THE STUTTER OF RECOGNITION:

RE-VISIONING THE BAROQUE IN CONTEMPORARY PAINTING

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Plate 1 : © Fiona Greenhill, *Lilac Wine*, **2007/08, Oil and acrylic on canvas, 122 x 81.5cm**

Plate 2 : © Fiona Greenhill (image above right: underpainting of same)

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ABSTRACT

The major theme that runs throughout my work has always been the question of representation; where to draw the line between 'real life' and 'art', illusion and abstraction, transcription and composition. The line between illusion and truth, or to put it another way, "between the ontological and the epistemological – between 'things as they are' and 'things as they seem" [1], was also a concern that preoccupied the seventeenth century. This research challenges the assumption that the ancients are fixed firmly and stably in a past in which the moderns are the victors and the ancients the losers[2]. This research reconsiders the contribution the Baroque has made to Western thought, but in particular, to explain its ongoing appeal and its continuing relevance to painting in the late twentieth / early twenty-first centuries. And more importantly for the purposes of my own research as a painter in the digital age, is to pose the question: how to formulate a Neo-Baroque aesthetic adequate to addressing the problems and uncertainties specific to painting in the twenty-first century?

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[1] Geraghty, Anthony, *"*Nicholas Hawksmoor's Drawing Technique of the 1690s and John Locke's Essay *'Concerning Human Understanding'",* from *Rethinking the Baroque*, Hills, Helen, (Ed), Ashgate Publishing, 2011, p.125
[2] Latour, Bruno*, We Have Never Been Modern*, (translated by Catherine Porter), Harvard University Press, 1993, p.10

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INTRODUCTION

The major theme that runs throughout my work has always been the question of representation, that is, where to draw the line between 'real life' and 'art', illusion and abstraction, transcription and composition. The line between illusion and truth, was also one that preoccupied the seventeenth century, as Heinrich Wölfflin famously observed in his study of the Baroque. In Wölfflin's analysis the distinguishing characteristic between the Baroque and the Renaissance was the Baroque's engagement with this binary opposition: "between the ontological and the epistemological – between 'things as they are' and 'things as they seem'"[3].

The late twentieth / early twenty-first centuries have witnessed the re-emergence of the baroque and its pre-occupation with the question of representation. Writing in 1987, the Italian semiologist, Omar Calabrese was one of the first to identify a link between the defining features of the aesthetic of mass culture in an epoch "so confused, fragmented and indecipherable"[4], with a prevailing taste he termed, neo-baroque. More recently, a number of contemporary commentators have expanded the parameters of research into the neo-baroque[5], although these discussions with rare exceptions[6], seldom consider either examples of contemporary painting or painting from the seventeenth century. More extraordinary in some ways is the fact that two key painters of the Baroque, Vermeer and Caravaggio, are curiously and for the most part, absent. Despite this omission in the increasing amount of literature that has arisen regarding the Neo-Baroque, I argue, that in painting we currently find one of its most ubiquitous and concentrated manifestations.

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[3] Geraghty, Anthony, *"Nicholas Hawksmoor's Drawing Technique of the 1690s and John Locke's Essay 'Concerning Human Understanding'"*, from *Rethinking the Baroque*, Hills, Helen, (Ed), Ashgate Publishing, 2011, p.125

[4] Calabrese, O., *Neo-Baroque: A Sign of the Times*, (trans. Lambert, C.), Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1987, p.xii

[5] in particular see Ndalianis, A, *Neo-Baroque Aesthetics and Contemporary Entertainment*, MIT Press, 2004; Egginton, W., *The Theater of truth: the ideology of (neo)baroque aesthetics*, Stanford University Press, 2010 & Lambert, G., *On the (New) Baroque*, The Davies Group Publishers, USA, 2009

[6] the key exceptions to this are: Helen Hills, (Ed.), (2011) *Rethinking the Baroque*; Mieke Bal's *Quoting Caravaggio* (1999) and Wacker, Kella A., (2007) *Baroque Tendencies in Contemporary Art*; Elizabeth Armstrong & Victor Zamudio-Taylor's (Ed.) (2003) *Ultra Baroque: Aspects of Post Latin American Art*.

Whilst this resurfacing of the Baroque and its engagement with the problem of representation is not relegated exclusively to painting, painting is, I maintain, specially positioned to 'rethink' the Baroque. Painters today face particular problems peculiar to the digital age; the familiar critical dismissal of painting in favour of more contemporary lens-based media, the general perception of abstraction's diminishing returns, the seemingly retrograde agenda of representation and its perceived market complicity. In this hostile atmosphere, the unsettling question of painting's relevance and efficacy in the digital age persistently re-emerges. If the Baroque as Calabrese suggests, is not merely an historically fixed moment in time, but an impulse to reconcile and unify the contradictions of an age arising from anxiety, upheaval and flux, it is perhaps no surprise then, that the work of numerous painters working in a pervasive atmosphere of ideological and procedural uncertainty exhibit signs of a Neo-Baroque aesthetic.

Despite the current interest in applying the term neo-Baroque to a broad range of cultural products from *Toy Story* to writers of *Magic Realism* to Jean Paul Gaultier whilst simultaneously also acknowledging that the neo-Baroque spans the Twentieth and Twenty-first centuries, it would seem that attempting to establish a definition of the term is as deceptively 'simple' as reaching agreement regarding the definitional parameters for the historic Baroque has traditionally been. Furthermore, the neo-Baroque seems to span all age groups from established older practitioners such as Ed Ruscha, Gerhard Richter, Audrey Flack, to mid career artists such as Johannes Kahrs and recent graduates, such as Tomaselli and Tauba Auerbach. And it would also seem that it is not merely transhistorical but also, a transcultural phenomena extending from Europe to America, Australia, South America, and so on. Despite these challenges however, the most fruitful way forward is to consider the neo-Baroque as more a sensibility than an identifiable or homogenous style. Under these terms the neo-baroque is characterised by a propensity for kitsch, dazzling colour, ornamentation, virtuosity and pop-culture theatrics, as well as instability, poly-dimensionality and inter-textuality. Determining the definitional criteria and theoretical background to the neo-baroque is therefore the objective of Chapter One. In so doing it assumes that the neo-Baroque is not a return to a former Baroque, but is a reformulation of the poetics central to the historic baroque, from the vantage point of the present, as by examining the historic Baroque we discover instead, not the ossified remains of the past, but what we find productive in the present.

Chapters Two through to Six attempt to tease out direct parallels between the Baroque and the neo-Baroque in ways that correspond to my own practice, largely by applying two broad thematic frames; that of 'theatricality' and 'microcosm / macrocosm'. Part Two, Chapter two specifically draws parallels between the advent of new subject matter in the Baroque and neo-Baroque that imply a certain politics of vision for which Norman Bryson's adoption of Charles Sterling's terms Megalography and Rhopography are eminently suitable. This is a subject that Chapter Three extends into a discussion regarding the artificiality that defines the Baroque against the background of what Jonas Barish has termed, the anti-theatrical impulse, seen here in both its seventeenth and twenty-first century variants by investigating the role of the spectator. Part Three extends the metaphor of the theatre to the meta-concept of the macrocosm/microcosm that in the seventeenth century articulated the profound consternation regarding the vastly expanded parameters of a de-centred universe that continue to haunt the contemporary landscape. As such Chapter Four considers the terms 'Detail and Fragment' as aesthetic responses that embody subtly different Baroque worldviews that manifested during the seventeenth century but which continue to be useful classificatory terms for defining a neo-Baroque mentality in the Twenty-first century. Chapter Five explores the particular brand of existential uncertainty in the Twenty-first century through considering a parallel concern for the reconciliation of opposing forces of subject and object, referred to in the seventeenth century as the concept of 'coincidentia oppositorum' (coincidence of opposites) that finds its modern day correspondence in the term 'Chaosmos'; a term used to denote the aesthetics of 'productive uncertainty' in the neo-Baroque era. This chapter also considers notions of originality, repetition, the role of chance in the artistic venture and therefore also the larger issue of the artistic autonomy and agency of the artist in the creative process, that once again parallel the seventeenth century in surprising ways. And finally, in Chapter Six, I consider the metaphoric implications articulated in numerous instances of artists' conceptions of light and scale that similarly expressed a shared concern between the seventeenth and twenty-first centuries; the profoundly unsettling idea that the individual is a conscious, sentient, minute particle adrift in a limitless and incalculably immense *inhuman* and *insensate* universe.

This research, by drawing direct parallels between seventeenth century painting and contemporary art, by extension also attempts to demonstrate the multiple ways in which my current work parallels that of a diverse group of contemporary painters (in particular the work of

Gerhard Richter, Ed Ruscha, Marilyn Minter, Audrey Flack, George Shaw, Johannes Kahrs and Keith Tyson) whose work I reappraise in view of signs of a pervasive Neo-Baroque aesthetic. As such this thesis documents certain 'Baroque strategies' that are employed in contemporary painting as a means by which to navigate the inhospitable contemporary environment of post-medium art. This research reconsiders the contribution the Baroque has made to Western thought, but in particular, to explain its ongoing appeal and its continuing relevance to painting in the late twentieth / early twenty-first centuries. And more importantly for the purposes of my own research as a painter in the digital age, is to pose the question: how to formulate a Neo-Baroque aesthetic adequate to addressing the problems and uncertainties specific to painting in the twenty-first century?

PART ONE : THE BAROQUE AND NEO-BAROQUE

Plate 3 : **© Ed Ruscha, *ME*, 2004, Acrylic on canvas, 162.5 x 183cm, sourced : http://pictify.com/275424/me-by-ed-ruscha**

PART ONE : BAROQUE AND NEO-BAROQUE

CHAPTER ONE : THE PRESENT MOMENT OF THE PAST

"[The poet] is not likely to know what is to be done unless he lives in what is not merely the present, but the present moment of the past, unless he is conscious not of what is dead, but of what is already living."[7]   T.S. Eliot

Faced with the desolation in the aftermath of the Second World War, T. S. Eliot perceived in the baroque, a means by which to formulate a modernist aesthetic. More recently a number of contemporary painters have developed certain 'Baroque strategies' as a means by which to navigate the inhospitable contemporary wasteland of post-medium art. Amidst a number of factors; the familiar critical dismissal of painting in favour of more contemporary lens-based media, the general perception of abstraction's diminishing returns, the seemingly retrograde agenda of representation and a perceived market complicity, the unsettling question of painting's relevance and efficacy in the digital age persistently re-emerges. If the baroque, as Calabrese suggests[8], is not merely an historically fixed moment in time, but an impulse to reconcile and unify the contradictions of an age arising from anxiety, upheaval and flux, it is perhaps no surprise then, that the work of numerous painters working in a pervasive atmosphere of ideological and procedural uncertainty exhibit signs of a Neo-Baroque aesthetic.

The originality of Calabrese's idea in his book *Neo Baroque: A Sign of the Times*, was the breadth of his investigations that compelled him to consider cultural phenomena as different to one another as *Donald Duck and Dante*[9]. In establishing links from *science to mass communications, from art to everyday habits* he identified the *existence of a "mentality," or shared perspective of taste*[10] in the late twentieth century, he called 'neo-Baroque'. This project, although owing a large debt to Calabrese's insights, is however, different. Numerous scholars from the 1940s to the present day

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[7] Eliot, T.S. *Selected Prose,* ed. F. Kermode, Faber, London, 1975, p.38

[8] Calabrese, O., *Neo-Baroque: A Sign of the Times*, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1992, (first published in 1987)

[9] Ibid., p.xi

[10] Ibid., p.xi

have likewise perceived a neo baroque 'taste' prevalent in society and culture at large, although these discussions with rare exceptions[11], seldom consider either examples of contemporary painting or painting from the seventeenth century. More extraordinary in some ways is the fact that two key painters of the Baroque, Vermeer and Caravaggio, are curiously and for the most part, absent. Despite this omission in the increasing amount of literature that has arisen regarding the Neo-Baroque, I argue, that in painting we currently find one of its most ubiquitous and concentrated manifestations.

Acutely alert to its perceived insufficiencies, numerous examples of contemporary painting exhibit the hallmarks of a neo-baroque "mentality": a propensity for open narrative, a heady mix of popular theatrics and kitsch, the assimilation of contradictory ideas within a single work or across an artist's oeuvre, and the integration into the medium-specific logic of paint, the plethora of media and sources mined from the culturally omnipresent media-scape. The deeper impulse that informs these works is fundamentally that of instability, which according to Calabrese is the underlying determinant of the neo baroque. Calabrese employs a binary opposition of terms 'stability' and 'instability' to distinguish Baroque from Classical form, whereby stably ordered forms indicate the classical and unstable forms, the Baroque. As Calabrese explains: "Crisis, doubt, and experiment are features of the baroque. Certainty is classical."[12]

Painting, it is argued here, is specially positioned to 'rethink' the baroque, given its historic precedent and its prevailing identity crisis in the face of the mechanical arts. These current anxieties are inextricably bound to an ancient debate that so pre-occupied the seventeenth century and which has continued to have a life in the present; the problematic relationship between illusion and truth. This is not to say that this is exclusively painting's dilemma. In actuality, it is not purely a philosophical impasse but is, to use William Egginton's phrase,

> "a problem of thought … that affects or unsettles an entire culture in the largest
> possible sense, that permeates its very foundations and finds expression in its plastic

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[11] the key exceptions to this are: Helen Hills, (Ed.), (2011) *Rethinking the Baroque*; Mieke Bal's *Quoting Caravaggio* (1999) and Wacker, Kella A., (2007) *Baroque Tendencies in Contemporary Art*; Elizabeth Armstrong & Victor Zamudio-Taylor's (Ed.) (2003) *Ultra Baroque: Aspects of Post Latin American Art*.

[12] Calabrese, Op. Cit., p.193

art, in its stories and performances, in its philosophy as well as in its social organization and politics"[13]

This particular 'problem of thought', i.e. the tension between illusion and truth; subject and object as it relates to contemporary art, is also one that is at the heart of Mieke Bal's rationale in her book, *Quoting Caravaggio*:

> "There is a historical reason for selecting baroque art for such a preposterous inquiry. I would like to put forward the idea that the current interest in the Baroque acts out what is itself a baroque vision, a vision that can be characterised as a vacillation between the subject and object of that vision and which changes the status of both. To the extent that this vacillation binds contemporary to baroque art, a certain coevalness between the two can be alleged."[14]

Although dealing exclusively with the response of contemporary artists to the work of Caravaggio, Mieke Bal's book, provides a direction for this research to reconsider the contribution the baroque in general has made to Western thought and in particular, to demonstrate its ongoing fecundity in painting in the late twentieth / early twenty-first centuries. And more importantly for the purposes of my own research as a painter in the digital age, is to pose the question, how to formulate a neo-Baroque aesthetic adequate to addressing the problems and uncertainties specific to painting in the twenty-first century?

BAROQUE AND NEO BAROQUE: PRESS ▶ 'REPLAY'?

In 1999 the American author, J. G. Ballard wrote:

> "Ed Ruscha has the coolest gaze in American art. [.....] Ruscha is closer in spirit to Vermeer, who quietly compressed a universe of experience and sensibility into his modest domestic interiors. Ruscha transforms the whole of outdoor America into a private domestic interior"[15].

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[13] Egginton, W., *The Theatre of Truth: The Ideology of (Neo) Baroque Aesthetics,* Stanford University Press, 2009, p.1

[14] Bal, M., *Quoting Caravaggio: Contemporary Art, Preposterous History*, The University of Chicago Press, London, 1999, p.16*, p7*

[15] Ballard, J. G., text from Exhibition catalogue, Anthony d'Offay Gallery, London, 5 May – 3 June 2000

That Ruscha should be compared to the Baroque painter Johannes Vermeer (1632-1675) will come as a surprise to many, and I doubt to no one more so than Ruscha himself, considering as he says, he "never was inspired by the holy world of painting"[16]. In fact, the author Silvia Wolf further enlightens us that during a seven month road trip through Europe in 1961, at what would have to be described as an early formative part of his artistic life, Ruscha saw a number of museums in Europe but wasn't however:

> "particularly drawn towards the old masters, nor did he feel compelled to see the original paintings of what he had seen in reproduction."[17]

As it happens I *do* subscribe to this assessment of Ruscha; Ruscha has always appeared to have had a single-minded interest in the cultural products of mass aestheticisation; of advertising, print media, photography, film, television, even popular music and talk-back radio in preference to "[….] the grandiose history of art and painting."[18] But I also hold the view that Ballard's comments are remarkably, acutely, suitable. In fact I would extend Ballard's observation and suggest that the shimmering Hollywood spectacle of Ed Ruscha's work reveals some striking formal affinities with the seventeenth century, to such a degree that we might call his work Neo-Baroque. The garrulous, be-sequined California, which the Los Angeles novelist Raymond Chandler baptised: "California, the department-store state. The most of everything and the best of nothing"[19] seems as far removed from the mute, refined world of seventeenth century Holland as it is possible to be. It is. I won't be suggesting it isn't. Neo-Baroque then, can't be a repetition of an historic Baroque. As Calabrese establishes, "this name [Neo-Baroque] does not mean that we have "returned" to the Baroque[20], but instead beneath the surface, an underlying form permits comparison and connection."[21] Therefore, in order to explain the underlying formal logic; to dissect the connective tissue of these baroque 'forms', we will necessarily have to begin by defining what is inferred in the use of the term, 'Neo-Baroque'.

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[16] Wolf, S., *Ed Ruscha and Photography*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, 2004, p.85

[17] Ibid.

[18] Schwartz, Alexamdra, *Ed Rushca's Los Angeles*, MIT Press, 2010, p23

[19] Marshall, D., *Ed Ruscha*, Phaidon Press Inc., London, 2003, p.12

[20] Calabrese, Op. Cit., p.xii

[21] Ibid.

Any attempt to clearly define what constitutes the neo baroque inevitably hinges on defining the

historic baroque, which brings us to the first obstacle; what we mean by the Baroque itself,

etymologically, historically, stylistically has long been contested. This "shrinking from the term

'baroque' within art history", as Helen Hills remarks, "is a particularly striking phenomenon,

because the idea of the baroque was foundational in the very formation of the discipline of art

history itself and, indeed, the concept of style within it."[22] In order to throw some light on these

definitional difficulties, therefore, let's firstly turn to what *is* broadly accepted.

The Baroque is generally perceived as having initially been a Catholic Counter-Reformation

response to the major shifts in power and territory in Western Europe in the seventeenth century,

as a result of the disintegration of the Holy Roman Empire. As such the Baroque generally marks a

shift in taste away from Renaissance Classicism. In painting a gradual move from Church towards

private patronage parallels in painting a marked change from the religious subject matter of

history painting toward the adoption of more prosaic subjects such as genre, landscape,

portraiture and still life that predominantly reflect new markets and audiences. It is a style that

finds expression not just in some of the most enduring examples of painting in the history of

Western Art, chief amongst them; Caravaggio, Vermeer, Hals, Rembrandt, van Dyck, and

Velàzquez, Rubins, but also permeated development across the arts; in sculpture, architecture,

literature and though a little later in the late seventeenth/early eighteenth century, music. The

seventeenth century saw the establishment of the modern theatre in which the productions

themselves became more elaborate, spectacular and by the standards of the day, 'multi-media';

whilst amongst the numerous innovations in music, the new genre, (a form revived from antiquity)

Opera, was established.

From its inception in Rome, the Baroque expanded throughout Europe as well as further afield,

particularly to its Catholic colonies. The remarkable explosion of artistic activity during the

seventeenth century coincided not merely with religious upheaval, but with profound political and

social change amongst which were; the rise of the merchant and middle classes, the mass

dislocation of people to increasingly urbanised centres, the invention of the printing press and a

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[22] Hills, Helen, *Rethinking the Baroque*, Burlington, Ashate, 2011, pp.3-4

subsequent increase in literacy and advances in all branches of science, (particularly in navigation, exploration, cartography, medicine and astronomy). Although the Baroque was a pan-European phenomenon, specific stylistic characteristics reflected the national traits of each country in which it emerged and evolved. Northern, generally Protestant, European gradually developed a more restrained, descriptive, 'dispassionate' form to that of their Southern Catholic counterparts, where a more overtly theatrical, impassioned and often sexually charged style prospered.

T. S. Eliot characterised the age of Donne (1572-1631) and Webster (1580-c.1634): *as* "[….. a] time, [in which] the world was filled with broken fragments of systems*"* and likewise that this description equally applied to the chaos of the Wasteland of the twentieth century, which knows only "a heap of broken images".*[23]* Angela Ndalianis is one of the more recent voices to affirm that "the formal properties of the baroque have made their presence felt beyond the temporal confines of the seventeenth century."[24] She identifies the current of Neo-Baroque poetics as having arisen from major cultural transformations, these being "[…..] the rise of conglomeration, multimedia interests and new digital technology."[25] Although the Neo-Baroque emerges from the historic frame particular to the late twentieth / early twenty-first century; from a "dynamism […..] expressed in technologically different guises"[26], the degree of seismic activity in the realm of cultural transformation is comparable to the profound upheavals of the seventeenth[27].

BAROQUE REFORMULATIONS

Theorising the Baroque has been a phenomenon that began in the late nineteenth century that has by and large reflected its transition from obscurity and disapprobation at the end of the eighteenth century to rediscovery and revaluation in the late nineteenth / early twentieth centuries. At the end of the eighteenth century the Baroque essentially submerged and

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[23] Maxwell, D.E.S., *The poetry of T. S. Eliot*, Routledge, 1952, p.61

[24] Ndalianis, Angela, *Darkness and Light: Caravaggio and His World*, from 'Caravaggio Reloaded: Neo-Baroque Poetics, exhibition catalogue, Art Gallery of New South Wales, November 2003-May 2004, p.73

[25] Ibid.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Ibid., see also for instance Scott McQuire's recent book *The Media City* (2008) regarding the changes to conceptions of space (public and private; interior and exterior) that new digital technologies in particular have evinced.

Neoclassical Enlightenment simultaneously surfaced. A prevailing atmosphere of hostility towards the Baroque ensued and numerous Baroque art and artefacts were destroyed during this period and replaced by more acceptably classicist conceptions of art and architecture. Many of the Baroque literary and musical masterpieces were effectively buried, forgotten or lost. When the widespread resurgence of interest in the European Baroque in the last years of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth occurred, it was to some degree as a means by which to counter the positivist rationalism of the Enlightenment whereby, as Parkinson Zamora observes:

> "[…] writers and art historians – working simultaneously and influencing each other – began to (re)discover in the Baroque certain strategies of figuration and fragmentation that suited their own aesthetic and ideological purposes"[28].

As stated previously, at the beginning of the nineteenth century these 'reformulations' of the Baroque primarily took place in literature and art history. In Spain, writers such as Federico García Lorca, Dámaso Alonso, Gerardo Diego were reading and recuperating the work of Góngora and Quevedo as well as other Spanish seventeenth century writers and poets, as was the Mexican writer Alfonso Reyes in the 1920s. In the same decade, both Walter Benjamin published his study on Baroque drama, and Jorge Luis Borges wrote several pieces on the work of the Spanish Baroque writers Quevedo and Cervantes, as well as the English Baroque writers, Milton and Sir Thomas Browne in Argentina. Octavio Paz observed a Baroque sensibility operating not just in the work of Baudelaire and Appolonaire in the nineteenth century as well as in the work of T. S. Eliot in the twentieth, but also as having been an instrumental force in early modernist movements in general. He noted the resemblance for instance between the seventeenth century Jesuit priest, Gracián's (1601-1658) recommendation to merge two divergent 'realities' in order to provoke novel and unexpected correspondences as a more forcefully expressive style (as opposed to describing 'like' things). This device equated with the modernist aesthetic of disjunction as a strategy by which, to quote Eliot, to "amalgamate disparate experience"[29]. Interestingly, Paz also suggested that the

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[28] Parkinson Zamora, L. & Kaup, M., (Ed.), *Baroque New Worlds: Representation, Transculturation, Counterconquest*, Duke University Press, 2010, p.4

[29] Ibid., p.5

enigma regarding the affinities between the early avant-garde and the Baroque despite their different origins, could be explained by their intellectual formalist similarities, as he observes:

> "The solution to this small mystery is perhaps to be found in the role played by form in both baroque and avant-garde aesthetics. Baroque and avant-garde are both formalisms."[30]

Prior to the nineteenth century, Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), in his brief essay *On the Baroque* (1878) presented the artifice and theatricality of the Baroque as a strategy to oppose the stultifying Romantic, Enlightenment ideology of his day. In this Nietzsche draws an analogy between the enfeebled good 'shepherd' (emblematic of Enlightenment ideals) with that of the energetic alacrity of the 'robber' (the Baroque's capacity to directly apprehend the viewer); in other words the academically untrained artist/writer, as he says, will resort not to a "dramatic expression … [that] guides the hearts and minds of his fellow men, like a shepherd, [… but to one that] captures them by surprise like a robber."[31] In *the Birth of Tragedy*, written six years before this, he proposed a binary system in which two opposing forces operate within a work to produce a creative 'tension'. These two opposing forces were the Dionysian denoting the Baroque forces of chaos (representing the impulse inclined towards enigma, darkness and disorder that threatens to dismember and dissolve form) and the Apollonian, signifying the Classical (representing light, clarity, reason, order and veracity of form). Nietzsche maintained that both contrary forces were simultaneously suspended in a state of 'productive tension', although one mode was more dominant than the other, and as such were present at any time, in theatre, a work of art, a person, society at large, and so on[32]. Nietzsche was foundational in reconceptualising the Baroque at a time of high neo-Classicism when the Baroque was equated with decadence and deformity and as such his writing anticipated the work of subsequent scholars by decades.

The term 'Neo-Baroque' made its first appearance in *Baroque in Modern Architecture* (1951) by Gillo Dorfles (b.1910). In a later book, *In praise of Disharmony*, where, although he made no direct

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[30] Paz, Octavio, *Sor Juana*, Harvard University Press, 1988, p.53

[31] Nietzsche, F. *On the Baroque,* (Chapter One) extract found in Baroque New Worlds, p.44

[32] Geuss, Raymond, From the 'introduction' to Geuss, Raymond, & Speirs, Ronald (ed), *The Birth of Tragedy and other writings – Friedrich Nietzsche*, Cambridge University Press, , 1999

reference to the term, he identifies the principal characteristics of the modern age as: "[…] the abandonment (or decline) of […] order and symmetry […in conjunction with] the advent […] of disharmony and asymmetry." He posited that the Neo-Baroque was a specific period in the early twentieth century (encompassing movements such as cubism) and simultaneously claimed that Post-Modernism was a later period.[33]

Whilst early twentieth century incarnations of the Baroque have been broadly associated with methodologies and practices of the early modernist periods in particular Surrealism, Dada and Magic Realism, in more recent times the baroque has increasingly been linked to post-modernist and post-structuralist theories. Although some of the characteristics of the Neo-Baroque reveals a broad resemblance to Postmodernism, as a term in the manner in which Calabrese applies it, is less generic than Postmodernism[34]. Nonetheless, as Zamora and Kaup have thoroughly detailed in *Baroque New Worlds*[35], the porous nature of the Baroque itself – its heterogeneity and malleability, became the means by which to contest the dominion of colonising cultures in the Americas in a process of revision and renewal. With a revitalized feeling for the potential cultural and political agency of the Neo-Baroque, the Argentinean art historian Angel Guido argued in an essay in 1936, that New World Baroque art and architecture were, "models of "reconquest,"

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[33] Calabrese, Op. Cit., p.16

[34] Calabrese suggests that the term Neo-Baroque is less generic than Postmodernism, the use and meanings of which have become too diffuse. The first use of the term Postmodern, originated from 1960s America to describe instances of literary and cinematic works that didn't subscribe to modernist ideals of originality and experimentation, but to the deconstruction and pastiche of its immediate historical precedents.   The second instance was in the context of Jean-François Lyotard's influential *The Postmodern Condition*, (Minuit, Paris, 1979) initially a report to the Quebec Council of State, in which the basic premise is, to quote Lyotard:"… the crisis in narrations[…]. Simplifying to the greatest possible extent, we can consider as "postmodern" our incredulity when face by metanarrations." The third context is in relation to an anti-rationalist, anti-functionalist and decorative style in architecture and design. In summary then as Calabrese observes: "In literature the term "postmodern" signifies antiexperimentalism; in philosophy it means casting doubt on a culture founded upon narrations that then become prescriptive; in architecture it describes a return to citation from the past, to decoration, and to the surface of the object being conceived in a way that contradicts its structure or use." (Calabrese, p.13) Whilst often implicated in Postmodern debates, Calabrese suggests that the Neo-Baroque doesn't include all aspects associated with Postmodernism and that the Neo-Baroque can provide a more coherent description of what is being interpreted and the methods employed in doing so.

[35] Parkinson Zamora, L. & Kaup, Op. Cit., p.*,*

rebellious forms that take back the New World from its European colonizers"[36].

The Brazilian poet and critic Haroldo de Campos (1929-2003), also sometimes credited with the first use of the term Neo-Baroque in his essay *The Open Work of Art*[37] (1955), introduces later in the mid-1980s the influential idea of 'anthropophagy[38]' which he reasoned was the tendency of Baroque to cannibalise the colonial cultural forms and integrate it within the 'body' of the colonised subject, recalling Lezama's phrase: "at the banquet of the … jubilant Baroque"[39]*.* For Lezama Lima the Baroque "furnace of assimilation"[40] was the transformative force in which all past cultures; European, indigenous, African and Asian transmogrify into a uniquely *American,* post-colonial present. For the Cuban Writer, Carpentier, on the other hand, writing in the 1960s and 1970s, the Baroque is, somewhat confusingly, both a Latin American creative style as well as a universal transhistorical '*creative impulse'*.

The Cuban poststructuralist Writer Sarduy, in *The Baroque and the Neobaroque* (1972) and his book *Barroco* (1974) reject both Lezama Lima and Carpentier's suppositions that place the Neo-Baroque exclusively in Latin America, and writes instead that the Baroque is a universal condition in which the central organising principle is *"*[…] the apotheosis of artifice, the irony and mockery of nature"[41]. In perceiving affinities between the seventeenth-century Baroque and Neo-Baroque, Sarduy asserted that the Neo-Baroque was "an intensification of the de-centering and destabilisation of the universe begun by the former"[42]. Sarduy's thesis is a semiotic textual treatment that rejects the realism at the heart of Lima and Carpentier's work and instead in his own thesis suggested that the central operating device of the Baroque was that of "artificialisation". His was an anti-realist programme of interpretation in which he argued that the artificiality of the Baroque stressed the contingent nature of meaning itself.

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[36] Parkinson Zamora, L. & Kaup, Op. Cit., p.7

[37] Bessa, Antonio Sergio & Cisneros, Odile (Ed.), *Novas: Selected Writings by Haroldo de Campos*, North Western University Press, 2007, pp.220-222

[38] Bessa, Antonio Sergio & Cisneros, Odile (Ed.), *Novas: Selected Writings by Haroldo de Campos*, North Western University Press, 2007, pp.157-177

[39] Parkinson Zamora, L. & Kaup, Op. Cit., p.222

[40] Ibid.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Parkinson Zamora, L. & Kaup, M, Op. Cit., p.267

More recently, Egginton coins the term *coloneobaroque*[43] to signify the conflation of colonial seventeenth century cultural aesthetic influences with present-day Neo-Baroque ones that he regards specific to a "Euro-American modernity[44]. Like Egginton, Irlemar Chiampi in her essay *Barroco y modernidad* (2000) equates the Neo-Baroque with Postmodernism:

> "At once modern and countermodern, the Neobaroque functions within the postmodern aesthetic… as an archaeological project inscribing the archaism of the Baroque as a way of allegorising Latin America's dissonance with modernity."[45]

In broader terms outside the specific frame of the Latin American context (and in concert with other French thinkers, Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze) the French philosopher Christine Buci-Glucksmann in her book *La Folie du Voir* ('Madness in Vision', 1986)[46] theorised the aesthetics of the seventeenth century through a Post-structuralist frame enlisting into this enterprise the phenomenolgist theories of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and the psychoanalytic readings of Jacques Lacan. Buci-Glucksmann identified the chief mode in Baroque works to be one of extending the visual parameters within the pictorial space of the painting to that of the observing subject which she determined as a strategy to challenge the primacy of the Cartesian, disembodied eye in Western Art. The thrust of this thesis is consistent with the twentieth century movement which Martin Jay terms 'anti-ocularcentrism'[47] in line with Foucault, Deleuze and Lacan, but also with other French philosophers and theorists such as Georges Bataille and Guy Debord.

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[43] Egginton, William, *Theatre of Truth: The Ideology of (Neo)Baroque Aesthetics*, Stanford University Press, 2009, pp.70-71

[44] Ibid.

[45] Chiampi, Irlemar, Chapter 1 from*Barroco y modernidad* "The Baroque at the Twilight of Modernity" (2000), as translated and reproduced in Parkinson Zamora, L. & Kaup. M., p.517

[46] Buci-Glucksmann, trans. Baker, D. Z, Chapter 2 from *La Folie du Voir*, 'The Work of the Gaze', (1986), as translated and reproduced in Zamora, pp.140-157

[47] Zamora, 'Editors notes to "La Folie du Voir" (1986), as translated and reproduced in Parkinson Zamora, L. & Kaup, M, Op. Cit., p.136

THE QUESTION OF STYLE AND ORIGINS

This partial and condensed account of a number of foundational interpretations of the Baroque illustrate the complex and ongoing permutations that have so confounded definitions of the Baroque and the Neo-Baroque. Nevertheless, what does emerge as the motivating force underlying all these interpretations is the universal dissatisfaction, to varying degrees with the ethos of Enlightenment rationalism and;

> "The waning utility (not to say bankruptcy) of [its] principles of scientific reason, progressive history, individual agency, and stable identity (cultural, national, personal) […]"[48]

What these various accounts also illustrate is one of the central problems that has beleaguered conceptions of the Baroque; whether to treat the Baroque as a distinct historical period or a recurring universal form. This, as William Egginton states, "[…] is a consistent problem that haunts the work of theorists from Wölfflin to d'Ors, [and from] Maravall to Deleuze"[49]. How does one, for instance, reconcile styles that in the seventeenth century are as different from one another as Italian ceiling frescos are to Dutch still life paintings? This is as much a problem for Baroque scholarship as it is for the Neo-Baroque. By extension then, is it possible to distinguish common traits between styles of painting that have been described, at one time or another and to varying degrees, as Neo-Baroque, that are as seemingly dissimilar from one another as are the works of the Mexican artist Yishai Jusidman, or the British artist Jenny Saville or the German artist Johannes Kahrs to name only a few from many other potential examples in contemporary painting?

The Cuban writer, Jose Lezama Lima, encapsulated this problem in a concise, somewhat aphoristic phrase: "The earth is Classical and the sea is Baroque."[50] By this he meant that after two hundred years of obscurity and widespread disdain, the baroque had resurfaced, only to become overextended and subject to the risk of meaningless generalisation. Lima's statement is simultaneously a recognition of the heterogeneity of the Baroque, as much as it is also a

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[48] Parkinson Zamora, L. & Kaup, M, Op. Cit.., p.5

[49] Egginton, Op. Cit., p69

[50] Parkinson Zamora, L. & Kaup, M, Op. Cit., p1

cautionary note against the style of theorising that Eugene d'Ors' meta-historical study of the baroque *Lo Barrocco* (published in the 1933) exemplifies.

D'Ors conceived the baroque as a recurring 'eon' or formal constant out of a number of other potential 'eons' that could recur at any time and in any cultural context (and therefore not solely or specifically European cultures) from within which he identified a rather unmanageable twenty-two sub-species of the baroque[51]. In other words, faced with the proliferation of a broad and often seemingly arbitrary taxonomy of forms is it possible to achieve some sense of stylistic unity? And considering the patently disparate styles (culturally, geographically, historically) of the Baroque, is it possible to perceive 'a spirit of an age'? John Martin's response to this problem of stylistic diversity was to:

> "[…] admit at the outset that this is an impossible task. Not only is there no homogeneity of style in the Baroque period, but one is tempted to speak of the very diversity of styles as one of its distinguishing features"[52].

If a clear understanding of the Baroque has been beleaguered by questions of style, similarly the problem of its etymological roots have also impeded determining a clear definition. As such Sarduy once observed that "[…] Every essay on the Baroque opens by considering the origins of the term itself.[53] After nearly a century of debate it is now accepted that the term 'baroque', that "[…] proverbial bone in the throat of traditional Baroque criticism"[54], originates from the Portuguese word, 'barroca' meaning 'irregular pearl'. The problems with locating its origins has perhaps partly been due to the fact that it was not a word that was used in the seventeenth century, but was one thought to have been coined by Johann Winckelmann (1717-1768) in the eighteenth[55]. The term was generally used pejoratively in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to mean a degeneration or distortion of classicist Renaissance ideals. In its initial sense,

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[51] Calabrese, Op. Cit., pp.19-20

[52] Martin, John Rupert, *Baroque*, Harper & Row, New York, 1977, p.26

[53] Lambert, Gregg, *On the (new) Baroque*, The Davies Group, Aurora, USA, 2009, p.xxiii

[54] Ibid.

[55] Wacker, Kella A., *Baroque Tendencies in Contemporary Art* (from 'The Introduction'), Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007, p.1

there was a generous measure of genetic determinism implicated in this conception of the Baroque that implied a progressive movement from 'primitive' (Mediaeval) to 'perfection' (Renaissance) to 'deformity and decay' (Baroque/Rococco).

Wölfflin's formalist studies of the Baroque, primarily his major work *Principles of Art History*, (originally published in 1915) was the first instance of a systematic, value-neutral assessment of the Baroque. Wölfflin therefore represents a paradigmatic shift in thinking whereby the Baroque is seen not as inferior to Renaissance classicism, but as an equally valid, though different aesthetic. The basis of Wölfflin's thesis was the analysis of the formal properties of the art objects themselves by means of comparison within a binary opposition of terms: "the comparison of two styles [Renaissance and Baroque] to determine their general characteristics"[56]. He identified five categories of beholding by which to determine whether a work to a greater or lesser degree was either 'Renaissance' or 'Baroque' and which comprised: 1. Linear versus painterly; 2. Plane surface versus recessional depth; 3. Closed (or tectonic) form versus open (or atectonic) form; 4. Multiple, or composite, unity versus fused, or uniform, unity and 5. Absolute clarity versus relative clarity.

