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How Not to Disappear Completely: Characterising the Role of Anonymity in Contemporary Figurative Painting

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Abstract

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My research examines how anonymity functions as a performance and form of subjectivity within contemporary figurative painting. This is developed by considering how a paradox and double movement of 'presenting' whilst 'retreating', reframes the question of anonymity within the imagery and materiality of paintings, beyond one of *flattening* at the level of representation. By assessing how this translates as an ambiguity of power and psychological expression, I show how it takes effect within the work of the late Swedish artist, Dick Bengtsson, as well as within my own practice. This is established initially by investigating Bengtsson's paintings according to Friedrich Nietzsche's duality of *Apollonian* and *Dionysian* forces, to demonstrate how a rational *Apollonian* strategy to achieve anonymity conceptually, conflicts in the making of paintings with a *Dionysian* state, in which reason is abandoned. By assessing how Bengtsson's paintings revolve around this tension, I establish their precedent in relation to Luc Tuymans and Martin Kippenberger within a subsequent trajectory of post-conceptual figurative painting.

In rethinking anonymity as an ambiguity of power in the *making* of paintings, I explore how this tension unfolds within particular motifs, as they *appear* within paintings. This is established within my practical research where I juxtapose the hermit in art-history with the corporate team-building participant: situating activities of the latter in landscapes of the former. By evaluating how the ascetic nature of the hermit represents a problematic of empowerment - which I establish through Michel Foucault's *Technologies of the Self* and Nietzsche's *What is the Meaning of the Ascetic Ideals?* – I consider how this finds parallels with the corporate team-building participant, who, I argue – despite appearances - mirrors the hermit's plight, within a late-capitalist culture of gamification and 'structured fun'. This lays the foundation for Isabelle Graw's thesis *Painting as a Thinking Subject* which, I suggest, in its critique of *subjectivity* within the current economic climate, presents a convincing case for re-examining the question of agency, before I assess the impact of this research, finally, within my recent painting practice.
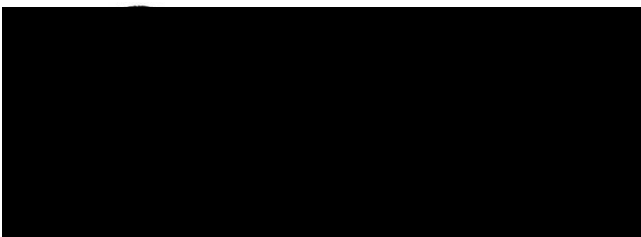
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I would also like to thank my wife, Annabel Elgar, my mother, Christine Moon-Willems, and my mother-in-law, Patricia Elgar.

<u>Declaration of original authorship</u>

Declaration: I confirm that this is my own work and the use of all materials from other sources has been properly and fully acknowledged.

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Foreword

The theme of presenting whilst retreating that runs through this research first became a question for me in the summer of 1999. As a postgraduate painting student at the Royal College of Art at the time – and fortunate recipient of a travelling scholarship to New York that year – I found myself drifting between stalls at a midweek edition of Greenmarket, a small farmer's market on the corner of Union Square and East 17th Street, in downtown Manhattan. On the far side of the displays, I noticed a member of the Amish community – who I later spoke to – selling bakery produce, whilst taking calls on his mobile phone and attending to updates on his laptop. The spectacle seemed somewhat unlikely in my callow judgment, as I recalled the way in which my grandmother had told me about the Amish as a child. And yet, here I was, arrested by a paradox, in which the anachronistic image of societal withdrawal that she had invested in my imagination, had been punctured by the presence of late 20th century technology. Following the encounter, I thought about this brief meeting for some time, in an attempt to arrive at a series of artworks that might function plausibly in response; taking account of the contradictions that witnessing this Amish bread seller seemed to engender. Little did I know at the time, that Max Weber's seminal text, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, went some way to locate the ascetic roots of capitalist enterprise in 17th century Europe, by claiming how the Puritan ethics underlying god's *calling* within different protestant communities, significantly influenced its development; what Weber identified as *inner-worldy* asceticism[1]. Finally, I realised that the only way that I could engage with the Amish as an artist – who really, I knew nothing about – would be to visit them. This was not conceived in any literal sense, of course, but as a kind of performance within painting, in which the hosts of the depicted guest lodges and I would convene within the artworks indirectly: presenting on the one hand, whilst retreating on the other. What was being established was an acknowledgment that this imagined encounter was sustained by an underlying fiction, in which the playing out of roles would be central. It

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[1] 'Inner-worldly' asceticism was characterized by Max Weber in *Economy and Society* as the concentration of human behaviour upon activities leading to salvation within the context of the everyday world and then developed in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. See Max Weber, Guenther Roth, and Claus Wittich, *Economy and Society : An Outline of Interpretive Sociology. Vol. 1* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2013). pp. 547-548 & Max Weber, *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism ; Translated by Talcott Parsons ; Introduction by Anthony Giddens* (London; New York: Routledge, 1992). Chapter 5.

seemed ironic at the time in pursuing this course of action – albeit this was echoed in the paradox of technological convenience that I had encountered at the market stall beforehand – that on further investigation, the Internet, which was barely established as a portal of information and exchange at the time, generated dozens of links to Amish Bed & Breakfast websites. On returning to London some weeks later, the beginnings of the *Search for the Amish Guest Lodge* series was born (Fig. 1) and the question of painting in response to presenting whilst retreating was underway.

Fig. 1 Simon Willems, *Search for the Amish Guest Lodge (2),* 1999, Oil on Board, 30 x 35cm.
Private Collection.

Introduction

0.1   Anonymity: Parameters and Identification

This practice-based PhD explores the idea of anonymity within contemporary figurative painting as a *performance* and form of subjectivity. In considering anonymity in these terms, I assess how it fuels the imagery and materiality of paintings through a double movement of 'presenting' whilst 'retreating'. Central to this research, then, is the idea that as a *performance* and form of subjectivity, anonymity reads, paradoxically, as a *motion* engendering movement and contradiction. It seems important to stress that in using the term *performance,* I am referring here to the different ways in which an action revolves around its staging and presentation and, furthermore, how this manifests itself as a psychological expression. This is developed within the thesis, firstly, as an investigation into how this becomes a question within the *doing* and *making* of paintings and, secondly, within particular motifs, as they appear within paintings[2], having emerged directly from the problematics of my painting practice. In this introduction I will outline what I intend to draw upon in navigating this two-fold enquiry and how this will take effect in shaping my project, prior to setting out my research question and objectives. Before proceeding to do so, however, it seems necessary to first ascertain - at a preliminary level - exactly how the term anonymity is being identified and applied.

The etymology of anonymity, 'state or quality of being nameless', as it applies to the anonymous individual, 'nameless person', seems to suggest that no overriding characteristics or qualities can be discerned at that level of identity, defining an individual or state. According to this logic, anonymity comes to represent – or at least emphasises itself with – outward appearance, in contrast to its deployment as a means of concealment, which imbues it with a defining – 'deceptive' – quality. It is within this capacity that anonymity embodies a paradoxical motion; whilst it *presents* itself through appearance, on the one hand, it manages at the same time to *retreat* from this presentation by stealth[3]. To that end,

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[2] The argument being that it is not enough for anonymity to be examined solely on the level of how a painter deploys anonymising strategies, and that the selection of particular motifs and types of imagery in themselves retain a critical *reflective* function.

[3] Although this is not to negate how the etymology of anonymity might be thought and applied within the context of the ordinary, the everyday, the unremarkable or the commonplace, as they might refer to a 'state or quality of being nameless'. What is central to anonymity here is its motion as a *performance*, and the idea that as a movement, this is hidden.

anonymity is explored here as a process of fabrication; a means by which the rationale and desire to create an appearance and the appearance itself cannot be treated as one and the same thing. Perhaps this distinction can be applied to all paintings, that in functioning as the spectral presence of their absent maker, they retain a particular anonymity in their status as freestanding objects[4]. But this study is not wagered at all paintings, as it is a particular trajectory of largely European post-conceptual *figurative* painting[5]. And to consider anonymity as something illusory and performed – in this context at least – demands further elaboration, to establish exactly how one delineates 'strategy' from 'appearance'; unpacking, as it were, the director's instruction from the actor's delivery. A distinction can be made, for example, between how a painting by Gerhard Richter or Luc Tuymans might *look* anonymous in showcasing a photographic source and expressing indifference in its handling[6], and the thinking and rationale that lies behind its making. To consider the painting of anonymity, then, solely at the level of appearance, as something approaching a *style* or type of expression, is simply to miss the point and negate how this visual endpoint is only part of a process that works to conceal. This is precisely what early reflections on this Richter/Tuymans sensibility, such as Jordan Kantor's *Tuymans Effect* and Jerry Saltz's *Richter Resolution*, highlight: the desire to assimilate and (re)-present imagery strategically to appeal to anonymity as a particular *aesthetic*; whether dressed up as 'incompleteness', 'illegibility', 'briefness', 'obscurantism' or simply lack of detail[7]. It is one thing to support a

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[4] I am thinking in particular of Tristan Garcia's claim that to represent is first of all to *absent*, whereupon an exchange takes place within the painting itself, in so far as this presupposes the absenting of an artwork's present matter and spatial dimension, whilst presenting the illusion of a surface, which is itself, naturally *absent*. This offers a new reading of the anonymity of a painting as a freestanding object. See Tristan Garcia, "In Defense of Representation," in *Realism Materialism Art*, ed. Christoph Cox, Jenny Jaskey, and Suhail Malik (Annandale-on-Hudson, NY; Berlin: Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College; Sternberg Press, 2015). p.245-251.

[5] All of the artists I address in the first half of this thesis can be seen, in one way or another, to have responded to the significance of Richter within the canon apart from Dick Bengtsson. By referring to 'post-conceptual' I am referring to the legacy of conceptual art, which Peter Osborne delineates in Peter Osborne, *Anywhere or Not at All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art* (United Kingdom: Verso, 2013). as 'an art premised on the complex historical experience and critical legacy of conceptual art [….] which registers its fundamental mutation of the ontology of the artwork. [….]at the level of the historical ontology of the artwork; it is not a traditional art-historical or art-critical concept at the level of the medium, form or style'. See pages 46-69.

[6] The theme of anonymity is often used to describe the work of both artists. With Richter this lies more with the clinical rendering of the photographic source material that he draws upon, as well as the largely mundane selection of his imagery; whereas with Tuymans this is directed more at the unremarkable spare facture and anaemic palette that he deploys, as well as the filmic nature of his cropping strategies. See Peter Ruyffelaere and Adrian Searle, *On and by Luc Tuymans* (London; Cambridge, Mass.: Whitechapel Gallery ; MIT Press, 2013). and Gerhard Richter, Dietmar Elger, and Hans Ulrich Obrist, *Gerhard Richter: Text: Writings, Interviews and Letters, 1961-2007* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2009).

[7] See Jordan Kantor, "The Tuymans Effect," *Artforum*, November 2004. and Terry Myers, *Painting: Documents of Contemporary Art* (United Kingdom: Whitechapel Art Gallery, 2011). p. 183-85.

painting with an accompanying text that clarifies how its context might be appraised to sanction its look, but quite another to evaluate how this configures within a larger role-playing scenario.

Richter set a canonic precedent in attempting to undermine the question of subjectivity within painting by heralding the objectifying perfection of the photograph, as a vehicle to eradicate all style and meaning[8]. But however overly familiar and reductive this precedent might now appear within a post-war canon of European figurative painting, it takes on a slightly different meaning when viewed in relation to recent philosophical developments. Quentin Meillassoux's post-Kantian principle of 'anti-correlationism', that interrogates how "we only ever have access to the correlation between thinking and being, and never to either term considered apart from the other[9]", that has fuelled the joint trajectory of Object Orientated Ontology and Speculative Realism over the last decade or so, significantly re-evaluates the position and value of the human[10]. On one level, this shift in the zeitgeist might read as a far cry from Richter and the question of anonymity within contemporary figurative painting, that this thesis is concerned with. And of course, anonymity is not the same as - and cannot be reduced to - the absence or negation of human subjectivity. But as JJ Charlesworth observes in the aptly titled *Subjects v Objects*, when it comes to a stand-off that puts subjectivity into question, this theoretical development and its implications for the loss of human agency are wholly significant where "Autonomy and control are being ceded and artists are rushing to become objects or to side with the object.[11]"

Of course, subjectivity matters, and the problem that these philosophical developments pose, as they concern us here, lies less with what they represent as philosophical positions in themselves, so much as what they point towards in the negation of human agency. This is what Charlesworth and others such as Rosa Braidotti are at pains to highlight[12]. But can one

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[8] See Richter, Elger, and Obrist, *Gerhard Richter: Text: Writings, Interviews and Letters, 1961-2007.* for a more comprehensive account of how Richter talks about this.

