be addressed. And, of course, not just terminal death, but death as a process of regulation, conceived alongside Bataille's notions of death and communication. On the visual-material level, this takes us towards a consideration of the more recent procedures of communications theory.

Chapter 2

Visual Entropy and the Contagion of Death

Having examined the abstract economics of death within communication and representation, this Chapter now seeks to extend these ideas onto a physical plane to further understand non-linearity and death outside of their definitions as cultural abstractions. What is now to be determined is a practical sense of non-linearity as energy and information relations on a physical level that will then consequently crystallise these terms on a visual-material level. This should further enable an understanding of what painting's essence might be about, and thus lead into a new kind of discussion of paintings themselves in Chapter Three.

This chapter, then, seeks to elaborate the non-linear model of representation established in Chapter One through an investigation into non-linear conceptions of matter and representation.

The starting point for identifying this non-linearity leads us, inevitably, to the physical sciences. Not unlike Bataille's critique of closed linear structures, scientific research has made its own (relatively recent) paradigm shift, bringing about a universal critique of the 18th Century belief in closed systems (1). This paradigm shift has established 'the realisation that most systems in nature are subject to flows in matter and energy that continuously move through them' (2). Such notions of flow and energy in nature immediately suggest connections with the findings in Chapter One; Bataille's exposition of arbitrary cultural constrictions and hierarchies intuits a critical fluidity of information within structures such as nature, social ritual and the taboos surrounding sexual activity. In his ideas of interconnectedness and the contagion of communication, there is often the need to connect seemingly disparate phenomena with a common logic. The language of flowers is itself an essay on the movement of information of a different order through a seemingly straightfoward visual-natural sign.

In the spirit of this interconnectedness, more overtly scientific notions will be examined for their usefulness in bringing these similar logics from Bataille into a visual realm. Consequently, the terms of certain aspects of information theory and its conception of this flow as a function of nature should provide the bridge between the non-linearity of Bataille's economics and the new physics. In other words, can information theory extend and realise the paradigm of non-linearity outlined through Bataille in Chapter One as a visual logic? More specifically, visual-material?

To approach this question, we might first reconsider 'The Language of Flowers' (3). The point of this text is to outline the *difference* between what is seen and what is communicated. What is important here is the covert presence of circular and non-progressive narratives within signs that reassure us of the opposite. The visual aspect of the flower communicates this circularity with its very linearity. It communicates it by default. It maintains duality, but between different forms of information – the visual and the textual. Although the flower represents its own death in its flourishing growth, both realities cannot be seen at once. The organism is never both completely rotten *and* completely healthy at one moment. The non-linearity of the flower exists, in varying degrees, as thematic information outside the *visual* information of the flower organism at any one time. It cannot be visually dualistic.

The visual organisation of the flower is therefore linear, whilst what could be called the thematic or narrative organisation is non-linear. Any duality is between these related yet distinct visual 'formats'.

Whilst the language of flowers has been helpful in coming to terms with non-linearity in the visual, its limitations as a model for the visual-material interrelationship have become apparent. The difference between styles of the visual – say, the 'real' (visible plant growth) and the 'symbolic' (the flower represents death) – restrict its application to an understanding of the simultaneously visual material 'thing'; potentially, a painting.

Could there be a kind of organism that displays non-linear *visual* organisation? An organism that realises Bataille's theatrical metonymy in more constructive terms?

The importance of living organisms for a study of painting may not seem immediately apparent. Yet if a new conception of painting's essence is to be determined, then it might be constructive to think of painting organically, given the convoluted historical situation that this thesis aims to unpack. The world of living systems interfaces with painting in every way, from the atomised remains of prehistoric plants and minerals that make up the pigments, to the shapes and forms that figure in pictures and the ambient conditions that temper the medium as it dries, ages and eventually disintegrates. If we are to accept the conditions of scientific research that consider the flow of matter and energy in the world around us, it makes no sense to regard painting as external to this view. If the death of painting as a narrative is problematic for being imposed largely by external agendas, then the natural world of which a painting is a part is perhaps the only place to begin looking for its essence. If painting after its death maintains a non-linear logic akin to the analogy of the language of flowers, clearly we have already begun to consider painting as part of a wider universe of visual action, and as relative to the world of living things. Additionally, Bataille's interrelationship of communication and representation is about the ever-presence, and necessary (social) exclusion, of nature in all its horror. Representation, then, is a process based on the oscillation between the horrendous factuality and the (resulting) civilised domestication of nature. This oscillation is, of course, non-linear.

What is required is a model of visual organisation that elaborates both Bataille's economics of non-linearity and the pluralism of the death of painting as an interrelationship. The problem remains how to locate a visual model that connects the death of painting with non-linearity in the world at large, as something manifestly visual. This chapter will seek to find an organic model of visual organisation that does not merely work as an analogy, but extends the very essence of its nature into the mechanics of painting. The model will have to identify the multitemporality and pluralism of painting as naturally occurring visual phenomena in order to classify them as essential. This will also develop out of Bataille's idea of interconnectedness.

Currently the two paradigms we have worked with so far are represented like this:

The ironic monochrome: painting's dead, let's make a painting.

The language of flowers: life = death.

What kind of organism could connect these logics?

One textual example may provide a starting point for thinking about painting, nature and non-linear visual organisation.

Reinaldo Laddaga, in his essay 'Painting and Trance in Severo Sarduy's *La Simulacion*' (4), utilises this text by the Franco-Cuban (5) writer to outline the synthesis of painting and the world around it. *La Simulacion* (Simulation), a collection of fiction and essay fragments written in Spanish and French published in 1982, takes the mechanics of painting as its central problem and object of fascination. As the title suggests, the thesis on painting unfolds the theoretical premise of simulation familiar from the work of Sarduy's peers (Derrida, Klossowski (6)), yet it is refracted through his own interests in diverse cultural phenomena ranging from Buddhism to transvestism:

> Simulation connects and groups together within the same energy – simulation drive – dissimilar phenomena, coming from heterogenous and seemingly unconnected spaces that range from the organic to the imaginary, from the biological to the baroque: animal (defensive?) mimetics, tattooing, human (sexual?) transvestism, make-up, *mimikri-dress-art*, anamorphosis, *trompe l'oeil*... The space in which this galaxy unfolds is Painting: reflection and tribute (7).

The book presents a specific thesis: 'That of painting as a place where a unique energy expands as a function of 'simulation drive' (8). Transvestism is provided as an example of this kind of simulation, described as generating a trance- like visual effect of almost sublime energy:

> The transvestite does not copy, he simulates, since there is no norm to motivate and magnetize the transformation, or determine the metaphor; it is rather the nonexistence of the cherished one that constitutes the space, region and support for the simulation, for

> the attempted imposture: an appearance dominated by a Goya-esque drive between laughter and death (9).

According to Sarduy, the transvestite does not merely attempt to become a woman. The goal is instead impossible – to become 'more-than woman' (10). This kind of mimicry takes as its driving force the void of absence left by the desired state. The impossibility of replica induces the laughing fatalism of the simulation, rather than the camouflage of illusion. The truth of this failure modulates and scandalises the effect of the whole ensemble.

This might not be so surprising. Yet what is surprising is Sarduy's extension of this failed illusion into the natural world of insect mimicry, to further define the disordering impact of simulation. Painting's relationship to animality is a major theme in *La Simulacion*. Both the transvestite and the mimetic butterfly, in their acts of simulation, stretch the limits of their finite realms to the point of fright, and these in turn are for Sarduy potent and dramatic emblems of the painterly impulse:

> As soon as the Indonesian butterfly alights on its bush – each variety has its own – it begins its conversion: it sprouts appendages instinctively, so as to produce an illusion, affixing them as though they were petioles; its upper wings, now lanceolated, become leaves through which runs a central vein; on both sides of this axis extend scales which are alternately dark or transparent, shiny or dull, bumpy or smooth. Fixedness. Or rather, lightly balancing, oscillating, swaying to and fro, almost imperceptibly, in the wind (11).

The inevitable comparison begins to emerge, then. "Instinctively" the butterfly produces an "illusion", a magical transformation happens as 'random' material organises itself into a picture. The suggestive power of Sarduy's prose is not lost on Laddaga: 'The butterfly paints' (12).

The luxurious excess of simulation, beyond the utilitarian demands of survival, enables painting:

> It paints itself, spreads itself out like a painting, and it also paints the leaf on which it has perched; paints it from itself. To what end? In order to attain fixedness and remove itself from the realm of the visible by imitating its support. But once the conversion has begun – the transformation unleashed, the appendages extended, the outer covering arranged –

and it has presented 'its performance: "Representation of Invisibility,"' the process continues:

The insect's performance goes even further. The leaf, in its present state, is not sufficient. From the wings will sprout – the simulation process speeds up, it mocks the 'endurance' of a damp wall – tiny spots, grayish, like those which normally indicate a lichen-like disease on a leaf. Because the insect must imitate to the point of the waste that is death; the leaves are sick, anemic, torn, mossy, erased by the transparent scars left by the devouring insects, which spin a tiny filament of nacre (13).

Laddaga then identifies the analogy of modernity in Sarduy's text. The blending of the insect of the leaf becomes the collapse between the figure and the ground in modern painting. This is an existential analogy between the disappearance of form and the loss of life, suggesting that the end of the modernist painting project should be seen not just as the disposal of painting but an allegory of death through form. Indeed, the example of Rothko's suicide is mentioned as the culmination of the artist's search for the perfect red (14). And not only the culmination, but importantly, the only possible successful result. The simulation drive is then the death drive acted out through a morbidly elegant and protracted performance, a sinking into finality through formal duality. The transvestite and the butterfly overcome their forms in a majestic identity collapse, a transformation both painterly in its illusion and sublime in its frightfulness.

This narrative speaks of the death of modernist painting as something located both within and without, as Bataille does. It is a property of both the external wishes of a cultural system and the implicit purity offered by form in and of itself. The painting's performance of what it is ***in itself***, the 'form is content' issue, is then a dramatic essay on death as pure form. In this way painting could be seen not as the murder victim of photography or mass production, but as a suicidal purist.

For Laddaga, this death in painting connects it to all other phenomena in the world around the painting. The duality of the butterfly becomes an emblem of contagion within painting, one that extends the sense of painting to things around its frame. This is, for Sarduy, the invisibility of the

butterfly that similarly makes painting vanish in the eyes of the viewer, inundating the gaze with death in a kind of blindness.

Laddaga extends the point:

> From this a corollary follows: the painting, by stopping up the sight of the viewer, has the potential to change the world beyond its frame, if only for a moment. How? In what way? By contagion. By infecting the viewer with the 'viscous obscenity of death,' and thus impregnating his or her gaze, the painting infects the world (15).

This passage seems like familiar territory. In fact, once the influence is identified (16), the tone is unmistakably similar to Bataille's notion of the contagion of communication. The 'viscous obscenity of death ... impregnating the gaze...,' this idea of contagion could easily have come from Bataille. But does Sarduy go beyond him? There is an explicit link made between nature and painting? That painting's purity was always about death, as the collapse of figure and ground is a kind of visual death of each identity? What does Sarduy's butterfly do to extend Bataille's flower?

It might seem that Sarduy and Laddaga have provided us with an appropriate emblem of painting as nature. So is that the end of that problem?

Is this contagion a conception of essence as a *visual* thing? Is the butterfly emblematic of painting's essence? Is the butterfly essentially a painter?

Laddaga thinks so. However, this butterfly is a *modernist* painter, interested in the collapse of figure and ground distinctions. Its work is to re-approach the monochrome. However bizarre it may sound, it is this point which makes the butterfly's oeuvre a project of style. By focussing on this external result, Laddaga is investing the butterfly with the properties of a particular painting style, not with painting as an *essential* force.

We also know that the insect does not physically pick up a brush and interpret the leaf that it resembles. Simulation may be an important piece in the puzzle, yet, like the style issue, it quickly collapses into linguistic terms when scrutinised. Be it metaphor, simile, analogy or metonymy, the premise of simulation for painting amounts to simple comparison. Painting is *like* a butterfly on a leaf (metaphor), eggs stand in for eyes (Bataille – metonymy).

So can the butterfly help us any further with painting? Is it merely a pretty metaphor?

There is something of Sarduy's conception of painting that remains unresolved. Statements like 'Painting as a place where a unique energy expands as a function of "simulation drive"' suggest a more abstract, energetic conception of painting exterior to the seductive yet poetic allusions detailed previously.

To investigate this I would like to return to a point made at the beginning of this Chapter regarding the paradigm shift in scientific research. This is 'the realisation that most systems in nature are subject to flows in matter and energy that continuously move through them.' Sarduy's contagion is suggestive of exactly this kind of energetic flow of information from one state to the next. The logic of painting's death spreads from the gallery to the butterfly on the leaf and back again.
This sounds great: a very seductive image of painting's power and fascination. But what does it mean?

An examination of such a movement of information in the model of insect mimicry might elucidate the possibility of determining painting's essence. After all, the mimetic insect is a visual system that incorporates death within its logic, albeit, so far, in a style-oriented way. We therefore need to examine how this kind of flow operates in general before we return to insect mimesis specifically. Only then will we be able to determine the implications of the logic of the mimetic insect as both an image and an information system. Also, if communication, founded upon sexuality and death, is regulated by representation in Bataille, then a technical understanding of what the process of communication and representation actually is as a logic in the physical world will be beneficial.

Perspectives on the Organic

In his text 'The Origin of Language' (17), Michel Serres addresses the role of information and organisation in living systems explicitly. His inquiry starts with the model of organic systems and

the impact that information theory has had on a conception of thermodynamics within these systems.

These terms form a part of a scientific debate connecting genetics, cybernetics and information physics. Whilst this field of inquiry is vastly beyond the scale of this present study, predominant models of thinking in the field of information physics should lead constructively towards the concerns of my thesis by their very nature, without recourse to an exhaustive appraisal of the discipline. Serres' text is constructive in explicitly locating broad conceptions of information and organisation that ground the more specialist arguments in these fields. It is my intention to use this text as a 'skeleton' for the notion of informational flow in this present Chapter.

An example of this kind of flow in Serres' terms is his view on language acquisition.

The placing of the terms of language within life itself is the agenda here; Serres attempts to define language as a product of the organism's biological functioning. Could this indicate a system within the mimetic insect that generates its surface detail? Is this what is meant by language? If so, then this may bring into proximity the terms of both nature and painting through language. As death was established as language in Chapter One, the external – the physical-material – dimensions of painting as nature may be determined by Serres' example of language development. But I will return to this later.

For now, we need to follow Serres through descriptions of the organic complex. Initially this is to outline how the physics of closed systems has given way to ideas of flux and movement that form his notion of the origin of language. The organism is thus approached from both *global* and *local* perspectives. That is, close-up and long-distance.

The idea of flow opposes classical models of scientific research, so Serres begins with a description of these to establish traditional perspectives of local and global. Serres does this to historically locate certain established assumptions about living systems and their surroundings, and to assert that the notion of an organism as a system has undergone many changes throughout history. He then moves on to his alternative notions of local and global. But first, Serres details three types of system:

The first, *logico-mathematical*, is 'a coherent set of demonstrable propositions deduced from a small number of postulates' (18). This is the classical idea of knowledge, as in a system of differential equations. This system is independent of time.

The second is *mechanical*, linked to reversible time. 'A set which remains stable throughout variations of objects which are either in movement or relatively stationary. Within a set of mobile material points distributed in space and governed by law – Newton's law, for example – it is clear that time is fully reversible. If everything starts moving in the opposite direction, nothing significant in form or state will change' (19).

So the mechanical system depends on time but not on its direction.

The third type is the *thermodynamic* system. This theory of heat begins with the industrial revolution and defines systems as motors, creating movement by energy and power, through reservoirs and differences in temperature, rather than the simple relation of forces.

> As soon as one can build (motors) and theorize about them, - steam or combustion engines, and so forth – the notion of time changes. The second law of thermodynamics accounts for the impossibility of perpetual motion of the second type; energy dissipates and ***entropy*** increases (20).

The second law of thermodynamics states 'that the energy in the universe, although constant in amount, is subject to more and more dissipation and degradation. Entropy strives towards a maximum' (21). With this inexorable increase in entropy, time gains direction. 'Entropy can change in only one direction when the system is isolated' (22), P.T Landberg writes. This is the movement towards a high entropy state, such as 'heat death', understood if the universe is itself (somewhat audaciously) considered as a closed system, for the purposes of illustration. 'One can trace the broad outlines of a possible fascinating history of an expanding universe, from initial explosion through the formation of the chemical elements, galaxies and solar systems, to eventual heat death' (23). With this linear conception of closed systems, time is now *irreversible*. Angrist and Hepler provide a lighter example of this irreversibility by citing the nursery rhyme Humpty Dumpty:

> Experiences of catastrophic irreversibility such as those described in the ancient English rhyme form a part of man's universal heritage of trouble. The proverbs of the world are

> rich in spilt milk, burnt boats, and wasted youth. Each of these proverbs can be regarded as a statement of the second law (of thermodynamics), which expresses the uni-directionality of life and the utter futility of expecting a second chance (24).

All these systems have *closure* in common.

Closure is about encapsulating the system at a *global* level; that is, a classification of the logic of a system in its entirety.

Yet it is the dominance of these global models that Serres seeks to question. The far-fetched example of the universe as an isolated system illustrates the difficulties in considering any system as separate from others.

The principle of entropy outlined above is important - it will become crucial in Serres' conception of information and language, and consequently in my discussion of the visual. This basic principle needs to be retained whilst Serres becomes increasingly elaborate and figurative in his perceptions of organic functioning.

Global/ Macro

Closure is then a part of the old-world procedures of science. Serres describes closure in different ways. The closure, or partitioning, can take shape like this: as 'the so-called closure axiom for the universe of discourse' (logico-mathematical); 'the independence of movements and stabilities in relation to all exterior influences' (mechanical); or by 'thermal insulation' (thermodynamics) (25).

To repeat: these kinds of closure are of interest to Serres in relation to a living system, which has historically been described in these ways.

Yet the closure apparent in these kinds of descriptions is problematic to Serres when examined against a living system in the light of the birth of information physics and the theory of communication (conceived as 'the daughter of thermodynamics' (26)). Similarly, in terms of painting, this kind of closure is redolent only of the ideal of autonomy typical of Greenbergian formalism. A mode of thinking that determines the separateness of a system cannot extend the

language of painting beyond its formal terms. It seems that the flow of information could be the model that extends painting as an essence beyond its limits as an object. Yet we need more to understand how this happens. We need to see how thermodynamics becomes updated and modified in terms of information.

As entropy is a concept of thermodynamics, it is no surprise to find it regulating the 'daughter' theory of information and communication.

What is information theory? As already stated, the territory is vast. Yet certain provinces of the discipline may instruct us in our study of visual information.

A sketch of the history of this 'daughter' theory looks something like this:

In the 20th century, the birth of communication theory quickly established a link with thermodynamics (that information = negentropy), but on a much smaller scale. The theorists of information physics accomplished a study of ordinary acts such as reading, writing and the storing of signals with means borrowed directly from the physics of the *macroscopic-entropic* scale:

> The concept of negentropy may be applied far and wide, even to the writing of poetry. Poets frequently do not say what they mean; that is, they transmit a coded message. If the code is to be broken, the second law (of thermodynamics) says that a price must be paid for the information. The author's message or information is intended for a select audience – those who can break the code. Negentropy must be spent by those readers capable of receiving the message (27).

This development from a 19th century notion of thermodynamics to a 20th century notion of communication theory also mobilised the language of philosophical discourse in a new way. The thermodynamic principle became subsumed in the theory of communication acts. Serres elaborates:

> Hence, in a parallel manner, the great stability of traditional philosophical categories but their massive application in a different area: discourse, writing, language, societal and psychic phenomena, all acts which one can describe as communication acts. It

immediately became obvious, or was taken as such, that a store of information transcribed on any given memory, a painting or a page, should drift by itself from difference to disorder, or that an isolated-closed system about which we know nothing, an unknown of some sort, could be and, in certain cases, had to be a language pocket. By an act of simultaneous translation one can derive with relative ease the philosophical terms in use today. The system under consideration becomes a system of signs (28).

So the conventional perceptions of what constitutes a painting becomes modified and extended by information theory. A painting can be understood as a memory bank of information. And as information theory was derived from thermodynamics, the memory bank of a painting contains a ratio of order and disorder, entropy and negentropy as does a classical heat engine.

This new notion of *communicative* entropy developing from *material* (decay) entropy is central to re-understanding painting as informationally enmeshed in the processes of nature. On some level, information is part of painting's essence. We shall see how in due course. For now, let us return to the living organism, and more specifically, to organic language development as theorised by Serres. The findings of this section should inform a return to painting.

Naturally, as part of the global system, living organisms came to be seen in information terms too. As 'matter, life *and sign* are nothing but properties of a system' (29), the extension of this is that the living organism is an information *and* thermodynamic system. It gives off energy and information. This system is naturally subject to the irreversible time of the second law of thermodynamics: it is, of course, dying, but struggles against this time. Yet in this light, it is not the isolated-closed system of thermodynamics (thermal insulation) since the constant information flow through the organism renders it an *open* system. And even the example of the poetry reader illustrates this point. Negentropy is brought to the system of the poem by the observer, who increases its negentropy (information) with a consequential drop in the observer's own negentropy levels. There is then a flow of information between so-called 'separate' entities. Again - a painting is part of this matrix of information paths.

Serres argues that the living organism can now be regulated with 'a thermodynamics of open systems' (30), which accounts theoretically for the state of imbalance in which the organism exists (irregular flows of food, oxygen, heat, signals). This imbalance is *stable* – neither static or homeostatic, Serres labels it 'homeorrhetic' (31), meaning both 'same' and 'flow' (32). This is a river 'that flows and yet remains stable in the continual collapse of its banks and the irreversible erosion of the mountains around it' (33). Similarly, in another analogy, 'the organism is a barrier of braided links that leaks like a wicker basket but can still function as a dam' (34).

We now have a picture of what is happening to the organism when it is reconfigured as an information system. But if all this is starting to sound somewhat poetic, then we need to work out what these kinds of analogies might mean. How is an organism both a boundary and the collapse of that boundary?