Wölfflin's work has often been criticised for taking a metahistorical approach, (i.e. for disregarding the historic, social and cultural factors in stylistic development) most notably by Erwin Panofsky in *What is Baroque?* (1934), by Arnold Hausser in *Renaissance, Mannerism, Baroque* (1957) and most recently by Robert Harbison, in *Reflections on Baroque* (2010)[57]. Despite Wölfflin's expressed belief that style was something "[…] internally determined; [and that] outer conditions [could] only retard or facilitate the process [of stylistic development]"[58], he wasn't always as doctrinaire as he has been presented and to judge him narrowly in these terms is slightly misleading. Although espousing a disinterest in historical precedent, the visual archaeological record of art history is implicated throughout his writing, as Michael Ann Holly points out:

> "[…] one painting calls to another, and each successive work, as time passes, is in some crucial way a variant on its predecessor – to the point where the pictorial vocabulary of one representational form (a paradigm, perhaps, in Thomas Kuhn's

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[56] Holly, Michael Ann, *Panofsky and the Foundations of Art History*, Cornell University press, 1984, p.49

[57] Parkinson Zamora, L. & Kaup, M, Op. Cit., pp.46-48

[58] Holly, op. cit., p.51

terms) is depleted and a new set of formal problems articulates fresh artistic
problems to be solved."[59]

In point of fact, Wölfflin's motivation was not so much a disregard for history's contribution to the
evolution of artistic style, than it was to establish a morphology of visual forms that could be
demonstrated and examined, in opposition to the prevailing tendency at that time to study the
less verifiable problem of the artist's intention. In this way, Wölfflin's work was a correction of the
perceived tendency to put art in the service of ideology and simultaneously an attempt to confer
some degree of autonomy to the visual. In a more nuanced reading therefore, it is possible to
perceive Wölfflin's actual position in contrast to the slightly circumscribed reading of his critics, as
one whereby he asserts that the artistically educated eye acquires its learning from within a
relational web of previous art objects and visual forms, "of picture upon picture, of form on
form"[60], as he states, "Every artist finds certain visual possibilities before him, to which he is
bound. Not everything is possible at all times. Vision itself has its history."[61]

Viewed in this way, Wölfflin's study paved the way for a more nuanced and less negative formalist
assessment of the Baroque. This essentially describes Calabrese's approach, which by his own
admission is a revisitation of Wölfflin's basic premise, although, importantly he rejects the idea of
historical "rhythm" or "cyclicity". To this end, Calabrese enlists and reinterprets the Cuban writer
Sarduy's intuitions, that the Baroque isn't *solely* a specific point historically, culturally,
geographically, but is a "general attitude and formal quality of those objects in which the attitude
is expressed"[62]. Furthermore, according to Calabrese's analysis, in which he identifies a
commonality between a number of scientific theories (catastrophe, fractals, dissipative structures,
chaos theory and so on) and examples of contemporaneous forms of art, literature, philosophy
and even cultural consumption, that this does not imply a literal connection. It merely suggests
that the underlying impulse is the same, but manifest in different forms, as he says:

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[59] Holly, op. cit., p.55

[60] Holly, M. A., 'Wölfflin and the Imagining of the Baroque', from *Visual Culture: Images and Interpretations,* Wesleyan
University Press, 1994, p.360

[61] Holly (1984), op. cit., p.65

[62] Calabrese, Op Cit., p.15

"Neo-baroque is simply a 'spirit of the age' that pervades many of today's cultural phenomena in all fields of knowledge, making them familiar to each other and, simultaneously, distinguishing them from other cultural phenomena in a more or less recent past. [.....] This does not mean that there is a direct link. It simply means that the *motive* behind them is the same, and that this motive has assumed a specific form in each intellectual field."[63][Calabrese's emphasis]

Calabrese therefore maintains that the opposing morphological values "baroque" and "classical" which are embodied in the cultural phenomena of an age co-exist, at any point in history. This understanding opposes the view that they alternate independently of one another, to create an overtly simplistic conception of an homogenous 'Baroque' or 'Classical' era. By Calabrese and Sarduy's formulation, Classical elements coexist with their Baroque counterparts, even during a time characterised by a dominant mood of instability and metamorphosis (such as we might consider the historic Baroque to be). Whilst seventeenth century art objects may be determined as more or less "baroque" by the degree to which they exhibit certain formal traits (such as drama, exuberance emotion, contradiction, energy, and so on) and more 'Classical' those works which exhibit more stably ordered formal characteristics, it is still true to state that all art from that period is nonetheless, 'Baroque'. It is erroneous therefore, to conceive the Baroque as one in which Classicism was rejected per se. Classical precursors continued to be an important reference point for Baroque artists, and Classicism wasn't 'abandoned'. Baroque painting marked a distinct and decisive break with the Renaissance form of Classicism and thus, as Sutherland Harris remarks "even the most "classical" seventeenth-century artists cannot be confused with their Renaissance predecessors"[64]. Similarly therefore, examples of cultural phenomena that exhibit classicist traits can be found to exist in the twentieth century, although the dominant tendency (as it is in the twenty-first, according to the current research of Ndalianis and Egginton) is Neo-Baroque.

Where Wölfflin perhaps most deserves some revision is in the manner in which, as Michael Ann Holly observes, he "treats the visual arts as art and not as physical embodiments of certain intellectual constructs. Art as idea is ignored"[65]. It seems reasonable to assume that a pervasive cultural aesthetic, a "shared mentality" as Calabrese puts it, reveals a certain "orientation of

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[63] Ibid., p.xii

[64] Sutherland Harris, Ann, *Seventeenth-century Art & Architecture*, Laurence King Publishing, 2005, pxxi

[65] Holly (1984), Op. Cit., p.67

taste"[66] and that this 'orientation of taste' also reveals, although it can never be guaranteed with certainty or precision, an implied philosophic, ontological and epistemological position in relation to reality in which the object is necessarily implicated[67]. Thus, as Calabrese states, "An aesthetic judgment is almost always accompanied by an ethical, emotional, or morphological one, and vice versa"[68].

In accepting that contemporary art embodies a *shared mentality*, which in turn disclose certain preferences (philosophical, political, ethical and so on), brings me to propose adopting Mieke Bal's abductive approach, in which she states, "I will […..] present contemporary art here as a form of "cultural philosophy", and I will "read" it as such"[69]. Rather than understanding the Baroque purely within the narrow parameters of style, history, geography, we might expand conceptions of the Baroque as a 'frame of mind' or attitude that moves beyond these confines in which 'thought' is materially encoded in its cultural products. Bal extends Calabrese and Sarduy's insights when she says:

> "The Baroque, then, is not seen here as a "style" but as a perspective, a way of
> thinking which first flourished during a specific period and which now functions as a
> meeting point whose traffic lights make us halt and stop to think about (the culture
> of) the present and (some elements of) the past. Style, then, cannot be an aesthetic
> concept. It refers to cultural attitudes and states of consciousness which encompass
> intellectual and aesthetic, political and scientific, assumptions and thoughts"[70].

It is in this way that Bal suggests, *art thinks*[71], which brings us full circle to Wölfflin's statement that *Vision itself has its history*. The philosopher Judith Butler observed that for Derrida *the*

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[66] Calabrese, Op. Cit., pxii

[67] Of course it cannot be certain as the *logic of* [a] *culture* […are] *never* [the] *unifying features of an epoch, but only of one style of thought and life that enters into a more or less productive conflict with others.* (Calabrese, pp.7-8). Also the coherence of a 'dominant' perspective or theory reveals the particular agenda of the individual framing it, as much as it might suggest a 'cultural mentality'; as Calabrese remarks:[…..] *every phenomenon undergoing analysis is inevitably constructed by the analyst* (Calabrese, p.21)

[68] Calabrese, Op. Cit., p.22

[69] Bal, Mieke, *Quoting Caravggio*: *Contemporary Art, Preposterous History*, The University of Chicago Press, London, p.3

[70] Bal, Ibid.., p.16

[71] Bal, Ibid., p.22

performative remains [….] *an utterance that recites an already established code[72].* In other words, the intelligibility of a work relies on the double root of its reiteration of the past and simultaneously with a new 'recitation' of it, (that suggests its rupture from, intervention with, or addition to the previously *established code*), as Bal explains:

> "[…] performative utterances cannot succeed unless they repeat – hence, quote – an already coded, iterable utterance"[73].

Taking Bal's lead, art's capacity to 'think' enables it to be treated as a material, embodied "iterable utterance that implies a pictorial vocabulary" (to repeat Holly's phrase) constructed from previously established forms. Whilst the central concern of this research is the reformulation and deployment of a Baroque poetics in painting redolent of the twenty-first century, this does not suggest a poetics in which the past is fixed or stable, but contingent upon the requirements of engaging with the twenty-first century; a contemporaneous quotation that is in open conversation with certain formal aspects, or *shared* concerns of painting from the seventeenth century. As Bal proposes:

> "According to disciplinary tradition, ideas are the domain of philosophy. But philosophy is not inclined to consider painting and sculpture, photography and installations, on a par with the texts of the great philosophical tradition. Rather, it tends to make painting the object of philosophical reflection, perhaps an example of its theses."[74]

QUOTATION: THE POETICS OF REPETITION

> "[…] to articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it 'the way it really was' [.....] but to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger."[75]
> (Roland Barthes)

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[72] Loizidou, Elana, *Judith Butler: Ethics, Law, Politics*, Routledge, 2007, p.34

[73] Bal, Op. Cit., p.14

[74] Bal, Ibid.., p.22

[75] Castillo, David, R., Baroque Horrors: Roots of the Fantastic in the Age of Curiosities, The University of Michigan Press, 2010, p.xi

According to Ndalianis this current "moment of danger" has materialised:

> "We have reached a point at which the old and the new coexist, when older
> paradigms that dominated throughout the modern era are being unsettled and
> contested. This is a time of cultural shift; chaos and uncertainty appear to reign –
> and from the ashes, a new order emerges."[76]

Less optimistic than Ndalianis, Baudrillard asserts that our current epoch signals "the end of history"[77]. The familiar rhetoric of genetic determinism in which the Baroque is the final stage of cultural decomposition still reverberates. Francesco Guardini maintains that the Baroque seventeenth century signalled the genesis of the modern period whilst the current Neo-Baroque signifies its Post-Modernist recession from modernity. Accordingly, the Neo-Baroque is currently held in a state of suspended animation: in the "eye of an epochal storm, in the middle of a gigantic transformation"[78] the effects of which will be experienced at all cultural, social and economic levels, and which will usher in centuries of chaos with democracy itself in peril. Certainly it would be difficult to deny the momentous changes that appear to be unfolding, but it is not the task of this research to speculate about consequences, either optimistic or negative.

William Egginton, is less implicated in the apocalyptic visions such 'end of time' theories naturally infer, although he nonetheless, like Guattari situates "Baroque and Neo-Baroque aesthetics as historical bookends to the modern period."[79] His conception equates the Baroque and the Neo-Baroque as mutually invested in a Baroque "aesthetics … engage[d] with the problem of thought endemic to modernity, and [in] doing so through a deployment of at least one of two strategies: the major or the minor"[80]. Egginton's 'major' and 'minor' strategies are distinctions borrowed from Deleuze and Guattari[81] who applied the terms to literature.   The 'major strategy' for Egginton, suggests a possible space, beyond the veil of appearances where truth resides.

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[76] Ndalianis, A., *NeopBaroque Aesthetics and Contemporary Entertainment*, MIT Press, London, p.22

[77] Ibid.

[78] Ibid.

[79] Egginton, Op. Cit., p.128

[80] Ibid.

[81] Deleuze, G., & Guattari, F, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, University of Minnesota Press, 1986

Whereas, the 'minor strategy' refuses the distinction between illusion and reality, by accepting that distortion *is* reality. For Egginton, the Baroque is essentially theatre as he says;

> "the Baroque makes a theatre out of truth, by incessantly demonstrating that truth
> can only ever be an effect of the appearances from which we seek to free it."*[82]*

Although he seldom mentions art, Egginton's thesis seems a particularly useful one in which to consider the formal similarities between the Baroque and the Neo-Baroque in painting, as this returns us to an ancient debate in which painting is deeply and personally implicated. One of the fundamental questions that an artist faces in regard to the nature of representation is the line between 'real life' and 'art', truth and illusion. And although we might think these questions as particularly pertinent to our troubled modernity, the problematic relationship between truth and illusion similarly disturbed and absorbed painters in the seventeenth century. And just as this "problem of thought" as it relates to the seventeenth century manifested in specific formal ways, so to, as Ndalianis contends, the Neo-Baroque displays "a complex order that relies on its own specific system of perception"[83]. The baroque continues to hold a peculiar fascination for many contemporary painters, which is perhaps not surprising given the prevalence of new virtual "pseudoworlds"[84] in which reality is increasingly mediated and fractured. I suggest it is precisely its artificiality, as Sarduy so astutely understood it, that generates the stutter of recognition between the seventeenth and the twenty-first centuries; the artifice characteristic of the Baroque period, parallels in the Neo-Baroque an aesthetic constructed by the new technologies of vision that reflect a significant change, not just in the nature of looking, but in relation to reality itself.

Quotation, as Mieke Bal suggests in *Quoting Caravaggio: Contemporary Art, Preposterous History*, is at the borderline between iconography and intertextuality. Here the use of the term intertextuality, coined by the Soviet philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin, refers to the signs generated by an earlier culture, which, operate as a kind of visual (albeit in his case linguistic) 'ready-made' for the artist in subsequent generations. There is a danger of course in this understanding; of

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[82] Egginton, Op. Cit., p.2

[83] Ndalianis, Op. Cit., p.23

[84] Debord, G., *Society of the Spectacle* (trans. Knabb, Ken), Rebel Press, London 1983, p.7

assigning a passive role to the artist whose work is dependent on prior forms. Baxandall however, persuasively suggests that the role of the later artist in reiterating the past, is via an active re-engagement with the past that necessarily makes origins problematic. As Baxandall illustrates, Picasso's preoccupation with African masks found an unexpected correspondence with Cezanne's central motif of 'cones, cylinders and spheres' which together, in turn, evolved into the "continuous superplane" of his cubist works. Looking at the process in the rear vision mirror, Cubism is understood as the conjoining of these two disparate elements which taken from their 'original' source transposed into Picasso's personal "universe of representation"[85]. In this way, later artists alter the frame through which we understand the art of the past in order to reformulate the present, as Baxandall makes clear:

> "And then again, by doing this he changed for ever the way we can see Cézanne (and African sculpture), whom we must see partly diffracted through Picasso's idiosyncratic reading: we will never see Cézanne undistorted by what, in Cézanne, painting after Cézanne has made productive in our tradition."[86]

Rather than considering the wall that history inevitably erects between interpreter and author, subject and object as a limitation, the inaccessibility to a fictive 'real' past is judged to be an enrichment of the present[87]. Bal thereby offers another way of 'doing history' that carries productive uncertainties and illuminating highlights – a vision of how to re-vision the Baroque. Re-visioning the Baroque via the modern idiom of the lens aesthetic in painting (or screen aesthetic as it is in the digital age) serves to make present certain parallels, shared concerns between painters in the seventeenth and twenty-first centuries, but also illuminates the profound discontinuities of the present from the past which make our own position in that complex web, *utterable*.

I've never had any interest in a costume drama reappropriation of the past, that might sometimes be associated with Postmodernism in which the past often appears to be presented too concretely, too fixed; as merely 'illustration' that assists an overly deterministic conception of both

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[85] Baxandall, M., *Patterns of Intention: On the Historical Explanation of Pictures*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1985, p.61

[86] Ibid., pp.61-62

[87] Bal, Op. Cit., p.7

past and present; in short "stably ordered" conceptions of both the past and the present.   The

strategy I prefer to adopt, in dealing with the past in the present, is an oblique quotation, in a

manner that is preferably sly and surreptitious, that by stealth adopts and subverts certain formal

stylistic qualities as diverse as the shifting mosaic of light and shade in Vermeer, the sense of

remoteness and composure of Willem Kalf and the cinematic abbreviations of light and agitated

movement found in Caravaggio into a different register of a mechanised "pseudoworld". These

concerns I see as being synchronous with the concerns of numerous contemporary painters as

diverse as Gerhard Richter, Ed Ruscha, Audrey Flack, Keith Tyson, Johannes Kahrs, to name a few.

This research therefore aims to shed light on how to re-classify the work of some key

contemporary painters, as Neo-Baroque, which in turn helps establish a common underlying

methodology amongst works that otherwise might seem stylistically, culturally, historically, and

geographically irreconcilable. In order to do so, the central motifs of the seventeenth century will

be conferred onto the late twentieth/ early twenty-first centuries. The impetus towards

'democratisation' in the seventeenth century in its broader appeal to disparate audiences as well

as the recurring formal concerns of theatricality, macrocosm/microcosm, perspective, light, scale

and the vanitas are the co-ordinates that will assist me in attempting to navigate amongst the

profuse constellations of thoughts and images, so as to attempt to articulate the neo-Baroque

aesthetic in the new digital universe - one that addresses the doubts, complexities and anxieties so

pertinent and particular to painting in the twenty-first century.

PART TWO : THE THEATRE OF THE EVERYDAY

Some of the most enduring examples of realist art were produced in the Baroque era during the seventeenth century. Despite the fact that a large part of the appeal of Baroque's brand of realism is its apparent fidelity to natural appearances, it is easy to overlook just how 'unnatural' Baroque 'naturalism' is. This chapter examines the 'constructedness' of Baroque realism that I suggest finds a striking correspondence in the neo-Baroque. This chapter will explore the artificial and self-consciously theatrical character of Baroque realism manifest in examples of both Baroque and neo-Baroque works, by considering three domains in which the Baroque attitude distinguishes itself from a Classicist organisation. These three focus areas which establish a works 'baroqueness' are revealed by investigating the particular manner in which the Baroque deals with 'subject matter', 'point of view' and the perennial preoccupation with blurring the boundaries between illusion and reality.

The vexed question of what constitutes art may seem the exclusive pre-occupation of relatively recent times. However, to those unfamiliar with the early modern period, it may be surprising to learn that "[…] endless discussions about what does or does not constitute art originated in the seventeenth century expansion of visual themes".[88] To begin therefore, I contend that the trend away from paintings with literary and religious themes towards a demand for depictions of more lowbrow subjects (landscape, portraiture, still life and genre) that was a critical feature of a pan-European revolution in art in the seventeenth century mirrors a similarly significant development in the neo-Baroque.   By following Norman Bryson's line of reasoning in which he draws upon Charles Sterlings two opposing terms, 'Megalography' and 'Rhopograhy' I assert that a parallel transformation has taken place in the neo-Baroque ocular regime which is broadly speaking, a technological one in which lens-based and digital images have provided a seemingly infinite expanse of subject matter for the neo-Baroque artist.

Secondly, socially less rigid conceptions of identity emerged in the seventeenth century that significantly distinguished it from previous periods. Compared with earlier periods, social roles

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[88] Sutherland Harris, Ann, *Seventeenth Century Art and Architecture*, Laurence King Publishing, 2005, p.xviii

were notably more mobile and fluid and with a marked importance placed on the perspective of the individual, the 'theatre of the self' also indicated a shift in the importance of the spectator's active role in the construction of meaning in the work. However, the rise of the individual in the seventeenth century was not just symptomatic of the first stirrings of secularisation in the trend away from the public to the private sphere and from church and courtly patronage to mercantile and middle class interests, but also presented something of a paradox. An increased individuation was also set against the background of the simultaneous rise of absolute rule and programmes of censorship throughout much of Europe. In other words, the fracturing of the individual identity from the communal that marked the Baroque as fundamentally divergent from earlier periods is surprisingly resonant within the current neo-Baroque existential landscape. With reference to Alois Riegl, and in contrast to Michael Fried's Classicist, anti-theatrical readings, it will be demonstrated that the spectator in Baroque 'realism' is suddenly, implicitly internal as well as external to the pictorial frame of the work, the effect of which is to create an instability in which both subject and object become contested and uncertain.

Also strikingly analogous to the Baroque therefore, is the theatricality of the neo-Baroque. In the complex labyrinth of the online central nervous system, the individual is self-consciously, up front and centre stage. However, the vast online transnational network of connections between the particularized and private is also set against the background of a corresponding rise in the hegemony of collective and public mechanisms of control. Furthermore, it seems undeniably evident that the chief instrument for maintaining this hegemony is the omnipresence of the technological, lens-based visual logic of mass communications that have collapsed the frame separating high from low culture and 'real life' from simulation. For these reasons, I propose that the current manifestation of the Baroque defines itself primarily in painting through the metaphor of a 'lens aesthetic'.

Plate 4: Johannes Vermeer, *The Little Street*, c1657-8, Oil on canvas, 54.3 x 44 cm, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

PART TWO : THE THEATRE OF THE EVERYDAY

CHAPTER TWO : MEGALOGRAPHY AND RHOPOGRAPHY

"[…..] when you are looking at the originals, you seem to be looking at the copies; and when you are looking at the copies, you seem to be looking at the originals. Is it a canal-side in Haarlem, or is it a Van der Heyden? Is it a priceless Hobbema, or is it a meagre pastoral vista, stretching away from the railway track? The maid-servants in the streets seem to have stepped out of the frame of a Gerard Dow, and appear equally adapted for stepping back again. You have to rub your eyes to ascertain their normal situation. And so you wander about, with art and nature playing so assiduously into each other's hands that your experience of Holland becomes something singularly compact and complete in itself – striking no chords that lead elsewhere, and asking no outside help to unfold itself. […..] But to enjoy the Low Countries, we have to put on a very particular pair of spectacles and bend our nose well over our task, and, beyond our consciousness that our gains are real gains, remain decidedly at a loss how to classify them."[89]

The quote above is taken from Henry James' travel diary of 1875 in which he recorded his response to both the Dutch national character and Dutch 17th century painting. James, who was deeply ambivalent about both, agonised over the line drawn between 'real life' and art, reality and illusion, transcription and composition which Dutch seventeenth century paintings exemplify. These seemingly exact facsimiles of reality presented apparently without alteration or interpretation, raise the question; where does art situate itself between the world and our perception of it? Through the prism of Classicist discourse, the 'difficulties' that Baroque conceptions of the world provoke is in trying to categorise an art that adheres merely to the close observation of appearances. It reminds us of old philosophical polarities regarding representation such as 'realism' versus 'illusion'; 'composition' versus 'transcription'; 'feeling' versus 'intellect' and so on.   A pre-occupation and anxiety regarding the question of representation is introduced in this chapter and extended throughout this thesis as a central and defining motif of the baroque mentality.

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[89] James, Henry, 'In Holland', *Transatlantic Sketches*, J. R Osgood and Company, Boston, 1875, pp.382-384

Although we tend to view the widespread concern with questions of where to draw the line between concrete and simulated reality as a unique and distinguishing feature of the digital age, it was one that also occupied a considerable amount of critical, philosophic and creative attention during the seventeenth century. Heinrich Wölfflin in his study of the Baroque identified the tendency to confound reality and illusion as the defining characteristic of the Baroque in contrast to the Renaissance; that is the Baroque's marked taste for engagement in the binary opposition "between the ontological and the epistemological – between 'things as they are' and 'things as they seem"[90]. If we are to gain a more nuanced understanding of the Baroque and by extension the neo-Baroque one must bear this characteristic in mind, and dispense with clichéd conceptions that perceive the Baroque as merely decorative, ornamental, florid, ostentatious and so on. These characteristics applied too narrowly fail to account for the Baroque's stylistic heterogeneity, the most immediate example of which would be Vermeer and Caravaggio in the historic Baroque. Similarly, in the neo-Baroque terms such as 'excess and flamboyance' may be applicable to a degree in some examples, such as Marilyn Minter, or Keith Tyson, but are not sufficient to explain and link diverse artists such as Gerhard Richter or George Shaw. And yet, this thesis contends that just as in the historic Baroque the contemporary landscape represents a paradigm of diverse manifestations of the neo-Baroque pre-occupations with point of view, the role of the spectator and the line between reality and illusion. A more sophisticated picture of the Baroque therefore, can be drawn from considering the fundamental ways in which the Baroque diverged from Renaissance ideals in the first instance.

Broadly speaking, western art has aligned itself with the essentially Platonic concerns embodied in the Italian narrative tradition of history painting, that in general might be said to favour the verbal over the visual experience, imagination over description, idealisation over transcription and so on. Where the Renaissance provided the exemplary model of this tradition, the Baroque, beginning with Caravaggio at the end of the sixteenth century in Rome, marked an acute and far-reaching interruption to this dominant aesthetic. If Classicism most esteemed the idealised, imaginary and highbrow in art, the Baroque by contrast was, as Kerry Downes observed "… an art related more immediately to the beholder than to abstract principles"[91]. A major component of this shift is evident in the adoption of a fresh approach to subject matter that reflected a broader audience

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[90] Geraghty, Anthony, "Nicholas Hawksmoor's Drawing Technique of the 1690s and John Locke's Essay 'Concerning Human Understanding'", from Rethinking the Baroque, Hills, Helen, (Ed), Ashgate Publishing, 2011, p.125
[91] Downes, K., "Baroque", from The Dictionary of Art, vol. 3, ed. Jane Turner, Grove, 1996, p.268

base for not merely art, but for the full gamut of cultural products in the seventeenth century (ranging from literature, music, philosophy, religious enquiry, natural science and so on).

It would be hard to overestimate how profoundly the expansion of subject matter transformed art in the seventeenth century. Strictly speaking however, a key feature of the Baroque can be located not so much in a shift away from the idealised, but in conflating the ineffable and abstract with the concrete realities of lived experience. As John Berger suggests, the "Baroque wanted to turn the earth-bound into the celestial, and to make human figures appear as at home in the sky as on the ground."[92] The seventeenth century saw the democratisation of heaven, in which street urchins were cast as cupid, prostitutes the virgin Mary, labourers, St Matthew and so on. From its beginnings however Baroque realism had its staunch critics. The more Classically inclined Baroque artist Poussin famously declared that "Caravaggio […] had come into the world to destroy painting."[93] The central problem that Caravaggio raises (as did, in a wider sense, Baroque art in general) is in regard to the nature of the reality he presents: "When did he simply depict what he had in front of him and when did he turn to his imagination?"[94]

What had been most unsettling for James regarding Dutch seventeenth century painting, was its resistance to idealisation; its apparently unabridged, unmediated 'realism'. The supreme classicist, Joshua Reynolds wrote scathingly of Dutch art in 1781 that "It is to the eye only that the works of this school are addressed"[95]. James' impression of Holland is as he says, "exactly, to the letter, what one expects them to be" and, he continues,

> "If you come this way, as I did, chiefly with an eye to Dutch pictures, your first acquisition is a sense, no longer an amiable inference, but a direct perception, of the undiluted accuracy of Dutch painters. You have seen it all before; it is vexatiously familiar; it was hardly worthwhile to have come!"[96]

The classicist school of thought places importance in an aesthetic hierarchy that privileges the unique, the grand, the heroic, the frightening, the cautionary, the instructive and so forth. In

[92] Campbell, Neil, *The rhizomatic West: representing the American West in a transational, global, media age*, University of Nebraska Press, 2008, p.213
[93] Marin, L., *To Destroy Painting*, University of Chicago Press, 1995, p.3
[94] Varriano, John, *Caravaggio: The Art of Realism*, Pennsylvania, State University Press, 2006, p.2
[95] Alpers, Svetalana, 'Introduction', *The Art of Describing*, The University of Chicago Press, 1983, pxviii
[96] James, Henry, Op. Cit., p.382

history painting, to narrate is therefore to discriminate between the important and the unimportant. History painting, by privileging some things as more important, generates wastelands of the insignificant, the irrelevant, the trivial. Norman Bryson draws upon Charles Sterling's two opposing terms 'megalography' and 'rhopography' to distinguish between the differing 'agendas' of History painting and that of the lesser categories such as still life and genre painting. Megalography denotes the heroic, grand narrative of history painting, whilst Rhopography denotes the trivial, the unimportant, the overlooked[97].

As James so keenly observed, the Dutch displayed a preference for the Rhopographic in their "[.....] relish of the harmonies of the minor key; [whereby one is] persuaded to respect small things and take note of small differences [.....]" For James, it was the Dutch reverence for the inconsequential that reversed the established order of history painting in which "beauty [.....] is not beauty; [.....] ugliness [.....] is not ugliness; [....and] the poetry [.....] is prose, and the prose [.....] is poetry [.....]"[98]. What characterised the Dutch bourgeois mentality was its focus on the trivialities of day-to-day existence and on the appearance of things; "the stretch of whole provinces on the principles of a billiard-table" as James remarked. In portraying the Dutch, as a petty minded "people who cover their books with white paper and find occasion for a week's conversation in a mysterious drop of candle-grease on a tablecloth [.....]"[99], he was reinstating the edicts of classicist taste that was predominantly more academic, educated and exclusive and which was allied to a regime that was concerned with more worldly and important matters than mere appearances.

In *The Little Street*, women busy themselves with the menial task of daily chores and children bend absorbed in concentration over a game with their backs to us, but it is the catatonic façade of the building that seems to return our gaze rather than its human protagonists. The abrupt cropping of the painting that restricts a complete reading of the architectural context to only a partial glimpse, intensifies the feeling of an apparently 'artless', arbitrary arrangement. The incompleteness suggests in itself that the world extends beyond the arbitrary framing in the picture. This view (one of any number potentially similar views) depicts the commonplace and the predictable routine of everyday life in which the people appear to be no more than minor players. *The Little Street* thereby presents difficulties as to how to 'read' any narrative intent in the conventional

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[97] Bryson, Norman, *Looking at the Overlooked*, Reaktion Books Ltd., London, 1990
[98] James, Henry, Op. Cit., p.383
[99] James, Henry, Ibid., p.387

sense. There is a kind of even-ness of painterly attention paid to the surface in which the brickwork is as important as any figurative element. In Vermeer's treatment, figures are minor details in a seamless arrangement of seemingly superfluous information in which the eye finds no easy resting place. In this painterly 'even-handedness', no particularity establishes itself as more worthy of our attention than any other, almost as if viewing directly for the first time, that moment prior to our understanding or interpretation of the scene. Here the rhopographic subverts history painting's impost to the grand narratives of heroic action in which man's importance and uniqueness is central. *The Little Street* by contrast depicts anonymity, the commonplace and the unexceptional. Where rhopographic imagery relishes "the 'so what?'"[100], megalography employs:

> "[…..] a mode of seeing which thinks it knows in advance what is worth looking at and what is not: against that, the image presents the constant surprise of things seen for the first time. Sight is taken back to a vernal stage before it learned how to scotomise the visual field, how to screen out the unimportant and not 'see', but scan."[101]

Of course, the obvious descendants of this heritage are the Impressionists. When George Bataille declared Manet the exemplar of a 'new' methodology in painting in which the importance of the 'subject' had diminished almost to non-existence his description might equally have been applied to Vermeer (an artist who not coincidentally had, in the mid-nineteenth century only recently been 'recovered' from the obliterations of classicist historical discourse) [102]. As Bataille remarks:

> "What Manet insisted on, uncompromisingly, was an end to rhetoric in painting. What he insisted upon was painting that should rise in utter freedom, in natural silence, painting for its own sake, a song for the eyes of interwoven forms and colours. [And he further adds]: To some extent every picture has its subject, its title, but now these have shrunk to insignificance; they are mere pretexts for the painting itself."[103]

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[100] Bryson, Op. Cit., p.61
[101] Bryson, ibid., p65
[102] in a chapter titled 'The Destruction of the Subject' from his study, *Manet* (1955)
[103] Reed, Arden, 'Framing Manet and Flaubert', *Manet, Flaubert, and the Emergence of Modernism: Blurring Genre Boundaries*, Cambridge University Press, 2005, p.3

Roland Barthes' definition of the 'real' is that it: "[…] be self-sufficient, [and…] strong enough to belie any notion of 'function,' that its 'speech-act' has no need to be integrated into a structure and [that] the *having-been-there* of things is […] sufficient"[104]. Citing literary examples from Flauberts' Madame Bovary and Michelet's Histoire de France Barthes describes the apparent display of gratuitous detail in these texts as a kind of narrative luxury that doesn't further the overall structure of the plot but which produces an impression of the faithful, objective, unmediated record of the real: of its 'reality effect'.   The "significance of this insignificance"[105], as Barthes suggests, is the opacity of authorial intention. In other words, the meaning of a density of inconsequential descriptive passages (The Little Street by example) signify that:

> "[…] its structure is purely summatory and does not contain that trajectory of choices
> and alternatives which gives narration the appearance of a huge traffic-control
> centre."[106]

Under these conditions, the 'real' resists the idealist aesthetic of selection and discrimination as opposed to the baroque aesthetic of seeming indifference in which the indiscriminate, fragmentary and inadvertent take centre stage. Where unmediated description suggests the 'it was here', the "[…] motto implicit on the threshold of all classical discourse (subject to the ancient idea of verisimilitude) is: 'Esto' (let there be, suppose…)."[107]

If the historic baroque orientation of taste, in contrast to classicist principles, favours the more prosaic concerns of an everyday, earthbound reality, then a similar programme of democratisation might be said to apply to photography. In photography's rhopographic creed everything is theoretically worthy of attention thereby destabilising the order of artistic hierarchies. The mere sense of photography's limitlessness of subject matter is therefore, perhaps unsurprisingly, an apt departure point in the neo-baroque aesthetic, particularly pertinent to painting with its long history as the very symbol of exclusivity and the highbrow. As Sontag says;

> "The traditional fine arts are elitist: their characteristic form is a single work,
> produced by an individual; they imply a hierarchy of subject matter in which some

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[104] Barthes, Roland, (Translated by Richard Howard), *The Rustle of Language,* University of California Press, 1989, p.146
[105] Barthes, Ibid.
[106] Barthes, Ibid.
[107] Barthes, Ibid.

subjects are considered important, profound, noble and others unimportant, trivial, base. …[photography is] democratic: [it weakens].. the role of the specialised producer or auteur (by using procedures based on chance, or mechanical techniques which anyone can learn; and by being corporate or collaborative efforts); they regard the whole world as material. The traditional fine arts rely on the distinction between original and copy, between good taste and bad taste …"[108].