[9] Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude : An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency* (London: Continuum, 2008). p.5.

[10] The point being made here is that both *Object Orientated Ontology* and *Speculative Realism* in their various configurations take Meillassoux's 'anti-correlationism' as central; overturning forms of philosophy which privilege the human being, favouring distinct forms of realism against the dominant forms of idealism in much of contemporary Continental philosophy.

[11] JJ Charlesworth, "Subjects V Objects," *Art Monthly*2014. p. 4.

[12] R. Braidotti and T. J. V. Vermeulen, "Borrowed Energy," *Frieze* 165 (2014). See also JJ Charlesworth, "The End of Human Experience," *Art Review* 2015. Maria Walsh, "I Object," *Art Monthly* 2013. Svenja Bromberg,

really apportion the problematic of subjectivity within a simple either-or politically in this way? Is it not the case that human agency is more at the mercy of discursive power and forces than it is an imagined endpoint where subjectivity *stops*? This is precisely the distinction: subjectivity is standardised by how it configures *anonymously,* not how it seeks delineation within a dumb model of old world humanism.

This is why the broader question of anonymity within contemporary painting is so important: by interrogating how it engenders complexity and a playing out of roles - beyond it representing a certain artistic style or look – it retains a crucial political function.

Furthermore, the paradoxical motion of *presenting* whilst *retreating* that is deployed within painting as an anonymising strategy, reflects a broader problematic within contemporary subjectivity; for this is the same performance that is played out in our working lives, online and recreationally. It is the same double movement that the advance of technology and social media operates through and prefigures. And yet, on all counts, it is through such mask-wearing that one is able to retain a necessary distance from the flattening off and commodification of contemporary life. But maybe this flattening off and *fact* of subjectivity is not so recent, if one takes account of the question of agency surrounding the young woman in Edouard Manet's *Bar at the Folies-Bergère*[13], which is similarly determined by this double movement.

On both counts, then, as a question of how anonymity reflects the subjectivity of contemporary life, as well as how this translates as a form of subjectivity that is rehearsed and carried out within painting in different ways, this PhD is concerned with how the agency of the individual is recognised in its conditions as a wearing of masks and form of hiding. But how does this wearing of masks, itself, square with different forms of subjectivity as they might apply within the context of painting? Is there a definition of subjectivity that might prove useful from which to pursue this analysis?

"The Anti-Political Aesthetics of Objects and Worlds Beyond " *Mute* (2013), http://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/anti-political-aesthetics-objects-and-worlds-beyond.

[13] The principal point being made is that beyond the pooling of social types and classes that the *Bar at the Folies-Bergère* presents within the similarly flattened mirror reflection of a café-concert in late-nineteenth century Paris, the young woman who appears to be selling drinks and oranges remains completely opaque in not revealing any identity or expression. What she manages to achieve in fronting the picture at its centre, is precisely that anonymity in which she presents on the one hand, whilst retreating on the other. It is that sense of having to *honour* appearances and play out roles, whilst simultaneously withdrawing that I am concerned with and wish to explore. See Timothy J. Clark, "Bar at the Folies-Bergère," in The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and His Followers (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999). p. 205 – 258.

Felix Guattari's definition of subjectivity goes some way to locate how the question of subjectivity might be thought; delineating "The ensemble of conditions which render possible the emergence of individual and/ or collective instances as self-referential existential territories, adjacent, or in a delimiting relation, to an alterity that is itself subjective." But this only works to locate the 'conditions' through which subjectivity is produced[14]; not the 'nature' of its production, as it relates specifically to the making and doing of paintings, which is where this investigation needs to start from.

0.2   Research Trajectory

Taking this into consideration, this thesis looks to Nietzsche's Apollonian-Dionysian duality as an appropriate model of subjectivity in the production of artworks in the first half of this thesis. As a key element in the broader trajectory of the argument I will be making, what is critical to this duality is how *as* a tension underpinning paintings, it represents an ambiguity of power. This is to say, it is how this ambiguity of power manifests itself as a form of *presenting* whilst *retreating* that is primary to this investigation and the paintings of Dick Bengtsson in particular[15]. However, it seems important to point out that the ambiguity of power thematic that underlies this thesis first became a critical part of my thinking whilst researching Nietzsche's *What is the Meaning of the Ascetic Ideals?* Moreover, it was at this point, in considering how Nietzsche scrutinises its bearing within the *will-to-nothingness* (See Chapter 4.3 What is the Meaning of the Ascetic Ideals? p.124), that the idea of power as a force seeking domination - and the ability of something to dominate – became pivotal in how, in its ambiguity, it might also apply beyond the (ascetic) representation of hermits in art history. This was the distinction: it was precisely an ambiguity of power that fuelled the subjectivity of the corporate team-building participant motif within my own paintings, as well as the Apollonian-Dionysian tension underpinning Bengtsson's; notwithstanding the more general argument surrounding 'subjectness' within painting that Isabelle Graw takes to task, symbolically and economically, in Chapter 5.

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[14] My point here is that Guattari's definition of subjectivity does not take account of how subjectivity might be evaluated *specifically* within the act of making art and paintings. This is not to negate the nature or value of Guattari's critique in how subjectivity is recognised and its 'conditions' identified, which are about as close to a definition of subjectivity as it possible to get. See Félix Guattari, *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm* (Sydney: Power Publ., 1995). p. 9.

[15] The motion of presenting whilst retreating can be taken here to mean that which is 'presented' *rationally* by the individual within the Apollonian, on the one hand, as it relates to the act of making (formal decision making, the placement of imagery, harmony of colour, conceptual forethought), in contrast to 'retreating', on the other, in which reason is abandoned and primal (emotional) instincts take over.

It is not only in respect of the Apollonian and Dionysian, then, that Nietzsche features within this research and the ambiguity of power thematic gains currency throughout this thesis. In considering Nietzsche's *will-to-deception*[16] and *What is the Meaning of the Ascetic Ideals?*[17] in developing the theme of falsity and mask-wearing in Chapters 3 and 4, respectively, I assess how the paintings of Luc Tuymans and Martin Kippenberger - as well as the *ascetic* representation of hermits in art history – similarly revolve around this tension. Although I had not anticipated the extent to which Nietzsche's thinking would become critical to this project in starting it – and the idea was never to champion a specifically 'Nietzschean' body of research – this has, nevertheless, allowed me to respond to the problematic of anonymity as a complex of illusion, whilst enabling me to locate my own painting practice within this context[18]. What is being appraised, at both at the level of making paintings and identifying particular motifs within them (given the image-based nature of this project) is how a largely European strand of post-conceptual figurative painting – including myself - reveals such ambiguities in the use of materiality and photographic imagery, and, furthermore, how this is achieved in different ways through an *anonymising* lens.

0.3   Research Value

The analysis of anonymity as a motion of 'presenting whilst retreating' within this research, then, is proposed as a new way of making sense of the complex 'distancing' effects deployed by a range of contemporary painters within a post-photographic[19] and digital context, beyond it becoming synonymous simply with a *flattening* of representation. However, the value of this research can be identified, specifically, on two fronts. In the first

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[16] Nietzsche refers to the *will-to-deception* several times within his writings. However, this research is concerned specifically with how he talks about it in Friedrich Nietzsche and Walter Kaufmann, "The Will to Power as Art," in *The Will to Power* (New York: Random House, 1968). p. 419–453.

[17] Friedrich Nietzsche, "What Is the Meaning of the Ascetic Ideals?," in *On the Genealogy of Morals* (United States of America: Vintage, 1967). p.97–163.

[18] It seems important to emphasise, here, how my interest in Nietzsche's thinking within this research, stems from his engagement with the question of *power* and asceticism and not the more orthodox question of 'perspectivism', which in its antecedence, is often cited in relation to the emergence of much Post-modern and Post-structuralist theory.

[19] By referring to the 'post-photographic', I am referring to the wide-scale deployment of photographic imagery in painting - *as* photographic imagery - that emerged in various configurations in the 1950s and 1960s. Although artists such as Edward Hopper might similarly fall into this category, it wasn't until well after World War II, with the advance and ubiquity of mass-produced imagery that it can really be identified as a category. However, it could be argued, given recent developments within the digitalisation of visual media, coupled with the orthodoxy of post-conceptual strategies in responding to photographic imagery within painting (Richter, Tuymans, Sasnal etc.) that we are now experiencing painting within a 'post-(post)photographic context'.

instance, it is proposed through the largely ignored significance[20] of the late Swedish painter, Dick Bengtsson, whose work I foreground as an appropriate case through which to study the representation of anonymity as a conflict of subjectivity within the making and doing of paintings. There are several reasons why Bengtsson is critical to this thesis: firstly, Bengtsson's presence and influence on leading painters in the current generation of post-conceptual figurative painting is more than evident in the work of canonic figures such as Luc Tuymans and Mamma Andersson, as well as other artists whose work I cite and discuss. My argument here is that as a proto-postmodernist and critical voice – but also as a painter concerned with the properties and value of surface materiality - Bengtsson's painting practice can be seen as a formidable forerunner to much painting being made now; providing an important strand to the appraisal of image-based painting within a post-conceptual condition. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly within the context of doctoral research, Bengtsson's profile within the canon of late 20th century post-modern painting is severely under-represented. This is to say, no significant research on Bengtsson has been undertaken in the English-speaking world, despite the artist showing at the Venice Biennale in 1976 and being a critical figure in the history of Swedish painting[21]. Furthermore, there have been no museum survey retrospectives of Bengtsson's work – and therefore any opportunity for his work to be canonically reappraised - outside Scandinavia[22]. Regarding these last two points and the level of under-representation that surrounds Bengtsson, it has been extremely difficult as a researcher to locate material on him in English. Thirdly, there is the political nature of Bengtsson's project in its ability to speak to our own historical moment, in the current climate of burgeoning nationalist populism, Brexit, and the rise of the right that has gained momentum in recent years. It is my contention that this is precisely where the sophisticated and complex nature of Bengtsson's practice as an artist reveals itself, in its provocative gesture as a voice.

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[20] See Chapter 2.1 Re: The Case of Bengtsson p. 43. & Ronald Jones, "Dick Bengtsson," *Artforum*, no. Summer (2006) & Adrian Searle, "Hitler's Home Improvement," *The Guardian*, February 17th 2004.

[21] This is to say that there has been no substantial publication on Bengtsson outside Sweden. However, two articles written by Jake Clark and Richard Clegg in the Painting Journal *Turps Banana* in 2006, which were conceived in response to a visit both artists made to Bengtsson's retrospective at the Moderna Museet in Stockholm that same year. (See Turps Banana Issue 3: Jake Clark, "Paintings That Glow Like Jewels," *Turps Banana*, no. 3 (2007). & Richard Clegg, "The Broken Backbone of a Social Responsibility," ibid.) An edited version of the first part of Chapter 2 of this thesis, *Forging Reality: Surface and Reductionism in the Work of Dick Bengtsson*, will be published in edition 5.2 of the *Journal of Contemporary Painting* in the Autumn of 2019.

[22] The only museum retrospective of Bengtsson's work to be held outside Sweden was at Turku Art Museum (Turun Taidemuseo) in 2018.