Again, this duality of imbalance, this 'homeorrhetic' state, is not simply the collapse of boundaries. Significantly, the state depends on a *change of terms* at the boundaries between states within systems. Gregory Bateson clarifies:

> There is, however, an important contrast between most of the pathways of information inside the body and most of the pathways outside it. The differences between the paper and the wood are first transformed into differences between in the propagation of light or sound, and travel in this form to my sensory end organs. The first part of their journey is energized in the ordinary hard-science way, from 'behind.' But when the differences enter my body by triggering an end organ, this type of travel is replaced by travel which is energized at every step by the metabolic energy latent in the protoplasm which receives the difference, recreates or transforms it, and passes it on (35).

In other words, a barrier between levels in a system is not really a barrier at all. Rather, in information terms, it is a transformation point. It does not collapse; instead, it converts. The system, then, as an information system, is a converter. Energy, signals and meanings are

converted in terms of information as the system progresses. This retains the stability of the organism but also defines the organism as dependent on its surroundings.

In her book *The Ontogeny of Information* (36), Susan Oyama details this dependency in an extension of Bateson's general biological system. This more recent study utilises the collapse of the nature-nurture distinction in genetics in a new description of formal development:

> Form emerges in successive interactions. Far from being imposed on matter by some agent, it is a function of the reactivity of matter at many hierarchical levels, and of the responsiveness of those interactions to each other. Because mutual selectivity, reactivity, and constraint take place only in actual processes, it is these that orchestrate the activity of different portions of the DNA, that make genetic and environmental influences interdependent as genes and gene products are environment to each other, as extraorganismic environment is made internal by psychological or biochemical assimilation, as internal state is externalised through products and behaviour that select and organise the surrounding world. If biological plans, constraints, and controls have a serious meaning, it is only in such mobile, contingent phenotypic processes, not in a preformed macromolecular code specifying the species type, of which type the individual is but a token (37).

So it is now clear that once a living system is seen as a thermodynamic and information system, then this openness generates meaning through transformation and exchange, not by fixity and separateness.

Organic Temporality

If the living system is, in information terms, a kind of open system, then is its time still strictly irreversible in accord with the second law of thermodynamics?

If it is both an information *and* a thermodynamic system, how do we now understand its temporality? Although irreversible in a universal sense (the inevitability of death, totality), Serres locates the organism's time like this:

The living organism, ontogenesis and phylogenesis combined, is of all times. This does not at all mean that it is eternal, but rather that it is an original complex, woven out of all the different times that our intellect subjects to analysis or that our habits distinguish or that our spatial environment tolerates. Homeorrhetic means at least that: the rhesis flows, but similarity pushes upstream and resists. All the temporal vectors possessing a directional arrow are here, in this place, arranged in the shape of a star. What is an organism? A sheaf of times. What is a living system? A bouquet of times (38).

The organism is thus ***multitemporal.***

So the idea of homeorrhesis is based upon a plurality of temporal zones and thus, by extension, the possibility of areas of negentropy in the general entropy, islands of information (negentropy) in the entropic sea. For Serres, this should be familiar: 'we willingly accept, however, the fact that the things around us do not all share the same temporality ... pockets of local order in rising entropy, crystal depositories sunk in ashes – none of these things disturbs us' (39).

In its multitemporality, the organism is then a *converter of time* (40). Within the global drift towards death in the entropic stream, there is the possibility of a simultaneous occasion of another order of information developing, a local negentropic 'pocket' of order at a different temporal level to the global flow towards disorder - like a crystal formation in a bed of ashes.

Local, Micro

Now the things around us do not share the same temporality. With the help of Serres we have already established the notion of an *information flow* through the organism. This organism is 'synchronous for meanings and directions, for the continuous and discontinuous' (41).

How then do we begin to describe this relation between the global drift of entropy and the negentropic events that approach energy-death on a different temporal level?

Put differently, how do we locate the 'event 'of negentropy within the organic complex?

As communication theory discovered that information was a form of negentropy, how does this information occupy the organic system?

Ultimately we need to foreground the ways in which entropy and negentropy occupy the system of painting.

For Serres (now that the organism is both an information and a thermodynamic system), a question arises: How is language developed from this abstract relationship between energies? The question leads us into the involuted universe of the organic body.

Serres introduces us to the involutions of the living system as if it were a Russian doll, beginning with the whole of the organism then 'localising' inwards, through the respiratory system, into the organs, tissues, cells and molecules. These diverse systems at the local level of the organism function like a set of chemical reactions, the number of which 'although probably finite, is incredibly large, in view of the enormous molecular population' (42). For Serres, this mass of activity must generate *background noise*, enough, by the sheer number of reactions, to overwhelm the organism (theoretically speaking). But this does not happen. This noise, this *information*, only makes sense in relation to an *observer* capable of receiving it. But the observer in question perceives nothing of this chaos. As information theory only makes sense when the perspective of an observer is present to receive the information, we, as organic beings, are the observers of our own systems yet perceive nothing of the deluge of information passing from level to level within our local organic complex. This is a consequence of the impossibility of absolute observation. Angrist and Hepler explain:

> It should be made clear that information theory imposes a limit on the observations and measurements of a physical system over and above that imposed by the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle. (This imposes a fundamental limitation on the determination of an object's momentum and position) Brillouin has shown that any information resulting from a physical observation must be paid for by an increase in entropy in the laboratory. This entropy increase, on the average, will be larger than the information obtained when they are both measured in the same system of units. It is this condition that imposes a new limitation on the possibilities of observation (43).

The observer, then, becomes a sequence level in a larger sequence of information exchanges, rather than a detached point with a global overview. This re-orientation of the observer takes us then into the nature of the exchanges between one level of the organic process and the next.

Serres now describes these complex chemical-style reactions in a local-through-to-global direction within the conditions of organic functioning. These 'levels of integration' (44) make up the cybernetic model that pictures the links between the many levels in the system's makeup (molecule to cell, tissue, organ etc). This interlocking system, this Russian doll, transmits information from one level to the next and produces background noise. So the next level receives and manipulates the information given off by the preceding level and *integrates* the information-background noise couple at this level.

This integration is critical for Serres. How does it happen?

> If one writes the equation expressing the quantity of information exchanged between two stations through a given channel and the equation which provides this quantity for the whole unit (including the two stations and the channel), a change of sign occurs for a certain function entering into the computation (45).

This change depends on the observer of the system. 'This function, called ambiguity and resulting from noise, changes when the observer changes his point of observation. Its value depends on whether he is submerged in the first level or whether he examines the entire unit from the next level. (46).' Observation is then about the means to do so; the listening device that perceives the information is not the ears or any organ at the global level of the organism. It is instead the change in sign at the next level itself, occurring at the local levels of the organism in question. This level is a *rectifier* of ambiguity, of noise – it adds the noise (once the obstacle to messages) to the information. 'This discovery is all the more important since it is valid for all levels. It is a law of the series which runs through the system of integration' (47).

This law is connected for Serres with the origin of language and provides the central point of his thesis. He is clear about what it is that this 'listening device' (48) perceives:

> Nothing, or almost nothing, it seems, of what we recognise at the purely physical level as background noise and information; nothing which resembles, with perhaps certain

> exceptions, a signal – a figure against a ground – isolated from a vague and fluctuating cloud, from a multiple halo humming and buzzing at random (49).

Put differently, the form of reception at the local level of the organic structure is in no way similar to the kind of listening at the global level. Yet the 'system of integration' that rectifies the signal by splicing the noise with the information is a rudimentary form of listening that allows this message unit to progress serially. For Serres, this perception is the foundation of language: 'It does, however, perceive the signals that we subsume under the two broad categories of pleasure and pain. It receives them and emits them. It is not meaningless to say that it receives signals that we translate immediately into these two words' (50). So the two words 'pleasure' and 'pain' make up the final stage in the serial process of listening. 'The final couple, the only one to be perceived, would, in other words, be the last translation, the last rectification of the original physical couple of information-background noise' (51).

The axis of the serial development from the local to the global, from the molecular to the most highly integrated level is then the movement from a proto-language (thermal noise) (52) to individuated signals equipped with (something like) meaning (53). Living organisms 'can be described as apparatuses which produce language from noise and information, each according to its order of complexity. For each system, indeed, for each species, there exists an original set of signals' (54).

At this point it is worth remembering that this is not definitive scientific research. Serres' point takes the cybernetic/ genetic models which provide this kind of organismic structure in various ways and extends their suggestive power into an argument for the organic process of language development on a micro scale. Yet this is not unconvincing in terms of information theory. If information is a flow which is reconfigured at the greater boundaries of organic stages (such as the sensations transmitted from atmospheric conditions to skin receptors, the nervous system and the brain to finally produce the word 'cold'), then it seems possible that this could happen between noise and information at a micro level to produce language. Although this could be perhaps endlessly contested, the principles of information theory which provide the relationship

between entropy and negentropy, redundancy and message, are constructive for thinking about systems at all levels owing to their foundation in thermodynamics. Serres' view of organic language processes functions logically as a part of this thinking.

To return to language:

All is not linear, however, in the information transmission of a system. Although the 'listening apparatus' perceives nothing of the background noise (the ambiguity), ambiguity itself is seen to exist not only at this 'rectification' stage in the development of a signal.

Serres suggests a system with several elements. These elements are either completely different from one another or identical, repetitive. The information quotient is therefore either:

The total of the information quotient of the different parts; or:

A reduction to the information quantity of one part.

If the system is organised, the elements are in relation to one another, therefore they are similar (due to organisation) and different at the same time. ***This is where ambiguity arises.*** From a viewpoint at one point within the system, the transmission of information from one element to another subtracts ambiguity because it is an obstacle to the message, a noise. For an observer elsewhere within the system, ambiguity must be added, as it increases the system's complexity. Ambiguity in this case functions as information at the level of the system's organisation: 'In one case, it covers up; in the other case, it expresses. The entire symbolic function is embedded in this process, the entire strategy of free association, Freudian slips, jokes and puns' (55). For Serres, this change of sign of the ambiguity function is valid at the most elementary levels of the organism: 'a cell containing a nucleus, cytoplasm, membranes, and organelles. Henceforth, despite the most radical differences between embedded systems, they will at least share this process of reversal at their boundaries' (56). This correlates to Bateson's earlier point on there being a difference between information pathways inside the body and outside the body (57).

The organic body thus becomes a system of integration levels which behave as unconsciouses for the more global levels surrounding them. The noise-information couple crosses the boundary

of this information unit and is reversed, then decoded by the next link in the chain. This is the transformation of the sign for the ambiguity function. The ambiguity is lessened as the organisation increases and the message is clarified, along the chain, into language:

> Residual background noise is progressively eliminated: what was supposed to interfere begins constructing; obstacles combine to organise; noise becomes dialect. I imagine this occurs from the depths of the molecular chaos, in which information appears in its spatial simplicity and material forms, throughout the signifying and articulated message through the sequence of rectifiers (58).

In this way, the traditional unconscious described by Freud would in this case be the final rectifier ('since it has its own language in the full sense' (59)) following a sequence of prior unconciouses compounded of meaningless signals.

Now Serres returns to the three varieties of time detailed in the opening paragraph, those times that come together in a temporal sheaf within the organism. Serres concludes that this image is resolved with the change in sign for the ambiguity function. Furthermore, that this resolution involves re-approaching the thermodynamic model of time as follows: The rectification that takes place from one level to another gives background noise an organisational purpose, 'but this noise is the equivalent of thermal disorder. Its time is that of increasing entropy, of that irreversible element which pushes the system towards death at maximum speed' (60). So if disorder is transformed into order through the change in sign for the ambiguity function, then the inevitable drift towards this energy death of the thermodynamic model has also been reversed. If the changes at the boundaries of the integration levels rectify the disorder, the entropy of noise, transforming them into the negentropy of information, then 'they have reversed the arrow of time. They are rectifiers of time. Entropic irreversibility also changes direction and sign; negentropy goes back upstream' (61).

The negentropy of the information-conversion is summarised thus:'***Organisation*** *per se, as system and homeorrhesis, functions precisely as a converter of time'* (62).

Information then becomes the crystal buried in a bed of ashes, a negentropic island that is always in motion. The body creates language from information and noise.

There is no distinction between the interior of the organism and the exterior in this regard. The perspective on the level of integration, whether global or local, determines the value of the ambiguity. The observational point always contributes to this value as part of the system. All systems operate by this law of sequence.

This is the falling away of superficial boundaries acted out in Bataille's mutilation of rationality. The outlandish metonymy of Bataille's texts would then intuit the multilateral contagion not merely of communication but of ***information.***

This realisation calls for taking stock of how our language of flowers model has been modified by information theory.

Firstly, the language of flowers established death as language in Chapter One. Yet this language also defined a temporal difference between two information styles – the visual and the textual (life and death). These two existed as a duality, dependent on each other yet visually distinct.

This Chapter aimed to bring these two together on a visual-material level, to determine whether the language of flowers remains constructive for our purposes. Yet what it ultimately confirms is that the language of flowers detailed in Chapter One is now flawed not only as a visual sign for the death of painting, but also for the interrelationship between the ideas of Bataille and Serres. For where death becomes language in the displacement of the symbolic properties of its different states (beauty and decay), this is still, on *the physical-material level,* an illustration of the second law of thermodynamics – the irreversibilty of time. The flower's death, both real and symbolic, is terminal in thermodynamic terms. The death that the flower symbolises is the FACT of its own material entropy, its thermodynamic end. Bataille's multitemporality exists on a linguistic and symbolic, not physical level.

Is there a kind of organism that realises a death as part of its life? Can the duality of Bataille, the contagion of death of both Bataille and Sarduy, and the contagion of information of Serres be

united in the visual conception of a single organism? What happens when we return to the mimetic insect in the light of this new information?

The Language of Insects

As their Greek name suggests, the order of stick and leaf insects – *Phasmatidae* – really are apparitions. Positioning themselves in a tangle of foliage, they oscillate between absolute baroque presence and magical invisibility. These 'walking leaves' are generally elongate and *hemimetabolous* (no pupae stage of metamorphosis). Some are broad and flattened. Some forms are *apterous* (winged) though often only the male actually flies. They have biting and chewing mouthparts and all are *phytophagous* (leaf eating: bramble, guava, mango and oak). They all posses compound eyes and some of the winged forms possess 2 *ocelli* (simple eyes). Their antennae are generally *filiform* (hair-like) ranging from 8 to over 100 segments and their *cerci* (abdominal appendages) are short. They are often adorned with numerous spines and other protuberances to make the leaf resemblance complete.

The illusion has always been seen as a defence strategy, and for good reason; *Phasmids* are not built for swift exits. The creatures are poor athletes, managing only a feeble staggering motion at times when a sprint is urgently required. Species such as *Phyllium siccifolium* opt instead for *thanatosis*, or 'freezing'. In Greek *Thanatos* = death, and the journey of the insect from nymph to camouflaged adult could be seen as an unfolding *vanitas* performance, a deathly parody of life's transience - perversely, in the mimicry of life itself. The resulting illusion, acted out at the expense of the creature's identity in death simulation, paradoxically replicates life in the form of a leaf growing from a branch.

Yet the illusion of the mimetic insect has not always been regarded as the summit of Darwinian evolution for the insect world. In his essay 'Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia' (63), Roger Caillois, a contemporary of Bataille, suggests straightaway that we might consider the relation of this organism to its surroundings differently. That is, as pathology (64) (or disease, error) and that

mimicry is a highly specific instance of this. Caillois reminds us of the standard assumption of the purpose of mimicry:

> an inoffensive animal took on the appearance of a forbidding one: for example, the butterfly *Trochilium* and the wasp *Vespa Crabro* – the same smoky wings, the same brown legs and antennae, the same black and yellow striped abdomen and thorax, the same vigorous and noisy flight in broad daylight.

An insect may instead mimic another belonging to a different species,

> like the caterpillar of Choerocampa Elpenor, which on its fourth and fifth segments has two eye-shaped spots outlined in black: when it is alarmed, its front segments retract and the fourth swells considerably, achieving the effect of a snake's head capable of deceiving lizards and small birds, which are frightened by this sudden apparition (65).

Other examples may include the adaptation of form to form: 'box crabs resemble rounded pebbles; chlamydes, seeds; moenas, gravel' (66). Yet 'other species are even more improved, their hind wings being furnished with a slender appendage that they use as a petiole, acquiring by this means a sort of insertion into the plant world' (67). Caillois also describes the detailing of certain butterflies, which resembles the leaf it alights upon to the extent of replicating lichens and other damage.

However, the many attempts to explain these extreme resemblances are not satisfactory for Caillois (68). Biologists such as Bouvier and Cuenot (cited by Caillois) (69) respectively assert that mimesis is either a distinction from the normal type in the presence of needless, excessive or 'ornamental' detail in the creature's appearance: 'mimetic species depart from the normal type by the addition of ornaments: "lateral expansions of the body and appendages in Phyllia, modelling of the front wings in flatoids, etc..." '(70), or that similarity is based upon the chance 'accumulation of factors that are found separately in non-mimetic species and are there unremarkable: 'resemblance is therefore obtained by the sum of a certain number of small details, each of which has nothing exceptional about it and can be found isolated in neighbouring species, but whose combination produces an extraordinary imitation of a dry leaf' (71). For Caillois, this is not a

'combination like any other, since all these details can be brought together without being joined, without their contributing to some resemblance' (72). In this way, what become important are not the elements themselves but their '*mutual organisation*, their *reciprocal topography*' (73). The illusion is based upon an uncanny coincidence of visual effects. This 'painterly' ensemble produces this likeness in a mixture of pathological , pictorial, and ornamental details. But before we try to pin down the painterly associations of this organisation, we need to examine the mimetic insect still further.

This morphological mimicry is an image, but with a *material* dimension. This is not really an image, but a strange hybrid form of material representation. It is a kind of photography on the level of the object, a 'sculpture-photography or better *teleplasty*' (74). This is developed in the creature from some sort of 'cutaneous organs permitting the simulation of the imperfections of leaves, the imitating mechanism having disappeared once the morphological character was acquired (that is to say, in the present case, once the resemblance was achieved)' (75).

Now Caillois returns to a critique of the standard assumption of insect mimicry – that its sole purpose is defensive. Caillois points out that this would make sense if 'carnivores hunted by sight and not by smell, as is often the case. Carnivores, moreover, do not generally bother with motionless prey: immobility would thus be a better defence, and indeed insects are exceedingly prone to employ a false corpselike rigidity' (76). Similarly,

> predators are not at all fooled by homomorphy or homochromy: they eat crickets that mingle with the foliage of oak trees or weevils that resemble small stones, completely invisible to man. The phasma Carausius Morosus, which by its form, colour, and attitude simulates a plant twig, cannot emerge into the open air without being immediately discovered and dined on by sparrows. Generally speaking, one finds many remains of mimetic species in the stomachs of predators (77).

Mimicry is not then propagated by success, but by a pathological failure.

In this way, mimicry becomes 'a *luxury*, and even a dangerous luxury' (78). The visual information that at once distinguishes the creature from the normal type whilst also rendering it

indistinguishable from its context is surplus to the demands of survival and can perhaps place that creature at greater risk. The leaf insects Phyllium for example, 'browse amongst themselves, taking each other for real leaves' (79).

The resemblance, then, carries with it a curse. The success of the mimicry encourages activity at the level of the real as a reflexive response to successful representation. The 'luxury' of a realism expressive of the subtleties of organic growth, with all its unsavoury details, short-circuits any utility value the realism might have had. Here the cannibal nibbling elicited by this physical photography immediately becomes a part of the language of the physical photograph itself – it supplements and embellishes it, ornamenting it with a violence that immediately sinks into the language of leaf resemblance. The symbiosis between the information of one organism (leaf) and another (*Phyllium*) becomes grossly involuted to the point of identity collapse through both verisimilitude and agonising death.

The 'prestigious magic' (80) of this 'useless' yet uncanny representational system is both incantational and suicidal. In the law of magic, '*things that have once been in contact remain united* – (this) corresponds association by contiguity, just as association by resemblance corresponds quite precisely to the *attractio similium* of magic: *like produces like.*' Similarly, 'the same correspondence exists for association by contrast and the law of magic: *opposites act on opposites*' (81). The Phyllium step from the script of Darwinian linear evolution and become the authors of their own magical *vanitas* parody. The morphological instinct can be seen as excessive representation that has split its seams. The baroque overspilling of representational means cannot be contained by mere survival functions and become *expressions.* It is the positioning of all this luxury information in space that completes the pathological *fascination* (82): the 'magical' illusion of continuity between plant and insect. Once mimicry is no longer a process of defence and becomes an abnormal luxury, making sense only in the 'finale' of a correspondence with its context, it can only be 'a disturbance in the perception of space' (83). This is then the pathology: a risking of the creature's sense of orientation by the nature of what that creature *in itself* is. And what 'it in itself is', happens to be a sundry collection of over-the-top visual signs, some of which

have been obtained through a violence provoked by the likeness itself, such as bite marks on the insect by others of the same species. This is a collapse between space and represented space:

> It is with represented space that the drama becomes specific, since the living creature, the organism, is no longer the origin of the co-ordinates, but one point among others; it is dispossessed of its privilege and literally *no longer knows where to place itself* (84).

The 'personality', the creature's sense of difference from its environment, 'of the connection between consciousness and a particular point in space' (85), must be 'seriously undermined' (86). This is Caillois' 'Legendary Psychasthenia' – the disturbance in the relations between personality and space.

This pathology is connected with the experience of the schizophrenic, where space becomes a 'devouring force' (87): 'the body separates itself from thought, the individual breaks the boundary of his skin and occupies the other side of his senses. He tries to look at *himself from* any point whatever in space' (88). This reduction of life in the assimilation of space compromises the individual living organism as a distinct being. In becoming that which it most closely resembles, in splicing its identity with surrounding space, in the mimetic insect '*life takes a step backwards*' (89). Caillois summarises the point thus: 'alongside the instinct of self-preservation, which in some way orients the creature toward life, there is generally speaking a sort of *instinct of renunciation* that orients it toward a mode of reduced existence, which in the end would no longer know either consciousness or feeling' (90). And this can be seen in two ways: in the creature's *Thanatosis* (physical freezing), and their confusion between themselves and the plants that they feed on and emulate. Life is renounced in luxurious and dangerous representation.