Where the connection to the baroque may not be immediately transparent in the work of many contemporary painters or in my own work, it is self-evident in the work of Audrey Flack. Flack is furthermore someone who is forthright about the reasons for her choice of subject matter being those allied with a desire for democratization when she states:

"Every artist has an audience in mind for his or her work. James Joyce created 'Finnegans Wake' for the few who would take the time and effort to sort through volumes of material in order to comprehend a line. I hope to reach many people, all at their own level. The Shakespearean plays, which are still being interpreted by scholars, were instantly understood by the people of his time. To quote Cliff Joseph of The Black Emergency Cultural Coalition, "The power of Art belongs to the people."[109]

Both the baroque and the neo-baroque reveal that: "Taste could not be divorced from politics. Indeed, taste was politics."[110] Although I have reservations about the possibility of ceding 'power to the people' through the adoption of particular subject matter, it is hard to envisage something more offensive to the classicist cannons of 'tastefulness'. Flack's images are a mélange of identifiably 1970s motifs, abstracted from cookbooks, magazine clippings, playing cards, plastic fruit, baubles, etc. that embrace the pervasive fakery of the late twentieth/ early twenty-first century, transmitted via the medium of the lens aesthetic:

"At first I painted in a naturalistic lime colour, but when completed, it was super-intensely green. It reads to the viewer as a highly realistic fruit. It is, however, more real than real. It is not realistic at all. I had had the experience of seeing full-colour reproductions in art books and then seeing the original paintings, which paled in

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[108] Sontag, Susan, *'Photographic Evangels', On Photography*, Penguin Group, London, 1979, p149
[109] Flack, Audrey, (Introductions: Lawrence Alloway and Ann Sutherland Harris), *Audrey Flack: On Painting*, Harry N. Abrams, Inc., New York, p.31
[110] Saisselin, Remy, p.44

comparison to the reproductions. I did not want that to happen to my work. I also
realized how accustomed our eyes have become to intense colour. Kodacolour blue
sky is hardly natural. TV colour is not realistic."[111]

Photography engages with the rhopographic capacity to encompass a potentially limitless range of
subjects. Although when referring to the medium of 'photography' it is implicitly understood that
it is not a solitary, isolated medium divorced from lived experience, and is an integral part of the
ubiquitous universe of mass produced 'lens-formulated' images. It is this universe to which
Richard Hamilton referred when he perceived a distinct historical turning point that paralleled a
dramatically increased awareness of not just photography but the enveloping and encircling sea of
mass culture, as he reflects:

"In the fifties we became more aware of the possibility of seeing the whole world, at
once, through the great visual matrix that surrounds us, a synthetic 'instant' view.
Cinema, television, magazines, newspapers flooded the artist with a total landscape
and this new visual ambience was photographic…"[112]

The assimilation of a lens aesthetic into painting was a phenomena that, it has been suggested,
commenced in the nineteenth century[113], but which became increasingly insistent in the 1950s
and 60s. However, it was never an ideologically neutral-free zone for the adoption of merely
novel stylistic effects in painting. Like any pictorial system the photographic mode embodies
broad and diverse political attitudes. As Barbara Maria Stafford says, the intermingling of both
newly evolving and old media inevitably reveals and questions not only "what it is possible to see
but also determine[s] what can be thought"[114]. Painting incorporating a lens aesthetic mirrors the
"new visual ambience" in which the borders between high and low culture are blurred. It is also
the vehicle for a renewal of old themes in a contemporary vernacular, such as the baroque re-
presentations of Richter's *Lesende*, (1994). A faint echo of Vermeer's *Lady in Blue Reading a Letter*

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[111] Flack, Audrey, Op. Cit., p.29
[112] Hamilton, Richard, (Rugoff, Ralph; Hancock, Caroline; McCracken, Siobhan; Christov-Bakargiev, Carolyn); The Painting
of Modern Life, Hayward Publishing, 2007
[113] Scharp, Aaron, *Art and Photography*, Penguin, 1986
[114] Stafford, Barbara Maria, 'Revealing Technologies / Magical Domains', *Devices of Wonder: From the World in a Box to
Images on a screen*, Getty Publications, 2002, p.1
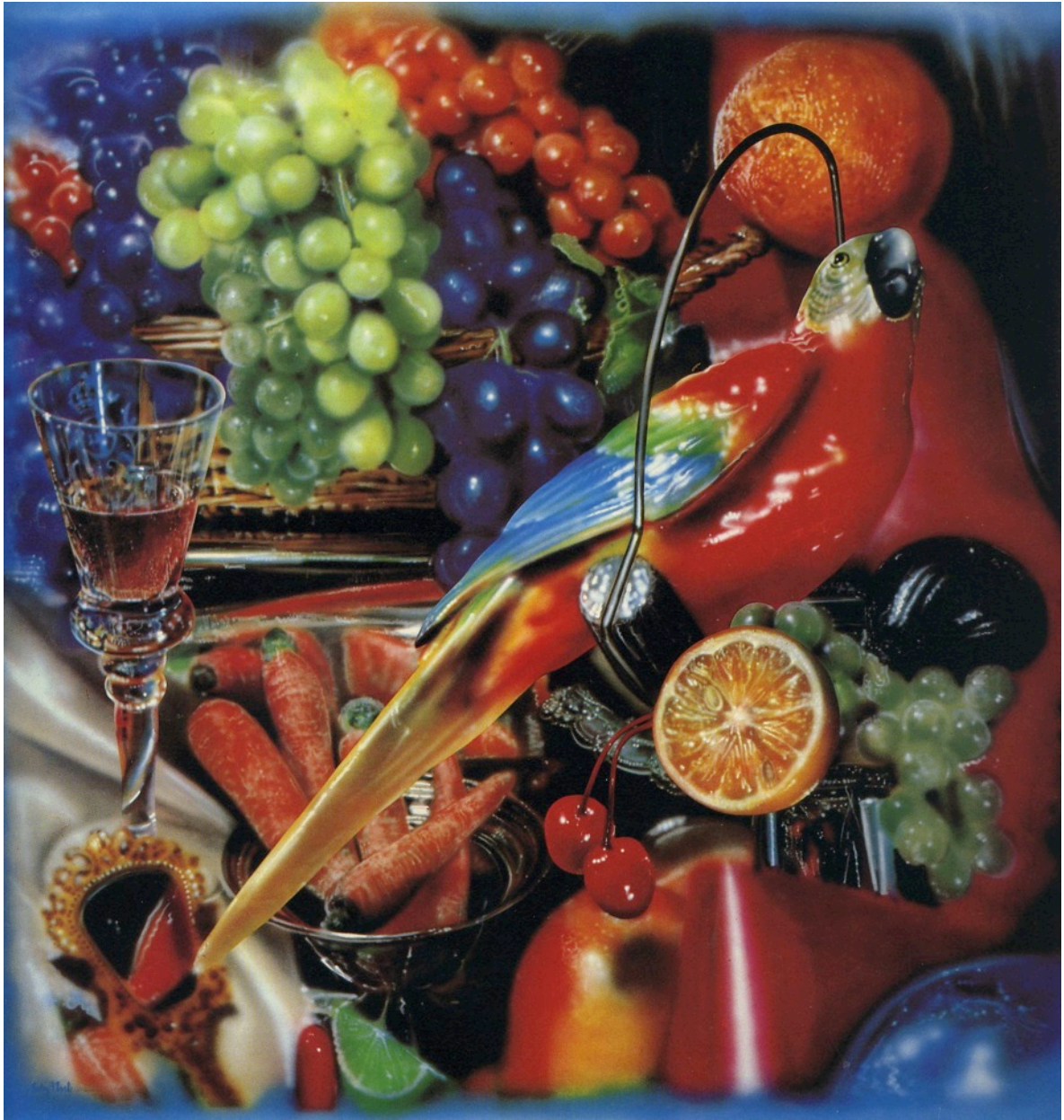
Plate: 5   © Audrey Flack, *Parrots Live Forever*, 1978, Oil and synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 211.2 x 211.2cm,
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

in Richter's treatment has transformed the original through the variably focussed lens and lugubriously, over-saturated magenta that distinguishes it from merely fine art and painting, into a contemporary motif of a snapshot image universally familiar in its portrayal of ordinary and unremarkable, private moments that are scattered over the course of everyone's lives. Richter's

paintings borrow from photographic vision, its very particular, circumscribed perspective of reality.

Photography, as Richter states:

> […] had to be more relevant to me than art history: it was an image of my, our,
> present-day reality. And I did not take it as a substitute for reality but as a crutch to
> help me get to reality.[115]

Similarly, rather than following the predictable trajectory of a conventional art training Ed

Ruscha's declared interest in mass culture initially lead him to enrol in illustration and design at

Chouinard Art Institute (now CalArts) in Los Angeles (an institution that had an established

association with the industries of Hollywood). From early on Ruscha cites the broad mix of popular

culture, from sources as diverse as Norman Rockwell to postage stamps; from Look and Life

magazines, to bill boards and advertising, as having been far more significant than the "the holy

world of painting"[116]. It was seeing a painting by Jasper Johns in 1957 however that persuaded

him to be a fine artist. Recognising a 'kinship' with pop artists Ruscha was similarly attracted to

the vernacular photographic imagery as a pretext for an art that, as he said, "[…] didn't seem to

follow the history of art"[117] and which certainly wasn't endorsed by his teachers. In fact, as Ruscha

explicitly states: "My teachers said it was *not* art." [Ruscha's emphasis][118]

In this cultural zeitgeist, photography operates outside the parameters set by classicist discourse

that decides what is worth looking at and by whom. As such everything is potentially subject

matter for painting as Richter suggests when he states;

> "Do you know what was great? Finding out that a stupid, ridiculous thing like
> copying a postcard could lead to a picture. And then the freedom to paint whatever
> you felt like. Stags, aircraft, kings, secretaries. Not having to invent anything any
> more […]"[119]

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[115] Richter, Gerhard, Obrist, Hans-Ulrich (Ed.), translated by Britt, David, *The Daily Practice of Painting : Writings and Interviews 1962-1993,* MIT Press, 1998
[116] Ruscha, Ed., (Schwartz, A. ed.), 'Ed Ruscha, Young Artist: Dead Serious About Being Nonsensical', from *Leave any Information at the Signal*, MIT Press, 2002, p.228
[117] Ruscha, Ed., (Schwartz, A. ed.), Ibid.
[118] Ruscha, Ed., Ibid.
[119] Richter**,** Op. Cit., p33

The baroque modus operandi is a direct appeal to the mind via the senses; as Francis Bacon once asserted: "Painting is the pattern of one's own nervous system being projected on canvas"[120]. Though my work differs markedly from Bacon's, in parallel, my intention one way or another has always been to draw from the immediacy of everyday, *lived* experience - to paint from snapshots without any overt ideological intention other than to assert the visceral sense that 'it was here' – myself as evidenced through the amorphous, shifting chains of sense perception, and back again[121].

The first step in the procedure I generally follow is to accumulate hundreds of snapshots from which only a few will ever be transcribed into paint. Initially I photographed whilst driving through the city as I deliberately wanted to replicate the sense of speeding through a familiar landscape in which the snapshot is a means by which to fix the image and separate it from the flux of appearances. Often (although not always) a defining characteristic of the images selected for painting are that they are equivocal, indistinct. Another recurrent characteristic in choosing images to paint is that they demonstrate (to me anyway) an instantaneous and strong visual or physical appeal: a gaudy blaze of light or colour, a sense of movement from stillness, an abrupt stutter of intelligibility from an image otherwise confused, murky.

The reliance on the cumulative litter of snapshots as the primary means of generating subject matter for painting parallels a lack concern for the 'worthiness' of subject matter or even about whether the body of works ultimately subscribe to an overarching conceptual uniformity, worked out in advance. This approach relies on a kind of faith that something intelligible, something 'meaningful' will inevitably emerge from form itself. There is in this sense no subject undeserving of attention. As Richter says, "The issue of content is thus nonsense; i.e., there is nothing *but* form. There is only 'something': there is only what there is"[122]. Abhorrent to Richter is "the message craft"[123] of a type of art that attempts to make "form [...] fit a literary idea"[124]. The unifying principle for me has always been procedural therefore. Rather than the rigid imposition of an idea into the pictorial realm, I try to employ a strategy that might enable me to remain open and receptive to something unexpected, to postpone final judgement in the hope that I can

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[120] Sylvester, David, *Modern Art: From Fauvism to Abstract* Expressionism, 'Francis Bacon', University of Michigan, p.1966
[121] Benjamin, Op. Cit.
[122] Ricter, Gerhard, Op. Cit., p.128
[123] Ricter, Gerhard, Ibid.
[124] Ricter, Gerhard, Ibid., p.127

introduce something larger than my own sensibility and the familiar thing. I continually gravitate towards images of things I might otherwise have overlooked or ignored, if not for the snapshot. Perhaps choosing to paint insignificant details and the mundane is at some level a calculated attempt to draw attention to the *inattention* in the confusion of everyday life.

The primary characteristic in the process of selecting images to work from is that the image dictates an insistence to be painted, although that characteristic is difficult to define as I accept also that my perception at any given moment as to what is noteworthy is contingent and inherently unstable. Therefore, the process of selection is often a protracted entailing sifting, sorting, re-sorting, filing, after which an image that displays potential is put to one side. I select images ultimately only if they seem to resurface in my consciousness: if they stubbornly persist to clammer for attention. This process is similar to the procedure Elisabeth Peyton describes when she remarks:

> "I can't really say how I choose an image to work from. Usually it is a picture I can't stop thinking about. …. Paintings have the ability to be a site for many ideas, where emotions can be distilled over a period of time. And, without thinking about it, there appears a translation of a photo – viewed – re-seen in the brain via the hand, with help from the memory. I want to slow down the reading of an image: I want to say, this is important – look at this. I prefer working from photos that are incidental and anecdotal, rather than formal."[125]

George Shaw's work similarly employs a neo Baroque eye to recording the superfluous minutiae of appearance in the familiar scenes of British council estates; here specifically Tile Hill, one of the first post-war council estates in Coventry where Shaw spent his early formative years from 1976 to 1985. Having left the area in his late teens to study art, Shaw returned post art school to paint the scenes of his childhood, but from the perspective of the present. Shaw similarly shoots hundreds of snapshots of a subject but will in the end work from only a select few. Although he paints mostly the familiar and nondescript left over spaces of modernist architecture, the delicacy of treatment and the use of humbrol enamel paint imbues the ordinary with a jewel-like otherworldly quality. The places portrayed are reminiscent of those scanned in the background of cop shows; the scenes seem to present us with background details; the location shots of grunge

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[125] Peyton, Elizabeth, from Rugoff, Ralph; Op. Cit., 2007

films, grimy documentaries, crime scene investigations. However, here Shaw enigmatically presents us with the empty stage minus their protagonists. The erasure of any signs of human life compounds a sense of *the what-if?;* of the depersonalized, the unexceptional, the nameless as Bryson says: "Anonymity replaces narrative's pursuit of the unique life and its adventures."[126] Comparable with Shaw, behind the mask of apparent superficial differences in treatment and subject matter, my work similarly reflects on the question of representation, on the nature of the commonplace, the customary; the 'pre-sets' of lived experience.

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[126] Bryson, Norman, Op. Cit., p.61

Plate 6: © George Shaw, Scenes from the Passion: Late, 2002, Humbrol enamel on board, 92 x 121cm, Tate Gallery,

London, sourced from : http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/shaw-scenes-from-the-passion-late-t07945

Plate 7: ©George Shaw, Scenes from the Passion, *The Blossomiest Blossom,* 2001, Humbrol enamel on board, 44 x 53cm,

image sourced from The British Council: http://www.homelandsindia.com/George-Shaw
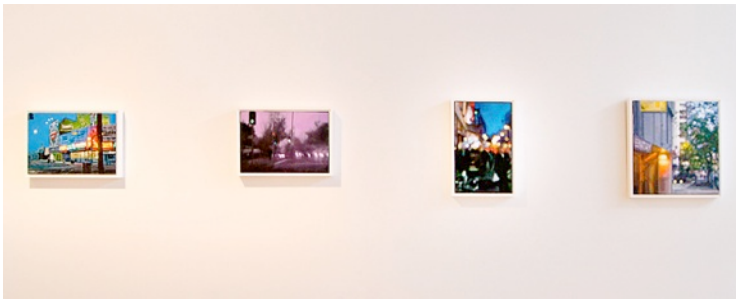
Plate 8: Fiona Greenhill, installation shot of (from left to right): *Out of Season*, 2012, Oil and acrylic on canvas, 25 x 36cm; *Newcastle Nocturne*, 2012, Oil and acrylic on canvas, 25 x 36cm; *Night Markets,* London, 2012, 36 x 25cm; and *Entry Point*, 2012, Oil and acrylic on linen, 40 x 40cm

Plate 9: Fiona Greenhill,, The Day begins, 2009, Oil and acrylic on canvas, 25 x 36cm

Paintings, such as *The Day Begins*, *Newcastle Nocturne*, *Night Markets, Out of Season and Entry Point* were part of a conscious return to working in a smaller more modest scale (something akin to the unassuming scale of Dutch seventeenth century paintings) and in a similar manner to an earlier series that originally began around 1999/2000 but from which the thrust of larger, more recent PhD work had moved away from. The initial impetus to paint small-scale ornate, consciously 'pretty' paintings was tied up with an urge to paint something contrary to the heroic dimensions of what I perceived as a broadly very masculine, non-figurative training I had received in undergraduate, circa 1980s Australia. Developing as an artist in an atmosphere broadly antagonistic to painting realistically and particularly from photographs, it seemed at the time that the focus was narrowly on a modernist programme that to my sensibility never felt very authentic: painting as the empty exercise of choosing between styles; the either/or of Abstract

Expressionism, Expressionism, Minimalism, Conceptualism and so on. Reading Ed Ruscha's

statement about his antipathy to the attitude of Abstract Expressionism resonated strongly with

my own experience;

> "They would say, face the canvas and let it happen, follow your own gestures, let the
> painting create itself. But I'd always have to think up something first. If I didn't, it
> wasn't art to me. Also it looked real dumb. They wanted to collapse the whole art
> process into one act; I wanted to break it into stages, which is what I do now.
> Whatever I do now is completely premeditated, however off-the-wall it might be.
> [Ruscha's emphasis]"[127]

At first glance, it may seem as though Ruscha's work springs from a different ideological planet

from my own practice. However, in the broadest sense, analogous to Ruscha, planning, as

opposed to 'letting it happen' has always been integral to the process. Also of fundamental

importance is the necessity to dissect the process of painting into its component parts as it relates

to each individual painting; a deliberate and systematic strategy of working firstly from source

material, to drawing, to tonal underpainting and then to the final layers; in other words, mostly

working in a modified idiosyncratic version of the conventional dead colouring technique that

separates out the different stages of the art process into its constituent parts in order to deal with

each separately, as opposed to the more contemporary 'premier coup' (from the French meaning,

'first cut') method which broadly aims at dealing with things 'all at once'. In opposition to the

heroic ideal of expressing an interior vision outwardly in the absence of something prior (be it

idea, plan or form), it is important to adopt a procedure, to throw a methodological net in the

general vicinity of the subject – to start with things pre-existing *in* the universe, rather than to

draw from immaterial archetypes and/or affect internal to the individual. My rationale is one that

studiously separates and displaces pre-existing objects from the everyday and the world at large

so as to transpose these into the alternate universe of paint.

The procedure I employed in first developing this series was to take snapshots mostly using a

macro lens, whilst driving through the city. I found this a helpful strategy at the time as it curtailed

my ability to consciously 'frame' the photographs or impose a prescribed 'idea', beyond the

obvious imposition of a mechanism for generating images. The process is in a way a contradiction

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[127]Ruscha, Ed., (Schwartz, A. ed.), Op. Cit., p.228

in terms as it is a calculated attempt to produce images that generally appear to be unplanned and arbitrary. Although they are of course, planned and strategic, what I liked particularly was that it created an impression – the semblance of the haphazard, the kitsch, the untidy appearance of lived experience without explanation. Rather than adopting the sanitised pre-packaged affectation of an essentially classicist style that somehow seemed intellectually remote from day to day *concrete* reality and which dealt with invisible abstractions, the series expanded from the rhopographic impulse to pick over the debris of *real* life.   Although the recent work is more ambitious in scale and encompasses a more diverse range of subjects the rhopographic inclination towards unadorned, unembellished mess is still key to their underlying motivation.

The series of smaller PhD works were devised, not as single works, but as a totality – a series seen collectively as a scattered, assemblage of fragments*.* Similar to Dutch seventeenth century art, the adoption of a diffuse view expanded over a series of works in an unobtrusive scale, portrays life in *'the minor key'.* Rather than the epically grand scale and effusively emotional tenor of a more Classical approach, the intention with these smaller works is to draw attention to the proliferation of mere 'details'. They diverge from classicist ideals by intentionally promoting the trivial and the unremarkable, both in scale and subject matter. Furthermore, a central and recurrent theme in all my work is the premeditated aim to apportion equal attention to figurative elements as to what might conventionally be considered inconsequential features (buildings, streets, trees, street lights, etc.). Indeed, the blinking of a traffic light or the flash of glare caught in the headlights of a car are frequently given more prominence in the register of grey scale to hue than are given to the anonymous, fluid, shifting forms of passers-by. Whilst buildings and natural objects have a certain material, identifiable presence, people are merely spectral flickerings across the surface. Though my work might superficially appear to be fundamentally and stylistically different to the examples of Ruscha, Shaw or Vermeer, they are nonetheless, painted in the same register. Although impossible to talk with certainty about Vermeer's intentions, the effect of *The Little Street*, (or *View of Delft*) and the other examples recently cited is to diminish the importance of the human in a limitless universe of equally unimportant, small, particulars.

This portrayal of ambivalence towards the question of humanity's significance in a sea of inanimate objects is also a means by which to impartially examine people, as, 'objects'. The 'objectification' of figurative elements or indeed their diminishment or erasure (and implied

presence through absence as in the examples of Ruscha and Shaw for instance), induces a self-conscious loop back towards the beholder whose ambiguous role in the act of viewing, I intend to argue in the next section, is a peculiarity of, and therefore, key to the Baroque aesthetic. The paradox of course at the heart of a project that seeks to apply an overarching 'objective' eye to concrete reality can often engender an increasing sense of the unreliability of material reality and the partisanship of the individual perspective. The repressed shadow that lies at the heart of Descartes rationalist programme is the contingent perspective of the individual and the acknowledged artificiality of the 'frame' and it is for this reason that the ambiguous role of the spectator is a recurrent theme in the Baroque aesthetic as it is similarly in the Neo-Baroque with its trust to devices and stratagems devised in order to get to a reality that seems unsettlingly more remote and inaccessible.

PART TWO : THE THEATRE OF THE EVERYDAY

CHAPTER THREE : THEATRICALITY AND ANTI-THEATRICALITY

It could be said that the leitmotif of the twenty-first century, in the ever-expanding "dazzling theatre of simulations"[128], is the declining faith in objective reality. At the very centre of this problematic blurring of the boundary between simulation and truth, is the role of the spectator: how far to trust to appearances as objective, verifiable truth or 'reality' as merely a product of the mind's eye; the subjective, internal state of the individual?

If we rewind briefly back to the seventeenth century however, we find the antecedents of this existential crisis. If the Renaissance established "the rationalisation of sight"[129] as William M. Ivins phrased it, through the development of mathematical and empirical systems for the visual representation of objective reality, then conversely, the Baroque was a period in which confidence in objective reality was markedly unsettled and contested; when the paradox between the 'world as it is' and the 'world as it appears to be' became an increasingly urgent theoretical, philosophical and theological problem. In his book, '*Vanities of the Eye: Vision in Early Modern European Culture*', Stuart Clark outlines the erosion of confidence in vision's ability to provide direct access to objective reality in the seventeenth century. This occurred not abruptly but was a slow accumulation over a 250 year period roughly from the 1450s onwards, that reached its apotheosis by the mid seventeenth century. Increasingly, as Clark asserts:

> "In one context after another, vision came to be characterised by uncertainty and unreliability, such that access to visual reality could no longer be normally guaranteed. It is as though European intellectuals lost their optic nerve."[130]

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[128] Porter, Roy, *Forget Baudrillard?*, Routledge, 2002, p.2

[129] Ivins, William, M., The Rationalization of Sight: with an examination of three Renaissance texts on perspective, Da Capo Press, 1973

[130] Clark, Stuart, 'Introduction', *Vanities of the Eye: Vision in Early Modern European Culture*, Oxford University Press, 2007, p.2

One broad factor contributing to this traumatic injury was occasioned by dissatisfaction at multiple levels (philosophical, religious, scientific, cultural) with Aristotelian scholasticism that had dominated since Medieval times, leaving behind the anticipation of a new philosophy that would settle long standing questions regarding its perceived deficiencies. As Stephen Menn observes: "In the history of Christianity, the early to mid seventeenth century was an age of continual crisis and of searching for a formula for stability."[131] In a very general sense, the search for this formula involved a widespread attempt to find a unifying philosophy that would reconcile religious belief with the new and emerging sciences. What eventually emerged by the end of the seventeenth century however, was the new mechanical philosophy, which, importantly:

> "[…] was not a single doctrine but a group of competing 'new philosophies', taking their origins from an incongruous mixture of Archimedean mechanics, chemical and medical traditions, humanist Epicureanism, scholastic voluntarism and nominalism, and many another philosophy new or old."[132]

It is productive therefore, to view the Baroque as a transitional moment in the search for theoretical models that accommodated often disparate and contradictory views and it is too simplistic to suggest a singular narrative in which Aristotelian philosophies were defeated and replaced by Neo-Platonic or mechanical philosophy in a seamless, unambiguous transformation. If it were possible to generalise about the seventeenth century, it would be that it was a moment in which there was a heightened sense of suspension, complexity, paradox and expectation. It is perhaps not surprising then, that in an atmosphere of extreme discord between opposing and often fanatical elements, that the theories (as well as cultural products in general) that often achieved highest prominence and widespread appeal were those that proved equally useful to all sides of the political and religious schism, as they frequently succeeded in melding divergent and seemingly incompatible views, but in a somewhat coded, open-ended form that frequently left ultimate interpretation to the individual.

One of the most striking affinities the neo-Baroque exhibits to the Baroque is that the globalised mass media and electronic collective similarly unite a multitude of disparate cultural, religious,

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[131] Menn, Stephen, 'The Intellectual Setting' from *Cambridge Histories Online,* Cambridge University Press, 2008, p.68

[132] Menn, Stephen, Ibid., p.74

political and scientific views in which the emphasis is on the individual's psychological needs, interpretation and theatrical self-fashioning. It is the self-consciously fluid and theatrical nature of the neo-Baroque's 'mix and match' aesthetic in a psychologically charged atmosphere that echoes the historic Baroque in which the individual was central and it is precisely Baroque 'theatricality' that is anathema to the Classicist mindset. In attempting to gain a nuanced understanding of the specific nature of Baroque theatricality, examining the ways in which it contrasts with the Classicist attitude can be revealing.

THE ANTITHEATRICAL PREJUDICE

Hostility to appearances in art is one of the cornerstones of art criticism and the main challenge to Scholasticism was also broadly founded on criticism that Aristotelian philosophy was too reliant on the senses and on superficial appearances. This animosity to the representation of appearances originates from a conventional reading of Plato's *Republic* and also forms the philosophical framework of what Jonas Barish terms the 'anti-theatrical prejudice'[133]. The anti-theatrical prejudice stems from the view that if the material world we inhabit is merely illusory and the eternal afterlife a 'truer' reality, then the world of the senses is also a kind of trickery and by this logic it also follows that imitation of the material nature of existence is an even greater form of deception. In this orthodox reading of Plato we need not restrict this criticism merely to painting. Disapproval was extended to any mimetic impulse in art in general; in theatre, literature, poetry, music and so on. Condemnation wasn't based on the denial that theatricality wasn't an effective or powerful means of communication however, but that it was indeed too intoxicatingly potent a force that could disarm the onlooker and thereby weaken their rational, moral faculties. Theatricality in this view had the potential to destabilise the natural order of the universe. Plato had recalled Socrates assertion that the painter reflected the appearance of the world as in a mirror but that, as was true in the case of mirrors, the image reflected was merely an illusion of the 'real', and that furthermore, the 'reality' that the mirror illusion reflected was in turn merely a representation of an original truth - the divine, 'eternal idea'. Thus Socrates' equation, re-iterated by Plato, is that an image of a bed is an illusion, of an illusion, of the truth. By this thesis, the

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[133] Barish, Jonas, A., *The Antitheatrical Prejudice*, University of California Press, 1985

painter (as for the poet, musician, etc.) is "thrice removed from the king and from the truth"[134]. In

this, Plato, as Barish states:

> "[... wished] to refound education on true knowledge rather than mere opinion, on
> analytical thinking rather than anecdote and incident, on philosophy, in short, rather
> than on poetry [.....]"[135]

Read in the conventional sense then, Platonism can be enlisted in the promulgation of the

Classicist enterprise; to establish fixed certainties derived through reductive logic. As Barish

elaborates;

> "Of the two primary properties of our minds, one, the faculty that processes sensory
> data, is untrustworthy, easily deceived by appearances, and subject to delusions. It
> takes light for shade and crooked for straight. The other, the "calculating and
> rational principle," deals in numbers and exact quantities. It sorts out and corrects
> the disordered impressions of the senses, certifying to the real truth of things."[136]

Following this logic, Classicism advocates the concept of the immortal, immutable and invisible

world: access to which is not through material reality but via an inner, cerebral and abstract,

higher reality.   By contrast, the Baroque, preoccupied with the fleeting nature of concrete reality

finds expression in the unreliable, the unstable and the variable. Whilst Classicism is averse to

theatrical hybrids and favours a return to a past, 'simpler' existence, in which 'pure forms' remain

uncontaminated by the blurring of disciplinary boundaries, the Baroque taste diverges in its

preference for the dramatic, the staged, the artificial and amalgam.

But, as Barish comments, in Plato's *Republic*, the attack on mimesis was after all, itself, conducted

in the mimetic mode.[137] As Cascardi remarks, one of the "irreducible paradoxes of the *Republic*"

and an irony Cascardi suggests would not have been lost on artists and writers in the seventeenth

century who had access to new more widely disseminated translations of Plato's lesser known

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[134] Barish, Ibid., p.6

[135] Barish, Ibid., p.8

[136] Barish, Ibid., p.9

[137] Barish, Ibid., p.11

poetical works, was "that of a philosopher who turns to dramatic dialogue and to myth in order to give us an image of the ideal state, while also claiming that certain central kinds of literature must be excluded from the state."[138] Plato's *Republic* together with other selective readings from Horace, Cicero and Aristotle became increasingly influential, in formulating a new conception of politics during the seventeenth century; from one that accommodated multiple perspectives, discourse, and polemic to that allied with instrumentalist politics of action, uniformity of opinion and 'science' that Cascardi asserts were allied with the humanist roots of Hobbes and Sir Francis Bacon in the establishment of emergent bureaucracies required to police and administer increasingly growing and heterogeneous Empires. The division of theory and practice became a feature of the newly emerging semi-bureaucratised state in which tolerance of diverse opinions was increasingly strained. In an atmosphere in which attitudes toward dissent were less acceptable and the place of the arts in Plato's ideal state was an increasingly contested one, numerous writers and artists responded to the question of art's use value through more oblique, veiled forms of critique.

As Anthony Cascardi argues, when public speech is suppressed by censorship as it was in the seventeenth century, political dissent is often expressed indirectly through less overtly contentious means, through the adoption of what Bakhtin termed 'double discourse' such as hyperbole, exaggeration, understatement, irony, all of which act as masks to conceal the real opinions and intentions of their author.   Play and banter characterise the Baroque: "Jesters do oft prove prophets"[139] as Shakespeare remarked. This theatricalisation of 'self', was a mechanism by which to gain some distance from fixed attitudes and to gain the perspective of distance from 'self' as a strong antidote to the possibility of lapsing into unmitigated subjectivity. Theatricalisation with its advantage of providing a covert means by which to critique the prevailing worldview was a distinctive feature of the Baroque aesthetic as indeed, it is in the neo-Baroque.

THEATRICALITY

William Egginton remarked that "The Baroque is theatre, and the theatre is baroque".[140] Theatre,

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[138] Cascardi, Anthony, *Cervantes, Literature and the Discourse of Politics*, University of Toronto Press, 2012

[139] Shakespeare, William, *King Lear*,

[140] Egginton, William, Op. Cit., p.39

in its intermarriage of media through the fusion of voice, movement and spectacle (and here we must also include Opera, pageants, festivals, and so on) is often cited as the definitive Baroque art form and theatricality as the quintessential Baroque aesthetic with its emphasis on role-playing, exhibitionism and the heightening of sensory experience. The theatre enjoyed immense popularity during the seventeenth century and infiltrated all aspects of daily secular, religious and intellectual life. However, theatre was more than merely a stylistic preference, and operated in an emblematic capacity. Reconceptions of the ancient metaphor *theatrum mundi* acquired new distinctions in the seventeenth century that resonated profoundly with the pervasive sense of societal and existential anxiety. Analogously, we also find the enduring concept of *theatrum mundi* reconceived in the google cosmos as an allegory for recombinant possibilities within the virtual infinite regress of worlds within worlds.

If we look to the early modern period's battle with visual culture, rather than assuming that these controversies have long since been settled, we find instead, that the critical terms of what does and does not constitute art established in the seventeenth century, continues to have an enduring afterlife in current debates. The tension between 'theatricality' and 'antitheatricality' that was a central and defining feature of the Baroque still continues to enjoy an active afterlife in the discourse of 'reception theory' in the late twentieth/ early twenty-first centuries. Michael Fried's central thesis regarding anti-theatricality that first emerged in his essay *Art and Objecthood*[141] set the parameters of critical discussion regarding postmodernism since the 1970s in terms that are perhaps not altogether distant from adherents to anti-theatricalism in the seventeenth century. The most obvious point of departure in approaching the subject of Baroque theatricality would logically be Caravaggio, as 'theatricality' is so routinely associated with his work that it is almost a commonplace. But there is another good reason to start here as Fried's recent book *The Moment of Caravaggio* would seem to labour against such obvious observations that suggest that the most innovative aspect of Caravaggio's contribution was his transposition of an earth bound theatricality of everyday, concrete reality.

Fried's agenda often sounds reminiscent of modernism's Darwinian programme. Moving progressively forward from early though "deeply problematic"[142] advances revealed in "the

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[141] Fried, Michael, *Art and Objecthood*,

[142] Fried, Michael, *The Moment of Caravaggio*, Princeton University Press, 2010, p.3

independent and autonomous 'gallery picture'" of Caravaggio that however in turn opens the way for the 'improvements' of that most Classical of Baroque painters, Nicolas Poussin, who is in turn surpassed by Courbet with all roads eventually leading to "the radical reconfiguration in the art of Manet and his followers"[143] further clearing the field for the supreme achievements to come in the 'advanced art' of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Fried mostly disregards the realist innovations of Caravaggio's work as incidental, preferring to call them "the continual resort to effects of instantaneousness" and remarks that these effects are "not in the end decisive"[144]. In Fried's reading, Caravaggio's art is free from any theatrical turning to a concrete reality in which the model is before the painter or the onlooker before the painting. The scene, following from Diderot, acquires its more convincing realism by the self absorption of the protagonists and their lack of awareness of the observing spectator. Fried, assumes a situation in which a painting has not been painted for an audience, but simply 'is'. This thesis follows similar lines to those he first established in *Art and Objecthood* and which he later expanded on in *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot*[145] that essentially reduce Caravaggio's painting, as Sheila McTighe remarked, to "an extreme case of self-reflection"[146]; merely the projection of Caravaggio's psychological state in which the onlooker is transfixed in a disembodied meeting of minds.

In contrast to Fried, most would agree that the initial and lasting impression is that of a Caravaggio who presents us with the vivid and palpable sense of "the theatre of this corporeal world"[147], to use Leibniz's phrase. Fried studiously avoids dwelling upon the tangible and material sources in his art, i.e. the unembellished, faithful depictions of human mortality – the very naturalism that had been so offensive to the establishment in his own day. As Keith Christiansen summarises, Caravaggio "[... seduces] the viewer into accepting a picture as the equivalent of a real experience rather than as an abstracted statement [… and this] lies at the heart of Caravaggio's art."[148]

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[143] Fried, Ibid., p.2

[144] Fried, Ibid., p.3

[145] Fried, Michael, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot*, University of Chicago Press, 1988

[146] McTighe, Sheila,

[147] Dougherty, Alex, 'Theatre, City, and the Baroque Imagination', from *Imagining the City: The Politics of Urban Space*, Vol. 8: Cultural History and Literary Imagination, Peter Lang AG, Bern 2006, p.107

[148] Christiansen, Keith, *A Caravaggio Rediscoverd: The Lute Player*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, p.17

Plate 10: Caravaggio, *The Taking of Christ*, (c.1602) National Gallery Ireland, Dublin

It is indeed Caravaggio's particular brand of theatricalisation of ordinary people in environments infused with a palpably realistic, psychologically charged atmosphere that seems authentic rather than mannered, that I suggest resonates most strongly within the collective imaginations of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. His unconventional casting of street urchins as cupid, prostitutes as the virgin Mary, labourers as St Matthew, and so on, minus the convention of halos and portrayed in contemporary dress enacting scenes from religious or allegorical narrative that radically challenged contemporary standards of decorum and that still continue to deliver a punch. In particular, his figures of gypsies, beggars, fortune-tellers, card sharps and other swindlers seemed to have a stronger affinity with street carnivals and popular theatre, especially the Italian

commedia del l'arte[149] tradition with its prescribed cast of comedic caricatures, than with the orthodoxies of Italian History painting. Indeed the dramatic effect achieved by Caravaggio is reminiscent of Shakespeare. Although few have noted the resemblance, Francine Prose remarks briefly on their affinity, in suggesting that "an intensely Shakespearean spirit – theatrical, compassionate, alternately and simultaneously comic and tragic – suffuses Caravaggio's art." Furthermore, another correspondence between Caravaggio and Shakespeare (who was Caravaggio's contemporary by seven years) is the way in which "[…] the lives of saints and martyrs and their dramas of suffering and redemption were played out among real men and women, on earth, in the here and now, and in almost total darkness." Of course, this is not to suggest a direct link between them, but merely illustrates a particular taste for plausible representations of everyday experience prevalent at this critical point in the seventeenth century.[150]

Caravaggio's proclivity towards sex and violence, (again, also a feature found in Shakespeare's later tragedies) may also explain his powerful appeal to a twenty-first century audience acclimatised to CSI and the instant reportage of You Tube, I-phones and social media. De Sousa notes that "Caravaggio found inspiration in public executions, Roman street life, hagiographical narratives, and mystery plays. Caravaggio tapped into the "grotesque and the extreme," as in *Boy bitten by a Lizard* or *Medusa*; or in *The Death of the Virgin*, in which the Virgin looks 'too much like the bloated corpse of a real woman.'"[151] Caravaggio's world of ramped up violence and brutality seems abundantly comparable to the popular appeal of gruesome high fidelity forensic 'reality'. The sheer scale of human misery brought sharply into focus via graphic images of war, persecution, violence, famine, mass displacement of whole populations, by the nightly news to the fortunate few who live in relative wealth and peace, is confounding and perhaps to a degree, politically enervating. As Gerhard Richter's question poses, what is more disturbing, the image of actively intentional violence, "[…] both in wars and as civilian murder" or, "on the other [hand …] the still more horrifying passive mode of assent (we watch the news while eating dinner; we enjoy seeing murders in films)?"[152] Caravaggio's macabre subject matter set within the claustrophobic confines of compressed theatrically lit spaces have the effect of making the figures markedly lurch forward toward the viewer. The frame hardly seems to contain its cast who seem in danger of

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[149] Ibid.

[150] De Sousa, Geraldo, U., At Home in Shakespeare's Tragedies, 2010, p.96

[151] Ibid.

[152] Richter, op. cit., p.243

spilling out into the real world of the spectator; the ever-present threat of the contagion of chaos colonising the space of the viewer. His depictions of space in this way are also strikingly analogous to Sacro Monte imagery which itself, as Andrew Graham-Dixon points out:

> "[…] is not art that seeks to idealise or generalise life; it is art that aspires to the condition of a simulacrum of life itself. Collectively, the chapels of sacro monte exemplified an ancient, pious fairground form of realism – a type of art that has in general been overlooked or avoided by most art historians precisely because of its naked and self-conscious 'vulgarity'."[153]

Significantly also, I think, Martin Gayford observed that "Caravaggio's reputation began to rise in the 1940s, which was perhaps not coincidentally, the age of Hollywood film noir"[154]. Certainly his paintings have the appearance of celluloid rather than paint. Caravaggio's paintings also recall not merely the dramatic productions so popular in the seventeenth century, but also it's sense of spectacle and some of the impressive theatrical props used to achieve astonishing displays that would amaze even today's audiences. The camera obscura with its inherent sense of drama, mystery and magic was one such instrument. In fact Caravaggio's distinctive 'film noir' aesthetic exhibit certain shared characteristics with descriptions of camera obscura images which had a distinctive 'visual feel' as Martin Kemp remarked[155], similar to slide transparencies.