But before I outline the second front on which the value of this research lies, it seems important to first identify what I share with Bengtsson as a painter, what drew me to him in the first place, and the value for me in focusing on him, in which various points merit consideration. To begin with, there is the complex materiality that Bengtsson achieves within his paintings through different translucent registers and the building up of layers. Accentuated, in part, by the way in which he treats panels to a hot iron whilst the varnish is drying to create a patina, even in his most opaque pieces the emphasis is always on a certain type of fabricated depth and 'seeing through' that the damaged surface provides. It is within this context that despite their provocative nature as images, Bengtsson's paintings are remarkably slow to assimilate, prefiguring an ambiguous temporality, at once anachronistic and hard to place. As a signature running through the work, this sense of interruption is further complicated by the theme of irreconcilable dualities that drive Bengtsson's paintings (nature *versus* culture, naivety *versus* sentimentality, and so on). Notably, it is this strategy of designing paintings around two irreconcilable elements - or at least the appearance of them - that has always been central to my own practice. This is what governs the pairing of the hermit and corporate team-building participant that underpins my practical research: that they appear somewhat antithetical, even if this seeks reappraisal on closer inspection. But there is also the sense of remoteness and *distance* that Bengtsson's paintings embody. Obviously, this ties in with the theme of anonymity and presenting whilst retreating governing this research. But it is not only the way in which Bengtsson appropriates other artworks and mechanically constructs paintings according to a detached painting-by-numbers logic that fuels this: Bengtsson *retreats*. This is to say, Bengtsson hides within his paintings. Bengtsson's paintings act as bunkers and outposts from which the artist can then communicate. This is the value of appraising them within an Apollonian/Dionysian duality: that the line delineating emotion and feeling from reason can be tested[23].

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[23] Although it is important to recognise how this particular theme recurs in the texts on Bengtsson to date – or at least the ones that I've had access to – and remains a central question. In that sense, this research can be seen to be following in that tradition, where the appraisal of Bengtsson's work is driven, principally, by how these inherent tensions and fortifications play out. (See Douglas Feuk, "Irony, Phobia, Mania: On the Image of Dick Bengtsson," in *Dick Bengtsson : English Supplement*, ed. Mårten Castenfors (Sweden: Moderna Museet, 2006). & Cecilia Widenheim, "Two Sides of the Same Coin," in *Hattfabriken/Luckenwalde by Gerry Johansson* (Sweden: Johansson & Jansson, 2013).

It seems critical to emphasise, therefore, that the motif of the hermit fuelling my practical research should not be read solely as one that I deploy within my paintings, but as a meta-figure that underpins Bengtsson, as well as every other aspect of this PhD project. What is being raised, then, is the question of how the image of the hermit satisfies different aspects of this research, including the role and activity of the painter more generally. With Bengtsson this takes effect in the strategic deployment - and self-concealing gesture - of appropriated imagery, which in its orchestration reveals an inherent tension between its purportedly 'anonymous' appearance, on the one hand, and its disclosure of expression on the other. *(This is me….This is not me…This was not supposed to be me).*

On one level, this is very different from the literal image of the hermit in art history, which weaves its way through my paintings. Certainly, the investigation into asceticism that I build in the second half of the thesis - as it underpins the hermit in art history - seems light-years away from the irreverent decadence that Bengtsson's practice embodies. Bengtsson's admiration for Joris-Karl Huysmans' fin de siècle novel, *Against Nature*, for example, which charts the reclusive indulgence of aesthete, *Des Essenties*, could not seem further away, in that sense, from the self-renunciative representation of the Desert Fathers, that I address in Jusepe de Ribera's *St. Onuphrius*[24].

At the same time, what is central on both counts is how the motion of presenting whilst retreating is identified. This is to say, it is the way in which Bengtsson's paintings and the figure of the hermit and corporate team-building participant that play out within my own work, revolve around a *performing* of anonymity, that is critical to the singular nature of this project. This is where I claim – within my own painting practice – that the juxtaposition of the hermit and corporate team-building participant present the second front on which the value of this research can be assessed.

0.4   Research Methodology

In re-emphasising how this research stems from the problematics of my own practice where

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[24] St. Onuphrius was one of the Desert Fathers who made a great impression on Eastern spirituality in the third and fourth centuries, around the time that Christianity was emerging as the dominant faith of the Roman Empire. At this time many Christians were inspired to go out into the desert and live in prayer in the harsh environment of extreme heat and cold, with little to eat and drink. See Chapter 4.1 Re: Etymology and Family Resemblance p.109-114.

the motif of the hermit has been central for some time[25], my methodological approach is directed at the *distancing* devices that the iconography of hermits in art history demonstrates, and how they might be assimilated and rethought through the example of Bengtsson, whose paintings reflect upon similar themes of remoteness. It is in this capacity that Bengtsson is proposed within this research as a primary case study, and where, by extension, the question of surface materiality becomes critical to any appraisal of his work and mine. Furthermore, it is within this context that the ambiguity of power thematic, which is developed from Nietzsche, fuels the notion of paradox as a motion and double-movement, and is proposed herein as a viable way of responding to, and making sense of, the idea of anonymity. It is in light of this that my overarching methodology develops around the concept of *paradox*. In deploying a dialogical exchange between practice and theory, this research affords a space for *thinking* and *making* that attempts to reflect my practice as a painter – not a theorist - in the first instance. Within this context, the examination and descriptions of individual paintings, including my own, are considered as vehicles in themselves within the research, for the playing out and testing of key theoretical elements. However, in identifying the central importance and analysis of specific artworks to this effect, cul-de-sacs are recognised, as they have emerged. In foregrounding the surface materiality of paintings as central to my enquiry, simply championing paintings according to what Paul Crowther determines within a Post-analytical Phenomenological tradition as their *intrinsic significance of the image*[26]- as a means to rebuff the Post-modern orthodoxy of reducing them to socio-political *cultural* production – itself, presents limitations. Although Crowther's position remains admirable in running against the grain of a field saturated by 'semiotic' critique[27], at the same time simply bypassing the question of meaning seems just as reductionist[28].   By the same stretch, taking up the question of

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[25] The hermit motif first became a question within my practice in 2008. See Chapter Re: 5.1 The Emergence of the Hermit. Pages 145-151.

[26] Paul Crowther, "Against Reductionism: The Intrinsic Significance of the Image," in *Phenomenology of the Visual Arts (Even the Frame)* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press 2009). p.9.

[27] Ibid. This is Crowther's central claim in this chapter: that under the influence of poststructuralism, many art historians and theorists have succumbed to a semiotic and social reductionism which prizes an assimilation of meaning and 'context', over and above an artwork's *intrinsic aesthetic significance* within what Crowther determines as its 'phenomenological depth'.

[28] My point here is that by championing the intrinsic significance of artworks at a pre-reflective stage of experience – in order to rally against an orthodoxy of reductionist inclinations - does itself becomes reductionist in attempting to circumnavigate the question of meaning.

materiality according to what Andrew Benjamin determines as a *Relational Ontology*[29] within a materialist philosophy of art, where artworks remain open art-historically beyond points of fixity, according to the claim that *A singularity is always the after-affect of a relation*[30], however philosophically ambitious, falls short[31]. Identifying artworks as 'documents' within which 'contexts' are understood as 'determined entities' is itself fixed, not ignoring that fact that Benjamin's analysis never extends the question of material matter - as *physical* matter - beyond philosophical readings of iconography at the level of *image*. By contrast, in locating the question of materiality as one of power - and the various tensions and ambiguities that ensue – this research recognises how *power* takes account of a painting's *intrinsic aesthetic significance*, alongside its socio-political conditioning, as well as how these might configure philosophically and otherwise. Although this realisation emerged in the first instance, tangentially, as I have stated, through Nietzsche's assessment of the *will-to-nothingness* within my preliminary research, the idea of paradox ricochets throughout the entire project, underlying each chapter within this thesis. In that sense, this PhD and the artworks that form part of it can be seen in relation to a series of relevant historical examples (Dick Bengtsson, Luc Tuymans, Martin Kippenberger, Mamma Andersson, Victor Man, as well as various hermit painters) that drive my trajectory[32]. However it is where those artworks – including my own - are assessed accordingly *as* paradoxes, taking the idea of *paradox* as a motion of *presenting* whilst *retreating,* that they read as a form of anonymous subjectivity. It is along these lines that I suggest that as a working model, the 'presenting-whilst-retreating' paradox can be applied as a crucial dynamic and valuable tool for thinking about the problematic of anonymity within image-based painting.

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[29] The concept of a *Relational Ontology* is a central theme within Benjamin's recent publications and can be defined as the philosophical position that what distinguishes subject from subject, subject from object, or object from object, is a mutual relation rather than one of substance; taking substance, ontologically, as referring to the essence or nature of a being. It is this within this context that Benjamin explores how artworks, and elements within artworks, *come-into-relation* with each other. See Andrew Benjamin, *Art's Philosophical Work* (United States of America: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015).

[30] Ibid. p. XV.

[31] My point here is that although Benjamin builds a case for how *A singularity is always the after-affect of a relation* within a *Relational Ontology* - in order to show how artworks might be *freed up* beyond them being incorporated into time chronologically as art-history – at the same time, he ignores how his own delineation of artworks as 'determined entities' within designated 'contexts' undermines any such 'relations'.

[32] It seems critical to emphasise that the examples I have chosen and cite within this thesis fall into two camps: firstly, those contemporary painters who, I feel, respond to and/or evidence a problematic of anonymity within their work and, secondly, those painters who in their representation of hermits similarly reflect upon this theme.

0.5   Research Objectives

Acknowledging these various points and considerations, my research project asks the following question:

how does a paradox of 'presenting' whilst 'retreating' characterise the representation of anonymity within contemporary figurative painting, and how might this double movement be appraised as a form of subjectivity?

Or, put another way: how might anonymity be rethought as a double movement and form of subjectivity within contemporary figurative painting, beyond its alignment with a *flattening* of representation? This is precisely my claim to new knowledge: that anonymity is not limited to a flattening of representation and thereby engenders *movement*. Recognising, as I did in the opening paragraph, how this is directed at the evaluation of anonymity as a form of subjectivity (firstly) within the making of paintings and (secondly) within particular motifs as they appear within paintings, what is central, on both counts, is how this characterisation translates as an ambiguity of *power*. What is being evaluated here is the idea of anonymity as a contradiction of intention, not the idea of it representing the expressionless or the universal, in say, a Giorgio Morandi or an Edward Hopper[33]. Given this distinction, this thesis responds to the following research objectives in accordance with a methodology designed around the concept of paradox.

1. Firstly, in moving away from how anonymity comes to reflect a particular style or type of expression, I will examine, through the example of Bengtsson, how anonymity presents itself as an inherent tension within his paintings; assessing how the desire to create the appearance of anonymity *conceptually* - in deploying particular strategies and devices - is lost in the act of making where reason is abandoned. In considering anonymity as an Apollonian-Dionysian tension, the emphasis here will not be to arrive at a position of finality or resolution, but a series of observations and questions, which through first-hand formal analysis will show how this conflict manifests itself in several of Bengtsson's paintings.

2. Secondly, whilst acknowledging the example of Bengtsson in what he shares with Tuymans (who was instrumental to my own art education), I will identify through the

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[33] The idea being that Edward Hopper and Giorgio Morandi are often cited as examples within painting of how 'anonymity' is demonstrated and achieved at the level of representation to satisfy particular themes.

example of Kippenberger's *Dear painter, paint for me* series, how Nietzsche's formulation of the Apollonian presents its own limitations within a post conceptual condition of painting, as it relates to the question of anonymity, and how it might be rethought.

3. Thirdly, in moving away from the doing and making of paintings more directly, my next objective will be to explore the ascetic representation of hermits in art history, in order to show how they revolve around a form of (paradoxical) anonymous subjectivity. By investigating how asceticism seeks appraisal within a number of relevant theoretical texts and manifests itself in different ways within a series of art historical examples - in sync with my methodological approach - I will consider in what capacity these paintings and representations embody an ambiguity of power through a motion of presenting whilst retreating.

4. Finally, I will evaluate the two motifs underpinning my recent painting practice, by assessing the juxtaposition of the hermit and corporate team building participant within my paintings. By determining how these two motifs demonstrate a problematic of empowerment, I will evaluate how they critique the question of anonymity that the issue of contemporary subjectivity raises, before reflecting upon how this configures within the broader impact that this research has had on their development and construction by examining several examples.