Is this collapse the same as Laddaga's modernist butterfly that conflates figure and ground?

We need to remind ourselves of this: ***That the 'instinct of renunciation' is not simply a reduction in one direction alone.***

Caillois reminds us that the internal structures of these creatures may also mirror the environment they depend on for sustenance (91). The retreat, the blurring between space and individual also expands the notion of the organism and the limits ascribed to it – '*expanding to the same degree*

the limits within which, according to Pythagoras, *we are allowed to know, as we should, that nature is everywhere the same*' (92).

The key to the mimetic insect, once considered from both global and local levels, is not in the flattening out of the figure (butterfly) against ground (leaf), but in the blurring of the distinction between the two at all levels. And the property that modulates this blurring should be familiar. It is, of course, *information* that constitutes this trans-boundary flow.

To recap:

In the case of both Serres and Caillois we have a sense of an organism's boundaries becoming blurred. The example provided by Serres, where a relentless flow of information passes through and transforms these boundaries, is not dissimilar to Caillois' 'reciprocal topography'.

Serres, however, describes the transfiguring of the organism's boundaries through *information*, and describes a signal's meaning as reliant upon the perspective from which that signal is considered. For example, the role of noise in the formation of a message is different if the point of observation changes within the system under consideration. Depending on the position of a observational point, whether at a micro or macro level, the ambiguity of noise is either a redundancy within the message unit, which adds complexity, or that which is to be transformed from mere obstacle into further information. So ambiguity is subtracted or added (respectively).

This 'mobility of observation' is detached from the global functioning of observation that Caillois begins with. For Caillois spies the organism as a predator would, in order to dismantle the seeming straightforwardness of this relationship. Serres' point is not about vision and this classical kind of scopic objectivity, but the correlation between a system and its context in the streaming of information on multiple levels. Oyama's genetic theory talks about this too: 'Organismic form, then, constant or variable, is not transmitted in genes any more than it is contained in the environment, and it cannot be partitioned by degrees of coding or by amounts of information. It is constructed in developmental processes' (93). The point of observation *is itself* the product of a previous level of information integration, rather than the pinnacle in a hierarchical chain of command. Serres does give regard to the visual dimension of the global perspective of

an organic system, but asserts that the global is only a late station in a sequence of prior exchanges and is founded upon them and is indistinct from them in principle (94).

Insect mimicry relies upon a high information quotient to appear identical to its surroundings, so could be seen as an undermining of identity through an excess of information. Identity then equals difference: when the insect looks like a leaf, it is no longer different from its kind visually, and so loses its identity. The difference gap closes as information of a 'leaf variety' increases on the insect body. Yet in the case of classical thermodynamics, information impacts upon a system as either *order* (negentropy, for instance when water freezes to ice), or *disorder* (like the scattering of children's toys in a room – their chaotic orientation contains a higher degree of information than it did when they were stacked neatly). So: it takes an increase of information to get from a non-mimetic, single coloured plain insect to an elaborately ornamented, multicoloured mimetic insect. The visual *effect*, however, is the opposite. It is a *reduction* in both *organisation* (the creature and it surroundings are so blurred together that one cannot be distinguished from the other) and *information* (there is nothing remaining to construct identity – the beast is invisible).

As negentropy is based on difference (less difference = more entropy), it is therefore also possible to *increase* entropy with organisation, as organisation can limit the difference between entities as can disorder. An example would be organising the children's toys into a collective mass: more organisation (less difference), more entropy. Information and organisation can increase entropy or negentropy, depending on the situation. Insect mimicry is, however, slightly between these two: *it is an increase in organisation to facilitate an increase in entropy (elimination of difference)* ***followed by the disappearance of organisation.*** In other words, the illusion of the resemblance eliminates the visual organisation that brings about the illusion in the first place.

This is supported when we consider the paramount importance Serres' places upon the perspective from which the system is observed. To recap: the ambiguity of noise (disorder) is either:

1: A *redundancy* within the message unit. This is like a gap in a message. An example would be the spaces between meanings in a sentence describing something. I.e: what is *not* stated in describing the appearance of, say, a tree (one might leave out something like the width of the trunk etc), places a greater complexity on the words which do say something about the tree's appearance in the sentence. Redundancy in the message unit adds complexity. An enormous list cataloguing every atom of the tree would contain less redundancy, less difference, than a paragraph containing impressions of the tree, punctuation, etc. So the list contains less redundancy, less gaps, therefore more entropy, than the descriptive sentence.

Or:

2: That which is to be transformed from mere obstacle into further information.

In the case of the mimetic insect, there is great complexity, yet this relies upon the elimination of redundancy, as the creature is practically identical to its surroundings. There are no gaps in its 'description' (through 'Physical photography' (95)) of the leaf with which it merges. It is the second kind of redundancy, the obstacle to be transformed, which describes the process of changing random information, or noise, into a message: e.g.: a patch of colour, arbitrary in itself, becomes a component of camouflage once in concert with other elements.

Now: to return to Serres' insistence on the importance of perspective. The first kind of redundancy is that perceived by an external observer (96). The second kind is perceived from within the system. In the case of the mimetic insect, this is reversed. Put differently, this is an externalising of Serres' process of the development of language: it is the *visualising* of the transformation of redundancy into message, of noise into signal, of disorder into order. Yet this order 'runs down' the order inherent in the organism's structure. The thermodynamics mentioned so far operate on many scales from micro to macro. In the case of the mimetic insect, it is the 'macro-visual' (the external 'look' of the thing) or the global scale that becomes important. *This* is the last station in all the noise transformations where there is a sudden reversal of signals, over and above the thermodynamic relations at the chemical or biomechanical levels. The levels of

entropy taking place within the creature are suddenly camouflaged at the global level of the organism, at the final level – that of *representation.*

The conclusion of this is that the mimesis of the insect is an example of a high order of ***visual entropy.***

If in Serres' conception of the organism the subjective and objective are no longer at odds, and in Caillois' view there is a 'depersonalisation by assimilation to space' (a similar 'trans–boundary' energy), then we are not dealing with these classical oppositions. Instead, visual entropy could be seen as a *relocation* of the visual realm as that which is prioritised after information becomes '*continuous*' (within and without) and redundancy is eliminated through over-organisation. The visual entropy of the mimetic insect is excessive in its sublimation of organisation – excessive, in that the amount of organisation necessary for that very organisation to become invisible is much greater than the survival requirements of the organism. Caillois himself asserts that there is a 'luxury' to this information that could be described as an 'exaggeration of precautions' (97).

Visual entropy is a consequence, specific to visual organisation, of the continuous nature of matter and information.

Yet what are the consequences for the Laddaga/ Sarduy butterfly? Does it still 'paint'?

To repeat:

Insect mimicry is *an increase in organisation to facilitate an increase in entropy (elimination of difference)* ***followed by the disappearance of organisation.***

The pathology of this supreme risk to the insect is extremely perverse. Yet what it ultimately illustrates is a logic of painting that is both dead and living, organised and disordered, there and not there. These features of visual entropy maintain duality between the local and the global stages of representation. Yet, unlike the flower, the dual dimensions are simultaneously visual, only multitemporally, on different visual registers. The organisation that vanishes only vanishes from the *global* viewpoint that apprehends the illusion. On a local scale, it can be detected. Yet the two cannot be perceived at once, yet are happening at the same time.

Visual-Material Multitemporality?

Continuity of information is a fact of painting's context, as outlined in the introduction. The flow of information from system to system allows painting to move from style to style, period to period as it sees fit. And we know that painting has this history of death to drag around with it too…

What the example of the mimetic insect shows us is that this multitemporality is ITSELF a pathological identity crisis that evokes death. The singularity (I am an insect) that is then shattered in mimesis (I am a leaf) is a process of visual death that is non-terminal. Not only in the sense that the insect lives through it, but also in the fact that the organisation of information that has shattered the insect's singularity has also, in a sense, died – it has vanished.

Yet this information, in its disappearance in visual entropy, insists on its absolute presence and sovereign importance on a different visual and temporal level. After all, it was this information which set up the entropic illusion in the first place. The pluralism of painting's multitemporal action finds a parallel in the mimetic insect that relies on exactly this multitemporality to define itself visually. This means that a presence has been given to the contagion of communication, rather than existing before signification. This is signification of a magical order – it organises itself with excessive visual information, only to slip out of this cognition process to another visual and temporal level. This is death made 'there and not there', *only at the level of the 'real', rather than the symbolic* (flowers).

It is the disappearance of the organisation of information that invokes high entropy, low difference and therefore death at the global stage. Yet the multitemporal nature of this action means that the illusion is predicated at another stage absolutely on the opposite: high levels of information, therefore negative entropy, therefore *life*. Multitemporality is an illustration not of the presence of death in life as illustrated in Bataille's flowers but rather, this: the 'reciprocal topography' of death and life and the simultaneous exclusivity of the two as temporal experiences and units of visual information. This is pure visual-material multitemporality. Death as visual, life as visual. All at once.

Now, painting as pluralism exhibits low difference and high entropy. There is 'nothing new' here. Paintings display factors of novelty from time to time, yet this is usually a component secreted within the familiarity of the form as a sign. An example of this is perhaps Michael Raedecker's work (fig. 2), which, although featuring an inventive use of materials including stitching and threading, contains this original approach within the terms of traditional picture-making.

Artists such as Jim Lambie (Fig. 3) and Takashi Murakami (Fig. 4), often perceived as rupturing and extending these traditional terms of painting, in my view utilise painting as a sign amongst others within a flux of signals, rather than reorganising the sign of painting itself. This flux could be analysed in terms of architecture, the entertainment industry, cinema or global commerce, or a mixture of all these, depending on the interests of the analyst. Whilst this constitutes the power of this work, 'sign: Painting' is nevertheless still activated when the work is seen to be extending or generally altering 'sign: Painting'. The same historical or traditional references make up this sign, appearing only in different shades and guises dependent on the work's specific logic. And it is this sign, available wherever painting is said to be taking place, that is a high-entropy sign. And it is exactly its visual entropy that allows it to be identified as present in work as diverse as Raedecker, Lambie and Murakami.

However, the high levels of information organisation that allow this sign to take place are happening at another temporal register and are low in entropy. They are importantly separate, local in relation to global, at once visually exclusive yet mutually dependent and dualistically present.

In the insect, there is a reversal of the function of the global stage of information development where the message is formed. Perversely and dramatically, what is formed at the global stage is not a message that can be read and absorbed but *the complete disappearance of any signal whatsoever.* And it is this magical perversity, the organisation of highly complex information in order to achieve nothing, which brings painting to mind. For is painting not an organisation of a vast plural history in a singular object that cannot visualise all this at the global stage? And if this body of information that informs the global stage then vanishes, then what are paintings if not

visually entropic? That is, low in difference from their history in their lack of outright novelty. It is this low difference that allows both a paint splat in a Jim Lambie installation and an exquisitely painted log cabin in a Raedecker picture to be understood as connected to painting.

Yet this is not the old argument of the continuity of materials carrying the truth of painting's essence. This is not reclothed Greenbergian formalism. This is instead the ***image*** of painting – sign: Painting – standing at any one moment for all of painting. And in this entropic self-effacement in proclaiming low difference, we find that this final transformation reveals this:

That painting is, as visually entropic dis-appearance, ***born dead.***

Yet perversely, this death is mobilised by the ever-presence of teeming negative entropy – LIFE.

The extension of this is that ***death*** is ***painting's essence.***

The perversity is that this is an excessive, rather than reductive, sense of essence.

So like the insect, the painting reverses the logic of message formation by camouflaging its information organisation by playing dead. With irony, mimicry, appropriation. This *thanatosis*, however, is created by a multitemporal life implicitly *beyond* the global view.

This is then painting understood as a part of nature, as a material information unit amongst others and thus sharing the logic of that world. Specifically, the logic of one of its most elaborately visual denizens: the mimetic insect.

To return to the Laddaga/Sarduy butterfly: the butterfly does NOT paint. It is ***Painting.***

So visually we now have, in this example, an image of nature as painting. Yet what about the other way around? What would painting as nature look like? Considering that we have arrived at this model through thinking of nature as a series of systems through which information flows, it makes sense to see what the consequences of this thinking are for the look of actual paintings.

There are countless instances of the natural world rendered on canvas throughout the centuries, yet what do these pictures tell us about painting's relationship to nature?

In the next Chapter I will investigate this look back towards painting from the world at large, to see how the flux of natural information modulates painting's essence as death made ***visual in art.***

Chapter 3

Sublime Mimesis

What happens when we take the logic of mimesis established in Chapter Two and come to think of the *look* of paintings? The sort of 'majestic identity collapse' that the *Phyllium* experiences sounds risky to an object like a painting. We can readily understand how an insect that blends in with its surroundings might be considered as a dualistic and visually entropic unit. Yet how is a painting – a screen, an object, a 'thing' materially 'there' - to be considered thus? Does a painting disappear? Are they now invisible – or something?

This literal extension of the previous point is clearly an over-simplification, fantastical in its poetic allusions. Yet there is a dimension to this strange logic that can be attributed to the understanding of paintings as visual experiences. If death is now painting's essence, this needs to be understood visually, to be something seen. It needs to be 'there' to be seen.

What follows, then, is a return to a moment in both science and painting when nature was considered as a separate system from human culture. Paintings will be discussed with the discoveries of Chapter Two in mind, to see if they reconfigure from a contemporary perspective. If nature is a flux of information, then it matters that findings such as those in Chapter Two make sense not just with recent paintings, but with painting as a sign at any point. This is perhaps the logical way to pursue an idea of painting's 'death essence' as something that mobilises visual signs. Values attributed to paintings will likewise be re-evaluated. This may go some distance in understanding them as dimensions of a new (death) essentialism.

Science and Nature

Science in the Newtonian "Golden Age" 'leads to a tragic metaphysical choice. Man has to choose between the reassuring but irrational temptation to seek in nature a guarantee of human

values, or a sign pointing to a fundamental correlatedness, a fidelity to a rationality that isolates him in a silent world' (1).

Alexander Koyre states that Newtonianism split the world in two (2). Science, united in geometrical equations and rationality, drives a split between this technical level of reason and the world of everyday human reality where people live, love and die. For Koyre, Newtonian rationalism exiles man from the world into a realm unaccounted for by science (3).

This binary view of the world in the 18th century provides the scientific context for the works made by American landscape painters such as Albert Bierstadt, Thomas Cole and Frederick Edwin Church.

The paintings of the western frontier by these artists and others, shown in the *American Sublime* (4) exhibition at the Tate Gallery, dramatise this kind of metaphysical split. We are confronted in these pictures with a view of nature as a boundless space in which man has no place yet. This is a forbidding and hostile site that man faces objectively as though gazing at an alien landscape, a screen of otherness devoid of the familiar features of local landscape that might afford cognition and lead to signification. It is this vision of nature defamiliarised that the paintings dramatically illustrate, portraying a place of exile somewhere between the artificially separated notions of 'culture' and 'nature' that would have had a strong topical relationship with the conceptions of science of the period. The physicist's seeking of a clear, mathematizable logic of the world around us reflected the painter's desire to make sense of this vast new territory with the visual logic of academic painting.

Things are not quite so straightforward, however.

The paintings simultaneously display a duality within their relationship to nature. For whilst they attempt to dominate it objectively in the visual by capturing it in academic representations at a distance, they also use the landscape symbolically, equating the spectacle of nature with certain cultural systems of meaning and value, and thus by extension drawing comparisons between nature and culture. By placing themselves superficially outside of nature, these artists attempted

to confirm not only our prestigious distinctness from the savage wilderness, but also the eternal values *within* it that form the bedrock of the morals of civilised society.

In this way, the works in this exhibition are about a *desire.* A desire to master, from this objective distance, the epic and ineffable, grand, vast and terrifying expanses of the American wilderness. And in the process, there is evidence of various familiar narratives being woven into the representations of this region to generate the above duality.

As a consequence, this desire for meaning and control modifies the look of the landscape considerably. For example, historical themes are explored with a shamelessly colonial bias, so that themes like the massacre of the American Indians appears as not much more than target practice with garden gnomes; elsewhere, theatrically exaggerated sunrises and sunsets appear, and become allegorical signs of religious enlightenment. Everywhere there are trademark-style signs of the landscape as a site of emotional and political projection: sunrises bringing new dawns, the rainbows of brighter tomorrows, rousing volcanic eruptions, hallelujah-style sunbursts, awe-inspiring waterfalls, reflective, introspective sunsets, majestic mountains and overwhelming cliffs below which people and animals scuttle about like insects. The desire to dominate this overwhelming space with the domesticated symbols of cultural and moral progress thus gives rise to a newly politicised approach to topographical landscape painting.

But are the thematic/ visual liberties taken in these pictures all they appear to be? That is, are they simply and harmlessly the artist's naïvely sentimental symbols of cultural achievements way back home in comfortable civilisation? Adjustments made to highlight the benefits of Christian values, colonialism and the pioneering spirit of America? In other words, adjustments made by artists fully in control of their subject as they wished to appear, masters of this new wilderness as though it were their own back garden? Are they so separate from nature as to be able to shape its iconography in any way they choose?

More specifically, does their technique - their mastery - or maybe lack of mastery - over the picturing of this space reveal anything deeper about their relationship to nature? And is this relationship complicated by the desire to artistically claim the wilds of nature in the first place?

With these questions as a starting point, the present chapter attempts to address and locate a notion of the sublime as refracted through the desire to paint a picture of it.

This will involve approaching both the conventions of the sublime, and perspectives on the observation of natural systems, from a contemporary perspective, to see if these redefine the location of the sublime within pictorial representation more generally. Following from the models of the visual-in-nature established (through the theme of insect mimesis) in Chapter Two, this will begin to approach a sense of how a painted image might come to visualise 'nature' and the sublime.

The themes of Chapter Two (based on an investigation of non-linear natural systems such as insect mimesis) make clear that the Cartesian division of the world into the binary terms of 'mind' and 'matter' (mentioned in the introduction) is now obsolete (5). The subject-object relation of Newtonian science has been replaced by the realisation that 'nature turns out to be only partly linear and deterministic; much of the time it is non-linear, self-organizing, unpredictable, reflexive and stable only through its own feedback processes' (6). Similarly, in Chapter Two we established Serres' notion of the multitemporality of the living information system and its development of language through levels of molecular conversion of message and redundancy (7). Nature becomes a system of economic exchanges between interlocking subsystems, rather than a screen of otherness facing us objectively. This is now the context of any enquiry into natural systems. It follows that the *picturing* of these systems would be modified accordingly. It is clear that the paintings in the American Sublime exhibition were produced in an era prior to these new discoveries regarding our view of nature and our position in it as a system of micro-systems. It is possible however that a backward look from this new position may open up new conceptions and locations of the sublime within pictorial representation today.

I wish to argue that it is perhaps in light of this new perspective that the paintings of the sublime landscape in the 19th century can be seen in a new way. That is, as *failing* to engender a sense of the sublime in the global manner that has been attributed to them. What will be considered is that

it is not the way in which nature is faced and mimicked academically by the artists that produces the iconic/global sense of the sublime in the paintings. Rather, it is the way in which nature *as a system* interpenetrates this conservative-economic position with its own type of economy. The terrifying vastness of the world would then be not so much a force that has been domesticated objectively by painting for sanitised consumption in polite society. Rather, it would appear as the contrary: as a force that threatens objective reflection from within and without, undermining an artist's confidence in whether a painting of a 'sublime landscape' might be made at all. And it is this scandalising of representation by the natural world that will lead to a further visual understanding of death as painting's essence.

Mimetic Anxiety

So how does 'nature' *do* this, and how does it become visual in painting?

The latter part of this question will be addressed first.

To recap: the artists used symbols to project their thematic perspectives onto the landscape to give it 'meaning.' Doesn't the decisive use of these signs and symbols evidence *high* confidence in what a painting is and how it is to be made? That is, to an observer, the artists could appear adamant: *painting is certainly a vehicle to convey allegorical meaning to a viewer through the power of the collective associations of natural phenomena, and by arousing the further associations of this imagery as found in religious/cultural//political iconography and propaganda.*

Yet, whilst this may be true, and it is clear that this intention can be read into the paintings, it is an assertion made at the *iconic* level of the image: that is, the *global* level. By generating a visually convincing representation of a site with the above ambitions in mind, it is clear that these themes can be integrated with ease into a picture, given sufficient technical facility on the part of the author. Furthermore, the paintings in the exhibition reflect an academic tradition based on pictorial formulas, and predate the early modernist thematisation of personal style (8). In this way, the techniques of descriptive oil painting were firmly in the hands of these artists. So once we

know they can physically paint these themes into a scene, what can be said about the *desire* to project these themes onto the landscape in a picture in the first place? Although there are clear economic and political agendas behind this desire (9), it is also possible that these pictorial tropes can be seen as theatrical reactions to exactly the subject in question: namely, the terrifying expanses of the wilderness. This 'sublime' force, rather than being somehow magically captured by the author in the very materiality and visuality of the paintings, could appear instead to be a kind of overwhelming super-author that causes the painter to create these stylistic confections or aberrations. In other words, there could be a reversal of the assumed hierarchy at work.

The indication that this may be so can be found once we examine the quality and character of the pictorial tropes. It turns out that these pictorial inventions and mannerisms and such like are not *only* means by which the painters can inject gravitas into their compositions. Academic works, by their very nature, rely on the convention of pictorial tropes in order to be recognised as such and become 'socialised' with their like in a cultural network of shared understanding. As academic works, the adjustments made ought, by definition, to be in the service of certain values such as elegance of composition and tonal equilibrium. But strangely, they are not. For academic painters, these artists make some distinctly academically illogical decisions. And these decisions, made somehow hastily in relation to the more conventional choices seen in the images, could be read as evidence of an anxiety that compromises the painting's very validity in the face of the sublime.

Bad Painting

The evidence comes in many forms of incongruous mannerisms:

- Decorative, formal dramas from a different visual lexicon (radial light effects familiar from religious altarpieces etc): **(fig. 5)**.

- Oddly florid and heavy 'panels' of brushwork (for nearby clouds etc): (**Fig. 6).**

- Solidified clouds clipped to the picture's top edge and the picture plane: (**Fig. 7).**

- Large objects (The rock) blocking the sight lines through a space towards a vanishing point: (**Fig. 8)**.