Then again, to be persuaded of Caravaggio's premeditated adoption of un-idealised images of ordinary people as the most effective means by which to broadcast religious doctrine to a larger, more diverse audience, we need only look at the theological prescriptions of the day. Reformist texts at the time suggested that the visual medium of art, and painting in particular, was most suited to portraying in a realistic manner biblical exegesis, since sight as opposed to text was something broadly and universally available regardless of education or language. This was a line of reasoning transplanted directly from St Ignatius of Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises*, (1548) which established the challenge to artists to "see with the eye of the imagination the corporeal place

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[153] Graham-Dixon, Andrew, *Caravaggio : A Life Sacred and Profane*, Penguin, 2011

[154] Gayford, Martin,

[155] Kemp, Martin, *The Science of Art*: *Optical Themes in Western Art from Brunelleschi to Seurat,* Yale University Press, 1990

where the object one wishes to contemplate is found."[156] Echoing Loyola, Theologians were almost unanimous in stressing the importance of painting in a manner that was not idealised or sanitised but which illustrated graphically and forcefully the shocking and grisly realities, prompting a visceral understanding via the senses from which it was thought intellectual comprehension and theological insight would ensue. Caravaggio may simply have followed through to the letter this and other such recommendations, as for instance, Gilio da Fabriano's, in his dialogue *Degli errori de'pittori* (1564) who advocates truthful depictions of martyrs shown "afflicted, bleeding, spat upon, with torn skin, wounded, pale, and unsightly."[157]

THE POLITICS OF PERSPECTIVE

Caravaggio was a contentious figure in his own day and even today his achievements continue to be a divisive subject among scholars. But however one evaluates his achievements, as Robert Hughes once remarked, "Caravaggio was one of the hinges of art history: there was art before him and art after him, and they were not the same[158]. Caravaggio signalled in the beginning of what has come to be regarded as the quintessentially Baroque period. And it follows therefore, that the capacity of Caravaggio's 'realism' to divide opinions is not symptomatic of Caravaggio alone, but is indicative of the numerous and contested appraisals of seventeenth century art in general. The central question that Baroque 'realism' poses, from examples as diverse as Caravaggio to Kalf, from Rembrandt to Ribera, from Velazquez to Vermeer, is to what extent the artist has merely transcribed from reality or alternatively, artificially organised reality in the service of artistic or narrative intent. Just as Caravaggio's work was considered by his earliest biographers as not having been sufficiently idealised, but painted wholesale from life, Dutch images are notable for diligently recording the minutiae of appearances. Likewise, Velazquez's highly naturalistic effect in paintings appears to pre-figure the snapshot aesthetic of figures caught unaware, seemingly 'artlessly' arranged in the moment of looking and was described by one of his earliest biographers, Palomino (1724) as "not painting, but truth"[159]. Such examples of Baroque naturalism apparently present the objective world, at least at first glance, with minimal modification or concessions to

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[156] Martin, John Rupert, *Baroque*, Penguin, 1977, p.55

[157] Variano, John, Op. Cit., p.75

[158] Hughes, R., **'**Art: Master of the Gesture', (Time magazine, 11 March 1985)

[159] Martin, Op. Cit., p.50

ideals – the world of actuality, as it appeared, before the artist, at that moment.

However, one of Alois Riegl's (1858-1905), primary insights was that paradoxically, in this turn to objective detail we are also alerted to the interiority of the spectator. Baroque 'realism', rather than achieving an assurance of the reliability of external reality, engenders instead an acute awareness of its constructedness, the strange and alien nature of objective fact in which "[…] som thing infinit Behind evry thing appeared […] and all the world was mine, and I the only Spectator and Enjoyer of it" [160] as Thomas Traherne (1636-1674) remarked.   In the seventeenth century an attitude of studied impartialiality epitomised by Bacon's desire to "dwell among things soberly […] and] to dissect the nature of this real world"[161] coexisted with a heightened introspectiveness that seemed to undermine the very possibility of certain knowledge, a sentiment expressed in Traherne's contemplation of the dichotomy between the "Thought of the World, or the World in a Thought"[162]. The conceptual interchangeability between the 'material world as theatre' and 'theatre as reality', between "what seems" and "that which passes show"[163] as Hamlet asserted, reduces the external world to a kind of make-believe in which it is hard to distinguish truth from fiction. As Martin Pops remarks (in regard to Dutch seventeenth century art) paradoxically it is through rendering tangible particularities of the phenomenal world; "through screens of secondary elaboration - the prodigious exactitude of texture and colour – [that] we discern a phenomenology of fairyland."[164] It would seem that the Baroque concern for the verifiability of objective reality, ironically also heightens a sense of the indivisibility of the object from the consciousness of the perceiving subject. In the Baroque's preoccupation with the dichotomy of the object/subject divide the role of the spectator is of central importance, not least because it has also been the most problematic for a number of art theorists in the late twentieth/ early twenty-first centuries.

In what Svetlana Alpers describes as the Albertian view, a view epitomised by Ernst Gombrich, the spectator stands in direct relation to the work in a one-way transaction between perceiver and

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[160] Norford, Don Parry, 'Microcosm and Macrocosm in Seventeenth-Century Literature', Journal of the History of Ideas, Vol. 38, No.3 (Jul-Sep., 1977), p.419

[161] Willey, Basil, *The English Moralists,* Methuen & Co.Ltd, 1965, p.56

[162] Norford, Op. Cit.

[163] Shakespeare, William, *Hamlet,*

[164] Pops, Martin, *Consciousness and The Chamber of Being*, UMI Research Press, 1984, p94

perceived, 'active' subject and 'passive' object. In contrast, Leo Steinberg places the spectator firmly before the work, but in this case the work acts as a kind of "complementary hemisphere" that shows "but one half of its own system"[165]. In other words, the work establishes a reciprocity between the spectator and the expectation established in the work as a kind of 'mirror of consciousness'[166]. Michael Fried on the other hand, expresses a preference for the anti-theatrical 'tableau' that provides the access point to an otherworldly, inter-subjective space in which the spectator is not physically accounted. And finally, Michel Foucault's thesis expounded in *The Order of Things* (1966)[167] suggests that works such as *Las Meninas* are 'allegories' of representation itself in which the work is dissolved into the prison of the individual consciousness from which vantage point it is impossible to verify objectively either the observable world or the view of the perceiving subject; all that remains is discourse, representations. Thus David Carrier helpfully characterised Gombrich's position as "I see the picture"; Steinberg's as "I see the picture and the picture sees me"; Fried's as only "the picture is seen" (thereby eliminating the spectator) and Foucault's stance as one in which "it is not the case that the picture is seen"[168].

However, Alois Riegl's theories regarding the distinction between internal and external coherence might provide the possibility of postulating a way in which to hold opposing positions simultaneously in a manner that perhaps also corresponds more closely with the Baroque's own drive towards overarching contradictions and of synthesising oppositions in what might be called a mode of 'productive uncertainty'; a worldview that I suggest is strongly analogous to our own in the twenty-first century. Alois Riegl's theoretical concerns were in part motivated by a larger concern; the increasing degree of subjectivity and individualism in society that he identified as having been first evident in the Baroque period and more particularly in the Dutch group portrait. His inquiries into Dutch seventeenth century painting were therefore always keenly attuned to what he regarded as the seventeenth century's achievement of a perfect balance between 'objective' and 'subjective' constituents in contrast to his apprehension that subjectivism threatened to lapse into solipsism in the twentieth century, which for Riegl, would infer the death of art. Riegl stated that all art:

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[165] Iversen, Margaret, *Alois Riegl: Art History and Theory*, MIT Press, 1993, p.145

[166] Iversen, Ibid., p.146

[167] Foucault, Michel, *The Order of Things*, Routledge, 2002

[168] Carrier, David, 'Art and Its Spectators', The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, Vol. 45, No.1, (Autumn, 1986), p.6

"is a matter of coming to terms between the subject on the one hand and the thing (i.e., extension, space) on the other hand, and by no means a full dissolution of the object in the subject, which would absolutely mean the end of the fine arts."[169]

Broadly, Riegl's theory attests to the idea that Dutch representations exhibit two primary characteristics that distinguish it from the Renaissance and indicate a new outlook in relation to the world; 'attention' and 'free space'. The concepts of 'attention' and 'free space', which he also determined as having been evident in Late Roman art, subtly interrelated with and evolved into his later key theory involving the dual opposition of terms: internal and external coherence. 'Attention' as imagined by Riegl is exemplified as a mode of painting that adopts a simultaneously disinterested attitude of watchfulness or alertness coupled with a sense of empathetic engagement with the world. In painterly terms, we might for instance recall Vermeer's descriptive passages in which a plethora of inconsequential detail is painted in a seemingly even-handed treatment, both dispassionate and sensitive. This view parallels Georg Hegel's observations that the abundant depictions of the everyday in seventeenth century Dutch painting had created an image of the "utterly living absorption in the world and its daily life".[170] Hegel remarked that Dutch art presented "[…] the paradigm of exemplary bourgeois culture"[171] and "[…] the Sunday of life which equalizes everything […]".[172] For Hegel, Dutch art was emblematic of a spirit of egalitarianism that displayed "a self-respect without pride" embodied in the democratically and impartially rendered representations of the mundane. The attentive attitude of Dutch art found expression in portrayals of the inconsequential and transitory as opposed to more weighty, important and eternal subjects. Thus Dutch painters were concerned with recording the subtle, fleeting expressions and exchanges between real people, rather than the remote and idealised archetypes of Classicism. Whereas in Classical works there is minimal expectation of any projective interaction of the spectator, by contrast, Dutch works establish a strong psychological engagement with the onlooker. In short the spectator seemingly approaches the work on a more

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[169] Olin, Margaret, 'Forms of Respect: Alois Riegl's Concept of Attentiveness', The Art Bulletin, Vol. 71, No. 2 (Jun., 1989), p.294

[170] Hertel, Christine, Vermeer; Reception and Interpretation, Cambridge University Press, UK, 1996, p23

[171] Hertel, Vermeer; Ibid., p14

[172] Hertel, Vermeer; Ibid., pp.23-24

Plate 11: Raphael, *The School of Athens*, (1509-1510), Fresco, Apostolic Palace, Vatican City, Rome

equal footing as the Dutch work calls upon the constitutive collaboration of the spectator with the work whereas Classical works limit the spectator's collaborative interaction. The supreme example of painting contrary to the Dutch aesthetic of attentiveness is Raphael's *The School of Athens* (Plate 11) in which figures are hierarchically arranged by degrees of importance and unimportance. Therefore, rather than a selective, discriminating aesthetic evident in Italian narrative, Hegel noted that, in contrast, Dutch painters:

> "link supreme freedom of artistic execution, find feeling for incidentals, and perfect carefulness in execution, with freedom and fidelity of treatment, love for what is evidently momentary and trifling, the freshness of open vision, and the undivided concentration of the whole soul on the tiniest and most limited things".[173]

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[173] Iversen, Ibid., p.98

In Riegl's second distinguishing characteristic 'free space' he draws upon a dichotomy between the development of 'free space' in contrast to 'cubic space' which he sees as inextricably connected to psychological typologies set on a continuum of 'subjective' and 'objective' poles respectively. "Art history"' he states, "[…] distinguishes between two manifestations of three-dimensional space: cubic space, which clings to material forms, and free space between figures."[174]

For Riegl, cubic space denotes a style of depiction in which individual things are seen to exist independently of one another. The supreme example of cubic space he suggests, is Egyptian relief, but an instance more contemporaneously juxtaposed with the Baroque is work in the Italian Renaissance tradition, of which *The School of Athens* is again representative. In *The School of Athens* figures are depicted as distinct and separate entities, clearly delineated within a uniformly evenly lit space that reveals the figures arranged hierarchically. This mode acquires its unity through a focus on significant action enacted by the central character/s (here Plato centre left, Aristotle centre right) in which all other participants who are there primarily only as passive bystanders are ranked in importance according to their proximity to this central point of action. It is a space ostensibly 'out there' to look at; a space distinct from that of the spectator. Cubic space adheres to an internal self-contained coherence[175] that infers an essentially uncomplicated relationship to the world of objects in which the detached subject is excluded from the scene. By contrast, Dutch works (although here for our purposes we might also consider many other Baroque group portraits such as by Caravaggio and Velazquez) employ free space that is characterised by the dissolving of bodies within an over-arching unification of the pictorial space around them as well as the appeal to the psychological engagement of the onlooker. Hence Riegl asserted that the first emanated from a worldview that subscribed to a relatively untroubled ontological certainty in objective reality whereas, the emergence of free space emanated from an increasingly subjective perspective. Riegl thus observed that in Dutch art:

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[174] Iversen, Ibid., p.93

[175] Podro, Michael, *The Critical Historians of Art,* Yale University Press, 1982, p.73

Plate 12: Johannes Vermeer, *The Music Lesson*, c.1662-5, Oil on canvas, 73 x 65cm, Royal Collection

"The general developmental tendency appears here to be directed toward binding the figures physically with the surrounding free space and psychologically with the external world: both subjective tendencies".[176]

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[176] Iversen, Margaret, Op. Cit., p.94

In *The Music Lesson*, (Plate 12) Vermeer repeats a recurring theme evident in much of his work; the intrusion of the spectator into the private sphere of people absorbed in the familiar daily scenes of domestic life. The sense of intrusion is the more forcibly created by the adoption of a low viewpoint that equates with a single point perspective roughly at waist height (which may have been the result of Vermeer simply sitting at the easel) but which also heightens the sense of interruption to the scene. Similar to the effect of Degas' later 'keyhole' perspective, there is a sense of observing without being observed, figures who are slightly truncated by chairs, tables, instruments and so forth, as if from a sly, slightly illicit perspective. This approach contrasts markedly with Renaissance prescriptions in which figures are arranged centrally, in a clear and unobstructed view of the significant action in which the main protagonists are engaged, as in *The School of Athens*. In Vermeer, however, objects are placed so close in the foreground that they almost seem to encroach on the perceptual space of the viewer. The fold of tapestry for instance which appears to loom unnaturally large and close to the viewer then recedes abruptly from the floor leading the eye up towards the middle ground where a white wine jug is placed prominently as if to echo the female figure, whose ambiguous, fleeting expression is seemingly caught briefly in the mirror above as she turns towards the male figure who returns her glance with a searching, concentrated gaze. At first glance, the effect is one of an uncontrived, artless arrangement of objects and models painted faithfully by the artist, as they appeared before him in the studio. However, on closer scrutiny it becomes apparent that the composition is very deliberately and deftly choreographed.

There is always a sense in Vermeer of the animation of objects themselves; of their anthropomorphic latency; as Cassirer paraphrased Patrizzi (1591) from the Latin "for to know an object means to negate the distance between it and consciousness; it means, in a certain sense, to become *one* with the object".[177] If it were a feature evident in only one painting it might seem unimportant, however this characteristic starts to take on a significance in Vermeer when in a number of works an empty chair, an abandoned instrument, the profile of a jug, and so on, usually facing out towards the viewer acts as a visual bridge connecting the cubic space of each individual to the free space of the scene that in turn extends towards the space of the viewer. The chair in particular seems to imply the absence of someone who is simultaneously central to the drama

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[177] Cassirer, Ernst, *The Individual and the Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy*, Courier Dover Publications, 2011, p.134

unfolding before us although exterior and elsewhere, ensuring a further link between internal and implied external coherence. Mike Gubser summarised Wolfgang Kemp's understanding of Riegl's ideas in which he noted:

> "that the categories of will, emotion, and attention define more than simple pictorial modes; they illustrate, […] three psychological attitudes toward external objects, three ways in which men relate visually to the world. Classical and Renaissance art, which emphasized will and emotion through action, tended to isolate individuals from their surroundings and depict them in a struggle with the external world. Dutch art, by contrast, fostered an attentive psychology that calmly bound men to their surroundings."[178]

Vermeer maintains the cubic space of the figures but at the same time fastens them to their surroundings. In a carefully orchestrated equilibrium between the cubic space and the surrounding free space internal to the scene Vermeer also links the internally coherent space of the work into in a visually seamless chain with the external space of the viewer.
The viewer is simultaneously an independent instance of cubic space along the continuum but also an extension of the scene depicted, a recurring feature of Baroque stage-management achieved through the partial glimpse of figures truncated by the infringement of chairs, tables, instruments and so forth. In such ways as this Baroque art simultaneously preserves an internal coherence in which subject and object are both independent and interdependent within the closed self contained world that it encloses, whilst at the same time the barrier between fictive and real space is dissolved by calling upon the viewer's projective participation in the scene. It is a means by which to hold opposing positions simultaneously. This agnostic position represents a bet both ways in the relations between subject and object; in this strategic 'constitutive dissembling' and 'artful artlessness' we discover a mode of 'productive uncertainty' that permeates the Baroque and neo-Baroque mind-set.

As mentioned previously an immediate correlation between Vermeer's *Woman in Blue*, and Gerhard Richter's *Lesende*, (1994) seems readily apparent if for no other reason than Richter's repetition of the everyday subject matter in which a woman is observed reading, oblivious to the

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[178] Gubser, Mike, *Time's Visible Surface: Alois Riegl and the Discourse on History and Temporality in Fin-de-siecle Vienna*, Wayne State University Press, 2006, p.166

Plate 13: © Gerhard Richter, (804) *Lesende,* (1994), Oil on canvas, 72 x 102cm, **San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA), Sourced from :** http://www.gerhard-richter.com/art/search/detail.php?paintid=8054&artworkID1=paintings&title=lesende&p=1&sp=32

gaze of the spectator. But it also adopts a subtlety attentive mode not dissimilar to Vermeer. At first glance, Richter establishes an arresting almost jarring contrast between a surfeit of incidental detail in the middle ground, where we notice the stray hair, the necklace, the print that the model is intently reading and so on, and the generalised treatment of background. In contrast to detail in the middle distance, an elegant, seamlessly, soft focussed backdrop frames the surrounding space around the figure thus preserving her independence. At the same time the acutely shallow pictorial depth of the painting, pushes the figure forward. In particular, the pronounced abbreviation of tonal variation in the sharply focussed area around the shoulder contributes to creating the effect of it visually extending into the space of the spectator. Thus the intently captivated expression of the model is poised delicately midway between the sharp focus shorthand of the foreground and the subtle gradations of hue and tonal variation in the blurred background. At the model's extremities observed in the fingers and the pony tail, the model

seems to be submerging into soft focus, or alternatively re-surfacing into sharp focus. In a deceptively simple way Richter retains the self-sufficiency of the model who is also seemingly caught in a shaft of light that separates her out from the surroundings whilst unifying her with the free space of both background and foreground through the adoption of what almost amounts to a monochromatic painting in magenta, but also through the variable focus of the lens. The internal self-contained coherence of the scene is thus maintained but at the same time, the concentrated expression that is difficult to interpret, again reminiscent of Vermeer (is she reading a board report, a newspaper, a letter?) calls upon the psychological engagement of the attentive spectator. These factors in combination assists in projecting the figure from the ambiguous fictive space that maybe a photograph but equally may be a television screen or a projection, into the exterior space in which the spectator is implicated.

In a similar way, despite some notable and obvious differences, *Remember Me* (Plate 14) corresponds to the integrative aesthetic of attentiveness. The figures here are placed slightly off-centre within the middle distance, and are viewed from a single point perspective slightly lower than the eye-line of the figures, so that the almost imperceptible projection of the foreground in shadow is perceptually co-extensive with the space of the viewer. The path that the two figures follow dissects the composition from left to right and distinguishes foreground from middle and background. From a perspective perceptually closer to that of the viewer, the path facilitates the movement of the eye from a point where the path widens and curves on the right side of the canvas, a place incidentally given emphasis by its darker treatment, into the middle of the canvas where a single white disc of light hovers. The path further leads the eye in the direction that the figures amble into the implied, distant view beyond the picture frame. This painting deliberately synthesises two opposing treatments; that signified by areas directly and opaquely painted with areas of thin glazes in which the underlying drawing and tonal underpainting is still evident. This latter aspect of the painting that lays bare the construction work of the painting is situated just above and to the right of the figures and has the effect of dispersing the three-dimensional space into a kaleidoscopic fragmentation of light and shade that seems even more pronounced in its flatness. The fragmentation of the image calls upon the constitutive input of the spectator and in this expectation of the projective interaction with the spectator.
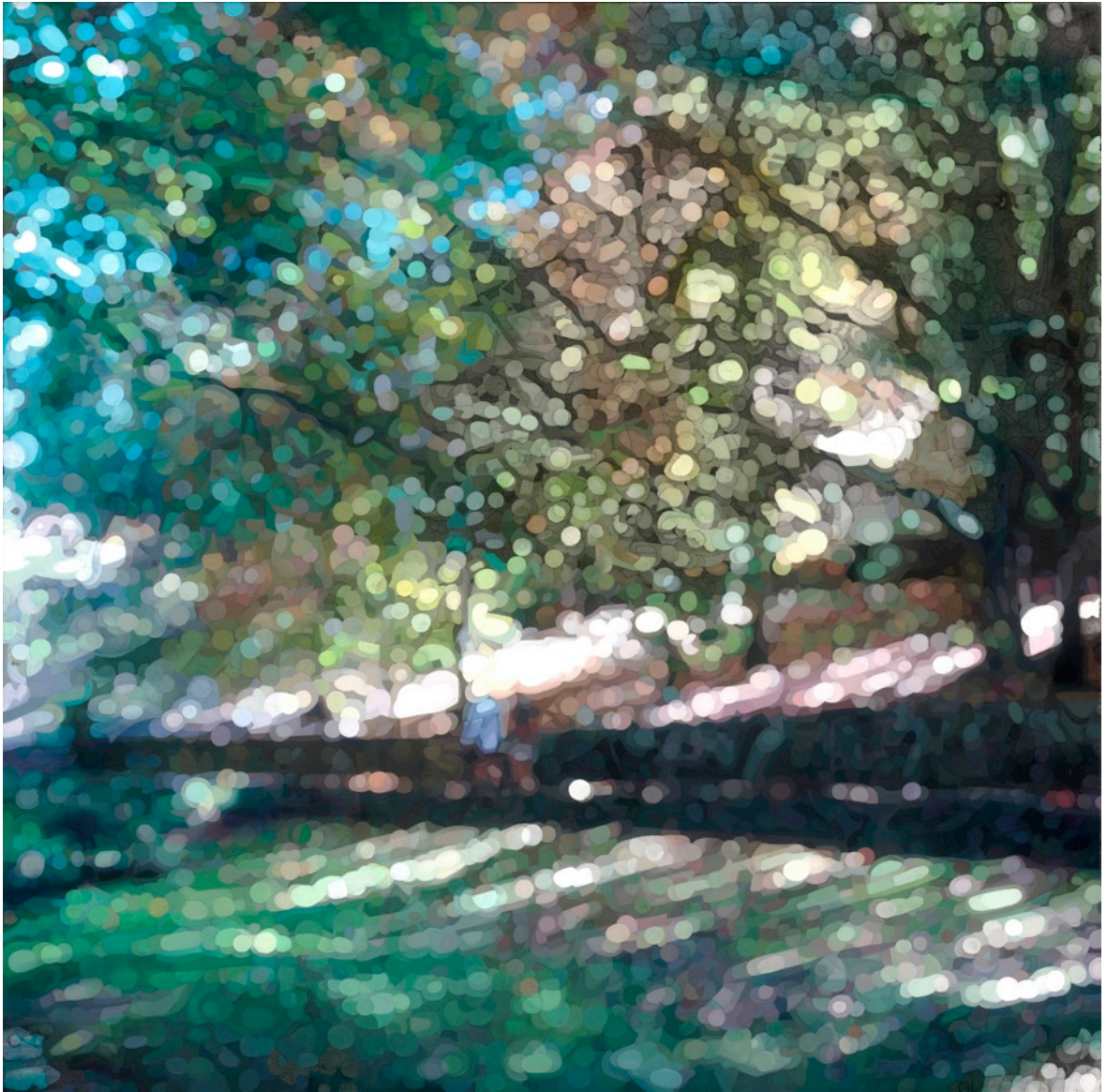
Plate 14: Fiona Greenhill, *Remember Me*, 2012, Oil and acrylic on linen, 150 x 150cm, Private Collection

The neo-Baroque however, is both conterminous with and at variance with the historical Baroque's aesthetic of attentiveness that I suggest, following Riegl's line of reasoning reflects the significantly altered nature of its subject/object relations. *Remember Me* is a neo-Baroque instance in which consideration is paid to a uniform distribution of flat almost geometric patterns of light and shade – to the calculatedly even spread of incidental information that doesn't favour one detail over another. Forms simultaneously fluctuate between coalescing and dissolving and the figures meld and collapse within the visual mesh that the lens artificially imposes across the visual field; simultaneously synthesising and disintegrating.

If Riegl perceived the increasing subjectivisation of society as evident in the advent of free space and external coherence, devices he thought assisted in maintaining a perfect equipoise between objective and subjective tendencies in the seventeenth century, in the twenty-first century subjectivity is at its most palpably apparent and strained. Where Riegl suggested that:

> "Classical antiquity had avoided this facing outward, for it recognized only objects.
> [he felt that] Modern art likewise is able to dispense with it, but on exactly opposite
> grounds: it knows only the subject, because in its view so-called objects are reducible
> to the sensation of the subject".[179]

Where figures appear in much of my work they are merely suggestive geometric shapes contiguous with the extended geometry of the surrounding free space. Despite the self-containededness of the figures positioned roughly within the middle distance (not dissimilar to Vermeer and Richter) the independence of the figures from the surrounding space all but collapses. The figures appear for an instant and then seamlessly submerge back into the flat mosaic that spreads uniformly over the whole pictorial expanse and beyond into an implied space that perceptually extends beyond the frame and towards the viewer. In Ruscha's work, on the other hand, the middle plane is essentially eliminated leaving a blank in which both subjects and objects are left homeless.

In Ruscha's *The Mountain* (1998), the loss of the middle distance in the painting reduces the reading to an unsettling pivot between foreground and background. The effect here is reminiscent of rolling credits in cinematography and at that, only the partial, close-up view in which the remainder of the sentence is missing or in which we see only a small fragment of a larger vista. The sharp colour contrast between foreground and background help to maintain their visual separation as does the contrast between elaborately attentive detail in the rendering of the mountain in contrast to the starkly uninhabited space in the graphic lettering. At the same time, the emphasis given to the 'T' faintly mirrors the pyramidal form of the mountain and thus connects them in some, albeit, unspecified way. The equal pictorial weight given to both mountain and word frustrates a hierarchical reading in which neither carries the significant action of the painting. The large cinematic scale of the painting also simultaneously engages bodily the

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[179] Iversen, Margaret, Op. Cit., p.147

Plate 15: © Ed Ruscha, *The Mountain* (1998), Acrylic on shaped canvas, 193 x 183cm, **Courtesy Allison and Warren Kanders, © Ed Ruscha, 2009. Photography: Paul Ruscha, image sourced from :**
http://www.studiointernational.com/index.php/ed-ruscha-fifty-years-of-painting/

spectator in the spectacle and the barely perceptible bulge at either side also add to an exaggerated sense of a perceptual looming forward followed by recession adding to the sense of suspension in a filmic abstract space; a visual disembodied hovering that recalls the immersive cinematic experience in which corporeal relations collapse.

Part Three : Microcosm / Macrocosm

Chapter Four : Detail and Fragment

Another aspect of Caravaggio's work largely elided by Fried is metaphor. Metaphor requires the active participation of a perceiving subject who is to greater and lesser degrees dynamically engaged with the intellectual and visual milieu within which the painter works and within which the painting is produced. Metaphors that persistently recur might then be said to operate as cultural models that enable a community to picture the world and their relationship to it and as such can therefore reveal something profound about the nature of the collective cultural imagination of an epoch. Certain key metaphors that surfaced during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and which were repetitiously and widely reiterated, were symptomatic of the existential concerns of the age. Apart from abundant allusions to the cosmic clockwork of the universe allied to the new mechanistic theories, there were a prolific number of metaphors, often newly resurrected and re-conceived from ancient sources, that profoundly resonated in the Baroque mind, (the mirror, the theatre, the camera obscura, the circle, reading as in the context of reading from the 'book of life', and so on). But the central concern that arose during the seventeenth century was related to the urgent question of Man's ambiguous place in an immeasurably expanded universe, and as such all emblematic allusions with their variable meanings and associations can be broadly organised under the unifying meta-concept of macrocosm/microcosm.

In the seventeenth century, Man's position in the natural order of the universe was seriously in doubt. Scientific exploration, geographically and cosmologically unseated European Man from a position of supremacy in the natural world and primacy in the universe. Man, that "little world made cunningly"[180] as John Donne supposed, stood at the juncture between macrocosmic and microcosmic spheres where the boundaries of selfhood itself were shifting and uncertain. The individual's agency in the world was similarly unclear in the seventeenth century and the problematic question of self-determination, i.e. how far can we assert our autonomy from the

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[180] Preston, Claire, 'Unriddling the world': Sir Thomas Browne and the doctrine of signatures', from Critical Survey, Vol 5, No. 3, Writing/revolution: the seventeenth century, 1993, p.263

world or alternatively our dependence or subservience to it thus provoked a great deal of heated debate; questions which in this genetically ambivalent world are still pertinent today.

Pico's *Oration on the Dignity of Man* (1486) sets out the characteristic polarity between the individual and the world that is central to Renaissance and Baroque thought. Unlike other animals the individual is endowed with the ability to choose his/her own destiny and therefore, unlike other creatures, man's nature is not rigidly determined. Man's dilemma is a paradoxical one however, as the individual is free, but only in so far as he/she is free to rise toward the divine or sink to the level of bestiality. Man's predicament, as Don Parry Norford clarifies is that:

> "one must be open to the world in order to traverse the circle of one's own
> possibilities, yet this openness must not become a dissolution, a mystical-pan-theistic
> losing of oneself in the world."[181]

In the Renaissance emanistic variety of physics presented by Ficino (1433-1499) the spheres of heaven and earth and man's place within it are fixed in an hierarchical top-down arrangement from God to man to the natural world. However, Man's position in the cosmic chain of command was disturbed in the seventeenth century as a result of numerous factors, but in particular, by science, which Leibniz's phrase again, in situ highlights:

> "The Theatre of this corporeal World shows to us more and more of its beauty, even
> in this life and through the Light of nature, since the Systems of the Macrocosm and
> the Microcosm have begun to be revealed by recent inventions."[182]

In "the theatre of this corporeal world", man is the fixed point between the infinite expanse of space through the telescope and the seemingly infinite expanse of the infinitesimal world seen through the microscope. At a time when astronomical and geographic frontiers were expanding, when "new Philosophy call[ed] all in doubt"/ the certainties of the world "[were] all in pieces/ [and] all coherence gone"[183], as Donne lamented, the question of man's place in the cosmos was suddenly a profoundly ambiguous one.

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[181] Norford, Ibid., p.409

[182] Dougherty, Op. Cit.

[183] John Donne, as quoted by Sutherland Harris, Op. Cit., p.xiii

The contradiction that arose from the Copernican de-centring of the cosmos was that man was both preeminent and subordinate within it. On the one hand, self awareness is gained through identification *with* and distinction *from*, the object. There must be an intellectual turning to the sensible world so that "in the 'otherness' of the sensible world the intellect finds its own indissoluble unity and identity"[184]. In this way the object is dissolved into self-conscious awareness of the self and "the external world is thus paradoxically both preserved and transcended."[185] Man was now potentially the bridge between two disparate and divided worlds as Thomas Browne alludes:

> "Thus is Man that great and true Amphibium, whose nature is disposed to live, not only like other creatures in divers elements, but in divided and distinguished worlds."[186]

But there was in the seventeenth century also a shift in importance from the infinite divinity of God to the infinite imagination of man. For Giordano Bruno there is the "limitless unfolding" within, for Traherne there is an "Infinity we know and feel by our Souls … as if it were the very Essence and Being of the Soul … [an infinity in which] Evry Man is alone the Centre and circumference."[187] Borges noted that, Bruno (echoing Alain de Lille's words from the twelfth century "God is an intelligible sphere, whose centre is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere") extended and transformed this metaphor into a speculation regarding Copernican space as one in which ; "We can assert with certitude that the universe is all centre, or that the centre of the universe is everywhere and the circumference nowhere."[188] Each individual thing contracts the universe within it in the same way that the universe is a contraction of God. The universe no longer emanates from a centre, but now expresses a folding and unfolding from infinitesimal points joined in a dynamic network of crossing and interconnecting chains. In contrast to older ideas of a unidirectional stable hierarchy, from top to bottom, man now discovers he is the centre of a multi-directional universe; that "amphibium between disparate

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[184] Cassirer, Op. Cit., p.171

[185] Norford, Op., Cit., p.411

[186] Huntley, Frank Livingstone, 'Sir Thomas Browne and the Metaphor of the Circle', from <u>Journal of the History of Idea</u>, Vol. 14, No. 3 (Jun., 1953), p.353

[187] Norford, Op. Cit., p.412

[188] Borges, Luis, *Labyrinths,* Penguin, 2000

worlds", but that furthermore, any point could theoretically also be a solitary axis in the unbounded folding and unfolding of space. The changing spheres of influence between man, nature and God in which any point could assume the central position in the universe first came to prominence with Nicholas Cusanus, as Cassirer elaborates:

> "In the new cosmology, which begins with Nicholas Cusanus, there is no absolute 'above' or 'below', and, therefore, there can no longer be just one direction of influence. The idea of the world organism is here expanded in such a way that every element in the world may with equal right be considered the central point of the universe. The hitherto one-sided relationship of dependence between the lower and higher world now takes on more and more the form of a relationship of pure *correlation*."[189]

It has been observed by a number of scholars that in the early modern period the terms 'nature', 'landscape' and 'scenery' coalesce. Citing Yi-Fu Tulan's *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitude, and Values* (1974), David Castillo noted that "the convergence of nature, landscape, and scenery signal[led] the demotion of the all-encompassing cosmos of the ancients […]" and, the emergence in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries of a different relationship between man and nature in which "[…] landscape entered the realms of spectacle and make-believe (the world of the theatre)"[190]. It is ironic that at the very moment in which man sought to firmly hold all objects in view, man's position in the cosmos was never more uncertain and precarious. Rather than the stable and remote universe of absolutes in equilibrium, 'truth', In a cosmos in which any point could be viewed as the centre, was now potentially merely a set of relations between coordinates, recalling Hamlet's words "… for there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so."[191] For Hamlet, Denmark and life itself he asserted were a prison, Denmark was a place of detention, confinement in a parallel way that the body imprisons the soul; either way existence is a locked chamber which provides a circumscribed vantage point onto the world; a fragmented and essentially unknowable world in its entirety, but also a world from which there was no possibility of escape except at death.

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[189] Cassirer, Op. Cit., p.110

[190] Castillo, David, (ed.), *Spectacle and Topophilia: Reading Early Modern and Postmodern Hispanic Cultures*, Vanderbilt University Press, 2011, p.3

[191] Shakespeare, William, *Hamlet*,

Eliot remarked that in the age of Donne and Webster, "It seemed as if, […] the world was filled with broken fragments of systems'[192], observing that "in the seventeenth century a dissociation of sensibility set in from which we have never recovered"[193]. The idea of the theatre of the world as a metaphor for wholeness, for overarching incompatible viewpoints in the face of existential anxiety was profoundly appealing. As Alex Dougherty remarked, it "answered an urgent need to envisage a single paradigmatic cultural situation or mythos, which would create a space of synthesis for conflicting worldviews and fragmented perspectives."[194] The image of the theatrum mundi encompassed a conception of existence in which the cosmos was a contraction of God, earthly existence a contraction of the cosmos, the natural world a theatre for man's infinite imaginative capacities. Earthly existence was the world *as* theatre. The natural world was both God's artificial world in miniature and a theatre in which the infinite possibilities in the imagination of the individual could play out, as Thomas Browne remarks "the world to mee is but a dreame, or mock show, and wee all therein but Pantalones and Antickes to my severer contemplations."[195] In the Baroque mindset in which nature and theatre were synonymous, man was simultaneously a puppet subservient to invisible forces larger than itself or in a prominent position in which the natural world provided the lexicon to the infinite inventive faculties of man. The representation of space in painting echoed this theatrical telescopic bringing together of near and distant worlds, of the microcosmic and macrocosmic spheres, in that space was no longer the closed stable circuit of an autonomous realm viewed from a fixed point. Rather, "picture space, instead of being thought of as a closed, self-contained unit, is treated as a fragment of an infinitely larger totality."[196]

DETAIL AND FRAGMENT

Calabrese's main thesis, taking his lead from Sarduy, is to 'read' the cultural mindset that he determines as neo-Baroque, as emanating directly from science (although, contrary to Sarduy's view, Calabrese imagined this influence as reversible). Thus from the realm of philosophy and the human sciences he distinguishes between two modes; 'detail' and 'fragment' that he suggests

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[192] Maxwell, Op. Cit., p.61

[193] Maxwell, Op. Cit., p.71

[194] Dougherty, Op. Cit., pp.107-108

[195] Browne, Thomas

[196] Martin, Op. Cit., p.163

express related but also subtly different neo-Baroque strategies that address the concept of 'part' in the oppositional paradigm, 'part/whole'.

'Part' as it suggests acquires its meaning in a relational sense, in that it is understood as a portion of 'the whole'. Calabrese identifies two neo-Baroque strategies that assign value to the part; those of "the epistemology of the detail" and the "epistemology of the fragment". The "epistemology of the detail"[197] 'is one in which the detail, having been 'cut' away and isolated from the whole serves as a model for and explanation of the larger system to which it refers. In this sense, it is an attitude associated with a "hi-fi aesthetic'". It is a tendency to valorise the autonomy of a detail as "hyper-exceptional" or "exceptionalized".[198]   Detail that has been initially unnoticed is identified by 'the detailer' in a procedure that removes and re-contextualises it, thereby establishing a new relationship between the subject and the object of the cut. Calabrese refers to this procedure as the "assassin's practice"[199]. Of course as Calabrese points out, In drawing attention to the significance of a detail we are made aware of the "viewpoint of the detailer, who generally explains the significance of the detail, [and] explains the subjective reasons behind it and its function."[200]

The "epistemology of the fragment" by contrast, presents fragments in the *absence* of the whole. The aesthetic of the fragment has quantifiable limits expressed in two possible ultimate outcomes. Either it presents fragments at a microscopic threshold in which their relationship with the whole is now entirely unrecognisable, or at a macroscopic threshold in which the fragment/fragments may be so extensive, that it is no longer a fragment but instead an incomplete whole. For instance a handful of dust that is no longer indicative of the stone temple from which it came suggests the microscopic threshold, whilst at the macroscopic, a statue with a missing toe is no longer a fragment but an incomplete whole[201]. The fragment operates as a hypothetical self-sufficient entity that cannot ever be reunited with the whole and therefore is, as Calabrese implies the "detective's practice."[202]

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[197] Calabrese, Op. Cit., p.74

[198] Calabrese, Ibid., p.77

[199] Calabrese, Ibid., p.70

[200] Calabrese, Ibid., p.71

[201] Calabrese, Calabrese, Omar, *Neo-Baroque: A Sign of the Times*, Princeton University Press, 1992, p.74

[202] Calabrese, Calabrese, Omar, *Neo-Baroque: A Sign of the Times*, Princeton University Press, 1992, p.70

In summary then, the aesthetic of the detail alludes to levels of meaning revealed through the detailer's privileging of a previously overlooked detail that by virtue of its being singled out suggests a new relationship to the whole. Its tendency is to proceed from observation, to theory to explanation. The rationale of the 'detail' is therefore, as Calabrese suggests, deductive. The fragment by contrast however has severed its reference to the whole. The fragment establishes a hypothetical whole that remains absent. The fragment is therefore an isolated part of a whole, which without the possibility or likelihood of reuniting with the whole, is now a self-contained, autonomous system that refers to itself. The fragment is a portion of a whole that is missing, as for instance in archaeology in which the whole to which it refers is hypothetically imagined based on the fragment. The underlying analytical procedure of the fragment is therefore inductive or abductive. Inductive reasoning does not produce logical necessities. They merely hypothesize possible conclusions and coherent arguments in the absence of definitive proof.