0.6   Research Structure

This thesis is divided into five chapters. In Chapter 1 - I re-appraise the term 'figurative' within the image-based context of my research; introducing Gilles Deleuze's notion of the *figurative-given* as a more nuanced assimilation of what it means to make paintings in response to photographic imagery and painting's history. Recognising how Deleuze identifies the figurative-given as a pooling of clichés between photography and painting, I consider how Peter Osborne's critique of Richter's photorealism within a *double negation* offers an alternative to this idea. In conceiving of painting and photography as separate entities that cancel each other out, I assess how the absolute nature of Osborne's double negation might be re-thought as a tension and anonymising device of presenting whilst retreating within the act of making, which I locate in the formal strategies deployed by Elizabeth Peyton, Peter Doig and Michaël Borremans.

In Chapter 2 - I start with a biographical overview of the late Swedish painter Dick Bengtsson. This is developed to locate Bengtsson within the canon, as well as to identify his influence on a generation of post-conceptual figurative European painters working now. By considering how the conceptual nature of Bengtsson's practice lends itself to a post-modern arena of semiotic reductionism in its deployment of 'sign games', as I highlighted in the research objectives, this is developed by looking to Nietzsche's duality of Apollonian and Dionysian forces, as a theoretical tool for considering the question of anonymity as a conflict of subjectivity within the making of paintings. By examining how a rational Apollonian strategy to achieve anonymity through conceptual devices conflicts with a selfless Dionysian state of making – (in which emotion takes over and reason is abandoned), I consider how this tension lends itself to the appraisal of Bengtsson's paintings. This becomes the foundation for the latter part of the chapter, in which I consider four of Bengtsson's paintings in relation to pieces by Luc Tuymans, Mamma Andersson, Wilhelm Sasnal and Victor Man, respectively.

In Chapter 3 - I consider how Bengtsson's notion of 'forging reality' - as it grounds the question of anonymity and a trajectory of post-conceptual painting that has emerged since - is rooted in Nietzsche's appraisal of appearance over "truth", that he details in *The Will to Power*. By assessing what Bengtsson shares with Tuymans through the latter's notion of an 'authentic forgery', I consider Tuymans' canonic impact and working methods, whilst I was a painting student at the Royal College of Art in the late 1990s. In the final part of the chapter, I re-frame Nietzsche's notion of the Apollonian within what I call the Alter-Apollonian, in an attempt to re-think the inherently problematic emphasis that Nietzsche places on the 'individual' within the rational nature of Apollonian thought, where a post-conceptual condition of painting undermines this. The argument here is that Nietzsche's notion of the individual, as it defines the Apollonian within the production of art, does not take account of where that individual might be conceived and deployed by proxy. As a question of how this might play out by example and present a different model of presenting whilst retreating, I consider its implications in Martin Kippenberger's 1981 series, *Lieber maler, male mir/Dear Painter, paint for me.*

In Chapter 4 - the question of anonymity, as a motion of presenting whilst retreating, is developed through a different perspective and interpretive theme. By considering how it

unfolds within my own painting practice, I explore in these two chapters how the hermit in art history and the corporate team-building participant motifs that appear in my paintings, configure as a form of subjectivity. Whilst the main argument in evaluating anonymity as something illusory and performed is retained, Chapter 4 takes the problematic of asceticism defining the representation of hermits in art history as its point of departure. By evaluating how the word asceticism evolved from the Greek word *askesis* – as it denoted an empowering of the self in classical antiquity - I contrast this with its later Christian meaning, in which it denoted self-renunciation. I consider Ludwig Wittgenstein's notion of *Family Resemblance* as a productive tool for recognising how different ascetic elements fuel the representation of hermits in art history, taking Jusepe de Ribera's *St. Onuphruis* as a case in point. This is further developed through an examination of Michel Foucault's *Technologies of the Self*, in which I assess how different art-historical traditions reflect upon the image of the hermit to satisfy different agendas. By examining how Nietzsche characterises various ascetic types in *What is the Meaning of the Ascetic Ideals?* I show how the question of anonymity underpinning the hermit in art history reflects a multi-faceted ambiguity of power. This is explored through Jan Adriaensz van Staveren's *Hermit in a Ruin* (1650-68) and Joseph Wright of Derby's *A Philosopher by Lamplight* (1769), as well as other paintings I introduce in Part 2.

In Chapter 5 - I locate how the hermit and corporate team building participant emerged within my research as motifs. This is developed by introducing the figure of the hermit through the Leopard Man of Skye[34] narrative that became the source material for the exhibition, *How Not to Disappear Completely* that I had at Gallery SE in Bergen (Norway) in 2010. Whilst reflecting upon the ambiguity of power thematic that I developed in Chapter 4, I explore theologian Gavin Flood's claim that the ascetic self is a performed self[35], in order to reframe how the question of re-enactment and tradition, that he explores, might also apply to the corporate team building participant. I consider how the solo exhibition, *You Must Enjoy it Like This!*, that I had at Galerie Polaris (Paris) in 2006, grounded my interest in corporate team building activities and the management concept of 'structured fun'; thus becoming an appropriate topic for further investigation at the beginning of my PhD. In evaluating how the notion of 'structured fun' taps into the question of anonymity and

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[34] See Chapter 5.1 Re: The Emergence of the Hermit p.145-151.
[35] See Chapter 5.5 Re: Re-enactment, Memory & Ritual p.164-167.

presenting whilst retreating, I assess how Simon Critchley and Organization and Management Professor Samantha Warren both approach the question of resistance that it engenders from different positions. This is developed in the chapter's penultimate section, by assessing how the role of positive psychology in the workplace, that Warren fiercely critiques, can be seen as a lens through which to consider a neoliberal agenda of what Cederström and Spicer term *gamification*; the means by which the logic of games - with its agenda of 'success' and 'reward' - is applied to life and work. This is reflected upon in the final section, where I consider Isabelle Graw's thesis, 'Painting as a Thinking Subject and Highly Valuable Quasi-Person', in which Graw presents a convincing argument for thinking through the question of subjectivity within painting as a reflective space in which to critique the economic - and therefore political - conditions of where painting finds itself.

In Chapter 6 – I reflect upon the impact of this and other aspects of the research project within my recent painting practice. By focusing on the paintings, *Neverending Lanyard (after The Sleeping hermit by Joseph Marie-Vien 1750)* (2019), S*hell (after Landscape with a Hermit by David Teniers the Younger)* (2019), *Burnout (after Saint Paul the Hermit by Nicolas Poussin 1637-38) (2018),* and *Deadbox (after Mountainous Landscape with Two Monks and a Hermit by Marco Ricci) (2019)* in particular, I consider how different dimensions of my research have fuelled and informed the development of my recent paintings in responding to the research question.

Chapter 1: Establishing the Figurative Given

1.0   Chapter Introduction

As I made clear in the introduction, this practice-based PhD is concerned with the question of anonymity, as a paradox of presenting whilst retreating, within the context of image-based, that is, figurative painting. This should not be taken as read, however, that such a study could not be applied to abstract painting, painting in the expanded field or painting more generally. What is being reflected upon here is the question of anonymity, as it informs my image-based painting practice. What becomes central, given this distinction, is how the term 'representation' comes to denote the literal 're'-presentation of photographic sources within paintings, as well as a question as to how this act of deployment might be thought as a form of subjectivity.

In this preliminary chapter, I will attempt to locate exactly how the term 'figurative' is to be recognised and appraised within this research and map out some of the core problematics that painting in response to photographic sources within a contemporary context poses. It seems important to emphasise that all the work examined, addressed and made within this research is created in response to photographic material.

1.1   Starting from Exhaustion: Deleuze's Figurative Given

Whilst the term 'figurative' traditionally suggests the literal representation of the human form and/or paintings concerned with one form of mimetic realism or another, 'figurative' is used here in keeping Deleuze's notion of the 'figurative-given', which he describes in *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*[36]. According to Deleuze, the 'figurative-given', acts as a ready-made backdrop of 'psychic' clichés[37] that fills the painter's head and the blank canvas with images, before any work is undertaken. For Deleuze, it is these clichés - which refer to painting's history and the obstacle of the photographic[38] as a well of ready-made perceptions – which the artist must confront and overcome, in response to their source material. Although Deleuze's emphasis on the photographic within this context is directed towards his reading of Bacon, whose paintings rely almost exclusively on photographic

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[36] Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, New Edition ed. (Continuum International Publishing Group Ltd.; , 2003).p.87
[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid.

sources; the idea of the figurative-given - as both a mental barrier and material form of photographic reference - is relevant to my own painting practice, which relies heavily on photographic imagery. Furthermore, it is central to the conceptual strategies of image-making that Dick Bengtsson deploys within his paintings, whose work I will be discussing in the next chapter, as well as to the other artists that I address in these first three chapters. Although my rationale for introducing the figurative-given in this project is more concerned with how the term *figurative* might be thought and applied within painting - beyond the bulk of its history when it meant something else - it is the 'given-ness' within the figurative that Deleuze is at pains to emphasise, that exposes how psychic clichés translate here as anonymous reference points. For that is precisely how clichés in this context make sense: as masks constantly in rotation, that obscure the wearer.

Critically then, the figurative-given, in its paradoxical status as both an obstacle of exhaustion and tabula rasa, becomes the springboard from which paintings emerge in response to the photographic. This does not mean that paintings conceived in response to photographic references need *necessarily* retain a photographic 'look' – albeit they might - but merely that they have been developed *from* or in accordance *with* secondary sources. Deleuze's point is not that the mesh of clichés that besiege the artist, and the photographic source material that they work from, be 'transformed' or reacted against as a 'statement'; for as Deleuze observes, this only leads to its own set of clichés, but that the artist confront this cliché-ridden reality and wrestle with it, to ascertain *what* in the act of painting proves productive and what not in moving forward.

Deleuze's notion of the figurative-given provides a productive channel for thinking about the post-photographic, because it confronts the question of painting in response to photography as one of limits: the painter is circumstantially obliged to lend him or herself to the saturation of clichés and ready-made perceptions that the *doing* of painting presents; this is how the process of doing and making starts. This way of thinking about painting does not concern itself with painting and photography as separate entities that cancel each other out, because it champions where they form a point of collapse: it is the pooling of clichés

and the drowning within them, from painting's past and photography's present that the artist must attempt to tread water through the chaos[39].

1.2   Painting Through the Double Negation

At the same time, Deleuze's figurative-given presents a very different conception of thinking about painting in response to photographic sources than Peter Osborne's notion of the *Double Negation,* which Osborne develops in his critique of Gerhard Richter's photorealist paintings from the early 1990s, *Painting Negation: Gerhard Richter's Negatives*. For Osborne, the double negation becomes a 'cancelling out' that photography imposes on painting and painting on photography, creating a conceptual space that takes account of the photographic as part of the subject matter of painting[40]. This is, Osborne suggests, what marks Richter's practice out within a critical history of contemporary art. To this end, Osborne's thesis does not run counter to Deleuze's figurative-given - although it is interesting to imagine how Richter's Photorealist paintings might have sought appraisal from Deleuze specifically within this context - where both arguments prove useful in assessing how the photographic within painting might be thought in the reality of *making* paintings. However, what Osborne's thinking does touch upon in exploring the *double negation,* is the question of anonymity and how, as a motion of presenting whilst retreating, it takes effect in painting through the deployment of photographic source material.

Through interrogating the implications of what a 'doubling' of distance from the "real" object might propose within the artwork, Osborne emphasises the centrality of the photograph within it as a sign of its "content" - in its various representational modes - rather than its 'form', where the 'photographic' runs counter to any signification of a purely formalist play[41]. To this effect, the practice of photography in all its depth, history, politics and

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[39] Deleuze uses the term 'chaos' to refer to that which the painter must pass through within the act of painting in order to *emerge* from it (Deleuze, Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation. p. 103). Although Deleuze is identifying this within the context of what he calls the diagram ('operative sets of asignifying and non-representative lines and zones, line-strokes and colour patches') that each painter has at their disposal, what is being emphasised is the sheer groundlessness and vulnerability of this experience.

[40] Paraphrased from Peter Osborne, "Painting Negation: Gerhard Richter's Negatives," *october October* 62 (1992).