- Oversized clouds linking foreground to background: (**Fig. 9)**.

- The continued handling of a passage of paint into a different element, such as earth-into-sky (right half of this image): (**Fig. 10)**.

- Inexplicable lumps of matter in strange places, such as the black triangle on the far right of the horizon line in this image: (**Fig. 11)**.

- Perversions of natural phenomena (symmetrical, perfectly semicircular rainbows parallel to the frame): (**Fig. 12)**.

- Artless repetitions (potato print-style trees etc) or symmetrical patterning: **(Fig. 10 - trees in centre distance).**

Appearing in both studio paintings and oil sketches made on the spot, these things bring us back sharply to the painter's invention, and, usually in equal measure, to the picture plane.

This in my view suggests a compromising of the conventional objective relationship between an academic painter and their subject. This almost hysterical cancelling out of the problems of painting a scene and the depth of a space occurs by keeping the picture (theatrically) shallow with the above devices and tricks. What is then suggested is a crisis in representation that in fact goes against the expression of the sublime in an iconic (allover, global, synthesised, general) sense. This paradoxical flattening, this introduction of claustrophobia and closeness, brings an ***internal*** dimension to the expression of the picture. By its very definition this internal dimension returns the painter's gaze away from the distant horizon and vast wilderness and back into the local space of the painter's mind - their ambitions and desires. In this way, the expression of the sublime is not iconic and global ('picture'), but indexical and local ('detail') – it is played out as a neurotic interplay between the painter and the canvas in sub-regions of the image. This takes the form of incongruous formal solutions to boundless, or endless, pictorial challenges. The only way that all the majesty of the site can be expressed is to edit, make abbreviations and exaggerate. The space is just too big otherwise. Yet in this very admission of failure through adaptation, the

expression of the sublime becomes displaced. It becomes localised, more to do with a worm's eye view of the picture, rather than the God's eye view of the scene by the painter as master of the scene. Anxiety fixes a conservative response to the sublime in the local dimension of language, indexically referencing the concerns and anxieties of the author.

Darian Leader makes a similar observation on the role of frustration or anxiety in the generation of style aberrations in Francis Bacon's *Van Gogh* portraits (10). For Leader, Bacon's frustration in trying to capture the human scream in his earlier *Pope* series finds dramatic expression in these *Van Gogh* paintings. The nature of the scream – as a force that overflows from the body and disrupts its unity – then becomes something largely unrepresentable, and finds no satisfactory site in the *Pope* paintings. The scream then is displaced from the mouth of the Popes to the brushwork in the *Van Goghs*:

> Whereas, in the *Pope* series, it was the figures themselves that were the focus of colour and brushwork, now it is the whole canvas, which becomes covered in a kind of frenetic, glutinous impasto. Why not see a link between the disappearance of the scream in the *Pope* series and the emergence of this new technique? If the Popes stop screaming, it isn't because they're any happier, but because the scream has now moved into the paintwork itself, its acoustic vibrations disrupting the surface of the canvas, as if the scream, impossible to capture by painting the mouth and the body, has been shifted to another register, that of the very texture of the painting (11).

Anxiety then generates anomalies within style if the source of anxiety cannot be contained by representation. This seems to equally be the case with the American landscapes as with Bacon's *Van Goghs*. In a similar way, this is representation that can do nothing to claim for its own ends the power and limitlessness of the challenge ahead – which in this case is the void of the oceanic frontier landscape. Failure to live up to the challenge becomes the message locally secreted within the grand claims of the picture's global iconography. A joyous landscape, celebrating the boundlessness of the human imagination and the courage of pioneering civilisation, is littered with micro-indiscretions betraying self-doubt, confusion and vulnerability. Grand symbolism is erected

on a bed of micro-disasters, congealing in miniature to form an inversion of the symbol, a parallel picture of desolation and futility. Desperate editing invention becomes the latent expression, more insistent in its incongruity, subtlety and locality of scale. The space has to be cropped, twisted, smeared, highlighted, plugged-up, flattened and abbreviated in order for all the majesty to come across. This seems to show an anxiety based upon a fundamental conflict between the egotistical desire to successfully author a picture of something infinitely powerful, and the built-in futility of this ambition. Andrew Benjamin, in *Art, Mimesis and the Avant-Garde*, takes a similar perspective: 'distance comes to be experienced as always involving the ineliminable presence of an otherness that can never be overcome in the struggle for synthesis' (12). It is the struggle for synthesis that leads to these anomalies as attempts to reconcile this otherness with representation.

Our question at the beginning of this section was: *how does 'nature' **do** this, and how does it become visual?* If the discussion above approaches an answer to the second part of the question - as to how the natural threat of the sublime might appear in a secondary visual form (a painting) - then the first part must now be addressed. Namely, what is taking place within nature, or the painter's perception of or relationship to/ with nature, to create these tensions and anxieties? Investigating the painter's personal experience may help to approach this.

Impossible Excess

Following the course of the Missouri River from its confluence with the Mississippi, through the Rocky Mountains and eventually to the Pacific coast, the initial expeditions to the fresh territory of the American west reported awe-inspiring vistas beyond description. This was an epic geology, comparable with only the most grandiloquent of European painting and poetry. Attempting to describe the Great Falls of the Missouri River, Lieutenant William Clark wrote in 1805:

> After writing this imperfect description I ... wished for the pencil of Salvator Rosa or the pen of Thompson, that I might be enabled to give to the enlightened world some just idea

> of this truly magnificent and sublimely grand object, which has from the commencement of time been concealed from the view of civilised man.... (13).

Yet the desire to record this sight and the actual process of undertaking it are worlds apart. Clark's frustration may be that of a military man untrained in the arts he wished to deploy, yet the sense of needing higher aesthetic powers might connect with the experiences of the skilled artists who ventured out there, and who reacted to the challenge in such subtly surprising ways.

Paul Auster's novel *Moon Palace* (14) aptly illustrates the anxiety generated by this challenge in the character of Thomas Effing, a fictional painter who makes the pilgrimage to the American West himself. Here, towards the end of his life, Effing relates his experience in the wilderness to his home-help. In recalling the search for a subject in the rugged wilderness of this frontier space, the central contradiction in the idea of the sublime as something that a painting can translate and deliver to the civilised world becomes apparent:

> That was the trouble. The land is too big out there, and after a while it starts to swallow you up. I reached a point when I couldn't take it in anymore. All that bloody silence and emptiness. You try to find your bearings in it, but it's too big, the dimensions are too monstrous, and eventually it just stops being there. There's no world, no land, no nothing. It comes down to that.../ in the end it's all a figment. The only place you exist is in your head (15).

Already we can see that for Auster's painter this landscape is far from digestible in the way idealised by Lieutenant William Clark. Rather, what is described is an almost unrepresentable vastness to the landscape, incommunicable through the language of painting:

> Everyone knows what those places look like now, you've seen them a hundred times yourself. Glen Canyon, Monument Valley, the Valley of the Gods. That's where they shoot all those Cowboy-and-Indian movies, the goddamned Marlboro man gallops through there on television every night. But pictures don't tell you anything about it.../. It's all too massive to be painted or drawn; even photographs can't get the feel of it.

> Everything is so distorted, it's like trying to reproduce the distances in outer space: the more you see, the less your pencil can do. To see it is to make it vanish (16).

Effing the painter begins his journey through the west by drawing continuously, but this activity soon ends as the need to stay alive becomes more urgent. Yet his early efforts are marked by a problem-solving ambition in response to this excess of space:

> For the first couple of weeks I drew like a fiend. Odd stuff, I'd never done work like that before. I hadn't thought that scale would make a difference, but it did, there was no other way to wrestle with the size of things. The marks on the page became smaller and smaller, small to the point of vanishing. It was if my hand had a life of its own (17).

What Auster has constructed in Effing is a relational painter whose mechanisms as a recorder of experience are pushed to a limit. This conservative 'duty' to do justice to 'reality' suggests that Auster has grounded Effing's practice in the academic paradigm of the times. The sheer scale of the world before him forces his pictorial facilities to adapt quickly and totally. This desire to dominate the experience by generating a global picture of it mounts an enormous documentary-factual pressure on the academic processes of Effing's art. It is therefore bound to fail in light of more efficient modes of reproduction. This mechanisation of the artistic process, the slavery to (unpaintable) appearances of the act of depiction and expression makes of Effing a failed camera. His practice promptly disintegrates.

We can then see that in Auster's narrative, this pressure of verisimilitude takes a perverse turn. With his travelling companions either missing or dead, the lone Effing eventually takes refuge in the cave of a dead hermit in the desert. With the passing of the initial period of loneliness and panic, the artist gradually settles into a disciplined routine, living off the supplies he had found in the cave on his arrival. Only then, after ignoring the scenery for some time, does the urge to paint return.

The work, significantly, begins at night. Almost accidentally, he finds he has sketched the image of a mountain:

That same night, he unpacked his art supplies, and from then until his colours finally ran out, he continued to paint, leaving the cave every morning at dawn and spending the entire day outside. It lasted for two and a half months, and in that time he managed to finish almost forty canvases. Without any question, he told me, it was the happiest period of his life (18).

Here, the utility of capturing the vastness of the place like a camera is replaced by the act of generating images for its own sake. The finding of the darkness and the lack of visibility is what enables Effing to come to terms with his own representational processes. Having 'naturalised' the horror of the landscape's vastness by merging with it psycho-physiologically over a long period of time, these processes have attained a symbiotic relationship with the surrounding natural systems:

> He was no longer afraid of the emptiness around him. The act of trying to put it on canvas had somehow internalised it for him, and now he was able to feel its indifference as something that belonged to him, as much as he belonged to the silent power of those spaces himself (19).

The landscapes, never to be seen by anyone, are physically possible only once an *internalisation* had taken place and academic representational values had been abandoned. And once his limited supply of canvases had been exhausted, Effing begins to paint first on the furniture and then on the walls of his cave. A vision of the sublime endlessness of nature is then only possible *without* vision – once he has absorbed the place so much that it vanishes, he makes paintings that are never be seen or owned, culminating in the beginnings of 'a panoramic cave painting' (20). In the dark, away from any visual referent, stimulus or viewer, 'it would have been his masterpiece, Effing said, but the colours ran dry when it was only half finished' (21).

This fiction allegorises clearly the problem of attempting to capture the awesome or the endless in a concrete and secondary form such as painting. What is described in Effing's journey is the collapse of academic rationalism in the face of new and boundless perceptual challenges. What then occurs is an internalisation of this anxiety, culminating in the production of an entirely

personal pictorial code, perhaps with no visual 'merits' in the conventional sense at all. The subjective, egotistical eye (the painter) has been displaced ('he stopped worrying about results' (22)), the objective, rational eye plucked out (the academy, the viewer – "there was the fact that no-one would ever see these paintings' (23)). In this scenario, representation abandons all signs of utility and becomes cathartic and 'a-visual' – because of and about viewing, but at the same time unviewable. Internalised and unseen - to the point of unhinging contact with rational order and relational value, this is fugitive representation.

This a-visuality of Effing's desert studio, only enacted once the eye is internalised and focused away from its object, becomes a neat picture of the micro-visuality, based on anxiety, of the paintings in the *American Sublime* exhibition. The clumsy and confusing decisions made between the more formally elegant and academically viable ones reflect Effing's practice and experience, albeit on a local scale within the global whole. The global solutions to the sublime that Effing was able to achieve, first by immersion, second by catharsis, remain problematic in those of the painters of the sublime. Their local sublime erodes the authority of their global sublime from within.

Is this erosion indeed problematic?

Is this then pure negativity, i.e., failure?

We need to understand this micro-painting logic beyond its identity as just a kind of defensive reaction to a threat. How does its logic of otherness within a greater unit relate to notions of the sublime?

In other words, what does this internal defensive logic tell us about the painter's response and relationship to nature and the sublime? If there is terror as well as beauty in the sublime, is it any more or less sublime than the global iconography it inhabits?

To understand this further we need to begin with the historical definitions of the term 'sublime'.

The Sublime

'Greatness of dimension, is a powerful cause of the sublime' (24).

'Another source of the sublime, is infinity' (25).

The term 'sublime' can be largely attributed to its introduction in the second half of the 18th century by Edmund Burke to describe a kind of emotion experienced at the sight of grand natural scenes (26). This emotion - 'A delightful horror, a terrible joy' (27) - had, until this point, no distinct terminology. So from the start, through Burke's view, the sublime was connected with suffering and torment:

> Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the *sublime;* that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling....
>
> But as pain is stronger in its operation than pleasure, so death is in general a much more affecting idea than pain....
>
> When danger or pain press too nearly, they are incapable of giving any delight, and are simply terrible; but at certain distances, and with certain modifications, they may be, and they are delightful, as we every day experience (28).

However, the rationalism of the time provided several variants on this perspective. For instance, Hugh Blair modifies this foundation of the sublime in pain, asserted by Burke:

> Mighty force or power, whether accompanied with terror or not, whether employed in protecting or in alarming us, has a better title, than anything that has yet been mentioned, to be the fundamental quality of the sublime (29).

This emphasis on power rather than the pain of an individual subject is typical of some of the ways other, more subtle voices of the rationalist era address the sublime. Mostly, these other perspectives focused on this power of the sublime as a moral dimension to the natural world, one that confirmed the presence of an omnipotent creator. The response by a subject to the sublime, for Joseph Addison (30), reflected the immensity of God rather than any quality in ourselves, since

the human emotions were created by this divine author in the first instance. The feeling of pleasure brought about by freedom in nature is then simply an effect of this ultimate cause. Similarly, Johann Georg Sulzer extends this sentiment, but on a more earthbound moral plane. The immensity of the Lord of Creation as evidenced in the sublimity of nature should cause us to feel only our ultimate insignificance in the universe. Man is allowed to live through God's infinite mercy alone, with no pride in himself but his humility before God (31).

However, Emmanuel Kant's 'Analytic of the sublime' remains the most subtle and complex of those produced in the mid 18th century. The characteristics of the sublime are never defined in as finite a sense as they are in Burke. His view of definitions in philosophy is characteristically oblique:

> Many concepts can scarcely be analysed at all, for example, the concept of *representation*, the concept of being *next to* or *after one another*; other concepts can only be partially analysed, as for example the concept of *space, time*, of the various *feelings* of the human soul, of the feelings of the *sublime*, of the *beautiful*, the disgusting etc (32).

Paul Guyer summarises the scale of the field in question:

> Kant's distinction between the beautiful and the sublime can be understood only if we appreciate the complexity of his aesthetic theory, instead of reducing it to pure phenomenology or psychology or epistemology or linguistic analysis, each of which has a part in it, but none of which exhausts it (33).

A comprehensive definition of the Kantian sublime is therefore beyond the scope of this chapter. However, there are clearer dimensions within it, and which are indebted to Burke (34), that can be investigated. Whilst more complex and sophisticated than those of his predecessor, Kant's sublime can be seen to sometimes overlap with some of Burke's more stark assertions. Here, for example, Kant distinguishes between the sublime and beauty:

> The mind feels itself *moved* in the representation of the sublime in nature: whereas in the aesthetic judgement on the beautiful in nature it is in *restful* contemplation. This

> movement can be compared (especially in its beginning) with a vibration, that is, with a rapidly alternating repulsion and attraction to the same object (35).

This physiological-sounding explanation of aesthetic response reminds one of the respiratory-energetic movements of the body, though Kant denied this when it was offered by Burke (36). Instead, this was intended to capture 'an emotional vibration, a tension between felt elements of pleasure but also displeasure in the experience of the sublime' (37). Unlike the experience of beauty, which is seen as wholly pleasurable, the sublime is a complex feeling that although mainly pleasurable, contains an element of pain as well. And in Burke's account, this connection between pleasure and pain is equally evident, as we have seen: 'when danger or pain press too nearly, they are incapable of giving any delight, and are simply terrible; but at certain distances, and with certain modifications, they may be, and they are delightful' (38).

To summarise both writers overview of the sublime:

Neither Burke nor Kant define the sublime as a function or correlate of beauty. Equally, they both connect the sublime with the limitless, and a power that stretches the imagination beyond its conventional habits. Furthermore, the sublime spectacle, for both writers, has to be a source of fear, so in this way they concur that it is the state of mind engendered rather than the object itself that can be considered 'sublime'.

Kant, however, does not believe that every source of fear is therefore sublime, and is critical of Burke's empirical stance which allows the subject to appraise experience for themselves, without the universality of moral laws that Kant himself sought (39). For Kant, the attraction-repulsion interdependency involves the initial feeling of fear being judged as morally unreasonable – once there is no moral reason to be afraid of nature, uneasiness is superceded by joy (40).

If these are the terms by which nature is apprehended by the mind, how does this impact upon the status of the act, or the object, of pictorial representations of the sublime? The experience of the painter attempting to do justice to their experience becomes more complicated than those of a perceiving but not recording subject, as we have seen in the figure of Thomas Effing, the fictional

painter. How do these conceptions of the sublime tell us anything about what happened to Effing's conception of his practice out in the wilderness? If Effing's universe was turned inside out by the experience of such enormity, then could this be a function of the sublime itself? And similarly, could this explain the strange impulses rupturing the otherwise serene academicism of the paintings in the *American Sublime* exhibition? A connection with formal reflection in the logic of representa*tion needs to be* located.

Burke's earlier phrase 'conversant about terrible objects' may provide a connection with the featured role of painting by the American painters. Their works are clearly intended to be illustrative of an emotional state (awe, fear...), and if the sublime is what they set out to experience, then it makes sense that this 'terrible state' is what they are feeling, and what they are conversant with.

The kind of exaggerated aesthetic previously described in these works could indicate this response in an overall, global sense. And since being 'conversant about terrible objects' references the role of language, then it seems fitting to suggest that the global aesthetic schema of theatricality in the paintings is the domain of language and that it is at this level that the terror is primarily expressed.

This reportage from the scene of fright in aesthetic form is supported by Burke's views on aesthetic form, such as his consideration of colour as productive of the sublime (41):

> The cloudy sky is more grand than the blue; and night more sublime and solemn than day. Therefore in historical painting, a gay or gaudy drapery, can never have a happy effect: and in buildings, when the highest degree of the sublime is intended, the materials and ornaments ought neither to be white, nor green, nor yellow, nor blue, nor of a pale red, nor violet, nor spotted, but of sad and fuscous colours, as black, or brown, or deep purple, and the like (42).

There is then a hierarchy between colours that can codify the sublime for Burke, an aesthetic order that indexes feeling on a scale of effects. This aesthetic order is not restricted to colour,

however. The entire process of formal organisation is the true path to the sublime. If organisation is the key, it is not surprising, then, that repetition has a part to play:

> But as in this discourse we chiefly attach ourselves to the sublime, as it affects the eye, we shall consider particularly why a successive disposition of uniform parts in the same right line should be sublime, and upon what principle this disposition is enabled to make a comparatively small quantity of matter produce a grander effect, than a much larger quantity disposed in another manner (43).

For Burke there is extreme stimulation to be found in the succession of impulses in a visual unit that 'renews and enforces the impression' (44), creating sublime grandeur in this agitation of repetition, which guarantees the object's permanence in the mind's eye.

The aesthetic sublime is then a system of values that miniaturises the enormity of the sublime ('a comparatively small quantity of matter...') and reformalises it, despite Burke's emphasis on magnitude (in painting) as the pathway to the sublime (45). Clearly even the largest of paintings is nevertheless a miniaturisation of the vast landscape it depicts. But the expression of the sublime is possible only in a finely-tuned relational system. This rulebook helped guard against a 'taste for false sublime' (46) that Burke noted among painters of the time, exemplified by the introduction of 'gigantic and extravagant tinsel' or 'gigantic and monstrous figures' (47). The logic of the aesthetic sublime, the evocation of a terrifying vista, is then almost paradoxically based upon a subtle system of pictorial rules and manners.

This system privileging repetition and subtle internal scale relations comes together in John Baillie's 'Essay on the Sublime', which predates Burke's sublime by ten years (48). Baillie discusses sublimity as a general aesthetic quality, and in this universality connects an 'object' with the world around it. Uniformity generates vastness – a uniform painting creates a grand idea: 'when an object is uniform, by seeing *Part*, the least Glimpse gives a full and compleat Idea of the *Whole*, and thus at once may be distinctly conveyed the vastest *Sensation*' (49).

This simple statement connects aesthetics with a psychological method (later employed by Burke) whereby the grandness of the world is read in the patterns within created objects: 'where

an Object is *vast*, and at the same Time *uniform*, there is to the Imagination no Limits of its Vastness, and the Mind runs out into *Infinity*, continually *creating* as it were from the *Pattern'* (50). Although Baillie differs from Burke in the denial of the role of violent emotion in the production of the sublime, this conception of uniformity prompted Burke's theme of the 'artificial infinite', generated by 'succession and *uniformity* of parts' (51). This uniformity is not a homogenising scheme that cancels out difference to form a bland whole; rather, it is perhaps the identification of the informatic *continuity* between seemingly distinct systems, a theme familiar from the work of Michel Serres outlined in Chapter Three. Here, the internal psychology identifies with an external system and interprets its logic in a micro system – which may just as well be a painting as a building or picturesque garden. The move away from the conservative artificial isolation of closed systems in science (which was not to begin for another two hundred years (52), is here intuited in the beginnings of a convergence between mind and matter. The 20th Century realisation that natural systems are conduits for information and energy that continuously move through them (53) finds an unusual precursor in Burke's perceptions of scale and awe in nature:

> That, as the great extreme of dimension is sublime, so the last extreme of littleness is in some measure sublime likewise; when we attend to the infinite divisibility of matter, when we pursue animal life into these excessively small, and yet organised beings, that escape the nicest inquisition of the sense, when we push our discoveries yet downward, and consider those creatures so many degrees yet smaller, and the still diminishing scale of existence, in tracing which the imagination is lost as well as the sense, we become amazed and confounded at the wonders of minuteness; nor can we distinguish in its effects this extreme of littleness from the vast itself. For division must be infinite as well as addition; because the idea of a perfect unity can no more be arrived at, than that of a compleat whole to which nothing may be added (54).