THE EPISTEMOLOGY OF THE DETAIL

Calabrese explicitly offers the example of iconology in art history as being representative of the detail mode. Following this rationale, I would go a little further and suggest numerous works in the seventeenth century as being broadly representative. We might for instance recall the work of Jan Davidsz. de Heem (1606-1683) or Jan Steen (1626-1679) as being more characteristic of the detail mode than the fragment. De Heem and Jan Steen's work for instance, in spite of their vastly differing subject matter and styles, both exhibit the aesthetics of the 'close-up' in which the prolific instances of details help to contribute to an overall reading that refers to the broader iconographical system. The work of de Heem for instance, depicts an opulent landscape of sumptuous details, evident in the drop of juice from an oyster shell, the meticulous detail of a lemon peel whilst Steen presents an abundant smorgasbord of jumbled objects, belongings, broken pottery, animals and lewd gestures, and so on. Details (determined within the wider system of iconography), contribute to a re-reading of each work as essaying themes as diverse as the brevity of life to moral imperatives to moderate behaviour, and as such exemplify the wider, legible moral universe of the seventeenth century. In both examples detail signifies more than merely descriptive detail that was apparent in the first instance. Detail here is the epitome of a wider decipherable narrative to which it refers. As Calabrese remarks:

"When we 'read' any kind of whole by means of details, it is clear that our purpose is to 'see more' within the 'whole' under analysis, to the point of discovering elements that are imperceptible 'at first sight'. The specific function of the detail is consequently to *re-constitute* the system of which the detail forms a part, by discovering laws and particular aspects that were previously regarded as irrelevant to a description of the work."[203]

In Steen comparatively unambiguous actions and details operate to make decipherable, a relatively didactic narrative. Detail in these instances reveals something not observed in the first instance and "explains the system in a new way"[204] as perceived from the perspective of 'the detailer'. In the most overt examples, the 'discourse' implied by the aesthetic of the detail is one that necessarily appears 'constructed' or intentional.

In contrast to Steen, artists such as Vermeer often added and subtracted emblematic references that, rather than narrowing meaning, created a poetic dissembling, a sense of partial and incomplete potential meanings that are only ever hinted at but which are never made explicit. Unlike Steen where we are conscious of the perspective of 'the detailer' in the transmission of a message, Vermeer, the person, seems remarkably absent from his own work. It is as though we are presented with transitory, isolated and independent moments that have little decipherable meaning beyond the recognition of the moment itself. In short, although Vermeer's work employs the epistemology of the detail through various emblematic inclusions, these in the end don't assist in securing meaning. Vermeer's depictions of familiar seemingly inconsequential passing moments encountered in daily life, operate more within the epistemology of the fragment than that of the detail.

Just as I would suggest that Vermeer employs mixed phenomena of detail and fragment with a propensity towards fragmentation, Calabrese suggests that the neo-Baroque aesthetic is also one that utilises the mixed phenomena detail/fragment. For a neo-Baroque example of works inclined towards the detail mode, we might look to Antonioni's *Blow Up*, in which a photographer accidentally discovers a crime in the detail of a photographic enlargement that eventually becomes emblematic of the ultimate moral of the film; the impossibility of reconstructing the

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[203] Calabrese, Ibid., p.72

[204] Calabrese, Ibid., p.73

Plate 16:   © Guilio Paolini, *Young Man Looking at Lorenzo Lotto* (1967), Photograph, 28 x 23cm, **Image Sourced :**
http://deadsunflower.tumblr.com/post/18679777023/giulio-paolini-giovane-che-guarda-lorenzo-lotto

Plate 17:   (right) Lorenzo Lotto, *Portrait of a Young Man* (1505), Oil on wood, 28 x 23cm, **Image sourced from :**
http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Lorenzo_Lotto-_Portrait_of_a_Young_Man.JPG

whole. Another example Calabrese suggests is Giulio Paolini's *Young Man Looking at Lorenzo Lotto* (Plates 16 & 17). Paolini by re-presenting and re-titling Lotto's portrait as a photograph exhibited alongside the original, we enter into the contested realm of who is 'seen' in a work; the painter or the subject of the painting? Paolini said at the time that he wished to make the spectator picture themselves *as* Lorenzo Lotto being observed by the young man in the picture. Paolini's work through the aesthetics of the detail makes us cognisant of a previously overlooked aspect of the original; the perspective of the subject of the portrait, the young man himself, *studying* Lotto. The frame of the perceiving subject is perhaps all we see. Indeed is it possible to separate out from each other, either the young man, Lotto, Paolini or the spectator?

We might also think of Luc Tuymans' work *Apple* (Plate 18) which appeared in his exhibition, appropriately titled, 'Indelible Evidence' in which we see a close-up of an apple with a bite taken out of it. Tuymans' work isolates a significant detail from a British television documentary regarding a murder investigation. The work depicts the image of a half eaten apple from a crime

Plate 18: © Luc Tuymans, *Apple*, 1993, Oil on printed paper on painted wood, 25.4.26.7cm, **Gift of Jan Christiaan Braun in honor of Ronald S. Lauder, Image sourced :**
http://www.moma.org/collection////browse_results.php?object_id=94070

scene photo that reveals the teeth marks that eventually led to the conviction of the killer but which also, as Tuyman's noticed, suggested the image of a skull, slightly rotated. Under the terms that Calabrese establishes then, we "see more" in this instance by virtue of the forensic detail evident in the careful, detached view that television affords. Tuymans' deeper suggestion here is to highlight the way in which we never experience anything directly, but through the secondary amplifications of media. As Tuyman states:

> "For my generation, television is very important. There's a huge amount of visual information which can never be experienced but which can be seen, and its impact is

Plate 19: Fiona Greenhill, *Postcard to a Friend*, 2007/8, Oil and acrylic on canvas, 25.5 x 38cm

enormous. I think it's almost impossible to make a universal image. One can only make bits of images. Existence looks edited."[205]

Apple suggests the epistemology of the detail through the isolation of a banal particularity found at the original crime scene, something that is also re-emphasised in its composition as Calabrese also suggests that the aesthetic of the detail favours a composition of regular plane geometry whereas the fragment's composition is invariably fractal.[206] At the same time however, the epistemology of the fragment is also suggested in that the apple alludes to a sinister, darker presence/absence of a violence that the spectator can never experience, but which can only be seen via the distancing mechanism of the television.

In a similar way, the painting *Postcard to a Friend*, (Plate 19) re-contextualises Manet's *Berthe Morisot with a bouquet of violets*, (1872) as a postcard image in a still life setting. The postcard was originally sent to me from a friend who had been traveling in Europe during the 1990s and on the reverse side my friend had scribbled a quick note: "I think that you would have liked this Manet portrait – so strong – like your own & great economy of means". The initial

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[205] Loock, Ulrich; Vicente Aliaga, Juan and Spector, Nancy, from 'interview with Juan Vicente Aliaga', *LucTuymans*, Phaidon Press Limited, London, 1996, p.12

[206] Calabrese, Op. Cit., p.73

impetus for painting this was in some ways similar to Paolini in that I wanted to investigate a reversal through re-presenting the original that in this case was already a copy. I wanted to examine Manet's stylistic traits evident through a copy of a copy of a copy of the original; i.e. through imitating the original by painting from a photograph of the entire still life arrangement. I also wished to imaginatively examine Manet simultaneously from the perspective *of* Morisot, Morisot's direct confrontation with Manet but also Morisot/Manet thrown half into shadow looking out of the picture directly at the viewer.

The original painting seems so quintessentially a demonstration of Manet's distinctive stylistic traits rather than an identifiable portrait of the personality of its sitter. The paint handling in the original portrait so characteristic of Manet in its almost austere abbreviated bravura seems in such stark contrast to the work of Morisot herself whose work seems comparatively airy, indefinite, provisional and focussed on the domestic circumscribed feminine world to which she was confined. This homage to Manet also set out to replicate Manet's fully elaborated, evenly and opaquely distributed painting mode but is only evident in the portrait which in the end is juxtaposed with surrounding areas painted in a manner more associated with my own approach which by contrast combined broken brushwork with thin, transparent washes or left passages bare and unpainted in places. The impossibility of replicating Manet's style was something I wanted to test myself by attempting to reproduce the original as closely as I could, which in itself is of course an impossible task as something particular to ones own hand always creeps in. I have always been intrigued with Berthe Morisot's work, her relationship with Manet and her ambiguous place in the hierarchy of 'Impressionist greats' and in this work she seems to have doubly disappeared, first through her unclear status in the history of Impressionism and secondly through her absorption into Manet's distinctive style.

Although initially operating according to the aesthetic of the detail through the citation of Manet and still life elements, the composition itself in *Postcard to a Friend* is not one in which there is an unrestricted view of the subject. It adheres to a more fragmented composition that as Calabrese remarks "does not possess clean edges but is jagged like a coastline." In other words, its composition suggests the continuation of the scene outside the frame, signifying that the scene cordoned off from the whole is merely a fragment. Other details such as cherry blossom and seed pods suggest possible associations (brief flowerings, spent seed) but in the end don't explicitly add to any unifying logic but advance an increased sense of unrelated, unexplained, incomplete

information. Also, in trying to adhere as faithfully as possible to the original, it is nonetheless painted in my own idiom; Manet transposed to the different register of 'Fiona Greenhill'. Manet's characteristic bravura brushstrokes, reduced in scale to a dainty dolls house miniature version in which the painterly trace and 'brushy-ness' is diminished and translated into the flat, magenta saturated photographic key indicating the lens interference of the photographic reproduction from which I had worked. Rather than the direct vision of the painter of modern life[207], "the corner of nature seen through a temperament"[208], *Postcard to a Friend* was an attempt to signal the infinite regress in the mirror of reflections in which it is not always certain as to who is the subject or whom the object.

THE EPISTEMOLOGY OF THE FRAGMENT

In identifying neo-Baroque examples of the mixed phenomena of the fragment Calabrese cites David Byrne's *True Stories* (1986). *True Stories* comprises a collection of short clips constructed through a series of unrelated tabloid news stories, set against a soundtrack (the majority of which is composed and performed by Byrne, and his group Talking Heads) that takes place across diverse socio-economic groups in a fictional town in Texas, America. Rather than adopting the convention of unification through narrative, the film acquires its cohesiveness through the continuity of the narrator's voice (David Byrne himself), as well as the union of distinct and dissimilar stories.   The film's ultimate unifying principle is achieved through the presentation of a series of fragments, the details of which accumulate to suggest that personal experience is only a series of unrelated independent fragments that in the end, are perhaps not generalizable, beyond their disconnected *unlikeness*.

Similarly, the work of Michelangelo Pistoletto removes fragments of images from news stories, etc. which he then transposes to a painted image on a reflective surface, (Plate 20). Through the disjointed 'cut and paste' from media images as diverse as newspaper clippings, television and other photographic fragments Pistoletto's work suggests the abrupt and sudden way in which the media brings imagery of events remote from our own lives into our immediate environs. His work

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[207] Baudelaire, (translated and Ed. By Mayne, Jonathan), Charles,*The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, Phaidon Press, 1995

[208] Zola, Emile, Zola, E. *Mes Haines: causeries litteraires et artistique* (Paris: Charpentier, 1879), p. 229

Plate 20: © Michelangelo Pistoletto, *Ragazza che cammina,* c.1960 (installations shot), Painted tissue paper on steel, 230 x 120cm, **Image sourced :** http://www.castellodirivoli.org/en/artista/michelangelo-pistoletto/

also suggests perhaps the paradoxical false intimacy that such imagery can evoke. As he explains:

> "A mirror is always ready to give us accurate images of the things that happen right in
> front of us, or of those that take place a little further away, which we may not see. I
> even reached the point of making *Mirror Paintings* with images of the Vietnam War.
> That was in 1965. These events clearly didn't take place on the street in front
> of me, but I became aware of them through newspapers and television – I felt close
> to them after all. Modern media bring us distant images instantaneously." [209]

The fragment here is removed from the original context and is transplanted into the subjective space of the spectator, where it merges with the background *behind* the spectator whilst the

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[209] Rugoff, Op. Cit., 2007, p.77

Plate 21: © Fiona Greenhill, *Juncture*, 2012, Oil and acrylic on linen, 61 x 61cm

figure is also startlingly *in front* of the spectator. Near and distant worlds simultaneously maintain their independence but also merge with the illusory space of the spectator just as the spectator's reflection merges with the figure in the mirror. As Pistoletto remarks, "the purpose and result of my mirror paintings was to carry art to the edges of life in order to verify the entire system in which both function."[210]

For the most part much of my work adopts the fragment as its form. The work *Juncture* is an obvious example as it shows an image that was cropped from a snapshot that was originally in a

[210] Rugoff, Ibid., 2007, p.77

Plate 22: © Fiona Greenhill, *Still Life, Hong Kong Lights*, 2013, Inkjet on Hahnemuhle paper, 90 x 90cm
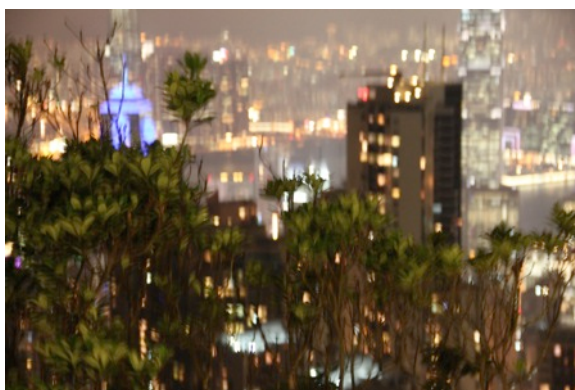
Plate 23: © Fiona Greenhill, Source Image for *Still Life, Hong Kong Lights*, 2012

landscape format. The constricted cropping transforms what was originally a partial glimpse of an architectural detail from an art nouveau building in the foreground (to the left) and a partly constructed contemporary glass structure and the surrounding scaffolding, in the background. Despite having adhered closely to the photographic source the compressed, abridged composition seemed suggestive to me of Mondrian's modernist abstractions, its systematic structure and subtle harmonies in grey interrupted by the contamination of a necklace of gaudy orange lights and a prominent cherry red slash, suggestive of a wound. Often the decision to paint particular images is sometimes simply that I find it amusing, or in some sense ironic. This image immediately suggested a humorous scenario in which the buildings almost assume anthropomorphic characteristics. Here a disagreement is being staged between two opposing parties engaged in an animated but silent struggle for supremacy between themselves; the kitsch noisy burlesque of art nouveau on the left against the purist aesthetic of a sanitised, orderly modernism on the right. This is not to suggest that this *must* be read in such a prescriptive way, as in the end it is merely paint on a flat surface. What attracts me to particular images is often I suspect the possibility of *misinterpretation*; the sense that anything framed in a particular and constricted way might lead to an understanding that in the end can only ever be arbitrary. I am interested in images that in some way betray the ideological agenda of the 'framer' which in the end is seen to be capricious, subjective.

The selection process from which the photographic work, *Still Life, Hong Kong Lights*, evolved, was similarly ironic. After reviewing a series of photos I'd taken in iPhoto, the pre-set image recognition technology of iPhoto selected this tiny fragment from the source image (plate 23) above, suggesting I title the unnamed 'face'. What I particularly liked about this image was its shifting and arbitrary nature of classificatory systems. In the original the fragment is simply a detail of a larger landscape panorama. The fragment removed from the original context suggested to me a ikebana-like still life image with distant city lights. In computational logic however, the fragment is a group portrait and removed from its surroundings, a face.

Mona on the Parra, a work that, like most of my paintings, was derived from a photograph that I took whilst driving, employs the aesthetic of the fragment. It depicts an independent moment seized from the unblinking stream of images that rush by in the course of daily life. It curtains off a single, autonomous ordinary instant that signifies countless other comparable moments arrested from the flow of time. It equates to some degree to Roland Barthes attitude to writing expressed

Plate 24: © Fiona Greenhill, *Mona on the Parra*, 2011-12, Oil and acrylic on linen, 91 x 91cm

in his statement; "fragments are then so many stones on the perimeter of a circle: I spread myself

around: my whole little universe in crumbs; at the center, what?"[211] Barthes identified the

structure of his writing as essentially 'novelistic'; as one that resists the linearity of a coherently

ordered narrative that evades the centre. Rather than a mode of discourse that follows a cohesive

sequentially organised narrative, his writing as he stated is "never lengthy, always proceeding by

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[211] Champagne, Roland A., *Literary History in the Wake of Roland Barthes: Re-Defining the Myths of Reading*, Summa Publications Inc., USA, 1984, p.10

fragments, miniatures, paragraphs with titles, or articles."[212] The fragment disturbs and interrupts the "smooth finish, the composition, discourse" in which he maintains:

> "no logic links the figures, determines their contiguity: the figures are nonsytagmatic, nonnarrative, they are Erinyes; they stir, collide, subside, return, vanish with no more order than the flight of mosquitoes"[213]

Barthes declares his preference for "a mode of notation, investment, interest in daily reality, in people, in everything that happens in life" and in a form that is defined as "simply [that] space where subtle, mobile desires can circulate".[214] Through the aesthetic of the fragment Barthes evades the "superego of continuity" that dominates conventional narrative in favour of contingency and indeterminacy. Perhaps as one might expect then, Barthes adopts Gide's motto "incoherence is preferable to a distorting order" as part of a manoeuvre to avoid "the monster of totality".[215]

By 'monster of totality' however, Barthes isn't confirming his resistance to order and coherence as such, merely to the tyranny of the "author's empire" that directs a univocal linear sequence of events. Indeed, for Barthes literature:

> "consist[s] of several indiscernible voices … to which we cannot assign a specific origin: literature is that neuter, that composite, that oblique into which every subject escapes, the trap where all identity is lost, beginning with the very identity of the body that writes."[216]

Barthes's interest is in the mobility of language that arises through the polyphony of contrasting voices. Barthes's "prattle of the text", "that foam of language" celebrated in *The Pleasure of the Text* is reminiscent of Bakhtin's "carnivalisation" in which meaning is always in the process of

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[212] Delville, Michel, *The American Prose Poem: Poetic Form and the Boundaries of Genre*, University Press of Florida, 1998, p.26

[213] Delville, Ibid., pp.26-27

[214] Delville, Ibid., p.27

[215] Calabrese, Op. Cit., p.87

[216] Barthes, Roland, '"The Death of the Author'", Aspen, no.5-6, 1967

materializing, shifting, decomposing[217]. The past is never entirely concluded, but is constantly renegotiated and re-freshed in the present. 'Meaning' is gained through the fragmented parade of bustling ideas, images, sounds. As soon as competing entities coalesce into a coherent form it mutates, decays, crumbles, re-combines and so on. Barthes's attitude also corresponds to Bakhtin's idea of Intertextuality that acknowledges the impossibility of original thought. Intertextuality cedes that all cultural products, 'texts' form the pre-existent code of discourse. In this sense no 'text', be it a novel, painting, newspaper advertisement, etc. is an entirely isolated autonomous entity as meaning is gained through association and dialogue with other 'texts'. The author is merely the coincidence of coordinates between points and "the text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture."[218]

Amongst an infinite number of 'texts' it would have to be said that the *Mona Lisa* is *the* consummate cultural icon. It has possibly been more reproduced, emulated and parodied than any other work and yet it still continues to demonstrate a remarkable capacity to withstand and adapt to the flux of time and taste. Part of the appeal that the original photograph on which *Mona on the Parra* is based, held for me was precisely the question as to why the *Mona Lisa* continues to enjoy such a long afterlife into the twenty-first century. And the fact that her new surroundings on Parramatta Road are at such odds with her original setting seems to testify even more to the riddle that her ongoing appeal presents.

At the time I took the snapshot that evolved into the painting, it seemed as though Dan Brown's *da Vinci Code* was being advertised in every corner of the globe. The incongruous combination of a supersized Mona Lisa (in reality a small painting) looking imperiously down on a busy street, dwarfing the people below, like some watchful indifferent God was what seemed most compelling. It seemed ironic that the original had been such a small, elusive, finely painted work but here was presented as a detail colossally up-sized to a commercial scale and yet despite this, her ambiguous expression seemed even more inscrutable. In the advertisement, Mona Lisa is removed from the dream-like ethereal setting in which Leonardo had originally placed her and in

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[217] Also a concept not dissimilar to Riegl's "Kunstwollen" [see Iversen, Margaret, *Alois Riegl: Art History and Theory*, MIT Press, 1993]

[218] Barthes, Roland, Op Cit. "the Death of the Author"

the new arrangement it is difficult to decide whether her expression is benign or perhaps even slightly menacing.

The puzzling question as to why some works and not others resonate more profoundly at different historical times, i.e. the question of a work's transcendence, is a deeply puzzling one that has always fascinated me. I think that Raymond Williams was to some extent correct when he suggested that the transcendent work's appeal is related to:

> "a relatively unchanging biological human condition […] probably found in some of the basic material processes of the making of art … [in that] the material process of the production of art includes certain biological processes, especially those relating to body movements and to the voice, which are not a mere substratum but are at times the most powerful elements of the work."[219]

A sentiment not dissimilar to Peter Fuller's tentative conclusion that:

> "[…..],a very important part in what gives a work of art enduring value concerns the nature of its relationship to elements of experience which do not change, or rather which change at a very slow rate indeed and, for our purposes, may effectively be regarded as constants[220].

In the twenty-first century, perhaps part of the explanation however for *Mona Lisa's* ongoing ability to captivate is by contrast to Fuller and Williams, that she signifies the utter, irretrievable *loss* of the past.   The *Mona Lisa* here is displaced from the dark chamber of Renaissance chiaroscuro into the forensic day-glo fluorescent lighting of the twenty-first century, transcribed and altered to the point almost of non-recognition through the exaggerated effects of camera shake and pixilation. In the context of Parramatta Road on a dull day the dream-like panorama of the world that Leonardo created for his subject seems as remote as the outer galaxy. It also seems bitingly ironic that Dan Brown uses Leonardo as the exemplar of a *decipherable* code, in a midday movie 'mists of time' aesthetic that seems so at odds with the inscrutability for which she is famed. I suspect it is her *unknowability*, the fact that her meaning may never be completely explained, that is a large part of her ongoing appeal. Dan Brown's Leonardo da Vinci is one that

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[219] Williams, Raymond, *Culture and Materialism: Selected Essays*, Verson, 2005, p.113

[220] Fuller, Peter, Art and Psychoanalysis, Writers and Readers, London, 1980, p.21

reductively narrows interpretation (albeit for narrative purposes), but in so doing only seems to highlight the *Mona Lisa*'s enigma. The *Mona Lisa*'s ongoing appeal epitomises a certain fluidity of meaning and instability of interpretation that I think parallels Mieke Bal's observation (when she is explaining the contemporary fascination with Caravaggio) that:

> "The images of today present us with a "Caravaggio" who is entirely ours; one who could have had no knowledge of, or agency upon, what we see him to be now; an irreversible *new* Old Master, who changes the Caravaggio we thought we knew as well as the historical illusion that we knew him."[221]

Although *Mona on the Parra* presents the *Mona Lisa* as an incomplete detail, in its new context it also exudes an air of being a self-contained, self-sufficient fragment transposed within a 'circle of crumbs' in which the view of the street is abruptly severed, cars dismembered, the road a disconcerting patchwork of greys that stands against the gathering clouds of a leaden sky like a makeshift Hollywood film set; a facade behind which there is nothing. The *Mona Lisa* transported to Parramatta Road creates the impression of it being a fragment, an independent splinter off the whole, partially through a compositional device that echoes Vermeer. In Vermeer's *Little Street* brickwork and figures are seemingly as equally worthy of attention as each other and there is a strong sense that indeed, this bracketed view, may be of no more importance than numerous similar views.

It is in this way that we might perceive a striking correspondence between Vermeer and the undiscriminating non-hierarchical aesthetic of the camera (of which the documentary photograph is the exemplar) in which extraneous detail and the main 'subject' of the photograph are given equal weight. From the perspective of the twenty-first century we might say that the unrelenting exactitude of the photograph corresponds to a similar aesthetic seemingly echoed in Vermeer in which people merge with the objective world, and vice versa, objects exhibit anthropomorphic characteristics. Delacroix was one of the first to intuit this aspect of photography when he remarked that "when a photographer takes a scene, the edge of the picture is as interesting as the centre … the subordinate parts as dominant as the main subject."[222] Svetlana Alpers noted that

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[221] Bal, Op. Cit., p.15

[222] Scharf, Aaron, Op. Cit.

although Western art has given preference to the platonic ideals of history painting that favoured idealisation over transcription, art since the seventeenth century has been punctuated with examples that employ a 'descriptive' aesthetic that seems reminiscent of the camera's non-hierarchical mode of transcription.[223]

It seems plausible that the descriptive mode that such paintings exhibit precisely is a feature that to twenty-first century eyes makes these works seem so contemporary and compelling. But it also seems likely that, albeit for different reasons, this fragmented, descriptive and co-extensive space that much Baroque art exhibits, also expressed the existential anxieties of the seventeenth century. In Caravaggio the stage-management of gratuitous detail, fragmented forms and body parts jostling for attention create a tension that pushes out towards the edges of the picture as if the frame is straining to contain its occupants and in Vermeer, there is a sense of the self-contained fragment of the contracted private world arrested and dislodged from the larger public world beyond its margins; islands of domesticity that keeps the potentially hostile universe at a distance. In Donne the private world of lovers denotes the larger universe in the sense that "little things … signifie great"[224], and we find that in Thomas Browne's "cosmic personality" (as Joan Webber[225] termed it); in the "cosmography of my selfe"[226] that:

> "The earth is a point not only in respect of the Heavens above us, but of that
> heavenly land celestial part within us: that mass of Flesh that circumscribes me, limits
> not my mind: that surface that tells the Heavens it hath an end, cannot perswade me
> I have any: I take my circle to be above three hundred and sixty; though the number
> of the Ark do measure my body, it comprehendeth not my mind: whilst I study to find
> how I am a Microcosm or little World, I find my Self Something more than the
> great."[227]

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[223] Alpers, Op. Cit., : "In the seventeenth century and again in the nineteenth some of the most innovative and accomplished artists in Europe - Carravaggio and Velazquez and Vermeer, later Courbet and Manet - embrace an essentially descriptive pictorial mode. 'Descriptive' is indeed one way of characterising many of those works that we are accustomed to refer to casually as *realistic* - among which is included, … the pictorial mode of photographs." (p.xxi)

[224] Norford, Op. Cit., p.423

[225] Ibid., p.418

[226] Browne, Thomas, from *Religio* Medici, (I.15) as quoted by Shuger, Debora, 'The Laudian Idiot', *Sir Thomas Browne: The World Proposed*, Oxford University Press, 2008, p.55

[227] Browne, Thomas, *Religio Medici*, Printed R. Scot, T. Fasset, F. Wright, R. Chiswell, 1682, p.169

For Browne, the divine plan is incomprehensible. Existence is that seamless, infinite folding and unfolding, contraction and expansion, between macrocosm and microcosm, the ultimate meaning of which cannot be comprehended by man. Beyond ascertaining the existence of isolated islands of knowledge and thought, the ability to grasp in its entirety the significance of God's ultimate blueprint of existence is, for Man, an impossibility. Although Pascal (1623-1662) diverges from Brown in that he is ultimately more inclined towards atheism, Pascal shares with Browne the view that man was no longer a fixed point but a self-contained independent entity; a circumference without a centre, a centre without a circumference in which there is no possibility of grasping the totality:

> "For, after all, what is man in nature: A nothing compared to the infinite, a whole compared to the nothing, a middle point between all and nothing, infinitely remote from an understanding of the extremes; the end of things and their principles are unattainably hidden from him in impenetrable secrecy."[228]

Barthes modus operandi bears an affinity to the Baroque sensibility. Barthes's, as Susan Sontag noted was simultaneously "confidently assertive, [but] nevertheless insist[ed] that [his] assertions [were] no more than provisional"[229]. It is this, Barthes's 'conditional certainty', that reveals a certain kinship with the Baroque attitude of 'productive uncertainty.' Furthermore, as Sontag also pointed out "Barthes harboured spiritual strivings that could not be supported".[230] Thus from an ideological position of ambivalence, reality for Barthes is presented as the theatrical spectacle of isolated fragments, details, crumbs; as "the pure and simple 'representation' of the 'real,' [precisely because] the naked relation of 'what is' (or has been) thus appears as a resistance to meaning; this resistance confirms the great mythic opposition of the *true-to-life* (the lifelike) and the *intelligible*.**"[231]** Barthes essentially seeks ways in which to express the impossibility of comprehending the purpose of existence; in Barthes the epistemology of the fragment expresses the infinitely unintelligible.

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[228] Norford, Op. Cit., p.423

[229] Sontag, Susan, *A Barthes Reader*, Vintage, 2000, p.x

[230] Ibid., p.xxxvi

[231] Barthes, Op. Cit., p.146

PART THREE : MICROCOSM / MACROCOSM

CHAPTER FIVE : CHAOSMOS

"The enigmatic character of art and philosophy […of the present era] is founded not on their distance from the real world, but on the contrary, on the fact that the essence of reality is enigmatic."[232]

The dual concept microcosm / macrocosm, is not an antiquated, obsolete metaphor relegated to history. The idea that man might be little more than a miniscule entity enmeshed in a decentred infinite expanse profoundly unsettled confidence in life's certitudes in the seventeenth century and out of this pervasive existential doubt manifested a Baroque preoccupation with the inordinately small and unendingly large. The incomprehensible ceaseless totality of space in which the observer is enfolded in Browne's 'cosmography' foreshadows the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries' existential uncertainty faced with the advent of chaos theory, of fractal 'worlds within worlds' and its related fields of enquiry, that have "been applied to everything from sociology to psychology, from business consulting to the neurosciences […] to contemporary novels […and] special effects in movies"[233]. Chaos theory suggests not disorder as such but a complex order beyond our predictive capabilities – an order that is unknowable either at the threshold of its smallest detail or at its outer limit. In a detailed account of scientific developments that have fed into the collective imagination, David Peat concluded that although "[…] the twentieth century began with confident certainty it ended in unsettling uncertainty"[234]. It would seem therefore, in spite of prodigious advancements in science and the expansion of the frontiers of knowledge, that what can be known with certainty is underpinned by an acceptance of degrees of uncertainty; of enigma.

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[232] Perniola, Mario, (translated by Woodall, Christopher) *Enigmas: The Egyptian Moment in Society and Art*, Verso, London, 1995, p.11

[233] Peat, F. David, From Certainty to Uncertainty: The Story of Science and Ideas in the Twentieth Century, Joseph Henry Press, 2002, p.15

[234] Peat, Ibid., p.xiv

An alertness to the enigmatic nature of existence that was felt so keenly in the seventeenth century and that many scholars (including Perniola and Peat) have identified as key to the contemporary collective ambience, also brings to the surface the closely related question of self determination. The question of an individual's agency or conversely impotence in the world (how far an individual is able to determine their own path in life) addresses the ontological problem of mankind's importance in the cosmological scheme. The Classicist view, that emanates either from staunchly religious or mechanistic instrumentalist perspectives, places humanity in a central position within an essentially prescribed, orderly universe. The neo-Baroque on the other hand subscribes to an unruly cosmos comprising 'incomprehensible orderliness'; a position that locates itself between two contradictory perspectives; one in which man exists in a meaningfully ordered chaos (an order beyond ultimate understanding) and one in which, conversely, man is effectively an inconsequential fragment in an essentially inhuman and infinite chaosmos, (as James Joyce conceived it as the coincidence of order and disorder)[235].

This chapter therefore takes as its starting point Joyce's idea 'Chaosmos' that corresponds directly with the seventeenth century concept 'coincidentia oppositorum' or coincidence of opposites, a stratagem that enabled the seventeenth century mind to briefly bind together subject and object, sense and non-sense, all and nothing, limit and excess. Just as the Baroque coincidence of opposites provides a means by which to synthesize new meaning through unexpected couplings of things already existent in the world, the neo-Baroque adopts a re-combinatory aesthetic that accepts both the impossibility of originality and the value of repetition. Repetition also asks what degree chance plays in the creative process and questions to what extent the artist can assert artistic agency and authorial autonomy. The associative play in the neo-Baroque chaosmos assumes the permeability of disciplinary boundaries and also questions the limits of language and meaning itself; the neo-Baroque form is therefore always one of admixture and here I suggest that it is specifically through grafting the technological aesthetic onto painting that defines the neo-Baroque in the twenty-first century. The aesthetics of amalgam (i.e. here specifically the technological into painting, the painterly into photographic) also defines a position that is diametrically opposed to Classical taste that abhors admixture and strives to uphold the modernist paradigm of medium specificity. In the neo-Baroque the *technological grotesque* I suggest is a

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[235] Joyce, James, *Finnegans Wake*, Oxford University Press, 2012, p.xxix

contemporary metaphor that articulates the disquiet elicited from the realisation of being conscious entities enfolded in an amorphous immensity that is not just *inhuman* but *insensate* and *unconscious*. And the final point that concludes this section and thesis considers the widespread prevalence of a neo-Baroque imaginative engagement in the arts in the twenty-first century with the ontological problems associated with scale; the mixture of fascination and dread associated with contemplating the immeasurable evident in the vacillation between miniature and gargantuan worlds that resonates with seventeenth century conceptions of microcosm / macrocosm. In parallel to the seventeenth centuries' existential uncertainty, the concern with problems of scale and worlds within worlds in the twenty-first century often express an underlying existential fear that our increasing dependence on technological devices will render society even more atomised, dispersed, disconnected and people more machine-like or alternatively, it articulates an even greater horror that we will be usurped by technology in a post-human age.

REPETITION AND ORIGINALITY : ARTISTIC AGENCY AND AUTHORIAL AUTONOMY

> "In fact, so much has been written upon most subjects now, that the great and
> increasing difficulty is, to say any thing, […] that has not been said or meant in some
> way a score of times before […] It is really safer to transcribe slily a good thing from
> some of the more obscure authors of antiquity than from the veritable olio of one's
> own desk; for a thought which we are aware was in another man's head before
> Daedalus invented carpenter's tools, may very likely be unknown and forgotten, so as
> to pass for a new one; […and thus we can say] that 'the ancients have stole all our
> thoughts […]'"[236]

Curiously, '*The Ancients have stolen all our best ideas*' was the title of a recent exhibition held at
the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna[237] that showcased the interactions of Ed Ruscha with the
Museum's permanent collection of historical objects. The title of the exhibition comes from a
remark Mark Twain is reported to have made although ironically this quote is itself, likely to have
been a re-acquisition from obscure earlier sources (one of which is cited above), but it also
expresses a sentiment that we consider to be contemporary but which was equally current in the
seventeenth century, evident when Shakespeare wrote: "If there be nothing new, but that which
is/ Hath been before, how are our brains beguiled/ Which, laboring for invention, bear amiss/ The
second burden of a former child"[238]. The neo-Baroque premise that underpins the show is as the
title suggests, that nothing is uniquely 'original' or 'new' and that a re-combinatory aesthetic,
using pre-existing objects as a kind of alphabet for infinite possibilities in the creative process, not
only offers a form of liberation from the strictures of the heroic pursuit of 'uniqueness' and
'unrepeatability', but defines the aesthetic of our age.

By contrast, the Classicist Modernist ethos subscribes to the heroism of unique and singular
examples of original genius; it reveres the sanctity of the individual masterwork and its
unrepeatability and is therefore hostile to the idea of copying, imitation and repetition that is the

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[236] Westley, F. and Davis, A.H., Spirit and manners of the age: a Christian and literary miscellany, Volumes 3-4, Westley
and Tyrell, Dublin, 1827, p.138

[237] 'The Ancient's Stole All Our Great Ideas', exhibition curated by Ed Ruscha in conjunction with the Kunsthistorisches
Museum, Vienna, 25 September – 2 December 2012

[238] Shakespeare, William, *Sonnet 59*

stock in trade of the post-Modern artist. However, the Baroque understanding of wit, invention and repetition, can also seem surprisingly and strikingly contemporary. Although we tend to think of our own age as one burdened by the litter of the past, the Baroque era was acutely and oppressively aware of the achievements of antiquity as well as having a heightened sense of the impossibility of gaining direct access to a world felt to have been irretrievably lost. Despite the significant expansion of knowledge regarding the ancient world that occurred during the seventeenth century it had the strange effect of making the distant past seem even more remote. As a result, the whole period oscillated between a nostalgic longing for a time thought to have permanently vanished and the amplified desire to outstrip its predecessors through the skilful renewal and redeployment of the ruins of the past in order to venerate their own present-day reality.

In parallel with the seventeenth century, Calabrese referred to our own times as one in which we are cognisant that "everything has already been said, everything has already been written."[239] Calabrese identified the "aesthetic of repetition", as the formal definition of a "universal Baroque," comprising "organized variation, polycentrism / regulated irregularity, and frantic rhythm". He observed that when faced with the prospect of saturation, of the impossibility of saying anything 'original', the response is to "change the rules governing both taste and production [through …] a tiny variation, the form of a rhythmic repetition, or a change in the internal structure." [240] Thus, the artist might secure a means of circumventing this impasse by "transcrib[ing] slily a good thing" from pre-existing sources through the introduction of small variations; distortions, exaggerations, elaborations, an increasing 'fractilisation'.