[41] Ibid.
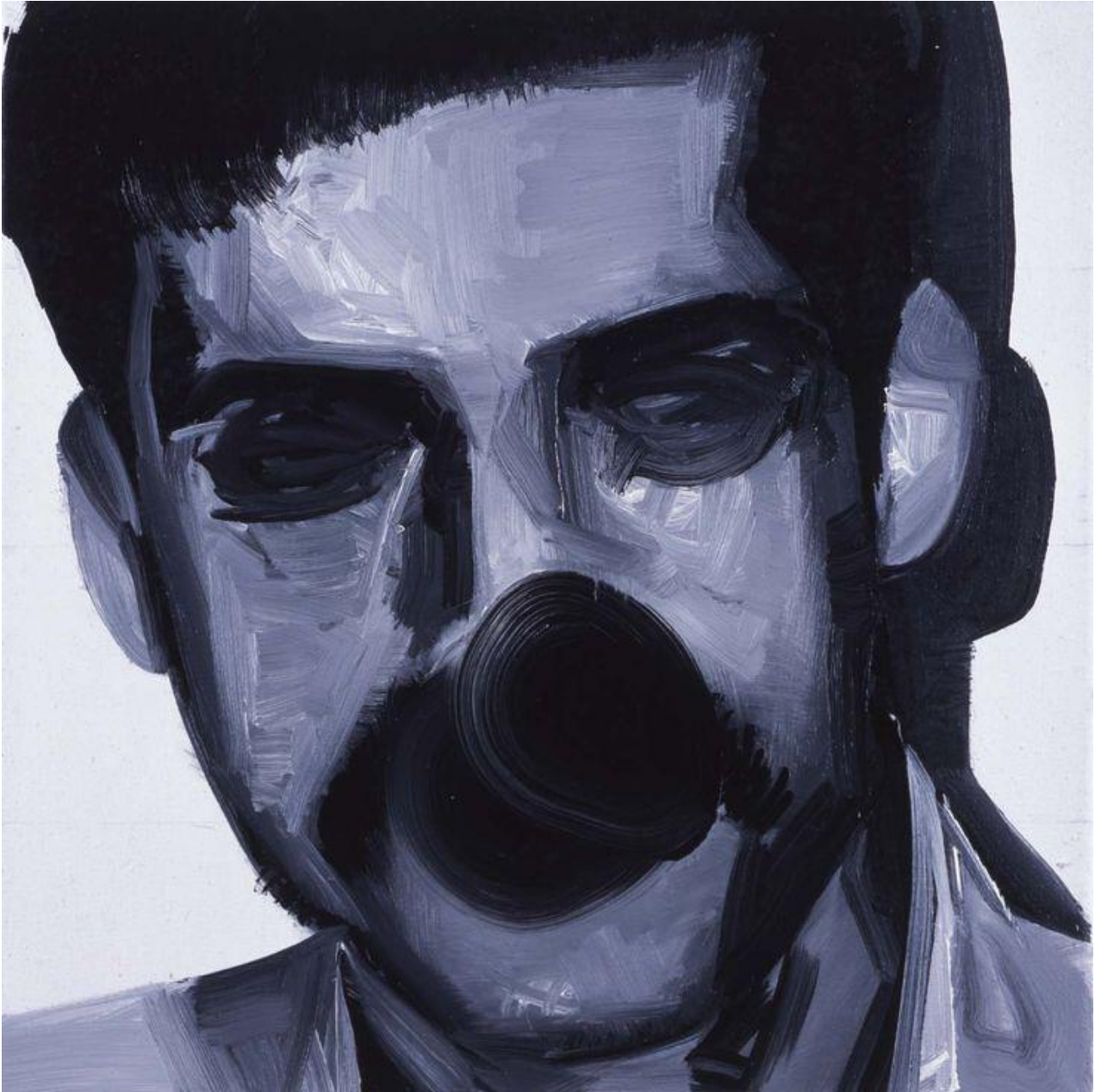
Fig. 2 Wilhelm Sasnal, *An Arab 2*, 2006, Oil on canvas (unable to verify dimensions).
Courtesy of Sadie Coles HQ, London.
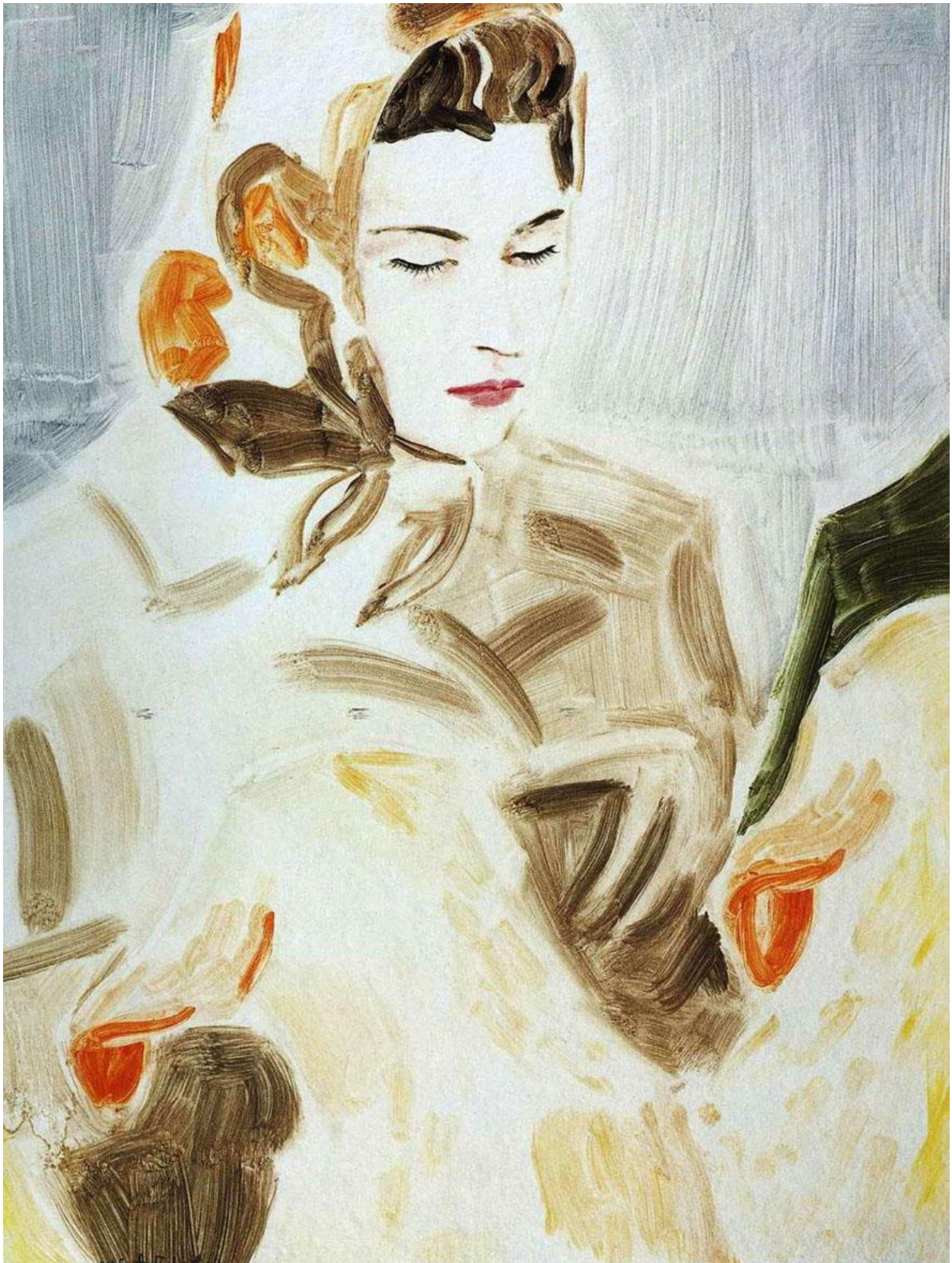
Fig. 3 Elizabeth Peyton, *Queen in the 70s*, 2002 (unable to verify other details).

Fig. 4 Peter Doig, *Concrete Cabin,* 1991 – 92, Oil on canvas, 200 x 240cm. Leicester   Arts and Museum Service.

Fig. 5 Michaël Borremans, *Disposition,* 2003, Oil on canvas, 70 x 50cm. Diane Wallace Collection, New York.

range of cultural reference, as well as its specificity within a particular source becomes part of the conceptual space that the painting opens up[42].

It is true that Richter provides a purer sense of this, where his paintings concern themselves with a strict mimetic exchange between photograph and painting, in their mechanically reproduced 'photographic' surfaces. This is certainly not the case with later artists, such as Luc Tuymans and Wilhelm Sasnal, who I will be returning to later, where the double negation appears nuanced to satisfy different tensions and levels of the 'photographic' within the construction of surface, in relation to what can be seen as more painterly and gestural applications. (Fig. 1)

So the question is then pitched at exactly *what* these nuances and applications serve within this tug of war, to the extent that the photographic is retained within them as an imprint that satisfies a sense of anonymity. Critically, what is important is the 'role' that the photograph plays within the painting as a sign of its "content", rather than its form. This is Osborne's point. But it does not matter whether a painting is 'photorealistic', simply alludes to, or thinly describes a *sense* of the photographic. Paintings can be painterly in facture; even 'anti'-photographic in appearance[43]; and yet still retain the anonymous imprint of photographs in the way that they suggest that as images, they could have been taken by anyone and everyone. What is being scrutinised, then, is the inherent tension emerging between the direct engagement that an artwork assumes in its facture *as* a painting, and the way in which it retreats from this through its distance from the "real" object that it *photographically* re-presents, by virtue of the double negation - that at some level - it proposes, as Osborne details.

A good example of the photographic as immanent to the painting in this way takes place in the work of Elizabeth Peyton (Fig. 2). Readily exploiting the contradiction between expression and photographic distance, Peyton indulges in a strategy of elaborate and 'expressive' brushwork, in order to 'frame' the various celebrities, rock stars, historical figures and friends that her secondary sources draw upon. Deliberately altering various

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[42] Ibid., p. 106.

[43] The point being made here is that many painters work from photographic source material in a way that there is no visual sense *necessarily* that they have done so. Examples of painters where this is the case - to the extent that there work could be deemed 'anti-photographic' within this context - might include faux-naïve painters such as Martin Maloney and Rose Wylie, as well as younger artists such as Jules de Balincourt and Barnaby Furnas, who deploy a highly personalised *slacker* aesthetic in the way that they work.

aspects of the photographic to maximise this paradoxical tension between photograph and painting, Peyton kills off levels of contrast, exaggerates local details of colour to undermine any surface 'flattening', whilst deploying a faux-adolescent handling of the paint itself.

In foregrounding the nature of her photographic sources from history, popular culture – as well as friends and family – 'as' cultural reference points, Peyton caricatures their familiarity as photographic signs. The figurative-given is accepted within Peyton's paintings as a sea of clichés; that is the point; enabling Peyton to play with and reconfigure the painting in its painterly gesture *through* the photographic and the way that we respond to them as clichéd images. In this way, Peyton's example illustrates how the continual redeployment of photographic clichés can be preserved *within* the painterly, whereupon the photographic is that which seeks appraisal as a sign of its "content", rather than its "form"; fuelling the tension between anonymity and disclosure.

This is a very different way of contextualising the photographic within painting as a means to sustain this tension, than painters such as Peter Doig and Michael Borremans who, for example, in different ways, incorporate photographic processes descriptively within the painting's design. In the latter case, such photographic elements feature prominently within the painting's overall narrative structure.