Like the Russian doll idea of Serres' living organism, the micro and the macro correlate, yet are not fixed because there is no absolute spatial location from which to apprehend them. The idea of the global status of a system as finite is here questioned, as it is in Serres' conception of language development, and Caillois' notion of mimicry: 'the idea of a perfect unity can no more be

arrived at, than that of a complete whole to which nothing may be added.' This flux reflects both authors' sense of the continuity of information; specifically, the way in which language becomes formed from sign changes between information and noise from the local through to global levels of an organism. For Serres, language is formed from within not without. It is generated from the noise of the internal molecular chaos, though a series of rectifying subsystems, through to dialect at the global stage.

Global Brightness, Local Darkness

In the 'successful' patterns of pictorial decisions at the global level within the paintings of The American Sublime, we can find confirmation of a discourse with a sublime force. There is order, emotively deployed colouration, and transitions from micro to macro. There is uniformity suggestive of infinity, in the consistency of style over the whole (at first glance). This is then conversant upon the sublime. It works out a sense of it in language.

Yet Effing's experience suggests the contrary – that sense cannot be made of the vastness. And Burke further supports this view:

> The passion caused by the great and sublime in *nature*, when those causes operate most powerfully, is Astonishment; and astonishment is that state of the soul, in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror. In this case the mind is so entirely filled with its object, that it cannot entertain any other, nor by consequence reason on that object which employs it. Hence arises the great power of the sublime, that far from being produced by them, it anticipates our reasonings, and hurries us on by an irresistible force. Astonishment, as I have said, is the effect of the sublime in its highest degree (55).

Considering that the visual ruptures occur in both the studio paintings and the on-site oil sketches, we can acknowledge a universal duality maintained over a significant time scale and between different environments. The idea of astonishment seems implicit in the process of frantically trying to deal with endlessness with visual tricks. If this astonishment causes panic on a local scale by setting up micro mutations of logic, then at the same time, the painter pulls academicism back to the scene and makes some sense of the rest of the image. This is not

Effing's a-visuality, based upon the disappearance of 'meaningful' vision. The finished painting maintains a convincing gestalt that is not immediately threatened by the local 'blips'. Rather, it is a dimension of this a-visuality *within* an overall extra visuality: academic painting, extra visual in its social matrix, its always 'already seen' homogeneous style coined and recycled in the visual climate of the times, carrying a core heterogeneous anxiety. This light of acceptance and manners and meaning, then, carries within it a centre of darkness founded on the failure of sight and representation caused by the unpaintability of the sublime. A bright sunrise is also the black of Effing's cave, a micro-panic in the homogenous surface of pictorial success and calm. If the painter gives a reflection on the sublime at the global level of an image, showing civilisation what the wilds look like, then they also acknowledge the secret horror of this, and the futility implicit in the belief in such a global, final picture. The paintings, in this way, illustrate the movement of Kant's sublime:

> The mind feels itself *moved* in the representation of the sublime in nature: whereas in the aesthetic judgement on the beautiful in nature it is in *restful* contemplation. *This movement can be compared (especially in its beginning) with a vibration, that is, with a rapidly alternating repulsion and attraction to the same object* (56).

To recapitulate: What we are left with is an analogous object to the object of study (the landscape). This object, a painting, plays out the trace of this very attraction–repulsion in the oscillating interdependent relationship between global success and local failure.

In this way, the painting constructs a teleology from primary astonishment to secondary reflective pacification in its singular form. It then maintains the conventions of the sublime aesthetic, such as repetition, emotive colouration and uniformity.

There now appears to be two kinds of sublime at work – one that codifies it as an aesthetic system (a bit like academicism), another that plants it firmly as a glitch amongst all this as a response to horror. As there are two kinds of sublime in the paintings at once, there is then some

kind of mimetic reflection taking place on two levels also, one that is more pictorial, one that is more emotional.

If the global stage of the image is reflective in one sense (recognisably 'realistic' through pictorial conventions) and also in another (indexing anxiety in ruptures within this logic), how do we describe this reflection? And what dimension is the more or less sublime?

It seems straightforward that whilst we may be discussing a mimetic ambition in painting, a desire for a painting to look like something we can all agree upon, we are clearly no longer describing the kind of mimesis outlined by Caillois. There is not intended to be continuity between a painting and what it depicts. One would never mistake one of these paintings for a window onto the wild American frontier.

This mimetic ambition, as well as the 'mimetic anxiety' that comes as a consequence (the 'ruptures'), could however maintain, paradoxically, an analogical or illogical mimetic 'logic'. Taking up this question will return us to painting as a direct presentation of nature, disrupting the classical opposition between mimesis (as artificial or cultural) and nature.

Mimesis and Mirrors

Mimesis could be said to hinge upon the painting, the painter and the painted all being components within nature as a system. The flows of matter, energy and information within the natural world make a painting merely one crystallisation stage in a constant flux of elements, a system of information within a broader, ever more global, information system. In this way, all paintings could be said to be mimetic. They all interface with the feedback loops and flows of the physical universe, and are as much a product of this as being - by their 'nature' – discursive of it. And as Burke suggests, the most extreme degree of minuteness is as productive of the sublime, as well as disorientation and lack of sense, as the greatest 'macro vista' (57). In other words, a painting, a skin of congealed synthetic and natural matter loaded with specific extra information in accord with an agent's energetic patterns and psychological profile, is exactly this kind of minute

component. Nature interfaces with the painting at all levels, which achieves a sense of the sublime both in its global frame and its local details but in different ways and for different reasons, like one scale level in a Russian doll. The figure of Thomas Effing allegorises this systematic view, as these flows of energy and information invade and overturn his superficial rational systems. His actions become part of an energetic cycle in such a way as to critically re-evaluate the assumed primacy of vision within his creative practice, and bring the ancient subject-object relationship of his Cartesian vision violently up to date.

But, to risk repetition in our questions, if both levels of the image are part of a general flow of information, how can we distinguish between them any longer? Furthermore, how can we begin to define which level is the most significantly sublime?

To go further, does this 'flow' mean that nature is art and art is nature? Is there a feedback loop at work that collapses the distinction between these terms? If the natural interpenetrates the processes of art - a crystallisation stage within a flux - is artistic agency merely a mutation that follows the logic that causes nature to assume the forms it does?

Mimesis, then, needs to be approached from this new angle, and Derrida's notion of 'production as mimesis' provides the starting point. This is drawn from Kant's theory of mimesis, from his critique of pure judgements of taste.

Derrida's reading of Kant connects pure morality and empirical culturalism. This political discourse is implicit, Derrida asserts, 'in every discourse on art and on the beautiful' (58).

In this connection, Kant's examples seem to hint at a close connection between art and nature. For Derrida, if the subject under scrutiny is beauty and pure judgements of taste, then, 'natural beauty might just as well have furnished them (the examples) for a theory for judgements of taste'. In the preceding paragraph of Derrida's text, the superiority of natural beauty had been justified from a moral point of view and by recourse to an analogy between judgements of taste and moral judgements (59).

If natural beauty has a moral identity, and there is an analogy between moral judgements and taste, does this new 'taste facility' then allow us to view nature objectively as art? Otherwise, what is the relationship between nature and art? Derrida continues:

> On the basis of this analogy one can read the 'ciphered language' ... that nature 'speaks to us figurally ... through its beautiful forms,' its real signatures which make us consider it, nature, as art production. Nature lets itself be admired as art not by accident but according to well-ordered laws (60).

So are art and nature the same? The question is answered clearly by Derrida's continued reading of Kant: 'art is not nature' (61); 'on the side of nature is mechanical necessity; on the side of art, the play of freedom' (62). This simplification places the terms of '*tekhne*' (art) and '*physis*' (nature) in an inherited dialectical opposition (63).

Yet the use of analogy by Kant, in equating nature with morals and then morals with taste, collapses this opposition in its very identity, thus placing the freedoms of art production under the rule of nature. The production of art is then commanded by natural law, in the totality of its flow as already mentioned. The play of 'genius' becomes a reflection of nature's dictates, even when the product is non-mimetic in the sense of a copied likeness. The value of a mimetic rendering of nature are then undermined by this, the inevitability of nature's hand in even the most non-mimetic creative responses to the natural. Nature is then always reflected in art. Mimesis in this way is not the imitation of nature but the reflection of nature in *physis,* in the nature-sanctioned authorship of creativity. It is not mimetic in the conventional 'secondary' sense (subject-object copying) – it is *physis* - nature's relation to itself. So now, there seems to be no opposition between the *tekhne* and the *physis*: 'Pure and free productivity must resemble that of nature. And it does so precisely because, free and pure, it does not depend on natural laws. The less it depends on nature, the more it resembles nature' (64). This 'productivity' reflects Effing's experience. In turning away from the visual, he could produce something abundantly visual, which ultimately became a 'truer' reflection of his experience. Derrida continues: '*Mimesis* here is not the representation of one thing by another, the relation of resemblance or of identification

between two beings, the reproduction of a product of nature by a product of art. It is not the relation of two products but of two productions' (65).

It is then the relation between one system and another that generates mimesis. The relationship between the painter as a system and the landscape as a system: '"True" mimesis is between two producing subjects and not between two produced things' (66).

This places the idea of mimesis in a new position. Conventionally, we are accustomed to considering mimesis as a surface illusion, like camouflage. Roger Caillois details this tendency as it appears in the insect world. In Caillois' account, mimesis in insects involves a 'reciprocal topography' between unremarkable elements that combine to generate a pathological and luxurious continuity between a creature and its environment. This familiar idea of mimetic camouflage occurs at the global level of the organism – that is, at the stage of a general visual overview. Yet Caillois reminds us that there are however stations in the development of a creature's visual character that occur *inside* the organism, and that these also maintain a mimetic relationship with the insect's surroundings. From this new perspective, the internal structure of an organism is as mimetic as the visual external appearance of that organism.

Caillois' assertion is similar to Derrida's (on Kant): that nature is reflected everywhere within production – from the artist's gesture to the systems inside an insect that distribute pigment to form camouflage. Or, as in Caillois' reference to Pythagoras: 'that nature is everywhere the same' (67).

Things become more complicated, however, once we return to the global position, to the objective overview of a system. In the insect, this is straightforward: there is a *visual* symbiosis between the creature and its habitat. A beetle blends in with a leaf and seems to vanish. Yet if art is equally reflective of and symbiotic with nature, then how does this impact upon the visual character of the art product? If the global overview of an insect is literally mimetic (camouflage), and the internal structure is mimetic on another register (materially?), then the appearance of mimetic verisimilitude in art becomes excessive if any other feature of its production, even if less imitative, is also mimetic. If art has to be naturally mimetic because of its very 'nature', then how,

in art, do we value overt pictorial fidelity to a natural source? Is this kind of mimesis akin to Caillois' view of insect mimicry as 'luxurious' – in other words, excessive and fundamentally unnecessary?

To recap – '"True" mimesis is between two producing subjects and not between two produced things' (68). Derrida further clarifies the status of the global verisimilitude of the image in an elaboration of this point: 'This kind of mimesis inevitably involves the condemnation of imitation, which is always characterised as being servile' (69). That is, the global imitation present in the image is servile to appearances. Being servile, it is not as mimetic as it could be because it subjugates the visual processes (comparable to, thus mimetic of, natural processes) to the utility of appearances. Utility, in the sense that imitation provides a *use* for representation – that is, the simulation and mediation/ translation of a prior visual experience for the cognition of other parties. Similarly, it becomes servile in its thematically indexing a primary, sovereign source of information. Or, put differently, it is servile to a primary text - hence, it is illustrative (70). In other words, there is more nature in the micro-glitches in the image than in the macro-stage imitation of the scene. This means that the glitches are more mimetic, in that they trace an organic process of thought that attempts to personalise the *scene as a system* through a *personal visual system.*

So: The paintings are mimetic at a micro level. This level is then the closest to nature, in that it functions as a visual system that is analogous to nature without becoming servile to the rules of imitation. It is also the place where the enormity and horror of the vastness of nature - the sublime – finds its expression. This expression is achieved in visual solutions that contradict academic logic: in other words, in academic errors. The sublime is delivered up in the nervous evidence of nature as an all-invasive force that threatens objectification.

Both dimensions – the micro and the macro – are dependent on each other for their meanings. The servility of the macro is contradicted by, and thus recognised and valued by, the heterogeneity of the micro. This interdependency sets up a dramatic parody of the attraction-

repulsion interdependency that characterises a response to the sublime. The global aesthetic of the picture may be illustration, but it is only because of this servility and secondary status that the true subject of the picture can be delivered. That is, horror.

How then do we describe this perverse reflection of the world in painting, and what are the consequences for the culture of painting today?

Conclusion

Painting as Anoriginal Illustration

The paintings considered in the last Chapter could be seen as faulty mirrors. They set up the reality of a site in a servile way – like a reflection. They then undermine this with a different reflection of the site, and this is based upon a psychological anxiety around the possibility of mastering the site pictorially, thematising the horror dimension of the sublime.

In this way, the painting as a whole becomes non-visual – in that the mimesis of the 'errors' (other to the mimesis of the illustration) becomes the site of meaning (and the sublime) in a mimetic and simultaneously heterogeneous way. Like Effing's experience in the wilderness, the global stage of the image thematically vanishes to leave space for a 'true' mimesis – that of one system's relationship to and implication in another. So failure, incompetence and doubt in these paintings lead to the sublime and to nature, whilst imitation and appearances become illustration and thematically disappear. They disappear as they prove themselves to be valued only in their relationship to the failures. Once the natural and the sublime in the failures are recognised, the global imitation can in a sense be dispensed with. This collapses the distinction between inside and outside, as the painting reveals itself as a system in relation to the larger system of nature.

The idea of the mirror is posited by mimesis, which situates reflection as central. But we have already moved away from a concern with the fidelity to appearances of imitation. So what kind of mirror is this? A brief excursion into a different kind of painting altogether may prove to be instructive. That painting is Francis Bacon's *Portrait of George Dyer in a Mirror* (1967-8) (Fig. 13). In this painting the mirror, that which would confirm the painting's internal relationship to the external world, or its mimesis, is exactly that which undermines its relation to the exterior whilst at the same time confirming it. A mirror is clearly marked as a figure beside that of the sitter in the portrait. Yet the 'reality' reflected within it has no literal relation to the thing reflected. At the same time, we recognise, from the sitter's posture, the angle of the 'mirror' and the presence of the word 'mirror' in the title, that the logic of reflection is, in some sense, taking place. Andrew

Benjamin has written of the mirror in this painting (1), in relation to the logic of painterly 'rules': 'if the oppositions marking tradition were at work, then the mirror within the painting, the frame of interpretation, would be understood as the presentation inside of that which lay outside the frame' (2). In other words it would be mimetic in the imitative, servile sense rejected by Derrida. However,

> the mirror, as figure and therefore in figuring beyond that opposition, thereby refers to its presence while no longer being reducible to it. The mirror as figure marks the presence of the interplay of refusal and generation, it is therefore, and of necessity, beyond synthesis (3).

This sounds very similar to the oscillation of the micro and macro in the *American Sublime* paintings. This interrelation refuses synthesis in an overall, global whole. This refusal of synthesis is defined by Benjamin as 'anoriginal heterogeneity' (4). The duality, parallel to the duality in our discussion, continues: 'within the painting the presentation of the head in the mirror and the head outside of the mirror is such that it is neither a true reflection nor an absolute non-reflection' (5):

> Here the presence of the mirror works to enact precisely what cannot take place within the relationship between the inside and the outside. The work therefore becomes object. The surface is no longer a simulacrum (6).

So again the imitative properties of the global synthesis are undermined by academic aberrations, like setting up the rudiments of a conventional physical space obeying the laws of gravity etc., then introducing a mirror with laws all of its own.

Going along with these definitions, the American paintings of our discussion could then be said to function as anoriginal heterogeneous mirrors. The sublime then arises in the images as a-visual camouflage that makes the images oscillate in their relationship to nature.

A 'sublime image' could then be said to be an illustration that harbours its own contradiction within it as a greater anxiety, an anxiety that undermines any conviction in synthesis or wholeness, and that in turn critiques the finality of 'illustration' as a pejorative term. The micro information would then be anxiety, the macro whole the servile pacification, with the relationship between the two acting out the oscillation between attraction and repulsion. In this way, the (multi) temporality of the object is thematised, allowing it to express itself as a system within other

systems, affirming it as an object and extending that object's analogous potential. Movements between regions of value, style, visibility and imitation then generate the ***sublime mimetic anoriginal illustration.***

To summarise: the American images, from a contemporary perspective, utilise illustration for the purposes of providing a homogeneous whole. This whole is then critiqued by a primary text (horror) secreted within the secondary illustration. The sublime is played out in the antagonism between the illustration as servile mimesis, and the horror as primary subjective drama. The painting is a 'memory bank' that inscribes the attraction and repulsion of the sublime in the melodramatic interplay between these elements. In this way the paintings are critical of the rational separation between nature and culture and also the desire for absolutes. Hence it is the experiences of the painters that afford this duality, in that their horror is not theoretical but empirical. This locates the subject firmly in the articulation of the sublime, as Burke aspired to, rather than in the universal moral laws required by Kant. In other words, it is the kind of mistakes and inventions they made as individual authors that broke the academicism of the global illustration and allowed the expression of the sublime to take place.

Yet in the very fact that the expression of the sublime takes place in the interplay between two disasters (academicism and panic) seems to suggest two things:

1. *That the ultimate mimesis of the paintings as a complete message unit (both levels) is only of the **memory** of the **impact** of the sublime.*
2. *That a painting of the sublime is possible only once the **impossibility** of this is acknowledged.*

In becoming memories, they implicitly negate the chance of recapturing the sublime in the present. They only speak of the threat to this kind of idealistic sense from greater systems. In this sense, they are about the horror of endlessness, or continuity. This continuity can easily be read as the threat of death, the continuous (the void) threatening the discontinuous (human life). Read

in a contemporary sense, these paintings speak more of the impossibility of an aesthetic sublime, the abjection of man before the oceanic void, and the problems the energy of such a vast stimulus can create for rationalising representative processes like painting. The symbolism of the sublime has thus been re-articulated in terms of process. Now we can see that the expression of the sublime is not present in the image of the figure staring out to sea (symbol of vastness, global overview), but in the orders of production of an image as they are pushed through *organisation* and *detail.*

Painting's Essence

So have we come any closer to grasping the essence of painting? Has the all-consuming pluralism of painting as outlined in the introduction been finally located? After all the narratives explored here, are we any closer to understanding how painting has managed to turn it's own obsolescence into a character trait?

Throughout this thesis we have consistently maintained a critique of this kind of global symbolisation – from the analogies of painting as a sick body to the language of flowers as symbolic of death. Yet now such global analyses are found to be contingent upon the smaller information exchanges that lead to their construction. And these exchanges, as in the case of the mimetic insect, are driven by principles of organisation that work to transform the meaning of the whole. With the insect, the organisation leads to the disappearance of both the whole, and the organisation itself that produced the illusion.

Similarly, paintings are systems of organisation that articulate their own anoriginal reflections of the systems that surround them. The human anxiety in the face of vastness (the sublime) is but one information signal that gets pushed through organisation to generate the necessary visual resolution. The disappearance of the prior organisation to enable the latter organisation is a due condition of visual entropy.

If nature is now seen as a flow of matter and information through various crystallisation points, then why shouldn't painting as a system of production within the natural world be equally subject to such trans-boundary flows? The example of the sublime in American landscape painting demonstrates the exclusive levels of organisation (that both contradict and support one another) between micro and macro production. The process of examining painting from a general, macro position has thus been reconfigured. It is now less the place where painting's identity becomes fixed - imposed by this or that textual analogy. Rather, as we have seen with the example of the sublime, these global resolutions are a single production stage within a process that includes other more antagonistic subtextual stages of production. These other stages are organised under different, contradictory principles, which rely on their exclusion from the global stage of realisation for their identity. So what we are left with is painting as a system that can by nature accommodate the threats mounted against it at the micro stages of production and organisation. Like the threat posed by the sublime to academic painting styles, Painting can turn it's own obsolescence into a character trait because such antagonism can be built into its subtextual stages of production as a self-critical mechanism. As the insect rallies its visual information to eliminate itself, or the sublime academic painting is a collage made with fragments of anxiety, the contemporary pluralistic painting similarly draws together the subtext of its own demise to erect a baroque structure of multi-deaths fanning out to generate a global overview that is both self-critical and protean.

Visual Entropy is the condition of this global overview of painting in a contemporary context. Yet as this formulation is regulated by information ratios of entropy and negentropy, this becomes modulated by the conditions the specific painting finds itself in. With multi-temporality containing *excessive* multi-death as its essence, painting, like the mimetic insect, is defined by an information flow between itself as a crystallisation point, the context it finds itself in, and the history that allows it to be identified. The point of crystallisation is an oscillation between entropy

and negentropy that is founded upon the oscillation between life and death, communication and representation.

Syntheses like either the 'life' or 'death' of painting become artificially global separations of painting's oscillating, multi-temporal multi-dead nature. Painting's ***essence,*** in other words, lies in its ability to transform subtexts of dissent into definitions of itself as a system, without repressing the content of those subtexts or risking its identity as painting. The status of the threat and the threatened are held in an exclusive yet mutually supportive balance, the ratio of which is variable according to the specific features of both. So in a final irony, it is painting's essence itself that achieved the demise of the historical attempts to locate exactly that essence. The desire to bring painting's essence 'to the surface' in all the for-or-against narratives of the 20th century were in fact ideas of history in general, not painting as a medium. They treated the medium as a story, not as a system.

So the death of painting (as a narrative of threat) is, because painting is always multi-dead, in fact the death of the death of painting - ***as painting***.

This is the multitemporal perverse action of painting as a system.

Yet once again, information invades and adjusts painting. Like the anamorphic skull in Holbein's *Ambassadors* (7), the latent trace of threat endlessly ruptures the serenity of such homogeneous certainty, exposing the vanity of these global resolutions.

Footnotes to all Chapters correspond to the MLA citation convention.

Notes to Introduction.

1. The word Painting is used throughout the thesis to define the practice of daubing coloured mud across a flat surface, encompassing a scope of activity from the Renaissance Masters to contemporary painting today. The history of this process is focused on western accounts, as the narratives that construct the context of my own practice and theoretical concerns spring from the arguments and consequences of western modernity.