For Calabrese Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose* is "…*the* prototype […] of a contemporary neo-Baroque aesthetic" observing that it is constructed entirely of quotations that have been "perverted" or varied to some degree so as to create something 'new'. In *The Open Work* (1962) Umberto Eco identified an increasing number of works that emerged during the early part of the twentieth century that exhibited a tendency to be interpretively 'open'. As such the 'open work' displays a pre-disposition towards multiplicity and polysemy in art and necessarily emphasizes the constitutive faculties of the 'reader' of the work in the interaction between reader and text. Eco's

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[239] Calabrese, Op. Cit., p.44

[240] Calabrese, Ibid., pp.44-45

formulation that the work is thus always mixed and 'impure' also illustrates his antipathy towards, as David Robey observes, "purity […] because it acts in too much haste."[241] Eco, Robey continues, is "a doubter by principle who believes in democracy rather than oppression and in discussion rather than revelation, all in accordance with his theoretical recognition of the impossibility of certain knowledge."[242] Eco's attitude assumes therefore that the work is always an active reworking between reader and text; that nothing remains 'pure', uncontaminated or self-sufficient. He maintains a belief in the egalitarian right of everything to exist, that everything is to degrees always 'mixed' and that 'original' thought in the primary sense is an impossibility. Hence, for Eco, "books always speak of other books, and every story tells a story that has already been told."[243] But this outlook also equates remarkably closely to certain attitudes prevalent in the seventeenth century, as Maria H. Loh points out:

> "When Julia Kristeva referred to the text as a 'mosaic of citations, which absorbed and transformed its individual components,' or when Barthes called it a 'tissue of quotations' and a 'multidimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash,' or when Jacques Derrida described it as an archive of 'always already transcriptions' (or the 'always-already-read,' according to Fredric Jameson), these authors were all drawing from a classical topos of eclectic imitation outlined by authors long before them. Predating postmodernism by over three hundred years, the Baroque theorist Secondo Lancellotti pointed out, 'There are many books in one book, and many authors speak through the mouth of one author.'"[244]

Flagrant instances of appropriation were fairly commonplace in the seventeenth century to a degree that many today who subscribe to Classicist ideals of the exceptional might find surprising and troubling. Sometimes this was to fulfil a documentary necessity by providing copies of old masters and other works for a specific market. However, the term *misto*, meaning mixture, was used to describe another class of repetition considered to be the Renaissance exemplar of

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[241] Robey, David, 'Introduction' to Eco, Umberto, *Opera Aperta*, Harvard University Press, 1989, p.32

[242] Robey, Ibid., pp.32-33

[243] Eco, Umberto, (translated by Waver, William) 'Postscript', *The Name of the Rose,* Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1984, p.20

[244] Loh, Maria h., 'New and Improved: Repetition as Originality in Italian Baroque Practice and Theory', from The Art Bulletin, Vol. 86, No. 3 (Sep, 2004), p.477

originality but which in the Baroque period underwent significant modifications that from a contemporary perspective can make the Baroque model seem remarkably familiar. The Renaissance model of *misto* was based on a discriminating mix of disparate sources from nature, recombined in such a way as to produce a 'new' ideal form. The Renaissance ideal melded together the finest examples in nature in a formulaic equation; the cut and paste of beautiful legs + face + body, etc = ideal woman. The underlying premise of this approach was that nature was in need of improvement, suggesting in a sense that nature was imperfect. In the Baroque period however, there was a significant and important fundamental shift that transferred the idea of improving the imperfections of nature to amalgamating disparate sources from the pantheon of art, in which it was felt no one individual alone could supply the ideal model, thereby suggesting that *both* art and nature were imperfect. As such Bernini advocated the judicial use of a 'mixed' style of appropriation from other artists when he expressed his admiration for Annibale Carracci:

> "His manner was formed from the ten or twelve greatest painters as if by walking
> through a kitchen he had dipped into each pot, adding from each a little to his own
> mixture."[245]

There was in the Baroque then the urge to surpass both nature as well as the art of the past but there was also the palpable sense that its influence was inescapable. Francesco Petrarch (1304-1374) echoing Seneca, suggested that the likeness between an artistic source and the artist's expression of it achieved through emulation should not be like painting an identifiable portrait of an individual, but must be analogous to the resemblance of a son to its father, since;

> "… in this case, even though there may be a considerable dissimilarity in features, yet
> there is a certain shadow […that…] recalls to our mind the memory of the father […]
> something hidden there has this effect."[246]

Matteo Peregrini (1595-1652) the first Italian theorist of the *concetto* or witty conceit similarly referred to "certain shadows" embodied in works that enabled the viewer to see the "double sense".[247] Emblems and witty conceits engaged the constitutive faculties of an audience that were responsive to associative games and double entendres; that recognized the numerous intertextual

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[245] Loh, ibid. p.487

[246] Loh, ibid., p.489

[247] Loh, ibid.

threads and "looked for shadows of the father in the son"[248]. This metaphorical way of thinking was often manifest in the use of emblems that were by their very nature a hybridisation that combined a motto, a short poem or axiom and a picture. Their preponderance expanded widely across various media (tapestry, architecture, painting, theatrical productions, etc.) which illustrates the extent to which they represented a broadly pervasive hybridised, flexible way of thinking in the seventeenth century. Emblems however should be distinguished from their more learned cousin, the *impressa* precisely because of their adoption of more populist and accessible iconography that specifically aimed at appealing to a diverse section of the community. Their general remit was educational, sometimes didactic and descended almost exclusively from Aristotelian poetics that extolled the sense of wonder and awe that can be elicited from the spectacular displays and unexpected couplings in image and textual combinations. Through spectacle and display of the extraordinary and exceptional, the individual is brought to contemplate the natural wonder of existence and it is this faculty, the natural inquisitiveness of man that distinguishes humanity from the natural world, as the supremely rational being. Wonder or *Meraviglia*, was a condition primarily stimulated by visual faculties and it is not surprising that at a time when, as Mario Paz remarked, the "… tendency to images reached its climax" visual imagery became central to pedagogical approaches that emphasised the efficacy and immediacy of visual media.[249] Viewed positively by its advocates *Meraviglia* was thought to engage all the senses simultaneously and to invoke an altered state or awareness in which realisation was grasped 'at once'.

THE NAUSEA OF THE EVERYDAY

No discussion of metaphor in the seventeenth century would be complete without mentioning the theorist, Emanuele Tesauro's (1592-1675) *Arisotelian Telescope* (1653) since it is the central theoretical text regarding the study of *acutezze mirabilia*, (wondrous witticisms). According to Tesauro, there are two distinct forms of communication; that of 'the proper' and the 'grammatical'. As Tesauro states;

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[248] Loh, ibid.

[249] Hanafi, Zakiya, *The Monster in the Machine*, Duke University Press, 2000, pp.189-190

"All the strength of every signifying Word… consists in representing to the human mind the thing signified. But this representation can be produced, either with the naked and proper word, which does not require any work from the ingenious mind: or with an ingenious signification, which both represents and delights. Whence two general differences in Oration are born: the first Proper and Grammatical: the second Rhetorical and Witty."[250]

Tesauro equates the 'naked' and 'proper' to the literal description of the thing itself. By contrast, the 'grammatical' is a metaphorical representation *analogous* to the object and which gains its startling effect primarily through establishing a resemblance between *unlike* things. Tesauro thus endorsed a style of rhetoric that forcefully bound together disparate and dissimilar things. In this he perceived a quintessential human trait that distinguishes man from both nature and angels and that makes man nearer to God since, an angel "speaks not with the Signs of concepts, but with the concepts themselves, so that one thing is both signifier and signified,"[251] whereas man has the capacity and *need* to signify things by means of other things and that since this is a facility universally available to everyone it can helpfully relieve the monotony of existence that mankind feels so keenly. Thus he continues;

"neither the Animals nor the Angels, but Men alone were given by Nature a certain nausea of everyday, although pleasant, things, unless utility is joined with variety, and variety with pleasure."[252]

Despite disagreement about what constituted judicious use of *acutezze* (which could be quite a contentious subject in the seventeenth century) most theorists, including both radicals such as Tesauro, and more conservative ones such as Gracián concurred that the use of *acutezze* echoed the creative powers of God himself and was therefore a divine characteristic since it is through this faculty that the individual can make something from nothing in the same manner in which the universe itself had come into existence 'from out of nothing'. Thus in a kind of conjuring trick, by coupling unlike things *acutezze* endowed otherwise commonplace and unexceptional things with

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[250] Farronato, Cristina, *Eco's Chaosmos: From the Middle Ages to Postmodernity*, University of Toronto Press, 2003, p.26

[251] Hanafi, Op. Cit., p.201

[252] Hanafi, Ibid.

'magical' properties, as when for example Tesauro remarked, "a Lion become[s] a Man; an Eagle a City, […etc.]"[253]

Tesauro himself makes an appearance in Umberto Eco's *The Island of the Day Before*, as the character Father Emanuele and his 'metaphor machine'. For Eco it is Tesauro's concern with the permeability of language itself; with the intellectual pleasure and wonder derived from unexpected amalgams and the ability to see one thing inside another, of 'the shadow of the father in the son' that establishes the historical precedent for the Postmodern 'open work'. In *The Aesthetics of Chaosmos : the Middle Ages of James Joyce*, (1982) Eco locates in Joyce a shared appreciation gained through Tesauro (as well as Bruno) that an infinite number of imaginative possibilities exist in the encyclopaedic aesthetics of fragmentation and recombination[254]. At heart, the witty conceit in the seventeenth century was, as Parry remarks, a manifestation of the desire to reconcile dissimilar things that arose from the underlying fear that the universe itself was profoundly paradoxical, indeed *irreconcilable*;

> "[…] the preoccupation with the metaphysical conceit was closely related to the polarity between subject and object. Holding the two elements of the metaphor at once apart and together, conceding likeness while being strongly conscious of unlikeness, the conceit – like the relation between subject and object – is a *Concordia discors* or *coincidentia oppositorum*.[255]

Joyce and Eco's Chaosmos similarly epitomise a twentieth century *coincidentia oppositorum* (or coincidence of opposites). Eco explains that the complimentary opposite of the 'open work', the 'consolatory work' by contrast presents a simplified and sanitised view of the world that elides the essential confusion and manifold intricacies of reality. The *Chaosmos* on the other hand is an allegory for the indissoluble synthesis of contrasting forces of 'stability and variability'; 'order and irregularity' suggesting that in this composite of opposites, this 'controlled chaos' we find the ruling principle governing the universe. In the late twentieth / early twenty-first century the

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[253] Hanafi, Ibid., p.201

[254] However, unlike Joyce, in which representation threatens to dislodge from the object of signification itself as in *Finegan's Wake*, for Eco representation always maintains its connection to the object. Thus for Eco, language is always metaphorical – a representation that transfers sense perception to thought and vice versa.

[255] Norford, Don Parry, 'Microcosm and Macrocosm in Seventeenth-Century Literature', Journal of the History of Ideas, Vol. 38, No.3 (Jul-Sep., 1977), p.427

prevalence of a proliferation of 'open works' thus mirrors the complexity and enigma of reality. The open work, like Tesauro's metaphor, seeks to bewilder and disorient the spectator; to shatter the habitual ways of perceiving the world through its dismantling and reconfiguration. Thus the open work offers the spectator the possibility of active engagement with the constitutive aspect of the work. And, rather than an oppressive order in which the spectator is essentially passive as in the consolatory work, a productive uncertainty or 'disorder' offers a kind of liberation and agency in the world that can stimulate the intellectual and imaginative faculties that define us as human beings in order to relieve the monotony and "nausea" of a situation in which we might otherwise feel we are ultimately powerless and without choice.

It is also therefore a kind of emancipation from the burden of having to 'invent', as *acutezze* offers the alternative of 'recycling' rather than 'originality'. And therefore another characteristic central to the efficacy of Tesauro's *acutezze* was novità, or novelty in which citation of familiar texts, common place or even unexceptional things was commended if it was felt that something new arose from a unusual or unexpected re-contextualisation, not unrelated to 'seeing the father in the son'. As Emmanuel Tessauro remarked:

> "Novelty is necessary for every witty production, and without this, marvel is diluted as well as grace and applause. [...] imitation [is] a type of wisdom whereby you propose to yourself a metaphor or some other flower of human ingenuity; then you attentively consider its roots; into well-ploughed and fertile soil, you cause other flowers of the same species to be generated, but not the same individuals." [256]

And similarly, Poussin remarked that;

> "Novelty in painting does not consist above all in choosing a subject that has never been seen before but upon a good and novel arrangement and expression, thanks to which the subject, though in itself ordinary and worn, becomes new and singular."[257]

Tesauro's metaphor thus describes a type of originality that obeys an organic process of evolution and growth from the repetition of the 'ordinary and worn'. Taking root in the particular psychological topography of an individual, it divides and branches, producing not the exact clones

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[256] Loh, Op. Cit., p.493

[257] Loh, Ibid., p.496

of former blooms but recognisable variants whose unique character is determined by the specific conditions located in the intellectual terrain into which it has been transplanted and through which it has been filtered. Thus in certain ways this also resonates with twentieth and twenty-first century notions of originality that, through processes of displacement reinvest the past in the present and question notions of authorial autonomy and artistic agency. It is an ideological position not too distant from contemporary notions in which a 'copy' is never a facsimile of the original when dislodged, recombined, reinterpreted, re-presented as when Ruscha says, "I have always operated on a kind of waste-retrieval method"[258] or when Richter remarks that "Even when I paint a straightforward copy, something new creeps in, whether I want it to or not: something that even I don't really grasp."[259]

The endless combinatory possibilities disclosed by *acutezze mirabilia* and ars combinatoria in the seventeenth century are by now obvious to anyone of the TV, internet and iPhone generation who habitually conflate a universe of disparate objects, static and moving images, aphorisms, music, and so on into a personal lexicon or album of fragments that memorialise the varied pathways of thoughts and memories that accumulate over time. A recent artistic manifestation of this 'mentality' would have to be Keith Tyson's exhibition *Cloud Choreography and Other Emergent Systems*[260] that surveys the artist's lustful pursuit of heterogeneity, indeterminacy and kitsch. In the series of paintings entitled *Cloud Choreography*, (Plate 25) Tyson catalogues the multifarious meanings of 'clouds', suggesting the mobile and associative nature of language and thought. Applying Tesauro's classification in a more flexible way than originally intended perhaps, nonetheless we might then say that the 'proper' definition that initially springs to mind is the more literally understood type of cloud we are accustomed to seeing in the sky. By contrast the various 'grammatical' permutations include atomic clouds, clouds in a coffee cup, factory smoke, engine clouds, dust clouds, cosmic clouds, Turner's clouds, volcanic clouds, jet trails, Constable's clouds, etc. All these supplementary images confer diverse ideas onto a single word 'cloud' whose associations reach beyond the literal meaning and access the encyclopaedic repository of both personal and collective memory. The title of the exhibition is therefore the principle by which

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[258] Wolfe,

[259] Storr, Robert, p37

[260] held at the Parasol Unit, London, 16 September – 11 November 2009

Plate 25 : © Keith Tyson, *Cloud Choreography: Time Travelling with the Clouds,* 2009, Oil on aluminium, 183 x 366cm,

Image sourced :

http://showstudio.com/shop/product/cloud_choreography_time_travelling_with_the_clouds

work is generated and by which its disparate array of fragments, methods and media are united in this modern day Kunstkammer.

Similarly the work *Artmachine Iteration: Give us this Day in the Life,* is one permutation of numerous potential artworks that originated from Tyson's 'Art Machine' – a generative procedure or set of instructions for creating a work that finds unity not through the synthesising aspect of the artist's personal 'vision' but through simply 'blindly' following a sequence of instructions figured out in advance. It questions the very idea of authorship echoed in the artist's statement "I've never seen myself as the author of a single idea I've had."[261] In parallel with Tyson, the cityscape series of paintings started life mostly as a set of instructions; to take photos whilst driving between home and art college and vice versa; images that, incidentally, were mostly derived by not looking through the view finder. I could allow myself to vary the journey slightly in one or two ways, but essentially I would take photos only between these two coordinates and as mentioned previously I soon accumulated a large collection of material that had resulted not so much by having been 'designed' as having been the outcome of a kind of intentional and 'premeditated artlessness' that

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[261] Romney, Jonathan, "On Cloud Nine", The Independent, Sunday 13 September, 2009

equates with what Richter referred to as a "planned spontaneity"[262]. The deliberate strategy here then was to attempt to postpone judgement about the worth of any particular shot, not to impose any fixed idea, not to attempt to draw out any definitive 'message', but simply to observe what emerged within the circumscribed limits set by this 'mock experiment'. In fact, what did seem to become apparent was the underlying desire to endow a sense of openness, indeterminacy and mystery to a subject notable for the very opposite reasons; their specificity; their over-familiarity and their transparently unexciting and mundane appearance. Thus I found very quickly that the images I liked most were those that exhibited accidental aberrations of light, colour, perspective and so forth that gave the ordinary a visual charge not customarily evident in the course of daily life; a characteristic particularly evident to me when seen as fragments in a frieze-frame staccato-like assemblage that had the effect of a discontinuous electrical current. In seeing the process as one of selection, rather than creation or invention, I equate my motivation with that of Tyson's in which he takes "an executive rather than a creative role."[263]

Whilst the recent PhD work still continues to expand on this idea and I don't always restrict myself to painting merely street scenes on particular routes, the basis of the work still lies in an interest in the ideal of the 'authorless' work, not so much stylistically since my work despite my intentions always looks idiosyncratically identifiably from my own hand, but in the sense that I am presenting something that everyone has collective ownership of, simply through the familiarity of the recognisable and unremarkable subject matter; the silent backdrop to all our lives as we pass from one point to another, in which we might be listening to music, absorbed in thoughts or chit chat, listening to talk-back radio, planning the dinner and so on. Whilst I was also interested in the way that these particular streets might have had some personal significance I am more interested in the fact that that is precisely an aspect that is not transparently explicable in the photos or the paintings. The subjective intentions and individual associations that might be hinted at in the works through small stylistic traits of handling paint with a brush are balanced by the 'facticity' of the lens aesthetic in the hope that the personal remains ultimately inaccessible and 'unreadable'. In the same way, I'm interested in the paintings being a kind of half-way house between objective and subjective states. Works that laboriously record simple 'facts', that also infer my own

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[262] Adriani, Götz, *Gerhard Richter: Paintings from private collections*, Hatje Cantz, 2008, p.29

[263] Weck, Ziba Ardalan de, *Keith Tyson : Cloud Choreography and Other Emergent Systems*, Parasol Unit/Koenig Books, 2009, p.74

response (however subtly and, ultimately, opaquely) but which also accommodate the personal and anecdotal associations made by the viewer themselves through their necessarily being required to perceptually reconstruct the images due to the fragmentation that occurs during the drawing process. Therefore the camera aesthetic incorporated into painting is a way of attempting to avoid an overriding prescriptive narrative message and to simply present the 'it was' as a glittering mosaic of fragments; a miniature curiosity cabinet.

Tesauro's use of *acutezze* that depended on the synthesising capacities of the spectator for its effect differs little to the curiosity cabinets, Kunstkammers (art room or museum) or Wunderkammers (wonder room/museums) in which diverse artefacts prompted the spectator to actively engage in reconstituting sense. As Stafford remarks the "[…] cosmos as displayed in the *Kunstkammers* was not so much a static tableau to be contemplated as it was a drama of possible relationships to be explored" not by *passive onlookers* but by contrast, "performers handling the props to better understand the world"[264]. In the Baroque museums of thought new constellations of meaning metamorphosed not from immaterial archetypal constants but from the encyclopaedic relentless flux of fragments from a *material* world.

THE RUBBISH HEAP OF OBSERVATION

Central to works that adhere to the aesthetics of the fragment is its seemingly inadvertent, 'unplanned' appearance. As Calabrese observed, works that employ the fragmentary mode present reality 'as it is' as if "determined by accident"[265]. The fundamental difference between detail and fragment is that the fragment doesn't propose *certainty*, merely the likeliest explanation. It is a speculative model of thought that does its best with the incomplete or even contradictory information to hand. It proposes questions to which it doesn't attempt a definitive solution, but simply a deepening sense of enigma. Therefore the aesthetics of the fragment often has "more the air of an investigation than an analysis."[266] Associated with the aesthetics of the fragment, Calabrese identifies the "conjectural model of knowledge" that emerged at the end of

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[264] Stafford, Barbara Maria, *Devices of Wonder: From the World in a Box to Images on a Screen*, Getty Publications, 2001, p.6

[265] Calabrese, Op. Cit., p.73

[266] Calabrese, Ibid., p.75

the nineteenth century primarily in the field of semiotics, in Peirce's ideas regarding 'abduction'; in Freud in the field of psychology and Giovanni Morelli in art history.

Giovanni Morelli, an Italian nineteenth century physician who is credited with the emergence of connoisseurship in art, developed a method of authenticating paintings based on the scrutiny, not of a work's overt stylistic features, but of its minor details such as fingernails, ear lobes, etc. The idea that the identifiable tell-tale signature marks made by an artist might be found not in the blatantly visible gestural marks but concealed in the physical attributes of the painting at the level of its micro-gestures and tiny stylistic inflections, profoundly influenced Sigmund Freud's development of the techniques of psychoanalysis. Similarly, in psychoanalysis the details of a dream are treated as fragments lodged in the ultimately unknowable entirety of an individual's psyche. The basis of psychoanalysis is the close observation of seemingly inconsequential details that afford the therapist a window into the hidden recesses of an individual's psyche; that the manifestly observable behaviour on the surface implies origins submerged in otherwise unfathomable psychological depths. As Freud remarked, remaining receptive to seemingly small, insignificant details enables the careful observer:

> "[…] to divine secret and concealed things from despised or unnoticed features, from the rubbish-heap, as it were, of our observations."[267]

In a sense, this receptiveness to meanings that are open-ended, fluid and concealed beneath the surface of appearances parallels the seventeenth century position in which essentially nothing is without potential import – a flexibility of mind that perceives surprising connections between distant things, meaning derived through the accretion of details, new unanticipated insights and novel variations in salvaging and reutilizing things that might be otherwise "ordinary and worn" (as Poussin remarked) and all in spite of an ideological acceptance in the seventeenth century that the integrity of the whole may never effectively be reconstructed since, as Browne remarked, God simply states "I am that I am" or "indeed, he only *is*" [my emphasis][268] and that "Wee doe too narrowly define the power of God, restraining it to our capacities"[269]. Thus the seventeenth century's broad adherence to the idea that nothing is inconsequential, however ultimately

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[267] P. Fuller, Op. Cit., p.32

[268] Browne, Sir Thomas, *Religio Medici*, (Part 1, Section 11) 1643 (as per the website www.penelope.uchicago.edu)

[269] Browne, Sir Thomas, *Religio Medici*, (Part 1, Section 11) 1643 (as per the website www.penelope.uchicago.edu)

incomprehensible, equates to the Freudian intuition that nothing is accidental; that we never say or do anything that doesn't also implicitly reveal some, hidden, deeper though ultimately, inscrutable, reality.

The Baroque attitude that perceives everything as latent with potential import is a position closely aligned not just to psychoanalysis, but of course is also the underlying operating principle behind Surrealism that similarly divines secret things from "the rubbish-heap of observation". Furthermore, Photography is eminently suited to the objectives of Surrealism, as in contrast to conventional methods of establishing subject matter from the Classical canons of taste and discernment, it embodies the capacity to make visible that which has been discarded and overlooked. In a procedure that determines hidden meanings in fortuitous chance combinations, photography is the supreme Surrealistic media of choice, since "the photographer's approach – like that of the collector – is unsystematic, indeed anti-systematic."[270] In particular, it is the genre of the snapshot and a certain type of documentary style of photography that are most useful in this regard because of the photograph's ability to bypass the artist's stylisations and the Classical determination of hierarchies of importance. In the Surrealistic enterprise the photograph artlessly reveals its own system and adheres to its own internal logic and that which we might not ordinarily notice, is exposed to scrutiny as if reality itself were not accessible *without* photography. As Sontag says;

> "All that photography's programme of realism actually implies is the belief that reality is hidden. And, being hidden, is something to be unveiled. Whatever the camera records is a disclosure – whether it is imperceptible, fleeting parts of movement, an order that natural vision is incapable of perceiving or a 'heightened reality' (Moholy-Nagy's phrase), or simply the elliptical way of seeing."[271]

In an attempt to classify Richter's seemingly contradictory practice numerous art theorists have made claims that Richter is a conceptualist, a realist, a romantic and so on. In essence however I think we should believe him when he says; *I am a surrealist.*[272] Surrealism seems entirely apposite to an artist whose process has evidently been founded upon requisitioning photography precisely for its potential use as a 'ready-made'. According to Duchamp's theory of 'rendezvous',

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[270] Sontag,*'Melancholy Objects',* op. cit., p77

[271] Sontag, Op. Cit., p.121

[272] G. Richter, Op. Cit., p.37

photography can be enlisted in the surrealistic enterprise of an art that is "[…] produced not by pregnancy and childbirth but by a blind date."[273] It is the snapshot, rather than the 'perfect print', that is especially suited to the surrealistic wager. The 'perfect' print, as exemplified in the work of the American photographer, Weston or his most famous pupil, Ansel Adams, for instance, has as its generating principle the ideals of 'high art'; order, balance, harmony, beauty. Conversely, the snapshot combines things in surprising ways through happy accidents of lighting, colour, perspective and so forth. The hierarchy in which things are overlooked by megalography as too ordinary, too everyday, too tasteless, too unimportant to be worthy of painting become obsolete in a practice that generates its images infinitely through 'random' selection, as Richter asserts;

> "Arbitrariness was the new hope. Arbitrariness was both unusual and important because I had always been of the opinion that I should never be arbitrary."[274]

In the very way that photography has provided "a radically new picture-making process – a process based not on synthesis but on selection"[275], Richter applies the same approach to selecting imagery to paint through assembling *Atlases* of disparate images (see Plate 26). The *Atlases* are representative of his broad approach in which there is no solitary 'masterwork', merely a series of trajectories, pathways, divisions, multiplications, permutations. As Richter stated, "I don't believe in the absolute picture. There can only be approximations, experiments and beginnings, over and over again."[276] Robert Storr notes that through the process of amassing and selecting images;

> "The editorial mind at work in forming these ensembles seems as determined to disrupt patterns as to create them, as eager to draw attention to certain pictorial equivalencies or disjunctions as to nestle the most personal or shocking items or clusters of items in settings that obscure their meaning to the artist and stymie interpretation based on conventional attitudes regarding intrinsic significance. At once a vast index of primary material and a device for reviewing and rethinking the many possible relations of one image to another as icons in their own right, … 'Atlas' is a mechanism for simultaneously organising and disorganising information, a way of showing the artist's hand and of camouflaging his intimate connections to the contents of display.[277]

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[273] Sontag, *'Photographic Evangels',* op. cit., p.130

[274] G. Richter, op. cit., p.124

[275] J. Szarkowski, *'Introduction', in The Photographer's Eye*, London 1983, p.6

[276] Richter, *Daily Practice of Painting*, p.199

[277] R. Storr, *'I: Beginnings', in Gerhard Richter: Forty Years of Painting*, Museum of Modern Art New York, 2002, p.29

Plate 26: © Gerhard Richter, *Atlas: Panel 3 & 4*, 1962-66, Black and white photographs, 51.7 x 66.7 cm, **Images sourced:**
http://www.gerhard-richter.com/art/atlas/atlas.php?paintid=11584 & http://www.gerhard-
richter.com/art/atlas/atlas.php?paintid=11583&p=1&sp=32

In a way the application of chance procedures in a work is a means of keeping the work 'open' and enigmatic. Similarly, Jean Arp who, from 1916, experimented with collages of torn paper arranged arbitrarily, made the assessment that such artistic games with chance reflect the acknowledgement of the arbitrary nature of life itself; that, as Margaret Iversen remarked, "For him, perfection and finish have the look of death, while accident, transience or withering show an openness to what happens, 'what befalls us'."[278] And whilst only a small number of images may be painted from the hundreds of photographs gathered into *Atlases*, the reasons as to why one image may seem more worthy than another are not immediately apparent in that an image's significance isn't clear until *after* it has been painted, as he explains;

> "A picture has a logic that can't be verbalised until afterwards; it can't be designed.
> ... I am more and more aware of the importance of the unconscious process that has
> to take place while one is painting – as if something were working away in secret."*[279]*

The remit of the aesthetics of fragmentation is a mode of playfulness, experimentation and exploration that meanders toward conclusions that haven't been determined in advance and which, when materialised, are only provisional, conditional, open-ended, as when Ruscha asserts that;

> "[…] as far as content goes, that's the most open-ended part of my art, in that both
> the words and images have to be fluid and simple and unlaboured and sort of
> automatic. Some of the images will crisscross one another. […] So there's no master
> plan to establish the procedure for doing a masterpiece. I do these things fairly
> automatically and with as much blind faith as needed to make a picture." [280]

As Calabrese states, "It is no accident that in those disciplines that lend themselves most naturally to analysis 'by fragment' one frequently has the impression of suspense, an adventurous progress toward a solution […]."[281] In a not dissimilar way Ruscha plays with fortuitous arrangements of words and images in painting that demonstrate the associative capacities of unexpected couplings

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[278] Iversen, Margaret, (Ed.), *Chance,* MIT Press in conjunction with the Whitechapel Gallery, London, 2010, p.19

[279] Richter, Op. Cit., p.195

[280] Ruscha, Ed, 'Ed Ruscha' Bill Berkson, (Originally published in <u>Shift</u>, v. 2, n. 4, 1988, pp.14-17, from *Leave Any Information at the Signal*, MIT Press, 2002, p.276

[281] Calabrese, Calabrese, Omar, *Neo-Baroque: A Sign of the Times*, Princeton University Press, 1992, p.75

that are specifically in order to introduce something less easily digestible, as he states that he has a "deep respect for things that are odd, for things that can't be explained."[282] Similarly, his rationale for his photographic books also provides a useful insight into his practice as a whole, when he says;

> "I have no exact method or motive in mind. I don't have to come up with an answer:
> 'did I say all I wanted to say when I finished?' It's not analytical. That's why a lot of
> the books leave questions. I put in the questions, I want it ambiguous [...] Whereas,
> with the first one, people did not know what I was up to. There was genuine doubt
> in their minds. I liked that, the idea of the question mark."[283]

However all these games with chance reveal in the end that it is impossible to establish to what extent 'chance' is random or in fact 'engineered'. Chance events, random combinations and infinite permutations; chaos in short, are ultimately theoretical cul-de-sacs as indeed it is never possible to establish to what degree either choice or accident have played in determining the outcome. Similar to Cage's repost that "Life without structure is unseen"[284] as Richter remarks, after the fact, what may have been intended to reveal chance effects and spontaneous events always have the semblance of 'order';

> "It is hard, say, to cross out six different numbers on a Lotto ticket in such a way that
> the arrangement looks convincing. And yet the sequence that emerges after the
> numbers are drawn seems entirely right and credible in every way."[285]

Therefore implicit in the embrace of an open-ended, intuitive process that relies not on invention but on selection from a series of disorderly fragments produced by the impartial lens vision of the camera, the artist is also ceding artistic agency over to the 'neutral' aesthetics inherent in the dispassionate view of the camera. The snapshot, that "message without a code"[286] applies a

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[282] Elkins, James, Six Stories from the End of Representation: Images in Painting, Photography, Astronomy, Microscopy, Particle Physics, and Quantum Mechanics, 1980-2000, Stanford University Press, 2008, p.56

[283] Ruscha, Ed, 'Premeditated' (Originally published in Real Life Magazine, n. 14, summer 1985, p.26, from Leave Any Information at the Signal, MIT Press, 2002, p.253

[284] as quoted by Iversen, Margaret, Chance, Op. Cit., p.15

[285] Richter, Op. Cit., p.

[286] R. Barthes, The Photographic Message, in Image, Music, Text, London, 1977

disinterested perspective on the world that generates previously unanticipated relationships, organisations and forms. Therefore as Cartier-Bresson remarked, "To take photographs is 'to find the structure of the world – to revel in the pure pleasure of form', to disclose that 'in all this chaos, there is order."[287]

The camera also in so doing provides the necessary 'remote vision' – a kind of disaffected, disinterested view to balance out the expressive and subjective aspects that will inevitably creep into the painting process.   It is this mixture of estrangement and sentimentality that I am always wanting to effect in the paintings – to achieve not simply the conflation of subject and object but that almost indefinable poise between the personal and the anonymous, the private space and the spaces inhabited by a faceless collective. In this way photography is most useful for its accurate, pokerfaced representation of reality, for its 'deadpan' aesthetic as when Iversen notes that Ruscha's photographs "serve to anchor language in a concrete, particular reality" [288] and when Richter states that; "Photographs are almost Nature. And they drop onto our doormats, almost as uncontrived as reality, but smaller."[289]

And it is here, in the 'dead-pan' aesthetic that exemplifies a shared mentality in the work of numerous painters working post-1950s that we find another strange and unexpected correspondence with Dutch seventeenth century painting.   This resemblance is glimpsed for instance in a remark made by Kenneth Clarke when he famously described Vermeer's *View of Delft* as looking like a coloured photograph observing that "It's really quite a shock to see a picture that has so little stylistic artifice"[290]. While we can only speculate that his remarkably measured and 'detached' style might be the result of closely observing the projection in a camera obscura, there can be no doubt about Richter, Ruscha, Tyson or Shaw's methods or intentions in using photography. The introduction of the lens aesthetic into painting is a way of ameliorating the subjective and anecdotal that tiptoes into every artistic venture where there is a material trace left of the artist's bodily intervention. The seamless and mechanistic appearance of the snapshot replicated and transposed into paint, therefore engages with photography's ability to eliminate or

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[287] Sontag, *'The Heroism of Vision',* op. cit., p99

[288] Iversen, Margaret, 'Auto-maticity: Ruscha and Performative Photography' *Photography After Conceptual Art*, Blackwell Publishing, 2010, p.24

[289] Richter, Ibid., p.187

[290] K. Clarke, *Civilisation*, British Broadcasting Corporation, London, 1977, p209

minimise a personal style in painting; as a means for filtering out elements that might otherwise register as too subjective in favour of something that paradoxically *expresses* a dramatic and vivid 'impartiality' in a parallel way in which we can say that Vermeer instituted a style that was attentively, 'sensitively dispassionate'. Furthermore, the perceived 'coolness' of Vermeer's work evident in its unmediated and 'undiscriminating' objectivity that we might say echoes the "styleless style"[291] that emerged post-1950s are features routinely ascribed to the northern European tradition, as when Norman Bryson astutely noted of Dutch still life for instance, that:

> "What is remarkable … is that they work as if they had no desire to produce a personal idiolect or style; where this emerges it does so almost incidentally, not as a central aim. What they do want of their images is that they represent a faithful record of the hours spent in their production. Their labour is apparently not subject to inspiration, but is an even skilfulness, without 'peaks'."[292]

When Jean Cocteau once perceptively remarked that Vermeer was the first Surrealist and that his painting *The Procuress* (1657) was like "a postcard sent from a better world by someone who has died, or sent into the world of the waking from out of the abyss of sleep"[293] he was also intuiting that in Vermeer we find the uncanny representation of the everyday, the non-descript, the ordinary that is also present in much seventeenth century painting. Again, although this 'otherworldly' characteristic noted in his work might be attributable to the close scrutiny of projected images in a camera obscura, this is ultimately debatable and also, beside the point. What makes these paintings so peculiarly 'useful' and enduringly compelling for a twenty-first century audience is the way in which they seem to adopt what Sontag remarks as photography's ability to distance the observer from the observed, and in the process, reminiscent of Cocteau's "postcard from a better place", create the curious sensation of transforming the familiar and commonplace into the alien and peculiar. It is through the close observation of the ordinary and unremarkable that counter-intuitively, imbues a familiar scene with a heightened sense of its strangeness; the surrealistic effect so often noted in Vermeer, equally adheres to works that embrace photography's particular version of reality. As Sontag affirms;

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[291] Wolf, Op. Cit., p.275

[292] Bryson, op. cit., pp132-4

[293] Hertel, op. cit., p1

"Photography's commitment to realism does not limit photography to certain subjects, as more real than others, but rather illustrates the formalist understanding of what goes on in every work of art: reality is, in Viktor Shklovsky's words, de-familiarised."[294]

THE HUH? AND THE WOW! AND THE TECHNOLOGICAL UNCANNY

It is this process of de-familiarisation in photography that bears a strong relationship to Freud's 'Uncanny', the etymology for which is the German word *unheimlich*, which as Scott McGuire points out more closely translates as 'unhomely'.[295] McGuire corrects the common misperception that by 'uncanny' Freud does not suggest what is made strange or unfamiliar, but rather the process by which;

"the familiar […is] *made* strange. [Thus] Uncanniness is a *disturbed* domesticity, the return of the familiar in an apparently unfamiliar form. Elsewhere in his essay, Freud approvingly quotes Schelling who defines the uncanny as the bringing to light of that which ought to have remained hidden. Uncanniness thus belongs to a complex scene of veiling and unveiling, of secrecy, revelation and improper exposure." [296]

Freud also links the uncanny to feelings of dissociation and ambivalence, that potentially induces three effects, again to quote McGuire;

"The first is uncertainty as to whether an animate being is alive, or, conversely, whether an object is really inanimate; the second concerns the enigma of the *doppelganger* or double […]; the third concerns the experience in which the distinction between imagination and reality is effaced."[297]

Increasingly direct experience is out-sourced in the twenty-first century via the proliferation of screens in the digital universe as McGuire asserts:

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[294] Sontag, op. cit., p121

[295] McGuire, Scott, *The Media City : Media, Architecture and Urban Space*, Sage Publications, 2008, p.8

[296] McGuire, Ibid.

[297] McGuire, Ibid.