By this, I mean the way in which Peter Doig, for example, includes the camera flash and lens reflection from the photographic source material he was working from in his Cabin landscape series from the early 1990s, in paintings such as *Concrete Cabin*, (Fig. 3) creating the impression that the floating white patches denoting the bouncing light of the lens, are will-o'-the-wisp and part of the magical realism that the painterly surface suggests. Or, the way in which Michaël Borremans manipulates the glossy reflection of a photographed page within a book in *Disposition* (2003) (Fig. 4), so that it doubles-up as a bleached out apparition; reframing the old masterly picture that the 'depicted' page enframes, through the reflected light on the page. On both counts, what is particular to photography within the image (i.e. the lens reflection and the flash) is transformed to satisfy a new function within the picture-making, becoming something else entirely within the process. In other words, that which is incidental and referred to outside of the frame in the original photographic source through the lens reflection and the flash – and therefore cannot be located - becomes a central *material* feature in the resulting paintings. However, whilst this is true on

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one level in how both paintings appear in their 'madeness' and function semiotically in their reworking of the original image in each piece, at the same time, these painterly transformations are reined in by the distancing quality that the photographic nature and framing of the imagery creates. With both artists, impersonal devices are deployed to accentuate this effect. In Borremans' case, the painted image is aggressively cropped, such that the secondary nature of the original source is emphasised, whilst no clarity or clues are provided as to *who* opened the book - only an image remains; the ambiguity echoed in the cursory detailing of the figures. And with Doig, any personalised charm that the enclosed forest suggests in representing a particular moment is countered by the functional nature and geometric handling of Le Corbusier's modernist apartment block, as discernible through the trees at the heart of the picture.

In all three cases, what each artist demonstrates in different ways, to different degrees, is how paintings can appeal to their madeness and materiality, on the one hand, by embracing, and even accentuating, the distance[44] and anonymising effect that photographic source material and imagery present, on the other. This is to say, it is *through* this tension and the recognition of the photographic as immanent to the artwork, as a form of presenting whilst retreating, that the problematic of anonymity is raised as a question.

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[44] My point here is that artists such as Elizabeth Peyton and Peter Doig are fully aware of the photographic clichés their paintings revel in, as framing devices, and that they consciously play on this *distancing* in counterpoint to the materiality and 'madeness' their paintings otherwise indulge in.

Chapter 2: The Case of Bengtsson

2.0   Chapter Introduction

Having determined the figurative nature of this research in the opening chapter, I would now like to focus on the question of anonymity and how it might be appraised as a motion of presenting whilst retreating within the work of the late Swedish painter Dick Bengtsson. While recognising the extent to which Bengtsson remains largely unknown within a post-war canon of European painting, the first part of this chapter will serve as a biographical overview, in order to locate Bengtsson's practice within the canon and take account of his methods and means of production.

As I alluded to in the introduction, one of the primary challenges facing any analysis of Bengtsson's paintings within a post-modern context of criticality - raised in part by Bengtsson's own attempt to provoke the viewer through the 'sign-games ' he deploys - is forming a response that does not lend itself to a cul-de-sac of semiotic reductionism[45]. Bengtsson's profile within 20th century Swedish art history has largely been defined by his prowess as a particular type of conceptual artist, creating a history of appraisal curtailed by this assumption[46]. And much as Bengtsson's paintings are abundant and rich in surface materiality, displaying a variety of technique, this critical aspect has been overlooked by the need to locate and define their conceptual rationale.

With this in mind, it seems imperative that any appraisal of how anonymity might be evaluated as a form of subjectivity is directed at the *doing* and *making* of paintings and not at what those paintings reductively come to signify as an end point[47]. It is in these terms, then, that Nietzsche's duality of Apollonian and Dionysian forces that I will be exploring in this chapter retains a critical function in being applied to Bengtsson's production. Whilst I

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[45] Reductionism can be taken here simply to mean: the propensity to respond to artworks through an assimilation of context(s), where the production of meaning becomes a means to an *end*.

[46] Feuk, "Irony, Phobia, Mania: On the Image of Dick Bengtsson." p.7.

[47] I am thinking of the bearing and significance that Paul Crowther's critique 'Against semiotic reductionism' has here (which I cite in the Introduction) in targeting those critical positions (Griselda Pollock, Rosalind Krauss, John Carrell, Carol Duncan etc.) that negate the materiality and *intrinsic aesthetic significance* of artworks in order to gain closure on a "semiotic" level. Whilst Crowther recognises the question of 'meaning' at the level of ownership – through what he describes as the 'end point' of consumption - the reductionist stumbling block surrounding Bengtsson's paintings, coupled with the questions they raise in being responded to as objects contained within chronological time does prove inherently problematic. See Crowther, "Against Reductionism: The Intrinsic Significance of the Image." p.9-34. See also Introduction 0.4 Re: Research Methodology p. 22.

recognise that Nietzsche's duality raises its own questions of limits – which I address in part in Chapter 3 - what is salient throughout Nietzsche's text is the role that *illusion* plays within it. As I have already suggested, it is the *illusion* of anonymity driving this investigation: the rational *Apollonian* deployment of formal and conceptual devices, on the one hand, conflicting with the *Dionysian* dissolution of reason and individuality, on the other. Indeed, it is precisely this tension between measured thought and a "forgetting of the self[48]" that, I argue, is central to Bengtsson as an artist.

At the same time, it seems important to point out that this theoretical application is not conceived as a reworking of philosophy, so much as a means to enable the reading of paintings. The Apollonian-Dionysian duality is a key theme at the heart of Nietzsche's writing and it is not my intention to truncate or distort its complexity, but merely to consider a few aspects of what it questions as they relate to my research. Furthermore, any Apollonian-Dionysian analysis that I establish will not lose sight of other factors and considerations, and the role that they play within the production of paintings.

However, before outlining what this chapter will cover, I would first like to reflect upon the significance and value of the formal analysis that I undertook as part of this research, at the Moderna Museet in Stockholm, Sweden, in October 2015 and June 2017. Having spent several days, on both occasions, studying Bengtsson's paintings in the flesh, what became critical to my engagement with the paintings was the need to take account of them as both 'effect' and 'affect', as Norman Bryson and Mieke Bal have argued[49]. On one level, such direct exposure to the paintings themselves, runs counter to the conceptual nature of Bengtsson's practice and his insistence on a methodology 'at a remove' from direct experience, through the use of secondary sources and impersonal techniques. Nonetheless, what cannot be taken as given, is that any first hand encounter with the artworks themselves, necessarily sets up the optimum conditions through which a response can best be formed, if indeed an ideal can ever be met. Lighting conditions alone change the terms of address dramatically, and in returning to Bengtsson's paintings on several occasions in different conditions, I was made aware of how such shifts undermined my earlier

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[48] BT 1 (p.17).

[49] "What art historians are bound to examine, whether they like it or not, is the work as effect and affect, not only as a neatly remote product of an age long one." This point is critical: that the experience of responding to artworks is *itself* not factored out of the equation. See Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson, "Semiotics and Art History : A Discussion of Context and Senders," *The art of art history* (1998). p.175.

observations. That said, witnessing Bengtsson's complex surfaces in close proximity - in both their construction and destruction[50] – was hugely productive in creating a space to think through the paradox of presenting whilst retreating within the context of this research. As will become apparent through the formal analysis within individual artworks to follow in the last part of this chapter, the reality of responding to paintings directly, in accordance with their actual scale and physical presence – beyond the shortcomings of reproduction – is central to any appraisal. Where possible, the intimacy of this engagement will take centre stage within the writing, although it needs to be noted, as I consider how Bengtsson's paintings come into relation with a number of pieces from within contemporary painting practice, which I will detail shortly, that those examples that I pair Bengtsson with, have not themselves received the first hand analysis that his paintings have.

Taking these various points into consideration, this chapter develops over three parts. In Part 1, I start by building a portrait of Bengtsson's artistic practice. Recognising Bengtsson's relative obscurity within this context, I begin by outlining Bengtsson's working method, primary influences, as well as the political climate of post-war denial within Swedish society regarding Nazi collaboration, that was to have such a profound effect on his notion of a 'forged' reality. In summarising how Bengtsson's method of fabrication was deployed within his paintings, I consider Bengtsson's antecedence in relation to the significance of Mamma Andersson and Luc Tuymans within the canon. By establishing what Bengtsson shares conceptually with Tuymans in particular, linking this in with Tuymans' notion of 'authentic forgery', which I address in Chapter 3, I lay the foundations for questioning how the provocative nature of Bengtsson's paintings lend themselves to a post-modern critical arena inclined towards reductionist readings.

In Part 2, I introduce Nietzsche's duality of Apollonian and Dionysian forces as a model of subjectivity in the production of art. In assessing how Nietzsche establishes the Apollonian and the Dionysian through the respective illusory states of 'dream' and 'intoxication', I consider how they lay the foundation for assessing the performing of anonymity within Bengtsson's paintings in part 3.

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[50] By 'destruction', I am referring to the patina and surface damage left by the hot iron that Bengtsson deployed whilst the varnish on his paintings was drying.

Finally, in Part 3, I consider four of Bengtsson's paintings[51] that I studied at the Moderna Museet in Stockholm, in relation to the same number of works by different contemporary painters working now[52]. In framing these comparisons according to the Apollonian-Dionysian duality, I start by exploring how the corruption of surface governing Bengtsson's *Oktoberceremoni* (1963) might be assessed in relation to Tuymans' *Body* (1990). By evaluating how both pieces are defined by a destructive treatment of surface, I assess how they deploy different strategies to fabricate the illusion of age. Considering how the surface materiality of *Oktoberceremoni* appears corrupt to the point of illegibility, I introduce Bengtsson's painting *Hitler's Dream Kitchen* (1974) in contrast, as a piece defined entirely by its iconographic clarity. Pairing this painting with Mamma Anderson's *Travelling in the Family* (2003), I examine how the groups of figures in both artworks unfold through a paradox of presenting whilst retreating. Whilst recognising the descriptive coherence of these two pieces, I explore how this is undermined by the interruption that Hitler's thought cloud and the polluting black smoke respectively present. I then take the swastika that has dominated so much discussion surrounding Bengtsson to date, by wagering how its limp penis mutation in Wilhelm Sasnal's linoleum print *Untitled* (2010), comes into conflict with Bengtsson's diptych *Hat and Cap factory* (1969). Finally, I address how the surface materiality and imagery in Bengtsson's *Richard in Paris* (1970) might be viewed in relation to Victor Man's two *Untitled* portraits (2010), in a way that anonymises the beholder through a strategic toying with the picture plane.

2.1 The Case of Bengtsson

Under-recognized within the canon of Post-war European painting, Dick Bengtsson (1936 – 1989), was known for his idiosyncratic use of appropriation and surface patina, as well as for his scathing address of Sweden's unofficial wartime collaborations with Nazi Germany.

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[51] My original intention, in considering four of Bengtsson's paintings in relation to the same number of examples within contemporary painting, was to use Andrew Benjamin's *relational ontology* (that I cite in the Introduction to this thesis) as an appropriate model for application. See Introduction 0.4 Re: Research Methodology p. 23 (Footnotes 29-31). However, further to these preliminary observations, it seems to me, that a more productive way to approach the problematic of time and history in responding to artworks is simply to recognise how they are not 'fixed' within a determination of context(s) - inasmuch as they have an after-life - and continually form new relations of meaning in the present. It is within this capacity, that I will be establishing my analysis in the final part of this chapter.

[52] The selection of pieces by Luc Tuymans, Mamma Andersson, Wilhelm Sasnal and Victor Man, I have chosen to consider Bengtsson's work in relation to, I feel, serve as good examples; not only within the context of anonymity and the question of presenting whilst retreating, but also in their respective deployment of materiality.

However, as I claimed in the introduction, Bengtsson's profile remains largely imperceptible and lost on a wider public. Furthermore, an unknown number of his artworks were tragically destroyed in a fire at his home in Voxna (Hälsingland) in central Sweden in 1982, and therefore the total number of his pieces in public and private collections remains relatively thin.

Self-taught, Bengtsson was employed as a postal worker for several years before first showing in Stockholm in a two-person exhibition with the political artist and cartoonist, Lars Hillersberg, in 1960. Beyond school, his only art education was a brief evening course in drawing in 1954[53]. It was during this period that he started making paintings on his kitchen floor, indulging in a highly personalised geometric abstraction, which although distinct from his later figurative works, would anticipate their semi-translucent handling and abrasive colour schema. Enclosing hieroglyphic forms within predominantly white colour fields, Bengtsson's early pieces work to undermine their own symmetrical structure, whereby faintly constructivist and heraldic-like designs appear airless, inaccessible and dense (Fig. 6). It was from these formative experiments that Bengtsson would develop a method of carving up space through a treatment of sections, thus allowing for a crude tessellation of parts to govern the whole. Employing this logic, Bengtsson gleaned second-hand imagery from encyclopaedias, brochures and postcards; painstakingly tracing them on to millimetre-squared paper, that would provide a linear template for the awaiting canvas (Fig. 7). Treating whole areas to a raw application of paint once the drawing was transferred, piece-by-piece, the surface would face the force of a hot iron following an industrial varnish while drying.