2. Crimp, Douglas. "The End of Painting." October no.16 (spring 1981): **75**.

3. Judd, Donald. "Specific Objects." Donald Judd: Complete Writings 1959 – 1975. Halifax, N.S: Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1975. **184**.

4. Bois, Yve-Alain. "Painting: The Task of Mourning." Painting as Model. Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1990. **231**. 'If one can take abstract painting as the emblem of modernism, however, one should not imagine that the feeling of the end is solely a function of its essentialism; rather it is necessary to interpret this essentialism as the effect of a larger historical crisis. This crisis is well known – it can be termed industrialisation – and its impact on painting has been analysed by the best critics,
following a line of investigation begun half a century ago by Walter Benjamin.'

5. Industrialisation is here used to refer to the impact of mass production on classical art making processes like painting. See Bois, Yve-Alain. "Painting: The Task of Mourning." Painting as Model. Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1990. **231**. 'Challenged by the mechanical apparatus of photography, and by the mass-produced, painting had to redefine its status, to reclaim a specific domain (much in the way this was done during the Renaissance, when painting was posited as one of the "liberal arts" as opposed to the "mechanical arts").

6. Schapiro, Meyer. "Recent Abstract Painting." Modern Art: 19th and 20th Century

(collected papers). New York: Braziller,1978. **217- 219**.

7. The term 'deconstructive' is here used to describe the modernist process of critically dismantling the form of painting to unearth the self-critical 'truth' of painting behind its 'artificial' constructs.

8. The term 'allegory' is used here to encompass varieties of narrative content found in painting throughout history.

9. 'Death' in this context is meant in terms of the modernist trajectory that first started perceiving media such as painting as outmoded and superseded by 'newer' forms such as photography. This is not the kind of death where a body or thing dies out somehow 'naturally', but rather a death that implies the collapsing of critical validity in the face of fresh innovation. This collapse is based upon a linear idea of development where historical death is the process of a thing being replaced by something newer and more efficient. See Bois, Yve-Alain. "Painting: The Task of Mourning." Painting as Model. Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1990. **229-244**. This text takes this history and its consequences as its main thesis.

10. Harrison, Charles & Wood, Paul. "Modernist Art." Art in Theory – 1900-1990. An Anthology of Changing Ideas. Ed. Charles Harrison & Paul Wood. Blackwell, 1992. V1B. **754.** Preface to Clement Greenberg, "Modernist Painting." 'More than any other single text in English, this essay has come to typify the modernist critical position on the visual arts. Its aim is to represent a logic of development supposedly connecting the most successful painting of the prvious hundred years, and thus to justify the findings of taste as involuntary responses to the inexorable self-critical tendency of painting itself. Though clearly built on Greenberg's earlier analyses of avant-garde art and culture, the argument of this essay relies less on social-historical forms of evidence and more upon the observation of technical changes in art itself. At the time of its publication Greenberg was closely engaged with the painters Morris Louis and Kenneth Noland, whose form of abstract painting he was soon to label "Post-Painterly Abstraction". The

essay can be read as a form of response to this work, which Greenberg saw as paradigmatic of the expression of feeling in art, and as preparing a position for it as the most advanced outcome of an unquestionable historical development.'

11. Herkenhoff, Paulo. "Monochromes, the autonomy of color, and the centreless world." Trans.Veronica Cordiero. Painting at the Edge of the World. Ed. Douglas Fogle. Walker Art Center. Minneapolis, 2001. **93.** Herkenhoff cites Benjamin Buchloh, "The Primary Colors for the Second Time: A Paradigm Repetition of the Neo-avant-garde.' October no.37 (summer 1986): **45.**

12. I have borrowed this subtitle from the Artforum publication of the round table discussion between Yve-Alain Bois, Thierry De Duve Isabelle Graw, David Joselit, Elisabeth Sussman and David Reed, hosted by Arthur C. Danto. Artforum March 2003. **206.**

13. Bois, Yve-Alain. "Painting: The Task of Mourning." Painting as Model. Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1990. **229-244.**

14. Ibid. **232.**

15. Ibid. **33.**

16. Crimp, Douglas. "The End of Painting." On the Museum's Ruins. Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1993. **97.**

17. Ibid. **98.**

18. Ibid. Additionally, style is used here to denote a general visual overview of a period of time in painting. For further study on the concept of style, see Wollheim, Richard. "What the Artist Does." Painting as an Art. Thames and Hudson, 1987. 26. 'General style comes in different forms. There are the universal styles: like classicism, or the painterly style, or the geometrical style.'

"Universal style, period style, school style – all this is general style, and general style contrasts with individual style, which comes in only one form. Individual style is the style of an individual painter.'

'When we talk about a general style and apply it to a body of work – and it is all the same for these purposes whether it is a universal, a period, or a school, style – what we are in effect doing is employing some kind of shorthand for a set of characteristics which we and those who share our outlook find particularly interesting, arresting, innovatory, in that stretch of painting. It picks out what we find distinctive of that painting. So, for instance, when we, we nowadays, use the term 'baroque' in the sense of a period style, we are likely to be referring in that body of work to which we apply it to some number of the following characteristics: strong chiaroscuro, forceful movement, liveliness of touch, recession, diagonal composition, deletion of defined volume, heady emotionalism, sensitivity to represented texture.'

19. Harrison, Charles & Wood, Paul. "The American Avant-Garde." Art in Theory – 1900-1990. An Anthology of Changing Ideas. Ed. Charles Harrison & Paul Wood. Blac kwell, 1992. VA. **554.** Preface to Clement Greenberg, "Towards a newer Laocoon." 'Greenberg thus clearly signals his concern with a longstanding question: is the existence of limits serving to distinguish *between* the various arts also a condition of the possibility of value *within* them? According to Greenberg's argument, it is a historical characteristic of the modern arts that each has had to define itself in terms of the limitations of its proper medium. At a time when vociferous claims were being made for the 'realism' of various forms of figurative art, his aim was at one and the same time to establish the quality of certain abstract art and to justify abstraction as the fulfilment of an inexorable historical tendency.'

20. Blauvelt, Andrew. "No Visible Means of Support." Painting at the Edge of the World.

Ed. Douglas Fogle. Walker Art Center. Minneapolis, 2001. **117.**

21. Bois, Yve-Alain. "Painting: The Task of Mourning." Painting as Model. Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1990. **241.**

22. Ibid. **232.**

23. Ibid. **243.** The term is Bois'.

24. Ibid.

25. Ibid. **242.**

26. Ibid. **243.**

27. For an outline of the impact pluralism made on the authority of Modernist judgements in the 20th Century, see Harrison, Charles & Wood, Paul. "Introduction." Art in Theory – 1900-1990. An Anthology of Changing Ideas. Ed. Charles Harrison & Paul Wood. Blac kwell, 1992. 7. For an extension of this idea of pluralism and the fiction of 20th century linearity, see DeLanda, Manuel. AThousand Years of Non-Linear History. Zone Books, 1997

28. Sussman, Elisabeth: "the Mourning After." Round table discussion between Yve-Alain Bois, Thierry De Duve Isabelle Graw, David Joselit, Elisabeth Sussman and David Reed, hosted by Arthur C. Danto. Artforum. March 2003. **211**. 'Generally though, many 80's artists saw painting as media, white noise, part of the spectacle – downgraded from heroic rhetoric, kitsch, reusable. They were drawn to psychedelia and to Op art as degraded abstraction taken up in mass-market graphic and interior design.'

29. Graw, Isabelle. "The Mourning After." Round table discussion between Yve-Alain Bois, Thierry De Duve Isabelle Graw, David Joselit, Elisabeth Sussman and David Reed, hosted by Arthur C. Danto. Artforum. March 2003. **209.**

30. Ibid.

31. Sussman, Elisabeth. "the Mourning After." Round table discussion between Yve-Alain Bois, Thierry De Duve Isabelle Graw, David Joselit, Elisabeth Sussman and David Reed, hosted by Arthur C. Danto. Artforum. March 2003. **210.**

32. In my view, the resurgence of exhausted pre-modern forms of representation confirms the contagion of non-linearity since modernism. The Belgian artist Luc Tuymans, for example, produces pictorial works that appear antiquated right from the start. These works have the look of dysfunctional history paintings – major historical events are portrayed in sickly pale hues with inferior materials, exposing little or nothing of the reality of the events they are based upon. These are paintings that operate retroactively, becoming refugees of painting's linear history in their very wretchedness. They derail painting's pedigree status by mimicking the procedures of amateur art.

33. Dunham, Carroll. "Thick and Thin." Round table discussion between Robert Storr, Carroll Dunham, Helmut Federle, Tim Griffin, Jutta Koether, Jonathan Lasker, Monique Prieto, Lane Relyea, Terry Winters and Lisa Yuskavage. Artforum. April 2003. **177.**

34. Ibid.

35. Fogle, Douglas. "The Trouble with Painting." Painting at the Edge of the World. Ed. Douglas Fogle. Walker Art Center. Minneapolis, 2001. **8.**

36. Ibid. **14.**

37. Birnbaum, Daniel. "Late Arrivals." Painting at the Edge of the World. Ed. Douglas Fogle. Walker Art Center. Minneapolis, 2001. **78.**

38. Ibid. **79.**

39. Foster, Hal. The Return of the Real. October Books, 1996.

40. See Foster, Hal. Compulsive Beauty. Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1993. Foster treats surrealism as a single organism, replete with complex relationships with

birth, death and the drives. In this he confuses the mind and intention of an artist, the artwork, and the context in which the artist works. His reading of the uncanny in surrealism is then predicated upon a dismissal of the differences between these complex categories.

41. Birnbaum, Daniel. “Late Arrivals.” Painting at the Edge of the World. Ed. Douglas Fogle. Walker Art Center. Minneapolis, 2001. **84.** Birnbaum is critical of Foster's straightforwardness on this point: 'The fundamental question he simply leaves aside: Is such an expansion at all possible?'

42. Ibid. **80**.

43. Ibid.

44. Ibid.

45. Kricfalusi, John. The Ren And Stimpy Show. Nickelodeon, 1991.

46. Birnbaum, Daniel. “Late Arrivals.” Painting at the Edge of the World. Ed. Douglas Fogle. Walker Art Center. Minneapolis, 2001. **79**. Birnbaum credits this observation to Thomas Mann.

47. Ibid. **80.**

48. Ibid.

49. Ibid. **79.**

50. Ibid. **85.**

Notes to Chapter 1

1. Bois, Yve-Alain. "Painting: The Task of Mourning." Painting as Model. Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1990.

2. Crimp, Douglas. "The End of Painting." On the Museum's Ruins. Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1993. **104.**

3. See Loock, Ulrich. "Survey." Luc Tuymans. Phaidon. 1996.

4. See above and also Labelle, Charles. "Luc Tuymans – Back From the Dead." Art and Text. 54 (1996). Turner, Jonathan. "Exquisite Corpses." ARTnews. November 1998.

5. See Krauss, Rosalind E. The Optical Unconscious. Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1993.

6. Foster, Hal. Compulsive Beauty. Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1993.

7. See Bataille, Georges. The Absence of Myth – Writings on Surrealism. Verso, 1994. Also Foster, Hal. Compulsive Beauty. Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1993. **xiv.** 'Georges Bataille, Roger Caillois, and Michel Leiris first developed Maussian accounts of the ambivalence of gift exchange and the collectivity of *la fete* into a radical critique of the equivalence of commodity exchange and the egotism of bourgeois self-interest.'

8. See Bataille, Georges. The Absence of myth – Writings on Surrealism. Verso, 1994.

9. Bataille. Georges. "The Language of Flowers." Visions of Excess – Selected Writings 1927-1939. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1983. **10.**

10. Ibid.

11. Ibid.13.

12. Ibid.

13. To extend and clarify this assertion, see Bataille, Georges. Eroticism. Marion Boyars, 1987. **11.** 'Indeed, although erotic activity is in the first place an exuberance of life, the object of this psychological quest, *independent as I say of any concern to reproduce life,* is not alien to death.' (my emphasis). This independence of eroticism from the reproduction of life (utility) is taken up further by Michael Richardson in Georges Bataille. Routledge 1994. **104.** 'The Denial of eroticism – which is particularly strong within our culture – is at the same time an attempt to deny and close out death and our connection with nature. It is a characteristic of a homogeneous society that refuses to recognise the element of disorder implied by eroticism. It is generally denied in two complimentary ways: through restricting sexual activity to its reproductive function and upholding an ideal of chastity or through a legitimation of indulgence in animal sexuality, that is by sanctioning libertinism and sexual promiscuity.'

14. Richardson, Michael. Georges Bataille. Routledge, 1994. **100.** 'The increase of anguish the awareness of death brings to human beings is incommensurate with anything else in the animal kingdom. With awareness comes the will to flee, to postpone, or even to outwit death. Humans clothe themselves, build houses and vainly seek to give themselves the security that will re-assert continuity within the frame of their own lives.'

15. Ibid. **104.** 'Bataille felt that Christian ideology had been instrumental in giving legitimation to the introduction of the work ethic to all areas of social life, in the process serving to cut it adrift from transgression.'

16. Ibid. 'In this carnality, paradise is momentarily recovered and we merge into our surroundings as we interpenetrate with each other's bodies and so any distinction between nature and culture vanishes.'

17. Bataille, Georges. Eroticism. Marion Boyars, 1987. 11. 'Eroticism, it may be said, is assenting of life up to the point of death.' Or: 'death is to be identified with continuity, and both of these concepts are equally fascinating. This fascination is the dominant element in eroticism.' Richardson extends this: '(Life) fears, condemns and tries to shut out what it nevertheless cannot do without.' (Georges Bataille. **99**). Or:' Our sensibility is tied to a lost continuity framed by our awareness of death.' (Georges Bataille.**104**). Or:' 'Eroticism is life momentarily overflowing its limits, life in its richest, most abundant possibilities. But these possibilities are framed by the realisation of death.' (Georges Bataille. **103-104**).

18. Richardson, Michael. Georges Bataille. Routledge, 1994. **5.** 'Christianity is thus a condition of servitude.' Richardson is summarising the following quote from Bataille: 'Man of the dualistic conception is opposite to archaic man in that there is no longer any intimacy between him and this world. This world is in fact immanent to him but is so in so far as he is no longer characterised by intimacy, in so far as he is defined by things, and is himself a thing, being a distinctly separated being.' Bataille, Georges. Theory of Religion. Trans. Robert Hurley. Zone Books, 1988. **74-75.**

19. Richardson, Michael. Georges Bataille. Routledge, 1994. **106**. 'Everything is directed towards the end of satisfying an object (i.e. God).'

20. Bataille, Georges. Eroticism. Marion Boyars, 1987. **65.** 'If transgression proper, as opposed to ignorance of the taboo, did not have this limited character it would be a return to violence, to animal violence. But nothing of the kind is so. Organised transgression together with the taboo make social life what it is.'

21. Ibid. **31.** 'These interminable millennia correspond with man's slow shaking off of his original animal nature. He emerged from it by working, by understanding his own mortality and by moving imperceptibly from unashamed sexuality to sexuality with shame, which gave birth to eroticism.'

22. Ibid. 63. 'The transgression does not deny the taboo but transcends it and completes it.'

23. Richardson, Michael. Georges Bataille. Routledge, 1994. **105**. 'But the Christian tradition introduced into this fundamental dualist pattern both a moral value and a transcendence by which opposing elements were no longer complementary to each other but came to engage in mortal conflict.'

24. Ibid.**106.** 'It is precisely this will to escape from guilt that is the sickness brought to the world by Christianity.'

25. Ibid. **37**. Richardson summarises Bataille's framework for the generation of communication: 'If it is an entirely independent being, it can understand nothing outside of itself. To understand its situation in the world it needs to engage with an other from whom it perceives its separation while at the same time desiring unity with it (this is the importance of communication). Our essence is thus to be incomplete beings.'

26. Ibid.**104.**

27. Although this is a gross generalisation, the phrase is intended to cover all levels of the animal kingdom, whilst acknowledging that some more 'sophisticated' species may practice recreational intercourse. For an introduction to the field of animal social mechanics, see de Waal, Frans. The Ape and the Sushi Master – Cultural Reflections by a Primatologist. Penguin 2001.

28. Bataille, Georges. "Preface." The Accursed Share - vols. 2 and 3. Zone Books, New York, 1993. **16.** 'The paradox of my attitude requires that I show the absurdity of a system in which each thing *serves*, in which nothing is *sovereign*. I cannot do so without showing that a world in which nothing is sovereign is the most unfavourable one; but that is to say in sum that we need sovereign values, hence that it is *useful* to have useless values.'

29. Bataille, Georges. Visions of Excess – selected writings 1927 – 1939. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1983. **137-138.**

30. Bataille, Georges. The Accursed Share - vols. 2 and 3. Zone Books, New York, 1993.

31. Bataille, Georges. Visions of Excess – selected writings 1927 – 1939. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1983. **139.** From Shaviro, Steven. "Reckless Calculations." Passion and Excess – Blanchot, Bataille and Literary Theory. The Florida State University Press, 1990. **42.**

32. Shaviro, Steven. "Reckless Calculations." Passion and Excess – Blanchot, Bataille and Literary Theory. The Florida State University Press, 1990. **42.**

33. Bataille, Georges. Visions of Excess – selected writings 1927 – 1939. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1983. **118**. From Shaviro, Steven. "Reckless Calculations." Passion and Excess – Blanchot, Bataille and Literary Theory. The Florida State University Press, 1990. **43**. (My italics).

34. Shaviro, Steven. "Reckless Calculations." Passion and Excess – Blanchot, Bataille and Literary Theory. The Florida State University Press, 1990. **43.**

35. Ibid. **45.**

36. Ibid. **44-45.**

37. Bataille, Georges. Inner Experience. Trans. Leslie Anne Boldt-Irons. State University of New York Press, Albany, 1988. **59.** From Shaviro, Steven. "Reckless Calculations." Passion and Excess – Blanchot, Bataille and Literary Theory. The Florida State University Press, 1990. **45.** 'There is no longer subject=object, but a "gaping breach" between the one and the other and, in the breach, the subject and object are dissolved, there is passage, communication, but not from one to the other: *the one* and *the other* have lost their separate existence.'

38. Ibid. **46.**

39. See introduction.

40. For more on silence threatening representation, see Kristeva, Julia. Powers of Horror – an Essay on Abjection. Columbia University Press, 1982. Kristeva's thesis extends many of Bataille's points in psychoanalytical terms.

41. Bataille, Georges. Inner Experience. Trans. Leslie Anne Boldt-Irons. State University of New York Press, Albany, 1988. **16.** From Shaviro, Steven. "Decapitations." Passion and Excess – Blanchot, Bataille and Literary Theory. The Florida State University Press, 1990. **83.**

42. Ibid. **46.** 'As an affirmative force, expenditure remains outside the "totality" or closed economic system which it nonetheless affects by "contagion". '

43. Bataille, Georges. "Surrealism and God." The Absence of Myth – Writings on surrealism. Verso, 1994. **182.**

44. Bataille, Georges. The Accursed Share - vols. 2 and 3. Zone Books, New York, 1993. **22.**

45. Ibid. **24.**

46. Ibid. **22.**

47. Ibid.

48. Ibid. **21.**

49. Boldt-Irons, Leslie Anne. "Translator's Introduction." Bataille, Georges. Inner Experience. Trans. Leslie-Anne Boldt-Irons. State University of New York Press, 1988. **11.** '...this evasion of anxiety through project, are what Bataille calls 'narcotics' necessary for us to suppress the pain of our limited existence.'

50. Bataille, Georges. The Accursed Share - vols. 2 and 3. Zone Books, New York, 1993. **53.**

51. Bataille, Georges. "L'Abjection et le Formes Miserables." Essais de Sociologie, ouvres completes. Paris, Gallimard, 1970. 2. **217**. From Kristeva, Julia. Powers of Horror – an Essay on Abjection. Columbia University Press, 1982. **64.** Here, Kristreva quotes Bataille's definition of the abject as 'the inability to assume with sufficient strength the imperative act of excluding.'

52. Bataille, Georges. The Accursed Share - vols. 2 and 3. Zone Books, New York, 1993. **79.**

53. Shaviro, Steven. "Decapitations." Passion and Excess – Blanchot, Bataille and Literary Theory. The Florida State University Press, 1990. **86.**

54. Ibid. 86. From 'Sept propos sur le septieme ange." **42-43.**

55. Boldt-Irons, Leslie-Anne. "Translator's Introduction." Bataille, Georges. Inner Experience. Trans. Leslie-Anne Boldt-Irons. State University of New York Press, 1988. **x.**

56. Ibid.

57. Shaviro, Steven. "Decapitations." Passion and Excess – Blanchot, Bataille and Literary Theory. The Florida State University Press, 1990. **89**. 'Affect Precedes language, just as it precedes the constitution of a subject.'

58. Bataille, Georges. Inner Experience. Trans. Leslie-Anne Boldt-Irons. State University of New York Press, 1988. **94.**

59. Kristeva, Julia. "The Abjection of Self." Powers of Horror – an Essay on Abjection. Columbia University Press, 1982. **5.**

60. Bataille, Georges. Visions of Excess – selected writings, 1927-1939. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1983. 49-51. From Shaviro, Steven. "Decapitations." Passion and Excess – Blanchot, Bataille and Literary Theory. The Florida State University Press, 1990. **87.**

61. Shaviro, Steven. "Decapitations." Passion and Excess – Blanchot, Bataille and Literary Theory. The Florida State University Press, 1990. **94.**

62. Ibid. **91.**

63. Bataille, Georges. Visions of Excess – selected writings 1927 – 1939. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1983. **200**. From Shaviro, Steven. "Reckless Calculations." Passion and Excess – Blanchot, Bataille and Literary Theory. The Florida State University Press, 1990. **38.**

64. Shaviro, Steven. "Decapitations." Passion and Excess – Blanchot, Bataille and Literary Theory. The Florida State University Press, 1990. 83. 'Contesting rationality and utility in the name of passion, he is nonetheless impelled to have recourse to conceptual language – if only to turn this language against itself'.