> "[…] Looking through these strange windows we are invited to perceive the world as
> if divorced from bodily constraints. We see the world from where we are *not*, from
> where we have *never been.* [via …] this mode of disembodied perception"[298]

The uncanny in the twenty-first century has transmogrified into what McGuire refers to as the
"technological uncanny"[299] – the intermittent mediascape in which the boundaries between
human perception and technological dis-embodied vision has become permanently strained.
McQuire's thesis articulates my own initial, hesitant intuitions gleaned from the first snapshots of
cityscapes made in the late 1990s – a motivation that has not altered, despite more recent
meanderings along labyrinthine permutations into different subject matter and larger scaled
works, that their rationale comes from the desire to seize a concrete moment of time from the
relentless, unfurling threads of visual information that invisibly weave through our lives. It is a
way to reconcile the conflicting idea that the world also observes me as a fleeting shadow across
the tabula rasa – here and then erased. As McGuire suggests;

> "The intersection between modern media and modern urbanism transforms the
> nexus between place and experience, familiar and foreign, self and stranger. The
> blurring of boundaries between human perception and technological vision asks us to
> rethink the space of consciousness, as the models of autonomy and interior
> subjectivity which have dominated modernity become increasingly difficult to
> reconcile with everyday experience."[300]

Tesauro sought to de-familiarise the world and make it 'wondrous', in a way that has been
recognisable to us ever since Sontag described the ultimate Surrealistic universe of photography.
Similarly, the 'monstrously' wondrous effects produced in a range of mechanical performances
and Baroque phantasmagorias, were little different to an audience who also enjoyed new,
spectacular effects of startling realism in painting or the ekphrastic pleasures of language in
acutezza meriviglia. All these various cultural products were intentionally meant to provoke a
response of simultaneous "stupor and marvel"[301] in other words of stupefaction followed by the
jolt of comprehending; and it is this stutter of recognition and wonder that accompanies the initial

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[298] McQuire, Ibid.

[299] McQuire, Ibid., p.11

[300] McQuire, Ibid., P.10

[301] Hanifa, Op. Cit., p.187

confusion before the form locks into the habitual that ultimately defines the Baroque and the neo-Baroque correspondence.   The interdisciplinarity, intertextuality and monsters of admixture found in Tesauro and other early moderns, can probably find no closer parallel in the twenty-first century than in the powerful effect of synaesthesia elicited in the work of Ed Ruscha; as Rugoff illuminates;

> "Whereas abstract painting had formulated an ideal of an instantly graspable optical field, Ruscha's canvas pointedly engaged the overlapping modes of processing visual information that characterise our everyday perception in mass media society."[302]

Acutezza meriviglia resonates with Ruscha's desire to elicit these "overlapping modes", to provoke an initial 'huh?' followed by the "wow" in painting when he says that "Art has to be something that makes you scratch your head."[303] Dale Hickey referred to this as Ruscha's deliberately conscious desire to enlist "the art of inducing wonder or admiration" that he equates to his own response as that "[…] subtle jolt of visual de-familiarisation as a prelude to delight."[304]

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[302] Rugoff, Ralph, *Ed Ruscha: Fifty Years of Painting*, Hayward Gallery exhibition catalogue 14 Oct-10 Jan, 2010, Hayward Gallery publishing, London, 2009, p.13

[303] Ruscha, Ed, 'Satement in 'What Artists Like About the Art They Like When They Don't Know Why', Paul Gardener '(Originally published in Art News, v.90, October 1991, p.117) *Leave Any Information at the Signal*, MIT Press, 2002, p.19

[304] Hickey, Dale, *Airguitar*, p.62

PART THREE : MICROCOSM / MACROCOSM

CHAPTER SIX : DISTANT LIGHTS

"When I consider the short duration of my life,
swallowed up in the eternity before and after,
the little space which I fill […]
engulfed in the infinite immensity of spaces of which
I am ignorant and which know me not, I am frightened.
and am astonished at being here rather than there."
(Pascal, *Pensees*, 1670)[305]

As previously stated, the compositional innovation of co-extensive space that distinguishes

Baroque art from Renaissance, expressed radically new conceptions of man's ambiguous position

in a vastly expanded universe. It is perhaps unsurprising then that the Baroque treatment of light,

the most important symbolic spatial metaphor in Christian art also articulated in diverse ways

man's reconfigured relationship to the world in the seventeenth century.   Whilst it is universally

acknowledged that light and shadow embody something deeper than mere stylistic effect in

Caravaggio for instance (Plate 27) as well as in the work of numerous Baroque artists (Rembrandt,

Vermeer, Willem Kalf and so on), it is difficult to determine the exact nature of its symbolic import.

It's seems reasonable however to state that the treatment of light in Baroque art often articulates

the very visceral sense of existential uncertainty; the idea that light as a metaphor for

consciousness and life also signified on the other hand, the absence of light in which darkness by

contrast suggests "the infinite immensity [that] know[s] me not"; concerns that continue to speak

volubly to a twenty-first century audience.

Paradoxically, as Sutherland Harris remarks, Caravaggio "made all artists think about light by

eliminating most of it in his mature work"[306]. His characteristic tenebrist lighting comprises a

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[305] [as quoted by] Martin, Op. Cit., p.154

[306] Sutherland Harris, Op. Cit., p.53

Plate 27: **Caravaggio,** *St John the Baptist,* Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri

strong light source overhead that falls dramatically on the subject/s placed in a darkened room, the earliest descriptions of which sound coincidentally almost like a walk-in camera obscura. Mancini (1558-1630) for instance described a light that "beams down without reflections, as would occur in a very dark room with one window and the walls painted black."[307] One of the most pronounced dislikes expressed by his early critics concerned Caravaggio's uncompromisingly exaggerated, high-beam lighting. Rather than adopting the prescribed manner of carefully modulated degrees of light and shadow, his figures, particularly in his later work, are carved from shafts of severe, concentrated light falling from above. The manner in which the light abruptly and sharply recedes into gloom without subtle gradations is a feature that made his work on one hand arresting, but on the other, particularly unpalatable to his many critics who considered this aspect dangerously excessive and showy. By amplifying the effects of darkness and shadow, and thereby also, its disturbing ancient associations with night, death and ignorance Caravaggio's art markedly departed from the conventional standards of decorum that the examples of Raphael, Michelangelo and Annibale Carracci's work established. Pugelisi explains, that whilst "Annibale's light was perceived as natural, soft, and revealing form, [.....] Caravaggio's was deemed artificial, harsh, and concealing form[308]."

Perhaps due to our habituation to the proliferation of film and photography, this aspect concerning this criticism of his work has largely gone unnoticed in the twenty-first century. However it is a criticism that was prevalent throughout the nineteenth century and endured into the first half of the twentieth. John Ruskin, who was known to have detested Caravaggio's work, dismissing him as a "worshipper of the depraved"[309] made the following observation about the disfiguring effects of the camera obscura that he perceived as evident in some of the work of the old masters (although it is likely he is referring to Rembrandt here, who it must be noted, shares a kinship with Caravaggio in this respect):

> "I have often been struck, when looking at a camera-obscuro [sic] on a dark day, with
> the exact resemblance the image bore to one of the finest pictures of the old
> masters; all the foliage coming dark against the sky, and nothing being seen in its

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[307] Varriano, op. cit., p.7

[308] Puglisi, C., Warwick, G, (ed) "Caravaggio's Life and Lives over Four Centuries", *Caravaggio: realism, rebellion, reception* (Associated University Presses, Cranbury, 2006) p.32

[309] Ruskin, J., Selections From the Writings of John Ruskin, (Smith, Elder and Co.) p.106

mass but here and there the isolated light of a silvery stem or an unusually illumined cluster of leafage."[310]

Ruskin conceded that the effect was impressive in terms of the 3-dimensional relief achieved in such works, but was careful to also assert that the radically reduced tonal range resembled the distorting effects of the camera obscura in contrast to *natural* vision. He cautioned against replicating this overtly theatrical style advising that it was better to aspire to a carefully modulated, gentle transition of tonal values rather than the extreme, distorting effect that exploded and dismembered form. Levesque had noted a similar feature in Caravaggio's work in 1792 in that his "cellar lighting" "fettered … and deprived [the light] of its diffusion" and had the added effect of reducing the "richness of local colours".[311] The violence that the form suffers as a result of this disfiguring effect (whether or not as a result of lens distortion) is what most offends Ruskin who stridently observes of that class of artist who resort to such extreme effects as one that:

> "[…] perceive and imitate evil only. They cannot draw the trunk of a tree without
> blasting and shattering it, [.....] they delight in the beggary and brutality of the human
> race; their colour is for the most part subdued or lurid, and the greatest spaces of
> their pictures are occupied by darkness. [.....] Salvator Rosa and Caravaggio are the
> most characteristic [..... examples of this class]."[312]

One of the most intriguing aspects of Caravaggio's consummate naturalism, something intuited by Ruskin despite his reservations, is that it was in fact quite artificial. However whether or not lens-based optical aids explain Caravaggio's stylistic innovation is ultimately beside the point. All the idiosyncrasies we are familiar with through film noire, such as lens flare; a flattening of the tonal range leading to an abrupt, disembodied, ambiguous effect, are indeed very like a Caravaggio but quite remote from how we actually see in natural vision. It is from the perspective of the twenty-first century that these effects are precisely those we recognise as features of photographic vision and not those of normal vision. This was Ruskin's later insight regarding the contrast between

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[310] Ruskin, J., Modern Painters, (Lancaster University Leverhulme-funded electronic edition,Vol I, p.141

[311] Puglisi, op. cit. p.33

[312] Ruskin, Ibid, p.98

what the camera depicts and what the eye perceives. Ruskin's initial enthusiasms for the camera were replaced with admonitions for using camera images wholesale, due to the realisation that the human eye has far greater capacity to perceive fine gradations of tone than the camera. It is a common and persistent belief that whilst we may initially think that the camera catches greater wealth of detail, it effectively reduces detail. Whilst the camera is non-hierarchical and does not discriminate the eye by contrast perceives greater detail and is selective.

There seem few precursors for Caravaggio's extreme style although Leonardo is the closest antecedent in terms of the ambiguous effects he achieved through chiaroscuro and sfumato and even here Caravaggio's approach was more extreme. The extraordinary character of Caravaggio's "cellar lighting"*,* what so offended his critics, was that the light was essentially one that dissolved and butchered form. Darkness engulfed, obscured, deconstructed. Rather than certainty and order, we are left with ambiguity, chaos, disorder, features that are compellingly apposite in the twenty-first century as we find precisely these characteristics in the work of numerous contemporary artists. Caravaggio's influence in Johannes Kahrs certainly seems self-evident. Kahrs starts with found images from TV, magazines, snapshots, etc. that he then, through an elaborate process of copying and recopying via old Xerox machines arrives at an image that has been 'butchered' and distorted before finally translating the image onto canvas. He then places a plate of glass in front of the image that serves to distance the viewer from the image. In Kahrs we find a monstrous amplification of attention paid to the abbreviated forms on the surface of the painting that paradoxically we seem unable to gain direct access to; as if Caravaggio had adopted the disembodied vision goggles from the world of mass media. Kahrs deliberately draws attention to the manner in which we scan the superficial plane of the flat visual field whilst in a contradictory way his work simultaneously elicits a bodily, visceral encounter with images that are often suffused with a disquieting and psychologically charged atmosphere.

What I most respond to in terms of my own work in Kahrs, and in contrast to Richter, is precisely that there is in this amplification of the surface abbreviations and ruptures, as well as in the kitsch aesthetic of heightened colour and intensified contrast the uneasy sense that the momentarily beautiful may at the next minute transmogrify into the grotesque, the unruly, the monstrous and the deformed. It is the barely repressed hysteria that I most identify with in Kahrs work and which

Plate 28 : **© Johannes Kahrs,** *Two men (sweat)*, **2008, Oil on canvas, 85.2 x 58.2cm, Image sourced :**

http://www.luhringaugustine.com/artists/johannes-kahrs#/images/9/

Plate 29 : **© Johannes Kahrs,** *Hula Girl*, **2000, Oil on canvas, 190 x 290cm, Image sourced:**

http://www.wallery.org/?artwork_id=108464

Plate 30 : **© Johannes Kahrs, *Melancholie*, 2002-2004, Oil on canvas, 270 x 16cm, Image sourced:**

http://www.wallery.org/?artwork_id=108474
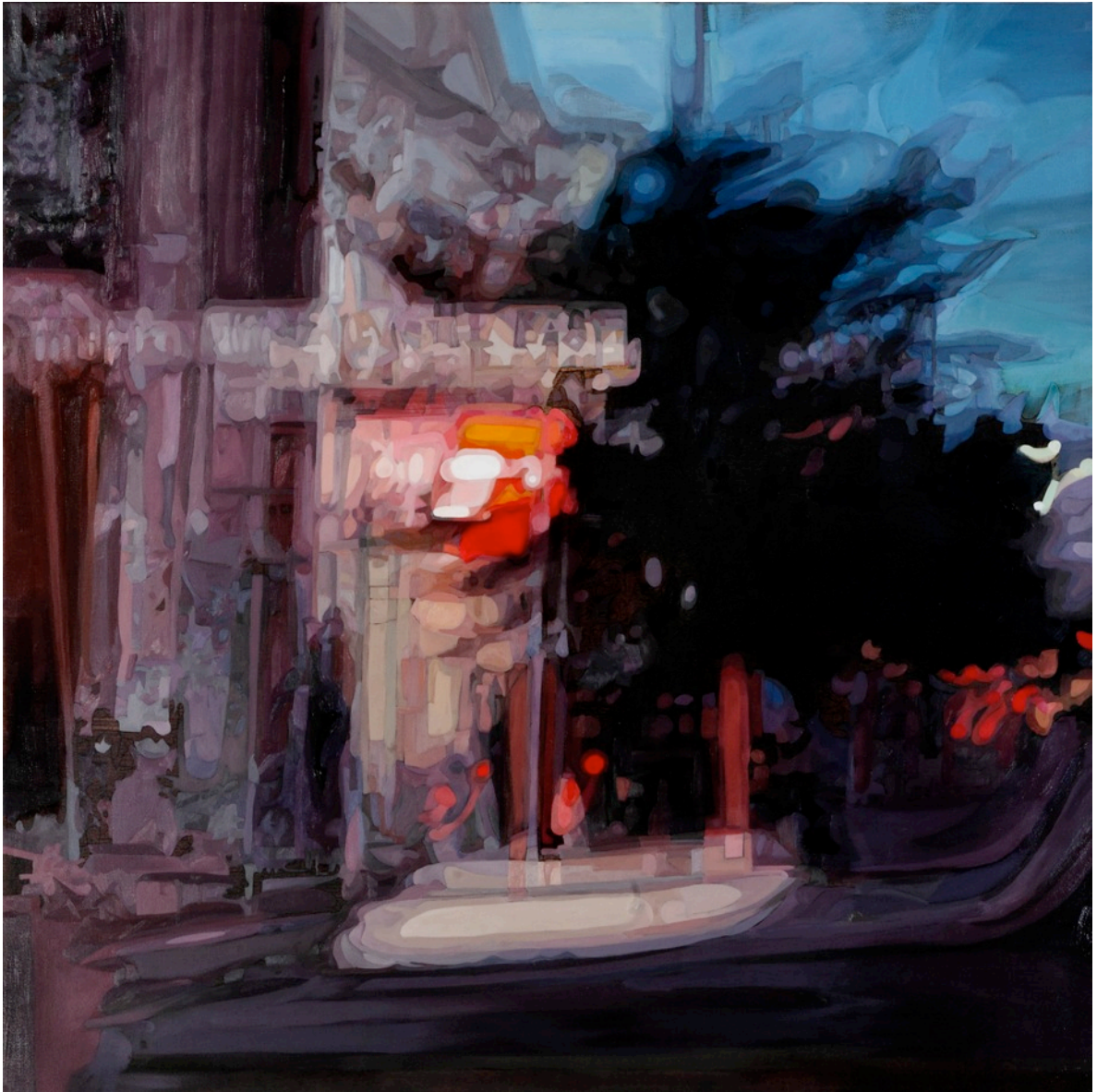
Plate 31 : Fiona Greenhill, *Moonlight, Newcastle East*, 2008, 91.5 x 91.5cm

I have attempted in a small way to emulate in works such as *Moonlight, Newcastle East* or in *Lost, Huon Pine Experience*. (Plates 31 & 32)

The historic baroque in the seventeenth century is characterised by inter-textuality or the idea of the 'play within the play' – of the blurring of reality and fiction. In the same way Caravaggio's subjects drawn from life conflate the themes of history painting with the everyday. Caravaggio's deceptive 'naturalism' fuses together a sense of the timeless and the transient, the static and the fugitive, the universal and the particular. The aesthetic that drives these paintings is a condensed
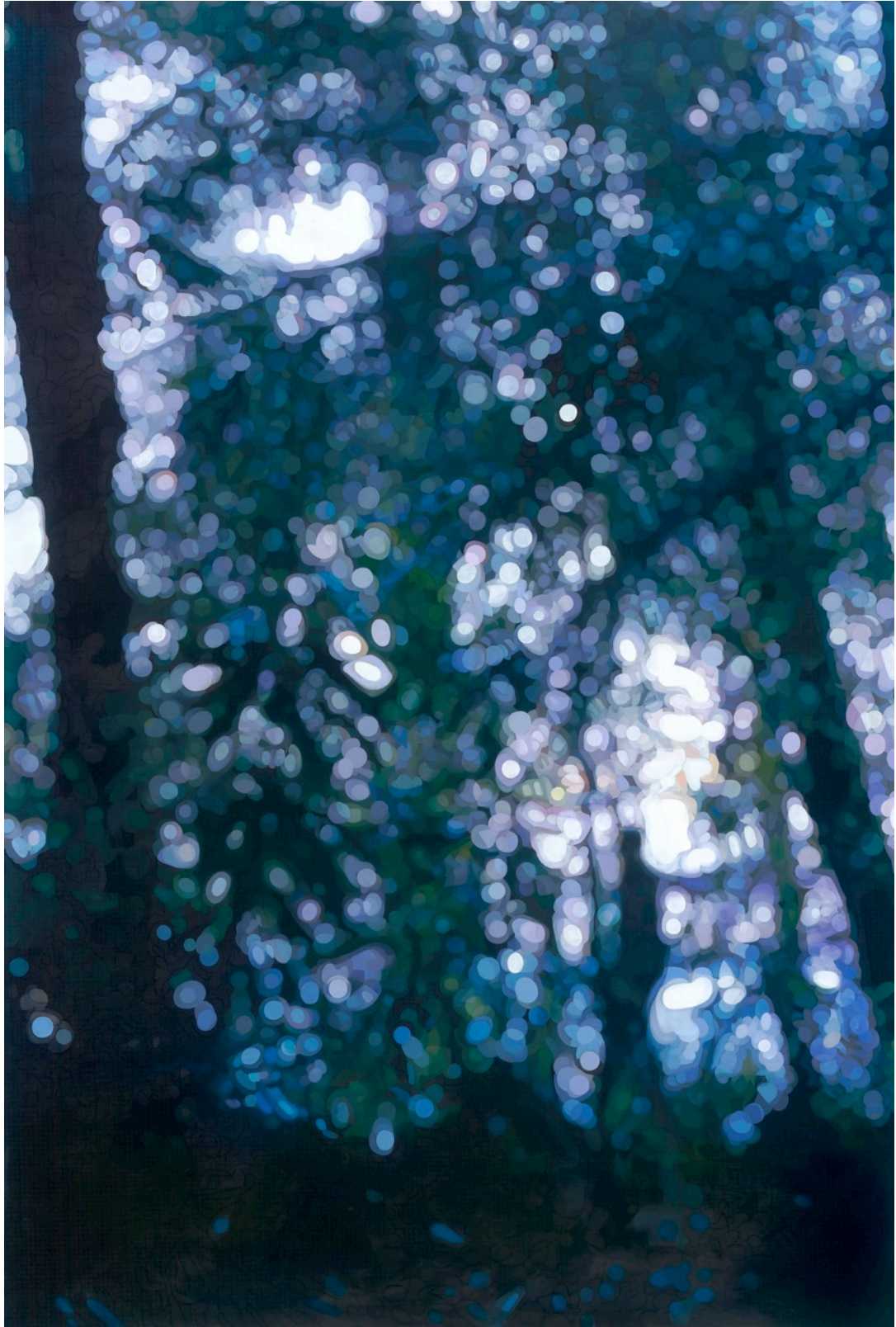
Plate 32 : Fiona Greenhill, *Huon Pine Experience*, 2012, Oil and acrylic on linen, 183 x 122cm

narrative, simultaneously prosaic, direct and spare. Dispensing with the conventional language of an idealising classicist tradition of the Renaissance, Caravaggio's narrative is uncertain and interpretively open. In a characteristically understated way, Ruscha also recalls something of the Caravaggesque light entering into the now filmic 'theatre of mind' and the line between the universal and the personal; fiction and reality; the sacred and the profane. Ruscha's work is similarly a parred back, sardonic allegory on contemporary culture. His work, which has taken a number of trajectories, here, in Plate 33 he evokes the Baroque altarpiece, re-cast as a Hollywood film set where the shaft of light takes on a distinctly Caravaggesque hard, frozen quality, as if carved from the solidified space of chiaroscuro. The light here is coincidentally reminiscent of Caravaggio's 'cellar lighting'. The scale and dramatic lighting evokes something of the spirit of the seventeenth century altarpiece, the instrument of Catholic reformist propaganda, here re-cast in the more familiar trope of Hollywood film studio. Despite the absence of anything much happening in the painting, there is a palpable sense of psychological tension and anticipation. Are the protagonists yet to appear or have they been beamed up? Disorienting – the slightly perceptible twist of the rectangle projected onto the floor (is it?). Is it a prison, a studio, a stage, an oblique and upside-down projection in a dark room, a metaphor for light entering the inner hidden recesses with all of its religious overtones?

Plate 33 : © Ed Ruscha, *Picture Without Words*, 1997, in the Lobby of the Harold M. Williams Auditorium, Getty Center,

Commissioned by the Getty Trust, Image sourced:

http://www.getty.edu/conservation/publications_resources/newsletters/13_2/profile1.html

However the artist from the seventeenth century who has had the greatest impact on my own work (although this is an aspect that would be difficult to garner simply from looking), is Vermeer. What has always maintained my interest in Vermeer is the thought that it is conceivable that his adoption of some of the unusual anomalies of light seen through an antique lens expressed deeper metaphoric connotations regarding the existential concerns that pervaded the seventeenth century but which in the context of the digital age seem remarkably fresh and appropriate.

One of the most distinctive features of Vermeer's style is the way in which he incorporates into painting the visual idiosyncrasies attributable to seeing objects through an unfocused lens. In 1964, Charles Seymour and Henry Beville, from the National Gallery in Washington, used an antique camera obscura to replicate the most distinctive and puzzling attribute of Vermeer's work, referred to as his 'Circles of confusion'. These 'circles of confusion', (see Plates 34 to 37) referred to in photography as light halation, are the effect of light reflecting off objects seen out of focus through a lens, and are not effects visible in normal vision. The renowned Vermeer scholar, Arthur Wheelock, speculated in his monograph[313] about the possibility that Antony van Leeuwenheok's (1632-1723) scientific discoveries under the microscope had played some influential part in developing Vermeer's distinctive aesthetic. Leeuwenheok, a contemporary of Vermeer's Living in Delft at the same time as Vermeer and who is widely considered the father of microbiology, was the first to observe and record what he termed 'animacules' in a drop of water (micro organisms evident through a microscope).   Wheelock raises the possibility that Vermeer's integration of light halation into his very idiosyncratic painting style reveals a shared concern with the idea that matter was composed of "globules" as Leeuwenheok later conjectured[314]. Similarly, John Martin also wondered whether:

> "It is possible that the peculiar phenomena of light revealed by the imperfect lens of the camera obscura (notably the so-called 'circles of confusion') took on in the artist's mind a quasi-mystical import precisely because they were things that could not be seen with the unaided eye."[315]

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[313] Wheelock, Arthur K. Jr., *Vermeer*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1981

[314] Wheelock, Arthur K. Jr., *Vermeer*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1981, pp.13-15

[315] Martin, John Rupert, *Baroque*, Penguin, 1977, p.226

Plate 34 : (left) Vermeer, Girl with a Red Hat, c.1665
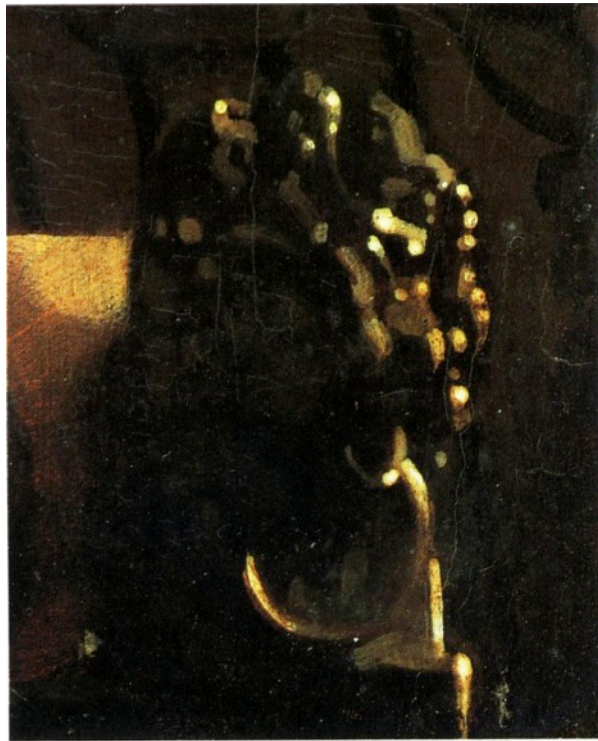
Plate 35 : (detail), Oil on canvas, 23 x 18cm, National Gallery of Art, Washington

Plate 36 : (left) photograph of wooden carving, (photo: Emidio DeCusati, Yale Art Gallery), Sourced from 'Dark Chamber and Light-Filled Room: Vermeer and the Camera Obscura', Charles Seymour, JR.,[316]
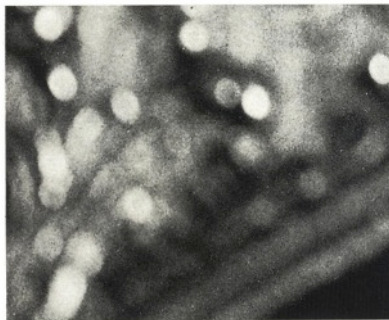
Plate 37 : out of focus photograph of the same carving revealing instances of light halation, (photo: Emidio DeCusati, Yale Art Gallery), Sourced from 'Dark Chamber and Light-Filled Room: Vermeer and the Camera Obscura', Charles Seymour, JR.,[317]

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[316] Seymour, Charles, Jr., 'Dark Chamber and Light-Filled Room: Vermeer and the Camera Obscura', The Art Bulletin, Vol. 46, No. 3, (Sep., 1964), p.34

[317] Ibid.

Plate 38 : (image above) Map of Provinces, published by Claes Jansz. Visscher in the 1590s, **Sourced from Ralph Steadman :** http://www.vermeerscamera.co.uk/reply3.htm

Plate 39 : (detail) Vermeer, *The Art of Painting, c1666-1667,* Oil on canvas, 120 x 100cm, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna

Plate 40 : (detail above) Vermeer, *The Art of Painting, c1666-1667,* Oil on canvas, 120 x 100cm, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna

Plate 41 : (left) Vermeer, *The Art of Painting, c1666-1667,* Oil on canvas, 120 x 100cm, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna

One of the most captivating aspects of Vermeer's work is the different relationship one has with the work from different distances. The comparison between plates 38 & 39, reveals that there is a close correspondence between the original map and the one that forms the backdrop to Vermeer's *Art of Painting* (Plate 17). However on closer inspection, (see Plate 40) the forms disintegrate into broad patterns of light and shade. Rather than revealing the specific detail one expects to find, the forms disperse into dots, dashes, in an almost abstract arrangement that only coalesces from a distance. It was Lawrence Gowing's penetrating study on Vermeer, that explained these abstract qualities so well when he observed that Vermeer reveals "[…] an almost solitary indifference to the whole linear convention and its historic function of describing, enclosing, and embracing the form it limits […]*318*

This feature of Vermeer's painting style, as Lawrence Gowing so eloquently observed, disregarded the entire linear convention in favour of the broad envelopes of form. Rather than delivering the promise as so much Dutch seventeenth century painting does, of high fidelity detail, the form when viewed at a short distance disperses into an abstract arrangement of patterns of light and shade. The overall effect is to create a paradoxical 'precise looseness'. This key feature of his distinctive painting style is quite singular in regard to his contemporaries, although Rembrandt's later works exhibit a certain affinity to this manner of working.

Although a still life painter, it is the work of Willem Kalf (1619-1693), that displays the closest affinity with Vermeer in this respect (see Plate 42 & 43). His work is poised between the high drama of Caravaggio and Vermeer's more restrained, refined style. The radically reduced depth and the theatrically staged effect, in which form rises from a infinitely darkened background provides an effective means of contrast with the brightly lit objects arranged in a tableau, recalling Caravaggio. On the other hand, his light is not as sharp and abbreviating as Caravaggio's and displays many of the optical effects similar to Vermeer's handling. However, from a distance, the effect of the heavy chiaroscuro is to imbue objects with a solidity that in Vermeer is never as certain or as delineated. It differs from Caravaggio, however, in that the light is somewhat scattered and diffuse, lending a greater range of tonal gradation and thereby avoiding the extreme cutting shorthand of Caravaggio.

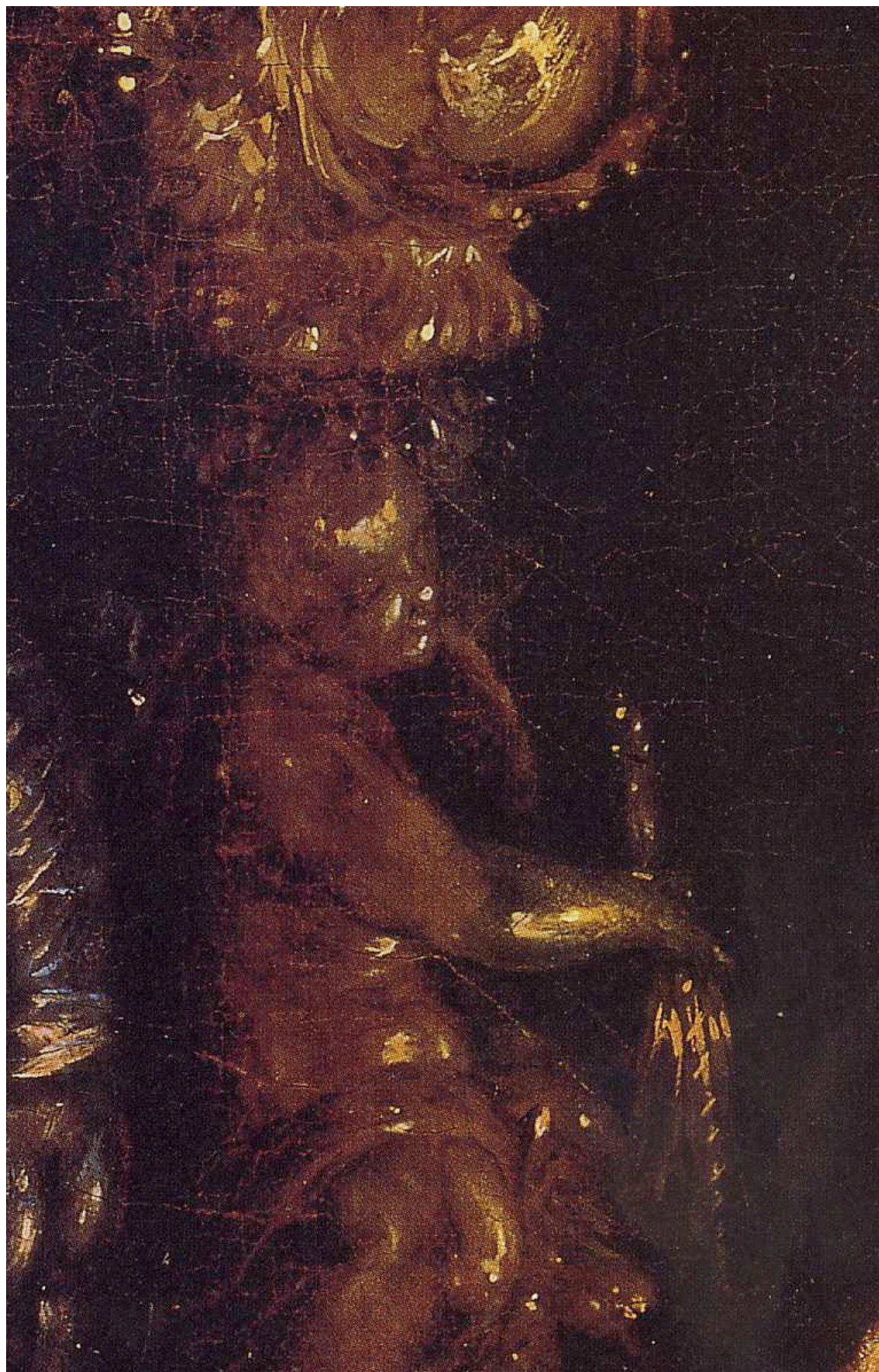318 Gowing, L., *Vermeer*, Giles de la Mare Publishers Ltd., 1997, p.20

Plate 42 :   Willem Kalf, *Still Life with Silver Jug* (c.1655-57), Oil on canvas, 73.8 x 65.2cm, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

Plate 43 :   (on next page) Willem Kalf, (detail) *Still Life with Silver Jug* (c.1655-57), Oil on canvas, 73.8 x 65.2cm, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

Although the master of *Pronkt* still life, his paintings are never totally preoccupied with an ostentatious depiction of detail, but rather, with the sensation of the objects seen. His paintings essay the sensuous, almost lascivious act of looking itself as Schneider observes:

> "Although he always depicted decorative objects – such as Chinese porcelain soup tureens, preciously decorated nautilus goblets and costly carpets – his paintings seem to have been dominated not so much by wealth and prosperity as by the aesthetic values and optical qualities of perception that emanated from these objects. Thus, the refraction of the light on the objects and the modifications of the colours as mirrored by each of the other objects become the real subject of his art."[319]

Kalf makes his theme the visible, fleeting nature of light and our sensations of it. The fragile nature of light in Kalf, implies in the broadest sense the brevity of life underlying the Vanitas theme of the painting itself. The conception of the metaphorical significance of light accords with the idea of the darkness at the dawn of creation in which the light of God provided the divine spark of creation. This idea, deeply embedded in the Christian (Catholic) philosophy, was formulated by Nikolaus von Kues (1401-1464) [320]. Light metaphorically gives birth to form; from obscurity form emerges by virtue of the light that makes it visible. The painting elicits the sensation of images materialising in front of our eyes. In fact, the darkness swallows the forms in some instances where forms recede so far into the background that they are on the periphery of visibility, such as the delicacy of the Venetian glass, that is distinguished merely by a thin white line from the darkness of the background.   As Schneider concludes:

> "His objects only exist to the extent that they can be perceived, but in order to be perceived they need light to dispel that darkness which is the original state of the world"[321]

The aspect that I find most poetic and most appealing about Vermeer and Kalf is the mosaic, carpet-like effect of what Bryson referred to in Kalf as a "purposeless virtuosity". It is the surfeit

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[319] Schneider, N., *Still Life* (Taschen GmbH, Italy, 2003), p.107

[320] Ibid.

[321] Ibid.

Plate 44 : Fiona Greenhill, Source photo for *Eddy Avenue*, showing cropping

Plate 45 : Fiona Greenhill, Preliminary drawing for the painting *Eddy Avenue*
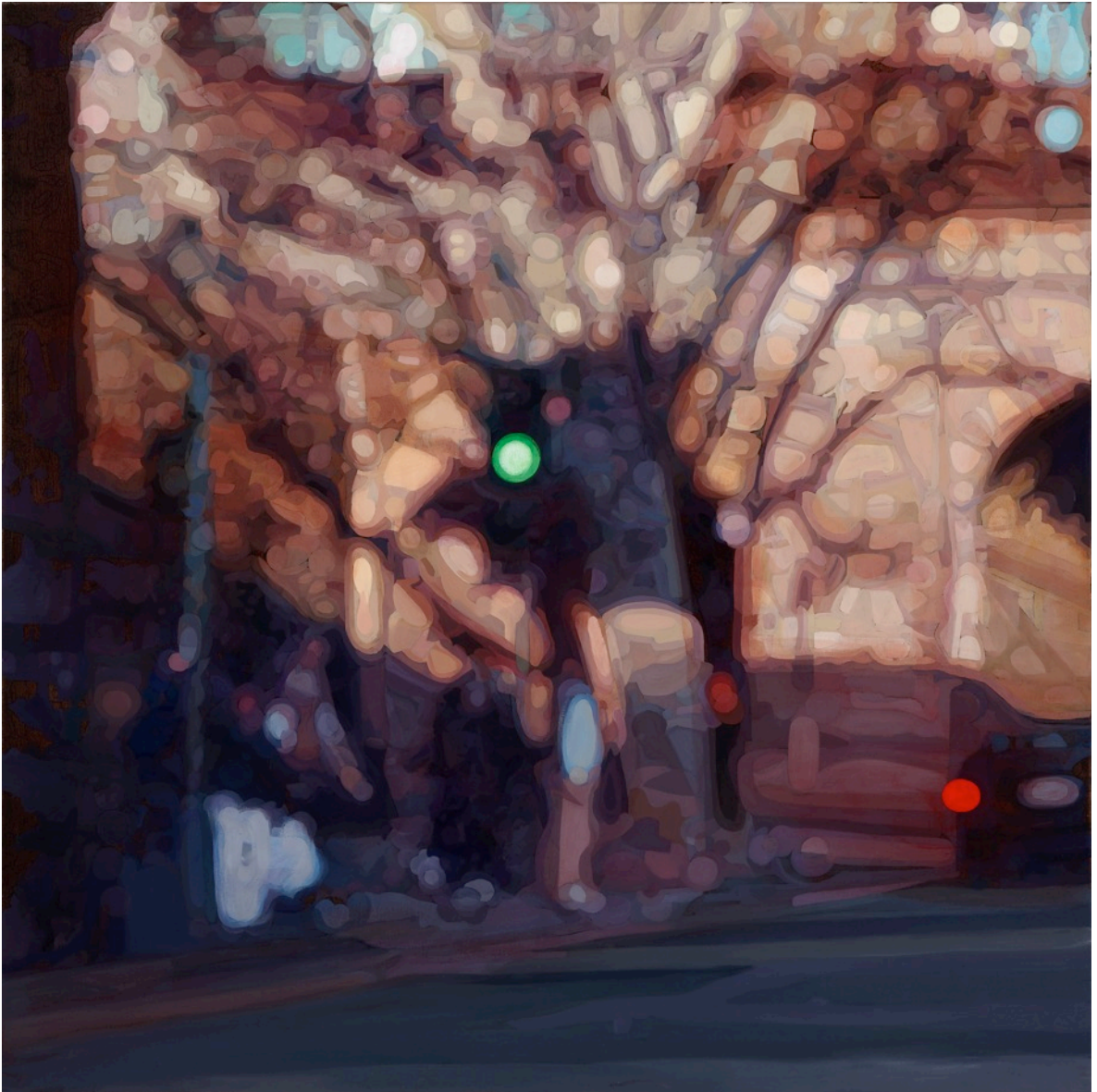
Plate 46 : Fiona Greenhill, *Eddy Avenue,* Oil and acrylic on canvas, 91.5 x 91.5cm

of information, the sheer density of inconsequential detail, seemingly there for its own sake. In the examination exhibition I deliberately show some photographic enlargements of the type of snapshot image that I work from precisely in fact to reveal how much less chaotic the photographs appear than the paintings. Another purpose in displaying them side by side with the paintings is to illustrate the painterly admixture that generate the photos and vice versa, the machinic lens vision that ameliorates the subjective aspects in the paintings. Although they are close relatives, the paintings always seem to state something less definable, more analogous to reality whereas I still

can't seem to get away from the feeling, as Sontag remarked, that "the photograph is a stencil off the real." (sic)

Although adopting the lens-based effects of light halation evident in Vermeer's work has had a central place in the development of my work since the late 1990s, the PhD research has alerted me to the grotesque possibilities latent in the kind of images I increasingly gravitate towards. The most pronounced understanding in terms of my own work is the elaborate drawings that take place prior to painting. I laboriously 'copy' the envelopes of forms that swim on the surface of the photo but also allow embellishments that are not necessarily in the original. The photos that are mostly blurry, through a perversely zen-like concentration to the task of a kind of 'automatic scribbling' are translated into a sharply focussed fragmentary assemblage. I use the photo to generate these particularly 'stupid' drawings that resemble to me a kind of viral version of Vermeer since drawing freehand, without following the insensate snapshot image leads to the kind of qualitative judgements I wish to avoid and which to me, resonates with the reasons Richter provides in his rationale for using photography in painting, since photography;

> "[.....] reproduces objects in a different way from the painted picture, because the camera does not apprehend objects: it sees them. In 'freehand drawing', the object is apprehended in all its parts, dimensions, proportions, geometric forms. [.....] This is an abstraction that distorts reality and leads to stylisation of a specific kind. By tracing the outlines with the aid of a projector, you can bypass this elaborate process of apprehension"[322].