Displaying a mechanical construction of space, his paintings discount the need for any greater synthesis, bypassing the desire to honour any craft or tradition-based agenda. They are immediate: confrontational. As artworks, they expose a directness of detailing reminiscent of high school art projects, where a process of 'copying' takes precedence over any nuanced purchase on an image's internal properties and an artist's capacity to personally define these. This sense of detachment and lack of formal training was readily championed by Bengtsson who would on occasion even invite school children to trace the

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[53] Feuk, Douglas. "Irony, Phobia, Mania: On the Image of Dick Bengtsson." Translated by Gabriella; Perry Berggren, Frank;. In Dick Bengtsson : English Supplement, edited by Mårten Castenfors. Sweden: Moderna Museet, 2006. p.6.

Fig. 6 Dick Bengtsson, *Komposition No 2 (Composition No 2),* 1958, Oil on panel, 46 x 55cm. Courtesy of Moderna Museet, Stockholm.

Fig. 7 Dick Bengtsson, *Badstranden (Beach),* 1958, Oil on panel, 105 x 112cm. Private Collection.

originals[54]. From the outset, Bengtsson's strategy was defined by anonymity, exploiting the value of publicly available material. Through the mechanical technique of tracing, Bengtsson was able to take himself out of the equation, creating a calculated sense of personal distance.

Anticipating Martin Kippenberger's *Lieber Maler, male mir (Dear painter, paint for me)* (1981) series, which I will be discussing in Chapter 3, as well as the serial antics of Francis Alÿs, in the similarly conceived *The Liar, the Copy of the Liar* (1997)[55], Bengtsson's strategy opens up the question of the inauthentic as a critique of cultural and political values. Nevertheless, where Kippenberger's address was one of sharp reproach at the signature styles of rising stars in the German art world at the time – and Alÿs a Sisyphean attempt to arrest the commercial value of the artworks through questioning their finality - Bengtsson's project was more concerned with the value of deception, as a means to confront ideologies that aligned themselves with modernity and progress[56].

In the few interviews Bengtsson gave, Marcel Duchamp is cited as a central conceptual influence on the development of his ideas[57]. Claiming 'Much of what I do is about art. I do not depict reality directly', Bengtsson talks about art's capacity to "express" reality. Aligning himself with Duchamp's credo that art should be an expression of the mind - rather than the eye or the hand - the routine damage that the artist exercised with an iron, echoes Duchamp's idea of using a Rembrandt as an ironing board, in the form of a reciprocal ready-made[58]. However reality is identified with the "falsification" of appearance for Bengtsson where, he suggests, "the idyll is not what it appears to be"; citing the "idyll" as "a fertile

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[54] Feuk, "Irony, Phobia, Mania: On the Image of Dick Bengtsson." p.8.

[55] *The Liar, the Copy of the Liar (1997)* was a project in which Alÿs employed Mexican sign-painters ("rotulistas") to paint enlarged and elaborate versions of his small paintings, which they were then free to produce in limitless copies. In developing the series Alÿs challenged the idea of the original artwork, by rendering the process of making more ambiguous, thus deflating the perceived commercial value of art.

[56] Bengtsson payed reference to several ideologies that aligned themselves with modernity and progress; on the one hand, there are the broader political ideologies that he refers to: National Socialism, Fascism and Technical Positivism (See Footnote 64); and, on the other hand, the 20th century artistic movements that he understands the former through: constructivism, Neo-plasticism, Functionalism and Suprematism. On all counts, the underlying emphasis is on order, purity and control.

[57] This is taken from an interview conducted by Anna-Stina Lindén in Dagens Nyheter on March 26th 1983, where Bengtsson states "When it comes to ideas I am influenced by Duchamp, but the images come from inside me"

[58] Feuk, Douglas. "Irony, Phobia, Mania: A Yearning to Be Cryptic." Translated by Gabriella; Perry Berggren, Frank;. In *Dick Bengtsson : English Supplement*, edited by Mårten Castenfors. Sweden: Moderna Museet, 2006. p.10. Duchamp's notion of using a Rembrandt as a reciprocal ready-made was part of his *Apropos of "Readymades"* that he delivered at the Museum of Modern Art, New York on October 19th 1961, which was later published in *Art and Artists* (London), No. 4, July 1966.

ground for fascism[59]" What becomes critical to the artist's assertion, are the particular historical and political circumstances in which the term 'idyll' is posed, as they come to reflect his geographical roots.

Bengtsson had grown up in a post-war Sweden that modelled itself on the political concept of the *folkhem* – (which translates literally as the 'people's home') or what more commonly can be identified as the welfare state. Playing an important role in the history of the Swedish Social Democratic Party following World War II, the folkhem's ideal was based on a healthy, though not necessarily ethnically pure community, that sat in contrast to a programme of forced sterilisation and detention of people 'unfit' for society, which went on until the 1950s[60]. Having experienced a culture of denial in his youth, where political and economic dealings with the Nazis throughout World War II[61] would have been reflected in the Nazi sympathies of some in the community and possible family members, such childhood realities became a significant part of Bengtsson's thinking concerning the question of outward appearance[62].

It is from this assessment of the power and value of *surface* appearances – that as an essential position - the 'forgery of reality' became a viable means of criticality for Bengtsson and a term that the artist referred back to throughout his career. Fiercely intellectual, his paintings function as a type of anti-art, burlesquing any claim to authorial sincerity. As a method of provocation they challenge how paintings read within a system of signs, working through dualities that contest any form of reconciliation, in which 'consciousness' is wagered *against* 'nature'; 'desire' *against* 'morality'; 'naivety' *against* 'sentimentality' and so on[63]. This sense of 'dividedness' features consistently throughout Bengtsson's career as both a formal and philosophical motif; not least through the following identification that the artist makes: 'I´m interested in the connection between futurism as well as early

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[59] Bengt Jahnsson-Wennberg, "Om Ironi Och Sentimentalitet," [On Irony and Sentimentality.] *Hjärnstorm*, no. 62 (1998). (On Irony and Sentimentality. Translated by Yvonne King) p.34-37.

[60] Tanja Schult, "How Deeply Rooted Is the Commitment to " Never Again"? Dick Bengtsson's Swastikas and European Memory Culture," in *The Use and Abuse of Memory: Interpreting World War Ii in Contemporary European Politics*, ed. Christian; Mertens Karner, Bram (United States of Amercia: Transaction Publishers, 2013). p. 62

[61] This fact has now officially been acknowledged and accepted as part of Sweden's national past.

[62] Ibid. As Tanja Schult suggests, it cannot be underestimated how much more authoritarian and less egalitarian the political climate was in post-war Sweden than it is today.

[63] The theme of 'dividedness' and rupture surrounding Bengtsson's paintings are recurring themes discussed by most if not all writers. For a comprehensive account, see Feuk, "Irony, Phobia, Mania: A Yearning to Be Cryptic." p.12

functionalism and fascism, and have an aversion to constructivism. The technical positivism contains a false belief in the future[64].'

Within this broader political context, Bengtsson became known for his employment of the swastika symbol, which in most cases would feature as graphically rendered insignia in the bottom left or right hand corner of the artwork, akin to a lapel pin, if not disquietly embedded within the paintings themselves. These would play off against images of rural Swedish landscapes, modernist paintings, as well as mechanical objects and monumental pieces of modernist architecture that would often repeat as a mirror of mock symmetry within a diptych (Fig. 8). As a recurring format that emerged elsewhere in his practice, this doubling device would figure like a child's 'spot-the-difference' puzzle book, where five differences have to be uncovered between two identical pictures[65]; providing Bengtsson with a practical and conceptual solution to dividing the artwork. However the swastika paintings only constitute a comparatively small number or works in relation to his overall production, considering the disproportionate attention they have received, raising its own question of reductionism. Bengtsson paid reference to a multitude of images in a variety of contexts, not least from art history and popular culture. Strategically irreverent, compositionally ambitious, amateur in execution, Bengtsson's work would not seem out of place in any number of galleries today.

Unsurprisingly Bengtsson's influence on leading painters now is considerable, perhaps most notably on compatriot Mamma Andersson, who recently presented his work in an artist edition book[66]. Nevertheless, Bengtsson's presence is felt in markedly different ways. Andersson's incorporation of his formal methods and means - as a positioning of style – is quite distinct from the 'distrust of the image', that Bengtsson appears to share with Belgian painter Luc Tuymans who, as I will be discussing in Chapter 3, similarly refers back to the Dutch wartime master forger, Han Van Meegeren, as a pervasive figure in his thinking[67]. For

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[64] This is taken from a newspaper article written by Åsa Wall for the Svenska Dagladet on May 6th 1983, in which she meets Dick Bengtsson at his retrospective at the Moderna Museet in Stockholm and asks him about his work in the exhibition.
[65] This is taken from Tanja Schult's text (see Footnote 60) and neatly encapsulates the inherent theme of deception within Bengtsson's deployment of symmetrical formats. p.64.
[66] Published by Salon Verlag in 2015, *Mamma Andersson Presents Dick Bengtsson* is a limited edition artist publication (Edition Ex Libris No. 23).
[67] Luc Tuymans, Peter Ruyffelaere, and Adrian Searle, *On & by Luc Tuymans* (London: Whitechapel Gallery : MIT Press, 2013). This text titled *Just an Image* was taken from Microhistorias y Macromundos, vol 2,ed. Pablo

Bengtsson, this influence developed following an article he read about the Dutchman, in which he learnt how Van Meegeren had managed to swindle the Nazis and museum establishment in the 1930s and 1940s with fake Vermeer paintings[68].

Interestingly, Tuymans featured alongside Bengtsson in the landmark survey exhibition on contemporary painting *Der Zerbrochene Spiegel (Broken Mirror)*, curated by Kasper König and Hans-Ulrich Obrist at the Kunsthalle Wien in 1993[69]. Although one can't help feeling that any discernible kinship between the two is more conceptual than it is formal, and perhaps what is most striking about Bengtsson's method of appropriation is that, like Tuymans, it taps into deeply philosophical questions concerning appearance, deception and truth, through an aesthetic strategy of semantic obfuscation and personal distance. However, for Bengtsson, the role of surface materiality takes a much more central role than Tuymans, despite Bengtsson's best efforts in detaching himself from any craft or personal expression. Bengtsson's paintings remain abundant in the breadth and richness of their technique.

2.2   Sign Games and Reductionism

As a highly contentious yet invariably remote painter, who achieved fame for his use of swastikas and the ruthless critique he brought to bear on a progressive – sanitised - modernity, Bengtsson, perhaps inevitably, courts a certain reductionist agenda. Paintings such as *Edward Hopper: Early Sunday Morning* (1970) (Fig. 9) and *Domburgsviten (Domsburg Suite)* (1972) (Fig. 10), which figure as two of the more written about pieces in his oeuvre, typify the unapologetic game-play the artist regularly employed.

Forcing the viewer to reflect upon the context of contamination that the Nazi symbol inevitably proposes, Hopper's street scene and Mondrian's metamorphosing Domburg church tower become guilty suspects, on the one hand, and potential foils on the other. As

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Sigg (Mexico City: Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes, 2010) 194-8, although Tuymans frequently refers to Van Meegeren elsewhere as a formative influence in writings and interviews.

[68] Henricus Antonius "Han" van Meegeren (October 1889 – 30 December 1947) was a Dutch painter and portraitist and is considered to be one of the most ingenious art forgers of the 20th century. Despite his life of crime, Van Meegeren became a national hero after World War Two, when it was revealed that he had sold a forged painting to Reichsmarschall Hermann Göring during the Nazi Occupation of the Netherlands.