65. Bataille, Georges. Inner Experience. Trans. Leslie-Anne Boldt-Irons. State University of New York Press, 1988.

66. Ibid. **92.**

67. Bataille, Georges. "The Solar Anus." Visions of Excess – Selected Writings, 1927-1939. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1983. **7.**

68. Boldt-Irons, Leslie-Anne. "Translator's Introduction." Bataille, Georges. Inner Experience. Trans. Leslie-Anne Boldt-Irons. State University of New York Press, 1988. **14.**

69. Bataille, Georges. "The Solar Anus." Visions of Excess – Selected Writings, 1927-1939. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1983. **7.**

70. In Bataille's novel 'Story of the Eye' (Penguin, 1982), eggs and eyes are frequently connected. See Jay, Martin. Downcast Eyes: the Denigration of Vision in Twentieth Century French Thought. University of California Press, 1993.

71. Bataille, Georges. "Rotten Sun." Visions of Excess – Selected Writings, 1927-1939. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1983. **57.** Here Bataille references the mythological expression of the sun as a man slashing his own throat. This is related to the duality of the sun: the 'mathematical serenity and spiritual elevation' of the sun not looked at, and the 'scrutinized sun' that induces 'mental ejaculation, foam on the lips, and an epileptic crisis.' Also: Bataille, Georges. "The Solar Anus." Visions of Excess – Selected Writings, 1927-1939. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1983. **9.** 'I am the jesuve, the filthy parody of the torrid and blinding sun. I want to have my throat slashed while violating the girl to whom I will have been able to say: you are the night.'

72. Bataille, Georges. "The Solar Anus." Visions of Excess – Selected Writings, 1927-1939. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1983. **5.**

73. Bataille, Georges. "Rotten Sun." Visions of Excess – Selected Writings, 1927-1939. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1983. **57.**

74. Ibid.

75. Richardson, Michael. "Themes and Intellectual Background." Georges Bataille. Routledge, 1994. **39.**

76. Bataille. Georges. "The Language of Flowers." Visions of Excess – Selected Writings 1927-1939. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1983. **10.**

77. Bataille, Georges. "The Pineal Eye." "The Sun." Visions of Excess – Selected Writings 1927-1939. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1983. **7, 84.**

78. Bataille, Georges. "The Pineal Eye." "The Jesuve." Visions of Excess – Selected Writings 1927-1939. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1983. **8, 85.**

79. Bataille, Georges. "The Pineal Eye." "The Sacrifice of the Gibbon." Visions of Excess – Selected Writings 1927-1939. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1983. **9, 85.**

80. See notes 51 and 52.

81. Bataille, Georges. "The Pineal Eye." "The Position of the Human Body and Eyes on the Surface of the Terrestrial Globe." Visions of Excess – Selected Writings 1927-1939. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1983. **5. 83.**

82. This term is used to describe Bataille's rational analysis of the behaviour of specific individuals or social groups. See Bataille, Georges. "The Pineal Eye." "Sacrificial Mutilation and the Severed Ear of Vincent Van Gogh." Visions of Excess – Selected Writings 1927-1939. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1983.

83. Bataille, Georges. "The Pineal Eye." "Sacrificial Mutilation and the Severed Ear of Vincent Van Gogh." Visions of Excess – Selected Writings 1927-1939. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1983. **62- 63.**

Notes to Chapter 2

1. Bateson, Gregory. Steps to an Ecology of Mind. Chandler Publishing, 1972. **456**. 'What I have to talk about is how the great dichotomy of epistemology has shifted under the impact of cybernetics and information theory.'

2. deLanda, Manuel. "Non-Organic Life." Incorporations. Ed. Jonathan Crary and Sanford Kwinter. Zone books, 1992. **129.**

3. Bataille. Georges. "The Language of Flowers." Visions of Excess – Selected Writings 1927-1939. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1983. **10.**

4. Laddaga, Reinaldo. "Painting and Trance in Severo Sarduy's La Simulacion." Trans. David Hinkle. Painting at the Edge of the World. Ed. Douglas Fogle. Walker Art Center. Minneapolis, 2001. **175.**

5. Ibid. **186**. 'The (apparently derogatory) phrase is that of Cuban bureaucrat Ambrosio Fornet'.

6. Ibid. **175.** 'He established himself permanently in France and lived in an intellectual environment that philosopher Francois Wahl, in a recently published biographical piece, describes as "distinguished by the presence of Roland Barthes, Sollers, Lacan, Derrida, and Alain Badiou."' **176**. '"Simulation" is, of course, a term current in the theoretical culture of which the writer was a part. It plays a fundamental role, for example, in Derrida's *La Dissemination* and especially in the *Logique du sens* of Deleuze (who, on his part, employs certain ideas of Pierre Klossowski).'

7. Ibid. **176.**

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid. **179.**

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid. **183.**

13. Ibid. **186.**

14. Ibid.

15. Ibid. **186**

16. Ibid. **180.** 'In La simulacion, a vaguely Freudian or Lacanian anthropology (or, perhaps simply Baroque: Gongorian, Quevedian) is modulated by other influences: that of Georges Bataille, of course, specifically his notion of *depense*, excessive expenditure, waste (to die would be, with regard to this reference, the greatest waste; hence one speaks of "the waste that is death").'

17. Serres, Michel. 'The Origin of Language: Biology, Information Theory, & Thermodynamics.' Hermes - Literature, Science, Philosophy. Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982.

18. Ibid. **71.**

19. Ibid.

20. Ibid.

21. Arnheim, Rudolf. Entropy and Art, an Essay on Disorder and Order. University of California Press, 1971. **9**.

22. Landsberg, P.T. Entropy and the Unity of Knowledge. University of Wales Press, 1961.**11-12**.

23. Ibid. 22.

24. Angrist, Stanley W and Hepler, Loren G. "Demons. Poetry and Life." Order and Chaos, Laws of Energy and Entropy. Pelican, 1973. **9, 171.**

25. Serres, Michel. " The Origin of Language: Biology, Information Theory, & Thermodynamics." Hermes - Literature, Science, Philosophy. Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982. **72.**

26. Ibid. **73.**

27. Angrist, Stanley W and Hepler, Loren G. "Demons. Poetry and Life." Order and Chaos, Laws of Energy and Entropy. Pelican, 1973. 9. **175.**

28. Serres, Michel. " The Origin of Language: Biology, Information Theory, & Thermodynamics." Hermes - Literature, Science, Philosophy. Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982. **73.**

29. Ibid. **72.**

30. Ibid.

31. Ibid. **74.**

32. Ibid.

33. Ibid. Serres give a definition of homeorrhesis: 'formed from the Greek words *homos*, meaning same, and *rhysis*, meaning flow. This is to emphasise the idea of continual movement and exchange as opposed to the less dynamic idea of stasis.'

34. Ibid. **75.**

35. Bateson, Gregory. Steps to an Ecology of Mind. Chandler Publishing, 1972. **459.**

36. Oyama, Susan. The Ontogeny of Information – Developmental Systems and Evolution. Fwd. Richard C. Lewontin. Duke University Press, 2000.

37. Ibid. **26.**

38. Serres, Michel. " The Origin of Language: Biology, Information Theory, & Thermodynamics." Hermes - Literature, Science, Philosophy. Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982. **75.**

39. Ibid.

40. Ibid.

41. Ibid.

42. Ibid. **76.**

43. Angrist, Stanley W and Hepler, Loren G. "Demons. Poetry and Life." Order and Chaos, Laws of Energy and Entropy. Pelican, 1973. 9. 177. From the footnote.

44. Serres, Michel. " The Origin of Language: Biology, Information Theory, & Thermodynamics." Hermes - Literature, Science, Philosophy. Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982. **77.**

45. Ibid.

46. Ibid. **77-78.**

47. Ibid. **78.**

48. Ibid.

49. Ibid.

50. Ibid.

51. Ibid.

52. Ibid.

53. Ibid. **79.**

54. Ibid.

55. Ibid. **80.**

56. Ibid.

57. Bateson, Gregory. Steps to an Ecology of Mind. Chandler Publishing, 1972. **459**.

58. Serres, Michel. " The Origin of Language: Biology, Information Theory, & Thermodynamics." Hermes - Literature, Science, Philosophy. Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982. **80.**

59. Ibid.

60. Ibid. **81.**

61. Ibid.

62. Ibid.

63. Caillois, Roger. "Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia." October**.** Trans. John Shepley. **17.**

64. Ibid**.**

65. Ibid.

66. Ibid.

67. Ibid. **20.**

68. Ibid. **22.**

69. Ibid.

70. Ibid. **22**. 'He (Cuenot) attaches himself in the beginning to the case of certain Phyllia of Java and Ceylon ...that live by preference on the leaves of the guava tree, which they resemble by the subterminal constriction of their abdomens. The guava, however, is not an indigenous plant but has been imported from America.'

71. Ibid. Caillois quotes Bouvier, Eugene Louis. Habitudes et metamorphoses des insects. Paris, 1921. **146.**

72. Ibid. **23.** Caillois quotes Cuenot, Lucien. La genese des especes animales. Paris, 1911. 'In the last edition of his work (1932), Cuenot doubts that this sum of small details could be directed by an "unknown factor," but the recourse to chance continues to seem to him the most likely hypothesis. **522-523**.'

73. Ibid.

74. Ibid. 'Morphological mimicry could then be, after the fashion of chromatic mimicry, an actual photography, but of the form and the relief, a photography on the level of the object and not on that of the image, a reproduction in three-dimensional space with solids and voids: sculpture-photography or better teleplasty, if one strips the word of any metaphysical content.'

75. Ibid.

76. Caillois, Roger. "Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia." October. Trans. John Shepley. **24-25**.

77. Ibid. **25.**

78. Ibid.

79. Ibid. **27.**

80. Ibid. "What else but *prestigious magic* and *fascination* can the phenomena be called that have been unanimously classified precisely under the name of mimicry (incorrectly as I see it, one will recall, for in my opinion the perceived resemblances are too reducible in this case to anthropomorphism, but there is no doubt that once rid of these questionable additions and reduced to the essential, these facts are similar at least in their origins to those of true mimicry).'

81. Ibid. **28.**

82. Ibid.

83. Ibid.

84. Ibid. **28.**

85. Ibid.

86. Ibid.

87. Ibid. **30.**

88. Ibid. **31**. 'Sometimes assimilation does not stop at the surface: the eggs of phasmas resemble seeds not only by their form and colour, but also by their internal biological structure.'

89. Ibid. **30.**

90. Ibid. **32.**

91. See 89.

92. Caillois, Roger. "Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia." October**.** Trans. John Shepley. **32.**

93. Oyama, Susan. The Ontogeny of Information – Developmental Systems and Evolution. Fwd. Richard C. Lewontin. Duke University Press, 2000. **26.**

94. Serres, Michel. " The Origin of Language: Biology, Information Theory, & Thermodynamics." Hermes - Literature, Science, Philosophy. Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982. **83.** 'There is no more separation between the subject, on the one hand, and the object, on the other (an instance of clarity and an instance of shadow). This separation makes everything inexplicable and unreal. Instead, each term of the traditional subject – object dichotomy is itself split by something like a geographical divide (in the same way as am I, who speak and write today): noise, disorder, and chaos on one side; complexity, arrangement, and distribution on the other. Nothing distinguishes me ontologically from a crystal, a plant, an animal, or the order of the world; we are drifting together toward the noise and the black depths of the universe, and our diverse systemic complexions are flowing up the entropic stream, toward the solar origin, itself adrift.'

95. Caillois, Roger. "Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia." October**.** Trans. John Shepley. **23.**

96. Serres, Michel. " The Origin of Language: Biology, Information Theory, & Thermodynamics." Hermes - Literature, Science, Philosophy. Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982. 74-75. 'This river, almost stable though irreversible, this basin, poised on its own imbalance in a precarious state of quasi-equilibrium in its flow toward death, ferries energy and information, knowledge of entropy and negentropy, of order and disorder. Both a *syrrhesis* (rather than a system) and a *diarrhesis*, the organism is hence defined from a global perspective.' Serres provides definitions

of the terms 'syrrhesis' and 'diarrhesis': 'The Greek verbs syrrhein and diarrhein mean "to flow together" and "to flow through".'

97. Caillois, Roger. "Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia." October. Trans. John Shepley. **25.** 'Delage and Goldsmith had already pointed out in the *Kallima* an "exaggeration of precautions." Caillois quotes Delage and Goldsmith. **74.**

Notes to Chapter 3

1. Prigogene, Ilya, and Stengers, Isabelle. Order out of Chaos. Bantam, 1986. **32.**

2. Ibid. **35.**

3. Ibid. **36.**

4. American Sublime – Landscape Painting in the United States 1820 – 1880. Tate Gallery, London, 2002.

5. Turner, Frederick. 'Biology and Beauty'. Incorporations. Ed. Jonathan Crary and Sanford Kwinter, Zone books, 1992. **408.**

6. Ibid.

7. See Chapter Three, page four.

8. Wilton, Andrew. 'The Sublime in the Old World and the New.' American Sublime. Tate Gallery, London. 2002. **18.** The progression towards the modernist project of form as content was instigated by European painting. This could be described as the increasing thematisation of style until the distinction collapses: 'The theatrical art of Turner, like the expressive naturalism of Constable, was dependent on a highly personal handling which, it needs to be said at once, was rarely adopted by the Americans.... A majority of the works have a cool, uninvolved handling that is sometimes strikingly at odds with dramatic subject matter and can strike unaccustomed eyes as dry and academic.'

9. Examples of political and economical desires in the images are many. American landscape painters were ahead of their European counterparts in commodifying their output, and this

depended largely upon allegorising the scene for the benefit of their audience. See Wilton, Andrew. 'The Sublime in the Old World and the New.' American Sublime. Tate Gallery, London. 2002. **33**: '(Bierstadt's) pictures were succesful in large part because they articulated sentiments that Americans wished to hear: they were the inhabitants, the explorers, and, according to divine plan, the conquerors of a vast continent.'

10. Leader, Darian. Stealing the Mona Lisa – What art stops us from seeing. Faber& Faber, 2002.

11. Ibid. **151-152.**

12. Benjamin, Andrew. Art, Mimesis and the Avant-Garde. Routledge,1991.

13. Wilton, Andrew. 'The Sublime in the Old World and the New.' American Sublime. Tate Gallery, London. 2002.

14. Auster, Paul. Moon Palace. Faber & Faber, 1989.

15. Ibid. **156.**

16. Ibid. **157.**

17. Ibid. **154.**

18. Ibid. **170.**

19. Ibid.

20. Ibid. **171.**

21. Ibid.

22. Ibid. **170.**

23. Ibid.

24. Burke, Edmund. A philosophical Enquiry into the origin of our ideas of the sublime and beautiful. Ed. James T. Boulton. Routledge and Kegan Paul ltd, 1958. **72**

25. Ibid. **73.**

26. Boulton, James T. 'Editor's Introduction.' Burke, Edmund. A philosophical Enquiry into the origin of our ideas of the sublime and beautiful. Ed. James T. Boulton. Routledge and Kegan Paul ltd, 1958. **lvii.**

27. Ibid.**lvi.**

28. Burke, Edmund. 'Of the Sublime.' A philosophical Enquiry into the origin of our ideas of the sublime and beautiful. Ed. James T. Boulton. Routledge and Kegan Paul ltd, 1958. **39.**

29. Boulton, James T. 'Editor's Introduction.' Edmund Burke. A philosophical Enquiry into the origin of our ideas of the sublime and beautiful. Ed. James T. Boulton. Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd, 1958. **lxxxvii.**

30. See Guyer, Paul. 'Nature, Art and Autonomy'. Kant and the Experience of Freedom. Cambridge University Press, 1993. 7. **240.**

31. Ibid.

32. Ibid. **193-4.**

33. Ibid. **196**

34. See Boulton, James T. 'Editor's Introduction'. Edmund Burke. A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful. Ed. James T. Boulton. Routledge and Kegan Paul ltd, 1958. Cxxvii.

35. Ibid. **203.**

36. Ibid. **204.**

37. Ibid.

38. See 26.

39. See Boulton, James T. 'Editor's Introduction.' Edmund Burke. A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful. Ed. James T. Boulton. Routledge and Kegan Paul ltd, 1958. **cxxvii.**

40. See Guyer, Paul. 'The Beautiful and the Sublime'. Kant and the Experience of Freedom. Cambridge University Press, 1993. 6. **213.**

41. Burke, Edmund. 'Colour considered as productive of the sublime'. A philosophical Enquiry into the origin of our ideas of the sublime and beautiful. Ed. James T. Boulton. Routledge and Kegan Paul ltd, 1958. **XVI.** 81.

42. Ibid. **82.**

43. Ibid. 'The effects of succession in visual objects explained.' XIII. **141.**

44. Ibid

45. Boulton, James T. 'Editor's Introduction'. Edmund Burke. A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful. Ed. James T. Boulton. Routledge and Kegan Paul ltd, 1958. **cxii.** 'Burke may be held partly to blame for this stress on size in painting: in the *Enquiry* he sufficiently emphasises "magnitude" as an element in sublimity.'

46. Ibid.

47. Ibid. **cxii/cxiii.**

48. Ibid. **liii.**

49. Ibid. **liii.**

50. Ibid.

51. Ibid.

52. Approximately. Edmund Burke's Sublime and Beautiful first appeared on 21st April 1757 (Ibid. **xv**), whilst the 20th century paradigm shifft in scientific perspectives could arguably be said to begin with the discovery of the chemical clock by William Bray in 1921. See deLanda, Manuel. 'Nonorganic Life.' Incorporations. Ed. Jonathan Crary, Sanford Kwinter, Zone books, 1992. **130.**

53. deLanda, Manuel. 'Nonorganic Life.' Incorporations. Ed. Jonathan Crary, Sanford Kwinter, Zone books, 1992. **129.**

54. Burke, Edmund. 'Vastness.' A philosophical Enquiry into the origin of our ideas of the sublime and beautiful. Ed. James T. Boulton. Routledge and Kegan Paul ltd, 1958. VII. **72.**

55. Ibid. 1. 'Of the Passion Caused by the Sublime.' **57.**

56. See 33.

57. See 52.

58. Derrida, Jacques. 'Economimesis.' Diacritics. Trans. R. Klein. Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981. 11. **3.**

59. Ibid. **4.**

60. Ibid.

61. Ibid.

62. Ibid.

63. Ibid. **9.**

64. Ibid.

65. Ibid.

66. Ibid.

67. See Caillois, Roger. 'Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia.' October. Trans. John Shepley. **32.**

68. See 64.

69. Derrida, Jacques. 'Economimesis.' Diacritics. Trans. R. Klein. Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981. 11. **9.**

70. On the role of a primary text in the definition of illustration, see Schapiro, Meyer. Words and Pictures – on the Literal and the symbolic in the illustration of a text. Columbia University Press, 1973.

Notes to Conclusion

1. Benjamin, Andrew. Art, Mimesis and the Avant-Garde. Routledge, 1991.

2. Ibid. **34.**

3. Ibid

4. Ibid

5. Ibid. **35.**

6. Ibid. **36.**

7. Holbein, Hans the Younger. The Ambassadors. National Gallery, London.

List of Illustrations

Fig. 1.

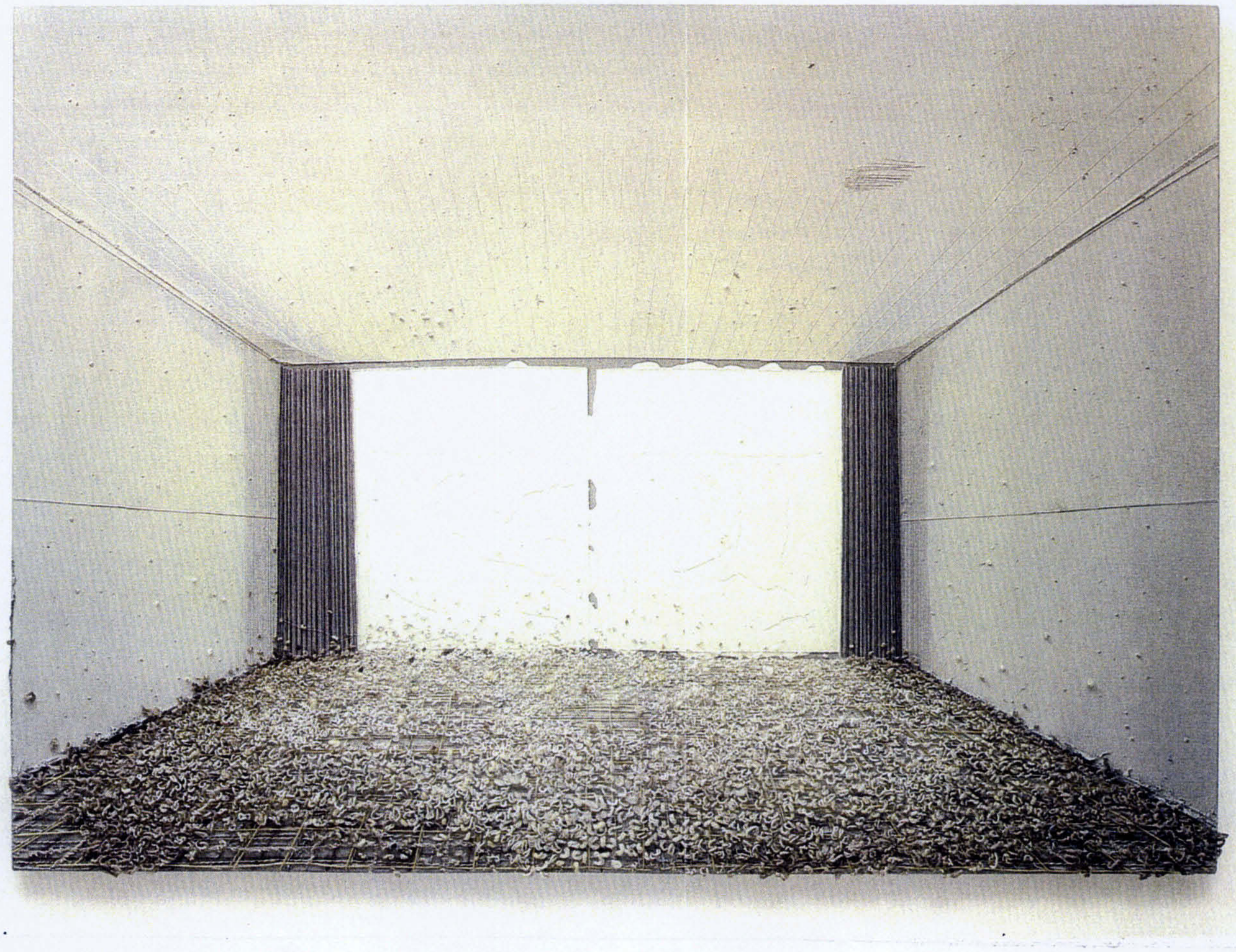

Fig. 2.