Although resulting in an outcome visually divergent from Caravaggio and Ruscha the painting, *Huon Pine Experience*, proceeds from a similar neo-Baroque impulse. A shadowy figure lurks through the undergrowth and the strongly contrasting light and shadow heightens the sense of dramatic tension, simultaneously flattening and compressing the pictorial space. The effect is a disorienting diorama-like, claustrophobic space in which the figure appears trapped in a circuit of endlessly looped time. The figure is only an impression; a transitory and fleeting, inky black silhouette. The absence personal and distinguishing features in the figure was a deliberate strategy to keep the narrative aspects as interpretively open as possible. Whilst the figure is

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[322] Richter, G., Op, Cit, p.35

uncertain and spectral, the light that passes through the trees is distinctly solid and sculptural. The overall effect is an overtly theatrical construction, although in contrast to Caravaggio's painterly 'film noir' or Ruscha's Hollywood illusionism, this painting self-consciously applies a 'digitised' treatment evident most strongly in the bluish colour scheme and shimmer of light and dark. Here an attempt has been made to simulate the screen glow of 'the world in miniature' as it appears on the camera display. The reading is intentionally enigmatic; who is this shadow?; where are they heading?; who is stalking who – observer or observed? The composition is restless, suggesting that it is a mere splinter of the original: a cropped fragment of the boundless universe. It implies its rupture from the whole and the absence of unity.

THE EPISTEMOLOGY OF SCALE

In the neo-Baroque era ideas regarding micro/macrocosm are most obviously manifest in problems related to extreme contrasts in scale; in drawing attention to the reversibility between the minuscule and the gigantic. The contemporary widespread preoccupation with problems of scale that reiterate Baroque concepts of the infinite and the individual's uncertain position in the universe are evident for instance in the now, almost hackneyed Surrealistic trope of 'worlds in a box' as much as it is manifest in images found in popular science; imagery for instance commonly found in blogs or publications such as 'National Geographic' that flip between, on the one hand, a magnified view of an eye reminiscent of a crater in an alien landscape by photographer Suren Manvelyan counterpoised with George Steinmetz's aerial view of camel trains, in which, after a moment's confusion, the viewer has the sudden realisation that the camels themselves are barely discernible, yet the shadows they cast fall over many kilometres in an almost toy-like world in miniature. From *Matrix* to *Toy Story* we are re-presented with the antique idea of 'worlds within worlds' and the illusory nature of existence in which alternate worlds and perspectives co-exist. And in a more explicit parallel, the cinematic technique of panning from macroscopic to microscopic is so prevalent it often passes by the spectator without even conscious recognition; for instance the dizzyingly rapid projection downwards from a bird's eye view at the top of a New York skyscraper before abruptly coming to rest on a single figure in the crowd below; from the vertiginous altitude of clouds to that of a single, solitary figure, the character Nick Carraway[323] in

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[323] played by Tobey Maguire in the film production by Bazel Lurhman, 2013

The Great Gatsby, 2013. All these examples resurrect the ancient notions of microcosm /

macrocosm through the examination of the epistemology of scale.

Another example in the book *Life of Pi*, (recently made into a major film of the same name, in

2012) recounts the experience of the main character Pi, who, after surviving a disaster at sea

becomes a cast away on a life raft. The motif of the book is Pi's realisation brought about through

his isolation and sense of powerlessness that he is a mid-point in an infinite and unknowable

expanse. Science determines that the oceans make up 75% of the earth's surface and yet 90% of

their hidden depths remain uncharted, vast and more alien than outer space and compared to the

individual, almost limitless. Pi recounted that in the vast underwater world "Just below me, all

around, unsuspected by me, were highways, boulevards, streets and roundabouts bustling with

submarine traffic"[324]; a world that was ultimately oblivious to his presence and disinterested in his

fate on the surface, as he reflected;

> "The sea lay quietly, bathed in a shy, light-footed light, a dancing play of black and
> silver that extended without limits all about me. The volume of things was
> confounding – the volume of air above me, the volume of water around and beneath
> me. […] I felt like the sage Markandeya, who fell out of Vishnu's mouth while Vishnu
> was sleeping and so beheld the entire universe, everything that there is. Before the
> sage could die of fright, Vishnu awoke and took him back into his mouth. For the first
> time I noticed […] that my suffering was taking place in a grand setting. I saw my
> suffering for what it was, finite and insignificant […]"[325]

Similarly the animated children's film based on Dr Seuss's story of the same name, *Horton Hears a*

Who!, (Twentieth Century Fox, 2008) is an explicit reference to the concept of limitless *unknowing*

that reveal affinities with Baroque existential concerns. Horton is a wild elephant who when

playing in the jungle one day, hears someone calling out for help. The voice it seems is coming

from a speck of dust in which it turns out the tiny world of Whoville exists. At the same time an

astronomer in Whoville believes that there is a universe beyond their spec of dust and that the

sheer magnitude of the universe beyond Whoville threatens it with potential extinction. Just as

Horton struggles to get other elephants to believe in the existence of Whoville, no one in Whoville

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[324] Martel, Yann, *Life of Pi*, Random House, Canada, 2001, p.170

[325] Martel, Yann, *Life of Pi*, Random House, Canada, 2001, pp.171-172

believes in the possibility of life outside their world. Meanwhile, Horton tries to convince the other elephants of the existence of Whoville:

> **"Horton**: There's a tiny person on that speck that needs my help!
> **Jane**: Absurd! There aren't people that small.
> **Horton**: Well, maybe they aren't small, maybe we're big.
> **Jane**: Horton...
> **Horton**: No, Really. Think about it. What if there were someone way out there,
> looking down on our world right now, and to them, we're the specks..."[326]

In a striking parallel the seventeenth century philosopher and writer Margaret Cavendish (1623-73) speculated about the existence of other realities that might exist concurrently with our own and of which we are mutually ignorant. Margaret Cavendish although an obscure figure now, was a minor celebrity in her day whose eccentric philosophical speculations bear some relationship to Leibniz. She hypothesized that there may be numerous perceptive dimensions in nature but that humans were only privy to animal perception.[327] She also theorized according to the continuum theory of matter, that nature was "an infinite body, bulk or magnitude, which by its own self-motion, is divided into infinite parts; not single or indivisible parts, but parts of one continued body [...]"[328] and her poem "A World in an Eare-Ring" expresses analogous philosophical speculations that coincidentally bear a remarkable resemblance to Dr Seuss's conceit of *Whoville*;

> "An *Eare-ring round* may well a *Zodiacke* bee,
> Where in a *Sun* goeth round, and we not see.
> And *Planets seven* about that *Sun* may move,
> And *Hee* stand still, as *some wise men* would prove.
> And *fixed Stars*, like *twinkling Diamonds*, plac'd
> About this *Eare-ring*, which a *World* is vast.
> That same which doth the *Eare-ring* hold, the *hole*,
> Is that, which we do call the *Pole*.
> There *nipping Frosts* may be, and *Winter* cold,
> Yet never on the *Ladies Eare* take hold.
> And *Lightnings, Thunder*, and great *Winds* may blow

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[326] Fox Animation Studios, Twentieth Century Fox, 2008

[327] O'Neill, Eileen (Ed.), 'Introduction' to *Margaret Cavendish: Observations Upon Experimental Philosophy*, Cambridge University Press, 2001, p.xxxiii

[328] O'Neill, Eileen (Ed.), 'Introduction' to *Margaret Cavendish: Observations Upon Experimental Philosophy*, Cambridge University Press, 2001, p.xxvii

Plate 47:   (Left) Neil Campbell, *Candy Flip*, 2011, Acrylic on wall, dimensions variable, installation view Blanket
              Contemporary Art, Vancouver, **Image sourced : http://mfineart.ca/artists/niel-campbell-exhibitions/niel-**
              campbell-sample-exhibition-a/
Plate 48:   (Right) Neil Campbell, *Boom Boom*, 2004, Acrylic on wall, dimensions variable, Installation view
              Contemporary Art Gallery, Vancouver, **Image sourced : http://mfineart.ca/artists/niel-campbell-selected-**
              works/

> Within this *Eare-ring*, yet the *Eare* not know.
> […] There *Governours* do rule, and *Kings* do Reigne,
> And *Battels* fought, where many may be slaine.
> And all within the Compasse of this Ring,
> And yet not tidings to the Wearer bring.
> Within the Ring wise Counsellors may sit,
> And yet the Eare not one wise word may get."[329]

Dr Zeus's *Whoville* and Cavendish's *World in an Eare-ring*, solicit the perplexing philosophical problems of scale that the individual's uncertain position in the face of limitlessness provoke in ways congruent with the concerns of numerous contemporary artists. Neil Campbell is a painter whose entire oeuvre to date seems to solely address the philosophical anxieties that the instability of scale provoke. Campbell paints directly onto walls in a manner that reveals no visible evidence of either brush or hand, thereby imbuing the work with a machine-like appearance that is more reminiscent of logos, designs and emblems from the world of commerce, advertising and business super-scaled up, than the world of fine art. The works direct application onto the wall induces a conversation with the architectural setting making the experience of viewing a physical interaction with it and the surrounding co-extensive space of the

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[329] Battigelli, Anna, *Margaret Cavendish and the Exiles of the Mind*, University Press of Kentucky, 1998, p.52

Plate 49 : © Ed Ruscha, *Greece*, 1961, **Image Sourced :** **http://www.barnesandnoble.com/w/ed-ruscha-and-photography-ed-ruscha/1006335601**

Plate 50 : © Ed Ruscha, *Florence, Italy*, 1961, **Image sourced :** **http://www.phaidon.com/agenda/art/articles/2013/february/18/ed-ruscha-by-the-book/**

viewer.   The bodily, visceral awareness of the scale of these mechanistic icons of industry dwarf the human-scale, the form of the silhouettes simultaneously suggesting a paradoxical conflation of

vacancy and fullness. The gigantic scale of these mysterious, inanimate shapes hover in an indeterminate space, staring back in an unblinking, emotionless gaze; effects that as Jerry Saltz remarks "make the room go rubbery and space wobble". Extending from the continuum of the gallery space and somehow into the shadowy outer galaxy beyond, "the wall seems to disappear as you imagine you're looking through the gallery into a parallel universe of dark matter."[330]

Although not immediately obvious, Campbell's work in fact revisits themes that have been central to (amongst others) Ed Ruscha's work since the 1960s. Ruscha addresses the concept of infinite space relative to the finite and bounded human presence within the omnipresent electromagnetic media-scape of L.A. Ruscha's work addresses the uncertain position of the individual (counter-intuitively largely through the considered omission of figurative elements) within the mass aestheticized space of commerce that includes talk back radio, popular music, auto culture, billboards, the cinema, cartoons and so on. The genesis of many of his definitive works; those that incorporate words and his 'City Lights' pictures can possibly be traced back to concerns that were nascent in some of his earliest photographs taken on a road trip through Europe in the 1960s (Plates 49 and 50). The sharply receding perspective lines, oblique angles and bird's eye views that frequently appear and reappear in his early photographs are features that would repeatedly re-surface in later paintings to an extent that one has to say that for Ruscha the problems of scale are emblematic of deeper ontological concerns. One particular photograph (Plate 49) shows a soldier standing on a wall facing the viewer. Ruscha suggested that what struck him as significant about this image at the time in terms of later developments in his work, was that perhaps "It [had…] unconsciously ushered me into an area of doing words across a canvas."[331]

The direct juxtaposition of figure and word profoundly resonated with Ruscha for reasons that probably bear some relationship to his similar preoccupation with aerial perspectives. Ruscha acknowledges that he has always had an abiding interested in a God's eye view of the world, evident when he states, "There's something about a tabletop … taking a viewer up in the air, so you can look down from an angle."[332] The 'tabletop perspective' of course is a distancing mechanism that in a way always reduces everything in the visual field to the status of a still life

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[330] Saltz, Jerry, 'Looking Out for No. 2', The Arts Reviews, <u>New York Art</u>, 21 September, 2008

[331] Wolf, Sylvia, *Ed Ruscha and Phtography*, Whitney Museum of American Art, 2004, p.60

[332] Ruscha, Ed, 'The Return of a Native Son: Painter Ed Ruscha Resurfaces in L.A.' by Michael Duncan, (Originally published in <u>Buzz</u>, May 1998, p.42) from *Leave Any Information at the Signal*, MIT Press, 2002, p.342

arrangement. Just as in the juxtaposition of word and figure the tabletop view depicts a compressed depth of field in which everything is reduced to a schematic glyph or 'ideogram'; abstract entities, shapes and marks. So perhaps it is not surprising when Ruscha states that;

> "when I began painting, all my paintings were of words which were guttural utterances like *smash*, *Boss* and *Eat*. I didn't see that as literature, because it didn't complete thoughts. Those words were like flowers in a vase; I just happened to paint words like someone else paints flowers. The words have these abstract shapes, they live in a world of no size: You can make them any size, and what's the real size? Nobody knows."[333]

As this statement seems to suggest, perhaps another part explanation of Ruscha's interest in painted words, signs, commercial products and product design is simply that, relative to the material world, words have no true scale. As objects they exist in the media biosphere in which scale is relative, uncertain and essentially *inhuman*. As Ruscha later clarified, his abiding interest in words in his work is precisely because:

> "Words exist in a world of no-size. Take a word like 'smash' – we don't know it by size. We see it on billboards, in four-point type and all stages in between […words exist] in this anonymous world of no-size."[334]

We return in a way to the logic of *Whoville*: another analogy for which might be drawn from the idea that a pebble picked up on the shore is small relative to the human hand in which it sits, but the same pebble from the perspective of a microbe may seem as large as a distant planet and from a point in outer space, an imperceptible spec. Ruscha is interested not in 'realism' as such or

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[333] Ruscha, Ed, 'Ed Ruscha' (Originally published in <u>Flash Art</u>, n. 138, January-February 1988, p.71, from *Leave Any Information at the Signal*, MIT Press, 2002, p.264

[334] Failing, Patricia, 'Ed Ruscha, Young Artist: Dead Serious About Being Nonsensical', 1984, from Schwartz, Alexandra (Ed), *Leave Any Information at the Signal*, MIT Press, 2002, p.231

Plate 51 : **© Ed Ruscha, *Talk Radio*, Acrylic on canvas, 50.8 x 61cm 1988, Image sourced :**
http://www.phaidon.com/agenda/art/articles/2013/february/18/ed-ruscha-by-the-book/

in 'true scale' but in the words themselves as abstract entities floating and disconnected in "this anonymous world of no-size"; fragments of disconnected thoughts, half-remembered, archeological remains free from any semblance of coherent meaning; the insensible non-human world that renders all meaning dispensable and superfluous. It is a way of contemplating the human bubble of existence, the spectral presence of human civilization adrift in the insensate infinite electromagnetic expanse. Words in Ruscha's work almost operate as performing automata in a theatrical tableau in which a sense of the human scale is obliterated by the abstract space and panoramic sweep of the impersonal eye of the movie camera. Similarly, Ruscha recalls his fascination as a young boy with the abstract space depicted in cinema that reminds one of the anomalies of vision itself that form the motif of all his work:

'It seemed like all movies would have a train in them. Invariably, they had the camera down on the tracks and shot this train so it appeared as though it was coming from nowhere, from a little point in the distance, to suddenly zooming in and filling your total range of vision. In a sense, that's what the Standard gas station is doing.'"[335]

It is in this sense that Pi's observation that "Life is a peephole, a single, tiny entry onto a vastness"[336] (albeit an immense, inhospitable and disinterested *material* universe) that accords with Ed Ruscha's preoccupation with the infinite abstract space of the mass mediated world in which scale-lessness, and anonymity prevails. Thus in *Talk Radio*, "Urbanism is reduced to the spiritual plane of all our souls as disconnected dots,"[337] as James Ellroy remarks; as the faceless and nameless vectors in an invisible electronic network of continuous reception.

Another artist whose work provides a quite different allegory for the dual concept of microcosm/ macrocosm in the twenty-first century is Marilyn Minter. Her colossally scaled works present a bugs' eye view of reality (Plate 52 and 53) in which high fashion has never looked more hazardous or intimidating. Initially a panoply of agitated, restless shapes swarm across the surface of the picture plane as It takes a few moments in which to adjust before the confusing jumble settles into something recognisable; the glint of razor sharp high heels in a cinematically noir-esque space.

Minter's work is a simultaneous critique and bacchanalian celebration of the carnival world of fashion, glamour and glitz. Despite having moved away from explicitly pornographic references in her earlier work, her more recent work continues to examine the presentation of sexuality and desire in the worlds of art and mass media. As such her work mirrors and reflects upon the technologies of seduction and the 'soft-porn' imagery upon which popular culture banquets. Foremost in this project is her interest in the ubiquitous and universal pleasure of looking in its most sensual and carnal manifestations. Persistently central to her concerns is the examination of the mechanics of desire in the global, media saturated world in which we are inescapably

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[335] Wolf, Sylvia, *Ed Ruscha and Phtography*, Whitney Museum of American Art, 2004, p.236

[336] Martel, Yann, *Life of Pi*, Random House, Canada, 2001, pp.171-172

[337] Ellroy, James, *Ed Ruscha: Fifty Years of Painting*, Hayward Gallery exhibition catalogue 14 Oct-10 Jan, 2010, Hayward Gallery publishing, London, 2009, p.9

Plate 52 : Marilyn Minter, *Heavy Metal*, 2011, Enamel on metal, 274.3 x 457.2cm, **Image sourced : Image sourced :** http://www.salon94.com/artists/detail/marilyn-minter/27

Plate 53 : **(below) © Marilyn Minter, Minter in front of *Heavy Metal*, 2011 (in situ, exhibition, Salon 94 Bowery, NY, 2011), Image source :** http://www.sfaqonline.com/2011/11/pretty-pictures-part-one/

immersed, indeed implicated, here revealed through the universal erotic pleasure involved in simply looking. Although to some degree there is a parallel with Ruscha in the mutual shared concern for depicting everyday images from the world of mass media the obvious precedents for which are found in Pop Art that elevates the mundane and everyday to the status of High Art, Minter's work is nonetheless quite different. By contrast Minter's work lacks the emotional detachment of Ruscha, Warhol, and so forth. Rather than the dead-pan aesthetics of Ruscha Minter presents a world that is manifestly erotic and voluptuous. About this she is quite explicit when she says, "I do try to seduce people with my paintings. I want you to get sucked in by their lusciousness."[338] As such the dripping of enamel paint in her earlier works finds a material correlation with flesh, sex and bodily fluids and the jewel-like lustre of enamel paint enhances the sense of visual opulence and richness. Despite the overt artificiality of imagery that simultaneously critiques and celebrates the fakery of commercialism, Minter nevertheless asserts that her motive is:

> "[…] to make images of something that's real. And, if you live in New York City, which is a place where people walk a lot, and it's raining and muddy, your shoes will get covered in mud and dirt. It's a real thing. It's the other side of glamour – a side that doesn't have a lot of representation, but that is still very real. That side is a true thing in my life, and one that other people recognize in their lives. I think that, if my work resonates, it's because I make a picture of those types of things or situations that the viewer knows are real."[339]

Minter's everyday is always an evocation of the dream-like celestial planet of high fashion defiled by the intrusion of mud, molten spurts and splutters of debris, pubic hairs, rivulets of mascara, etc. In Minter decomposition is never very far from enjoyment. Minter's enthusiastic embrace of mass culture reveals the implied erotic charge involved in the activity of looking and thereby society's complicity in not just material consumption, but in its own commodification *for consumption* via the circulation of images of the body, sexuality, the daily news cycle and so forth. In short Minter expresses the contradictory position of repulsion and attraction; being mindful of the seductive

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[338] Marily Minter in conversation with Mary Heilmann, '*MH:* How did we meet?', *Marilyn* Minter, Gregory R. Miller & Co., Germany, p.17

[339] Minter, Marilyn, 'Twenty Questions', *Marilyn Minter*, Gregory R. Miller & Co., Germany, p40
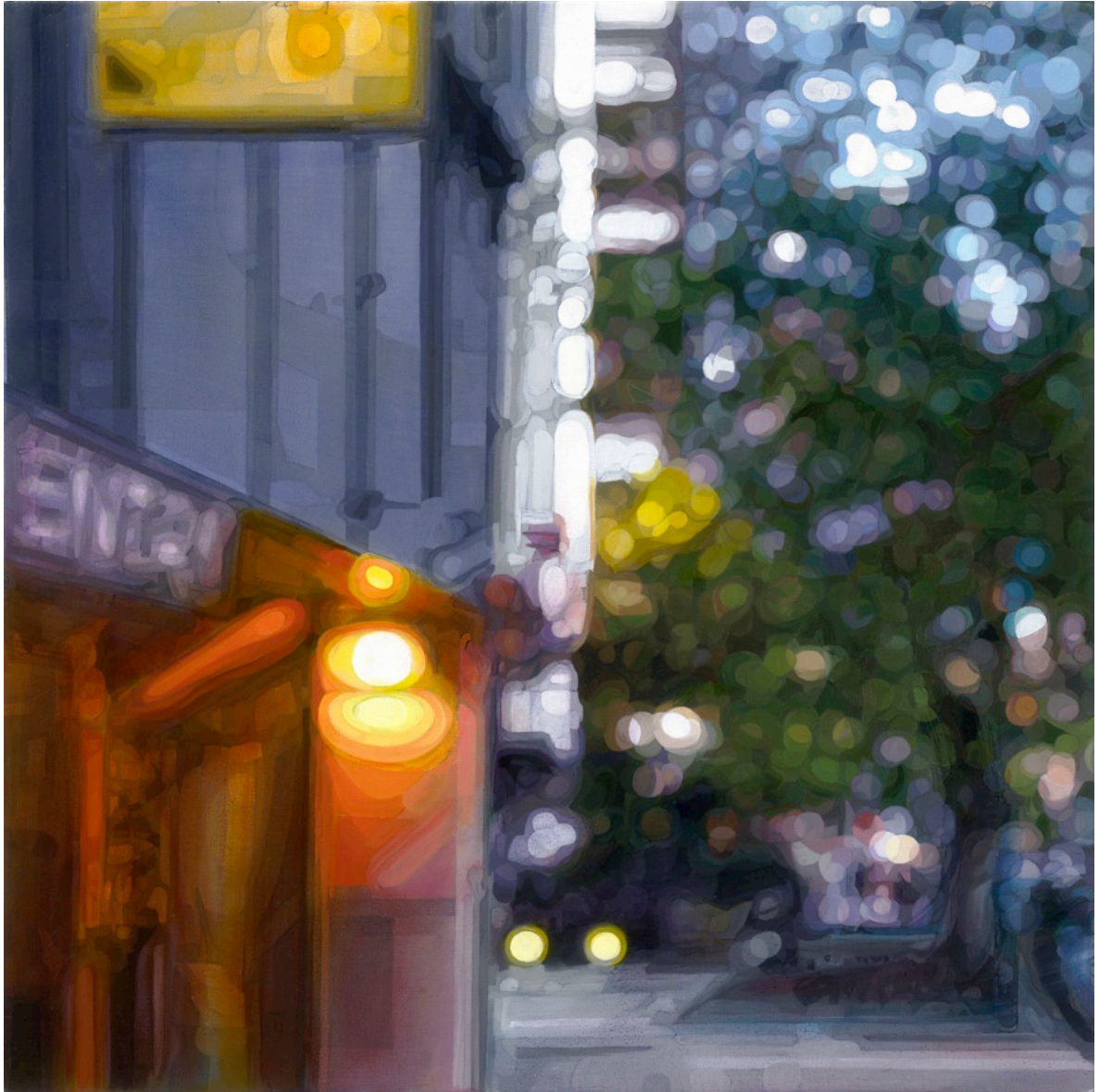
Plate 54 : Fiona Greenhill, *Entry Point*, 2012, Oil and acrylic on linen, 40 x 40cm

trap whilst acknowledging that we are all implicated in sustaining the machinery of commerce through our own enslavement to it.

In the antique conception of the chain of being the immense corresponds to the minute and human beings are microcosms of the larger universe. When Browne remarks that he is a composite of contrary things, not a singular entity; "I finde there are many pieces in this one fabricke of man; this frame is raised upon a masse of Antipathies" and that he finds in himself "[...]

a swarme of distinct essences, and in them another world of contrarieties"[340], it contains an essential truth that echoes current inquiries regarding the impossibility of an autonomous self. Minter's work questions how much agency the individual has in relation to the dictates of commerce or indeed, even one's own biological make-up and drives at the level of DNA. The sovereignty of the individual is de-stabilised in the twenty-first century through the interdependence of the individual on the dynamics of the group; be it familial, regional, national, international, and so on. The conscious and unconscious processes at all levels of social relations in which the sense of 'me' and 'not me' are illusory within the broader mechanisms of commerce, industry, institutions and so on form the macrocosmic enclosure of a self that is no longer unified; of a self "who is not a singleton, but a node in a web of connections".[341]

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[340] Norford, Op. Cit., p.416

[341] Warner, Marina, *Phantasmagoria: Spirit Visions, Metaphors, and Media Into the Twenty-first Century*, Oxford University Press, 2006, p.379

CONCLUSION

In much of my work I have also been receptive to images that exhibit incongruities of scale for reasons that overlap with those of both Minter and Ruscha. Numerous photographs that don't end up being suitable for paintings, often for reasons that are difficult to pinpoint, nonetheless exhibit traits that re-surface repeatedly in paintings, particularly through aerial or abruptly cropped frontal perspectives. The painting *Entry Point*, (plate 56) adopts a tightly cropped view of a pedestrian walkway in which a street sign 'Entry' looms up in the foreground, (the bottom left) close to the perceptual space of the viewer whilst in the middle distance two car headlights appear from an underground car park adjacent to which there is the barest suggestion of two diminutive outlines of figures in the background. The sign however that is barely legible from a distance completely disperses into incoherent shapes when viewed close-up. What I found interesting in this image was precisely the incongruities of scale between animate and inanimate; architectural and organic forms. The fact that the inanimate sterile features of the urban landscape appear disproportionately large in comparison to the pocket-sized Lilliputians in the distance, together with the prominent placement of the architectural features immediately in the foreground reinforced by the garish colour scheme of orange and purple-blue underlines a sense of their significance somehow, although in an unspecified way. I also liked the way the figures seem to merge with the natural forms, almost as if they were surfacing from a space that was fluid, kaleidoscopic and unstable into the space of the built environment that by contrast is severe, regular and uniform. Minter's momentary confusion and Rusha's admixture of 'noise' in the blandly lit street signage, are close cousins of this work.

Paul Virilio's essay *'The Overexposed City'* [342] describes the trend towards the de-centralisation of cities since the 1920s in which distinctions between the 'city' and its surrounding suburbs have coalesced into a seamless undifferentiated expanse. He suggests that this phenomenon has largely been brought about by transformations in public and private transport as well as with the development and expansion of communications technologies. LA would have to be the iconic vision of Virilio's 'ideal' city, with its branching highways, super-highways, sprawling suburbs all

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[342] Virilio, Paul, "The Overexposed City", and essay appearing in *Architecture Theory Since 1968*, MIT Press, 2000, pp.540-551

Plate 55 : © Fiona Greenhill, *252*, 2013, Inkjet on hahnemuhle paper, 60 x 90cm

plotted equidistant from the co-ordinates of commerce – the self-enclosed 'cities within cities' called shopping malls. From early on my growing interest in painting images of the city was motivated by the intuition that the city was a giant amorphous organism with its exo-skeleton of buildings, webs of nerve endings spanning out into invisible rivulets of optic fibre that transmit energy along the coordinates of the grid, its tubular vessels through which fresh water flows and waste is removed, its crowds of corpuscular molecules of humanity surging in an out of buildings, and as a measure of its metabolic rate; the pulse of cars pushed through the arterial maze of its streets. The city as organism was of course also an ancient metaphor popular in the seventeenth century. It contracts the macrocosmic world that is likewise encircled in the universe and within the circle of the city, the microcosmic corporeal body is composed of countless scores of individuals, all of whom collectively comprise the body politic. The city is in a constant state of flux, incessantly growing, expanding, contracting, withering, fading, disappearing, re-shooting, mutating. It is an ecosystem of sorts in which complex, serendipitous interactions occur. It is the ultimate machine for chance encounters, unexpected configurations, exchanges and connections. Scott McQuire remarked that the new urban "ex-centric" city:

> "[…] is symbolised less by a skyline of iconic skyscrapers than by networks of superhighways whose logic can best be understood from the air, or, increasingly, by invisible digital networks which demand to be mapped in new ways."[343]

Although I generally like to heighten the contrast between light and dark for dramatic effect – to draw attention to minor flashes of pure hue as seen for instance in a traffic light or street sign, a small flicker of bright colour bobbing in a subdued expanse of muted greys, in order to endow the ordinary with an aura of strangeness – an unexpected burst of prettiness. But I also like to employ a different aesthetic – one that tries to impose an evenness of attention over the entire surface of the painting so that one area doesn't dominate too much with the express purpose of leaving the impression of the interconnectedness of all its constituent parts.   In *Cliff Walk* for instance which is very nearly a monochrome work, I deliberately imposed an almost uniform spread of a myriad of greys – very slight gradations and shifts from degrees of grey/blue to grey/purple around a single central white circle of light. In certain works therefore, such as *Mona on the Parra, Juncture*, *Blind Date*, I wanted to suggest a complete contrast to Caravaggio – light no longer beams down and

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[343] McQuire, Op. Cit., p.19

Plate 56 : © Fiona Greenhill, *Girl in Green*, 2013, Ink jet print on hahnemuhle paper, 60 x 90cm

Plate 57 : © Fiona Greenhill, *Outhland*, New York, 2013, Inkjet on hahnemuhle paper, 60 x 90cm
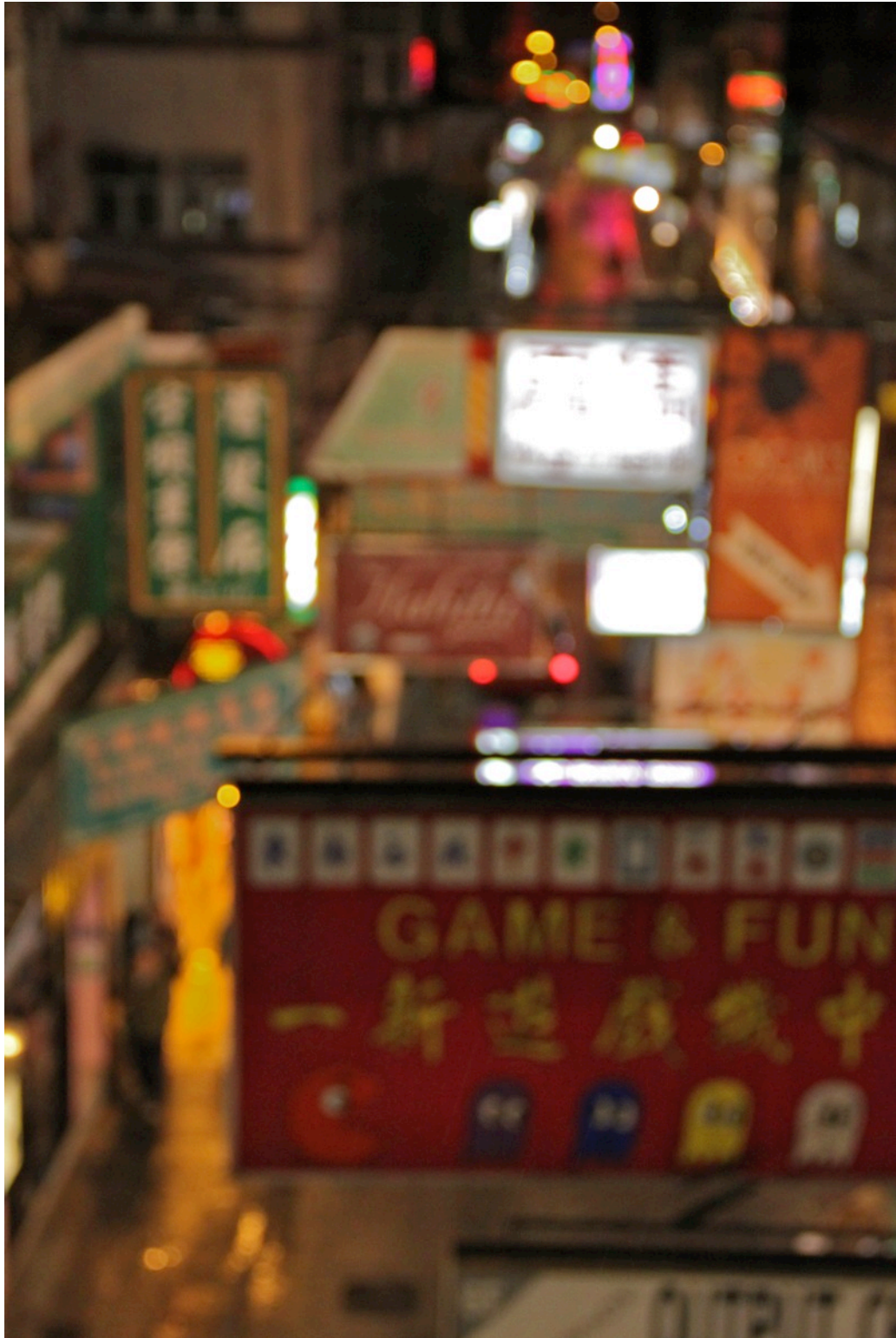
Plate 58 : ©Fiona Greenhill, *Game and Fun*, 2013, Ink jet print on Hahnemule paper, 90 x 60cm

Plate 59 : © Fiona Greenhill, *Yum Cha*, 2013, Inkjet on hahnemuhle paper, 60 x 40xm

illuminates; in *Mona on the Parra* or *Redfern Romeo* the light is even, reminiscent of the cold, harsh daylight of the twenty-first century and in *Blind Date* the image that is repeated in the lighter panel shows the image as a faded image in which the figures are nearly unrecognisable –

Plate 60 : © Fiona Greenhill, *Blind Date*, Oil, acrylic and Ink on linen, 2 panels 40 x 40cm each

the slow erasure of the material evidence in a photographic print here perhaps reminds of the inevitability of our own obliterations or non-being – of the inevitable translation from a form into an enigmatic hieroglyphic. In this regard, Ruscha sums up my own interest in aerial perspectives, raking light and distortions of scale, as when Ruscha stated that "[…] I started collecting these aerial photographs of Los Angeles, and then I realised, God, man, here's where I am. My painting is this way, too. Aerial photographs of Los Angeles go back to a tabletop gesture."[344] By the 'tabletop gesture' of course he implies the displacement of the human scale into abstract marks – the forensic incomplete trace of our presence found in the patterns left by oil spillage in parking lots viewed from above or as Ruscha states, the aerial perspectives that suggest;

> "[…] what these streets might look like in the year 5000 or something. [..] like these
> are patterns for streets that once existed in the world. I like the idea of making no
> value judgments of these particular streets .. They mean something in my history of
> living in L.A. […] I'm looking at these in the abstract, and then also I'm bringing it
> back to reality by making these real streets that intersect each other."[345]

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[344] Wolf, Op. Cit., p.272

[345] Ruscha, Ed, 'Conversations with Ruscha in His Studio' by Alexandra Schwartz, California, October 29, 1999, from *Leave Any Information at the Signal*, MIT Press, 2002, p.375

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