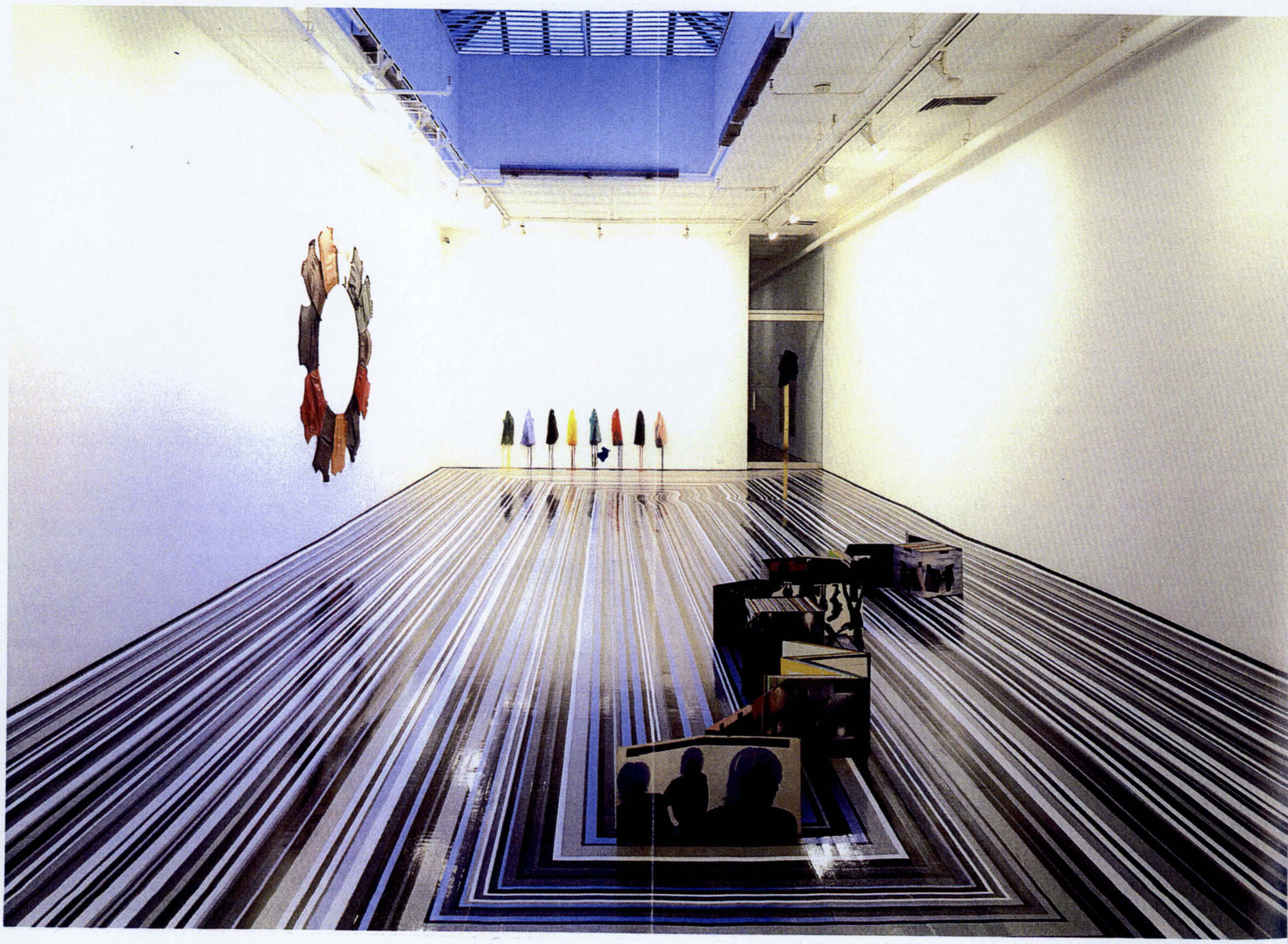

Fig. 3.

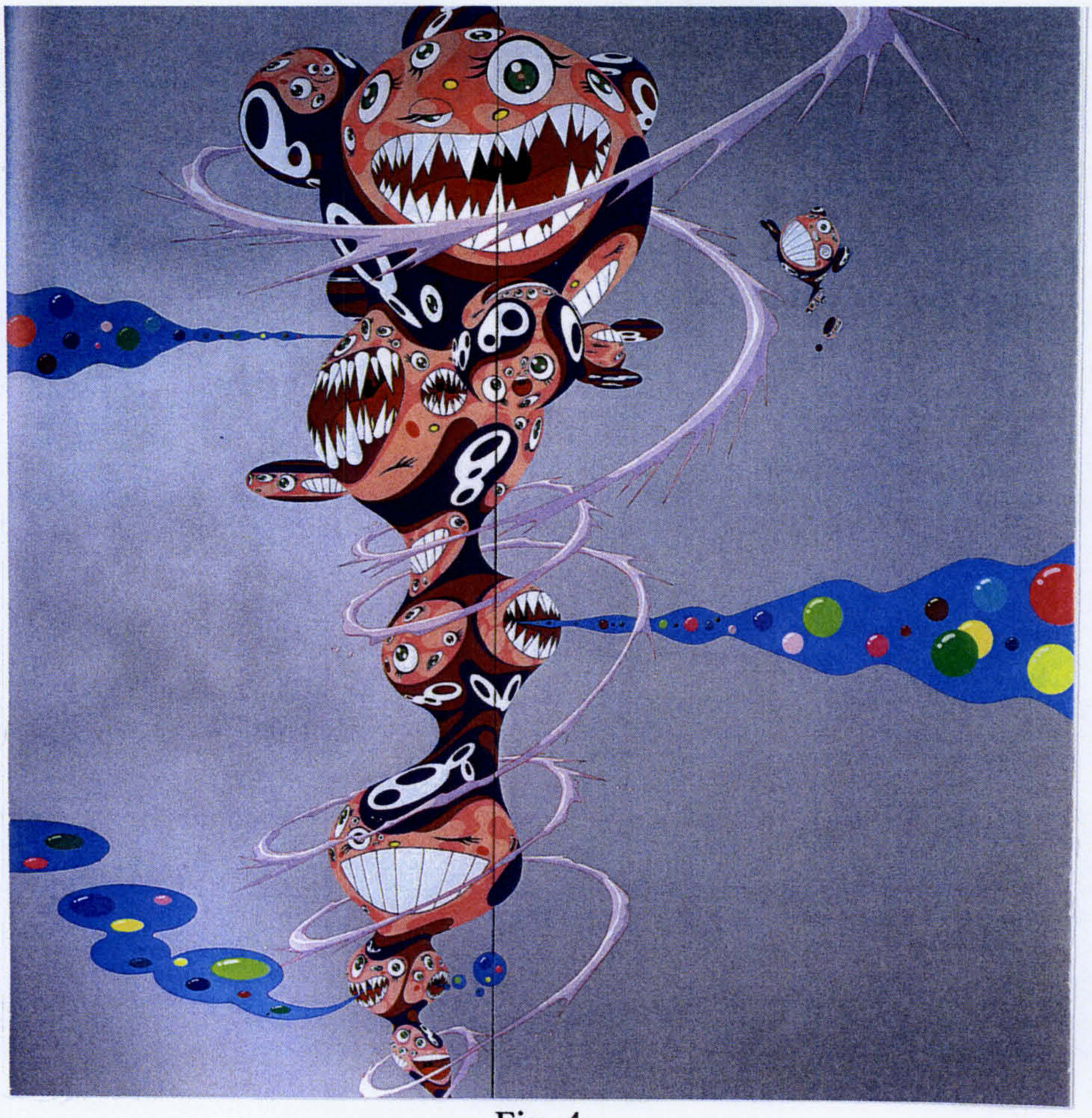

Fig. 4.

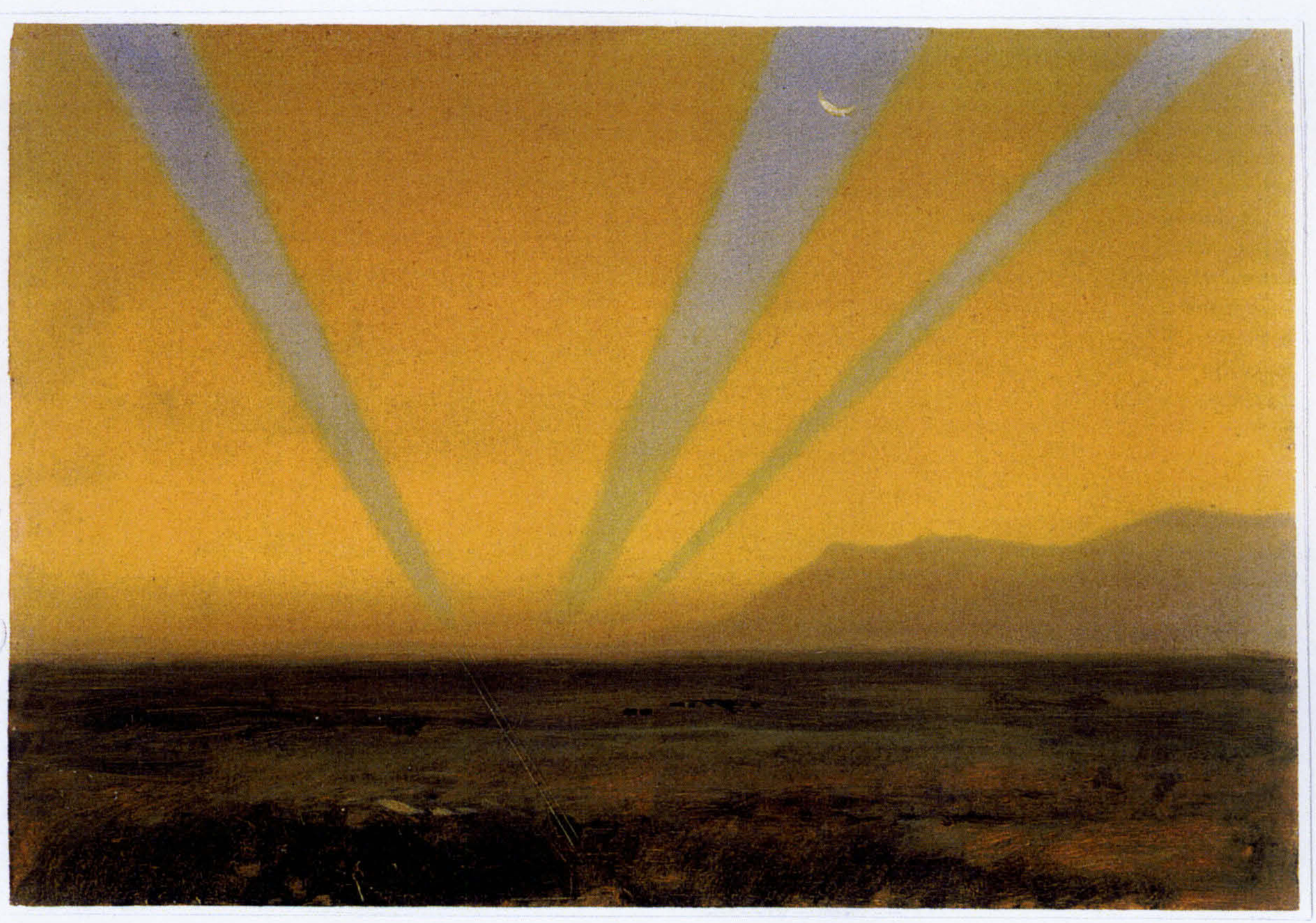

Fig. 5.

Fig. 6.

Fig. 7

Fig. 8.

Fig. 9.

Fig. 10

Fig. 11.

Fig. 12.

Fig. 13.

Bibliography

Texts

Angrist, Stanley W and Hepler, Loren G. Order and Chaos, Laws of Energy and Entropy. Pelican, 1973.

Arnheim, Rudolf. Entropy and Art, an Essay on Disorder and Order. University of California Press, 1971.

Auster, Paul. Moon Palace. Faber & Faber, 1989.

Bataille, Georges. Prehistoric Painting: Lascaux or the Birth of Art. Trans. Austryn Wainhouse, Macmillan, 1955.

Bataille, Georges. Visions of Excess – selected writings 1927 – 1939. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1983.

Bataille, Georges. Literature and Evil. Marion Boyars, 1985.

Bataille, Georges. Eroticism. Marion Boyars, 1987.

Bataille, Georges. Inner Experience. Trans. Leslie Anne Boldt-Irons. State University of New York Press, Albany, 1988.

Bataille. Georges. "The Language of Flowers." Visions of Excess – Selected Writings 1927-1939. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1983.

Bataille, Georges. The Tears of Eros. Trans. Peter Connor. City Lights, 1989.

Bataille, Georges. The Accursed Share - vols. 2 and 3. Zone Books, New York, 1993.

Bataille, Georges. The Absence of Myth – Writings on surrealism. Verso, 1994.

Bataille, Georges. On Nietzsche, Paragon House, 1994.

Bataille, Georges. Story of the Eye. Trans. Joachim Neugroschel. City Lights, 1997.

Bataille, Georges. My Mother Madame Edwarda & The Dead Man. Trans. Austryn Wainhouse. Marion Boyars Publishers, 1995.

Bateson, Gregory. Steps to an Ecology of Mind. Chandler Publishing, 1972.

Baudrillard, Jean. Symbolic Exchange and Death. Sage Publications. London/ Thousand Oaks/ New Delhi, 1993.

Benjamin, Andrew. Art, Mimesis and the Avant-Garde. Routledge,1991.

Birnbaum, Daniel. "Late Arrivals." Painting at the Edge of the World. Ed. Douglas Fogle. Walker Art Center. Minneapolis, 2001.

Blauvelt, Andrew. "No Visible Means of Support." Painting at the Edge of the World. Ed. Douglas Fogle. Walker Art Center. Minneapolis, 2001.

Bois, Yve-Alain. "Painting: The Task of Mourning." Painting as Model. Massachusetts

Institute of Technology, 1990.

Botting, Fred. Bataille. Blackwell, 1998.

Boulton, James T. 'Editor's Introduction.' Burke, Edmund. A philosophical Enquiry into the origin of our ideas of the sublime and beautiful. Ed. James T. Boulton. Routledge and Kegan Paul ltd, 1958.

Burke, Edmund. A philosophical Enquiry into the origin of our ideas of the sublime and beautiful. Ed. James T. Boulton. Routledge and Kegan Paul ltd, 1958.

Caillois, Roger. "Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia." October. Trans. John Shepley.
Crimp, Douglas. On the Museum's Ruins. Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1993.

DeLanda, Manuel. AThousand Years of Non-Linear History. Zone Books, 1997

De Landa, Manuel. "Nonorganic Life." Incorporations. Zone 6, 1992.

Derrida, Jacques. Mémoires: For Paul de Man. Trans. Cecile Lindsay, Jonathan Culler, Eduardo Cadava. The Wellek Library Lectures at the University of California, Irvine. New York; Guildford: Columbia University Press, 1986.

Derrida, Jacques. The Truth in Painting Trans. Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod. University of Chicago Press, 1987.

Derrida, Jacques. Of Grammatology. Trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976.

Derrida, Jacques. "Economimesis." Diacritics. Trans. R. Klein. Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981.

Fogle, Douglas. "The Trouble with Painting." Painting at the Edge of the World. Ed. Douglas Fogle. Walker Art Center. Minneapolis, 2001.

Foster, Hal. The Return of the Real. October Books, 1996.

Foster, Hal. Compulsive Beauty. Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1993.

Guyer, Paul. Kant and the Experience of Freedom. Cambridge University Press, 1993.

Harrison, Charles & Wood, Paul. "Modernist Art." Art in Theory – 1900-1990. An Anthology of Changing Ideas. Ed. Charles Harrison & Paul Wood. Blackwell, 1992.

Hollier, Denis. Against Architecture: The Writings of Georges Bataille. Trans. Betsy Wing. Zone Books, 1992.

Jay, Martin. Downcast Eyes: the Denigration of Vision in Twentieth Century French Thought. University of California Press, 1993.

Judd, Donald. "Specific Objects." Donald Judd: Complete Writings 1959 – 1975. Halifax, N.S: Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1975. **184**.

Kracauer, Siegfried. The Mass Ornament – Weimar Essays. Trans. & Ed. (with Introduction) Thomas. Y. Levin, Harvard University Press, 1995.

Krauss, Rosalind E. The Optical Unconscious. Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1993.

Kristeva, Julia. Black Sun – Depression and Melancholia. Columbia University Press, 1989.

Kristeva, Julia. Powers of Horror – an Essay on Abjection. Columbia University Press, 1982.

Land, Nick. The Thirst for Annihilation: Georges Bataille and Virulent nihilism; An Essay in Atheistic Religion. Routledge, 1992

Landsberg, P.T. Entropy and the Unity of Knowledge. University of Wales Press, 1961.

Leader, Darian. Stealing the Mona Lisa – What art stops us from seeing. Faber& Faber, 2002.

Libertson, Joseph. Proximity: Levinas, Blanchot, Bataille and Communication. Martinus Nijhoff, 1982.

Loock, Ulrich. "Survey." Luc Tuymans. Phaidon. 1996.

Oyama, Susan. The Ontogeny of Information – Developmental Systems and Evolution. Fwd. Richard C. Lewontin. Duke University Press, 2000.

Prigogene, Ilya, and Stengers, Isabelle. Order out of Chaos. Bantam, 1986.

Schapiro, Meyer. Words and Pictures – on the Literal and the symbolic in the illustration of a text.Columbia University Press, 1973.

Schapiro, Meyer. "Recent Abstract Painting." Modern Art: 19th and 20th Century (collected papers). New York: Braziller,1978.

Serres, Michel. "The Origin of Language: Biology, Information Theory, & Thermodynamics."Hermes - Literature, Science, Philosophy. Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982.

Shaviro, Steven. Passion and Excess – Blanchot, Bataille and Literary Theory. The Florida State University Press, 1990.

.

Stonier, Tom. Information and the Internal Structure of the Universe – An Exploration into Information Physics. Springer Verlag London, 1990.

Turner, Frederick. "Biology and Beauty". Incorporations. Ed. Jonathan Crary and Sanford Kwinter, Zone books, 1992.

Wollheim, Richard. Painting as an Art. Thames and Hudson, 1987.

Magazine Articles

Crimp, Douglas. "The End of Painting." October no.16 (spring 1981).

Labelle, Charles. "Luc Tuymans – Back From the Dead." Art and Text. 54 (1996).

"The Mourning After." Round table discussion between Yve-Alain Bois, Thierry De Duve Isabelle Graw, David Joselit, Elisabeth Sussman and David Reed, hosted by Arthur C. Danto. Artforum. March 2003.

"Thick and Thin." Round table discussion between Robert Storr, Carroll Dunham, Helmut Federle, Tim Griffin, Jutta Koether, Jonathan Lasker, Monique Prieto, Lane Relyea, Terry Winters and Lisa Yuskavage. Artforum. April 2003.

Turner, Jonathan. "Exquisite Corpses." ARTnews. November 1998.

Exhibitions/ Catalogues

American Sublime – Landscape Painting in the United States 1820 – 1880. Tate Gallery, London, 2002.

Painting at the Edge of the World. Ed. Douglas Fogle. Walker Art Center. Minneapolis, 2001.

Paintings and Artworks

Bacon, Francis. Portrait of George Dyer in a Mirror. Oil on canvas, (Thyssen-Bourniemisza Collection, Lugano, Switzerland; Marlborough Fine Art (London) Ltd). 1967-8.

Bierstadt, Albert. Sunset in the Yosemite Valley. Oil on canvas, 91.2x132.7 cm, Haggin collection, Haggin Museum, Stockton, California. 1868.

Church, Frederick Edwin. Landscape with Sunset. Oil and pencil on thin cream board, 22.7x33 cm, Cooper Hewitt, National Design Museum, Smithsonian Institution, gift of Louis P. Church, 1917-4-1261. c. 1860-70.

Church, Frederick Edwin. Rainy Season in the Tropics. Oil on canvas, 142.9x214 cm, Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, Mildred Anna Williams Collection. 1866.

Church, Frederick Edwin. Schoodic Peninsula from Mount Desert, Sunrise. Oil on thin board, 22.8x35 cm, Cooper Hewitt, National Design Museum, Smithsonian Institution, gift of Louis P. Church, 1917-4-332. c. 1850-5.

Cole, Thomas. Mountain Sunrise, Catskill. Oil on panel, 46.4x61.9 cm, Private collection. 1826.

Cole, Thomas. Landscape with Tree Trunks. Oil on canvas, 67.3.6x82.5 cm, Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, Walter h. Kimball Fund. 1828.

Cropsey, Jasper Francis. High Torne Mountain, Rockland County, New York. Oil on canvas, 58.4x101.6 cm, The Saint Louis Art Museum, Eliza McMillan Fund. 1850.

Edefalk, Cecilia. Kammerspiel ('Mirror'). Oil on Linen. Three panels, 23x16 in. each. Courtesy Museum fur Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt am Main; Dauerleihgabe der Freunde des Museums fur Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt am Maine.V. 1992-1993.

Gifford, Sanford Robinson. A Lake Twilight. Oil on canvas, 40.6x96.5 cm, Private collection. 1861.

Holbein, Hans the Younger. The Ambassadors. National Gallery, London.

Lambie, Jim. Installation view of Blackgloss. Vinyl tape, dimensions variable. At Anto Kern gallery, New York. 2000

Murakami, Takashi. The Castle of Tin Tin. Acrylic on canvas on board, 120x120 in. Collection Ruth and Jake Bloom, Los Angeles. 1998.

Raedecker, Michael. Radiate. Acrylic, wool, thread on canvas 80 x 98 in. CAP Art Collection, New York. 2000.

Others

Kricfalusi, John. The Ren And Stimpy Show. Nickelodeon, 1991.