[69] *Der Zerbrochene Spiegel (Broken Mirror)* featured 44 painters from around the world, including Gerhard Richter, Sigmar Polke and Ed Ruscha amongst other canonically significant artists. As the title suggests the exhibition was seen as a critical re-evaluation of painting; proposing the complexity of painting's position as one of 'fragmentation' at the beginning of the 1990s - as defined through what was perceived to be a burgeoning trend of individual positions.

much as they delineate a contextual parameter through which to access the work, creating an opening to potential understanding, they shut down any nuanced or slower reading of the paintings' materiality despite their ambiguous currency, limiting reception on a more subliminal level. However, what is intriguing about their deployment – or at least in the ones in which the swastika floats immaculately beyond the picture plane - is how they resist meaning beyond their ability to cast guilt by association. The Nazi insignia does not so much inhabit the surfaces of the paintings as flirt with them.

As a means of provocation, Bengtsson's use of the swastika has unsurprisingly met with controversy and confusion on more than one occasion. At a dinner held at the Moderna Museet in Stockholm in 1983, fellow artist Olle Carlström pressed a plate of potato salad on to the one that featured in the painting *Interiör från Kumlafängelset (Kumla Prison)* (1971) (Fig. 11) in protest[70]; refusing to raise his glass in its presence[71]. More recently, during Sweden's chair of the rotating EU Presidency in 2009, when Swedish Foreign Minister Carl Bildt invited colleagues from other member states to a two-day meeting at the Moderna Museet, the decision was made by the head of the Secretariat for the EU meetings, Mårten Grunditz, to remove the two Bengtsson paintings for the duration of the meeting[72].

In a surviving note from 1970, Bengtsson wrote of the swastika: 'In 1940 this sign, according to many people, stood for law, order, and ideology. Today, according to many people, it stands for historically defined atrocities. Both interpretations are equally temporary.'

Toying with the temporal complexity of his subject matter, in order to highlight its proximity to history and the question of distance that it raised, was clearly central to Bengtsson's critique. In employing the swastika as a symbol in his paintings, a double function emerges; on the one hand, the picture becomes less clear in its subject matter, where it is thrown into an immediate conflict by association and, on the other, a reflective space is created through its mere presence. This is a distinction that Bengtsson himself went on to elaborate:

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[70] Kumla Prison is a high security Swedish prison
[71] Felix Gmelin, *Art Vandals* (Stockholm: Riksutställningar, 1996). & "Konstvandalen," *Hjärnstorm (Print).* 1998 (1998). p.50-51.
[72] Sanctioned by then head of the museum, Lars Nittve, due to a lack of pedagogical resources to explain the work, this decision whipped up a considerable storm in the Swedish media. See Schult, *The Use and Abuse of Memory*, p.59-60.

Fig. 8 Dick Bengtsson, *Hatt och Mössfabrik* (*Hat & Cap Factory),* 1969, Oil on panel (diptych), 122 x 91cm. Courtesy of Moderna Museet, Stockholm.

Fig. 9 Dick Bengtsson, *Edward Hopper: Early Sunday Morning,* 1970, Oil on panel, 88.5 x 151cm. Courtesy of Moderna Museet, Stockholm.

Fig. 10 Dick Bengtsson, *Domsburgviten 1 – 7 (Domsburg Suite 1-7),* 1972, Oil on panel, 46 x 33cm. Courtesy of Moderna Museet, Stockholm.

Fig. 11 Dick Bengtsson, *Interiör Från Kumlafängelset* (*Kumla Prison)*, 1971, Oil on panel, 225 x 225cm. Courtesy of Moderna Museet, Stockholm.

'The purpose of a symbol is to help decode the meaning within a picture. But it can also slow you down and make reading a picture more difficult, and that was my intention. I chose the swastika as a symbol that broke away from the picture as much as possible. The symbol works on two levels. On the one hand it has a simple explanation in the motif, like, for example, the landscape with the church, where the swastika could stand for the authoritarian church. But it has also a more independent relationship from the picture. It provides a distance to what one sees and experiences[73].'

As the ultimate gesture of confrontation, this creates a viable arena in which Bengtsson is then able to challenge how values might be appraised through the 'distance' that is opened up, pitching the question of their relations within a broader political context. It is through this strategy that a critique of modernist values becomes possible, where the purity of Mondrian's neo-plasticist ideals are aligned (for example) with the authoritarianism of National Socialism. Nevertheless, despite their conceptual prowess and intellectual acuity, such methods threaten to create a deadlock within the functionalism-meets-fascism narrative they seem to wager, appearing somewhat didactic.

Although what Bengtsson demonstrates, beyond any seeming didacticism, is the symbol's lack of stability as a sign where its transforming force retains a significant power. The swastika is much less consumable now - given the rise of right-wing governments and nationalist populism in recent years[74] - than it was a decade or so ago. And it is precisely this distinction that I will be addressing in the final part of this chapter, in evaluating how one might read Bengtsson's *Hat & Cap Factory* in relation to Wilhelm Sasnal's untitled swastika print.

The discourse surrounding Bengtsson has largely been defined by the particular way in which these issues and complex juxtapositions are mobilized within the work and how the artist legislates for them. In this sense, the 'meta-art' tag that follows him comes to reflect a consensus of opinion, foregrounded by the sophisticated purchase Bengtsson had on appropriating art in order to question its use and value[75].

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[73] Jahnsson-Wennberg, "Om Ironi Och Sentimentalitet." p.35

[74] See Footnote 103.

[75] It is significant to note that semiotics had a pervasive presence in the practice of several key Swedish artists at this time including Bengtsson; not least through the influence of artists such as Robert Rauschenberg, who featured heavily in the programme of several exhibitions at the Moderna Museet in Stockholm in the early 1960s. Rauschenberg's hybrid Combines which freely mixed painting and sculpture in constructions that souped

Interrogating the complex nature of visual signs as a means to foreground the indexical and symbolic chains that they generate was an essential part of Bengtsson's thinking, paving the way for a more critical process of questioning underlying political values and their associative terrains. It shifted the focus almost entirely on to the viewer - honouring Duchamp's precedent - and Bengtsson's inclination to refer to the writings of Roland Barthes more than once in the few interviews he gave, seems very much in keeping with the reader-spectator emphasis that both Barthes and Duchamp championed[76]. Given this, the 'ironed' pictures and DIY patinas that Bengtsson became known for could be seen to tick the right boxes to satisfy his intellectual posturing and yet the effect they produce is not the same thing. Much as they satisfy a particular political and art-historical critique in the terms I have outlined, their canny use of quotation is not the sum total of their existence. Their materiality is highly complex, seeking further analysis beyond their semiotic appeal, as defined in relation to any intentions Bengtsson might have had. To respond to Bengtsson's paintings solely on that level, is simply to negate this critical distinction and their polysemic nature as art objects.

Similarly, the more time one spends assessing Bengtsson's use of materiality, the more one comes to realise that however much the artist strategically sets out his semiotic stall to provoke and entice, the more the artworks insist on a dialogue that is visceral and elusive.

It is interesting to consider this aspect of Bengtsson's paintings, whilst reflecting upon Swedish art critic Douglas Feuk's comments, in what he perceives to be the confined nature of discourse surrounding Bengtsson's work to date in the Swedish art press:

'The high esteem Bengtsson has enjoyed among Swedish critics over the past two decades does indeed stem from a perception of his works as primarily idea-based, as a form of sophisticated conceptual art. The many pictorial loans and visual references in his paintings have been interpreted as a contribution to the contemporary theoretical discourse on "signs". Or, even more narrowly:

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together everyday objects with collage, art historical references, alongside mass media imagery and painterly gesture, came to define this period. In setting up artworks that provided quotational fodder directly from reality, any combination of materials gained licence for appropriation - including artworks themselves. This was to prove instrumental in the development of Bengtsson's own method of production and it comes as no surprise that he used the expression 'combine' himself, to describe the series of diptychs that he produced, which appeared in the *Svenskt Alternativ* exhibition in Stockholm and Paris in 1970 and 1971, respectively.

[76] What I am emphasising here is the way in which Duchamp's analysis of "The Creative Act" (that he delivered at the Convention of the American Federation of Arts, Houston, Texas, April 1957) anticipates the Poststructuralist interrogation of the author that Roland Barthes' explores in "The Death of the Author" which was published in 1967. In both cases, the emphasis shifts from the role and value of the artist/author to that of the spectator/reader.

they have been interpreted as a comment on the problems of art, for instance as a criticism of the concept of "originality". To my mind, however, the experience is both more immediate and more unclear. And the most important facet of their effect is not their ironic-critical stand but their capacity to bring vague, emotional conflicts to life. Herein lies the real nerve of the paintings, in my point of view, but in essays and analyses this key aspect nearly always has been played down in favour of discussing more intellectual aspects, such as how Bengtsson's works relate to this or that aesthetic theory, be it modern, championed postmodern or some other kind. In my opinion, however, this is an unnecessarily constricted perspective on his art. To me, the experience of his paintings is more emotional than intellectual.[77]'

According to Feuk, Bengtsson appears to have been championed almost entirely for his 'conceptual' credentials, which has worked to negate other perhaps more significant aspects of his practice and what they could disclose. So the question becomes one of how it might then be possible to navigate these artworks in a way that takes account of this.

With this in mind, I will now consider a small selection of them individually in the final part of this chapter. As a representative sample of Bengtsson's production, the pieces I have chosen, I feel, pose different and contrasting challenges in the assessment of surface materiality and iconography, reflected in the various paintings by contemporary artists that I examine them through. This will be developed, as I outlined in the introduction, by considering Nietzsche's duality of Apollonian Dionysian forces, which I will first introduce and assess.

2.3   Defining Anonymity within an Apollonian-Dionysian Duality

In the Birth of Tragedy, Nietzsche explores the production of art as a physiological tension within what he defines as a duality of *Apollonian* and *Dionysian*[78] forces. Conceived as a reappraisal of the role that music and drama played within Greek tragedy, in order to show how art reveals the truth about suffering in life, whilst providing its consolation, the *Birth of*

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[77] Feuk, "Irony, Phobia, Mania: On the Image of Dick Bengtsson." p.7

[78] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy* (United Kingdom: Penguin 1993).p. 14 (Hereafter referred to as BT)

Tragedy was Nietzsche's first book, which he originally dedicated to Richard Wagner, and later re-evaluated[79].

Appropriating the Apollonian and Dionysian from Greek mythology, Nietzsche characterises *Apollo* (the sun-god), on the one hand, as representing light, order, clarity and the measure of rational thought[80]. The Apollonian for Nietzsche is allied with the creation of the *visual*; suggesting sculpture, painting and the physiological tendency towards dream-like worlds.

Dionysus, on the other hand, as the god of wine, represents a state of drunken excess – ecstasy - and the sexualised energy of emotional strength; it is in various states of *intoxication*, that Nietzsche associates Dionysian force with music and the reality of nature. So where the Dionysian becomes intoxicated with nature as a *reality*, the Apollonian focuses on that reality as a world of *appearances*; as Nietzsche claims: 'To reach a better understanding of these two tendencies, let us first conceive of them as the separate art worlds of *dream* and *intoxication*.[81]'

What is central to Nietzsche's conception of the Apollonian and Dionysian, then, is the central role that *illusion* plays within this duality. That is the critical distinction which Nietzsche makes: however intense a dream might be, we are always aware – ultimately - of its status as an *illusion* and therefore its orchestration by a rational force[82]. And although Nietzsche repeatedly refers to the Apollonian as man's "beautiful" illusion, it is important to recognise how he qualifies this hyperbole:

'It is not only pleasant and agreeable images that he experiences with such universal understanding: the serious, the gloomy, the sad and the profound, the sudden restraints, the mockeries of chance, fearful expectations, in short the whole "divine comedy" of life, the inferno included.[83]'

In contrast, illusion for the Dionysian is experienced as a *loss* of control and the dissolution of rational apprehension:

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[79] In a later edition – written fifteen years after *The Birth of Tragedy* was first published in 1872 - Nietzsche included a prefatory essay, "An Attempt at Self-Criticism", in which he robustly critiques and takes issue with many of the fundamental claims that he made in the first edition.
[80] Nietzsche develops the 'rational' basis of the Apollonian throughout the *Birth of Tragedy*. However, what is critical to it, is the idea that unlike the *Dionysian*, the Apollonian hinges on and the 'individual', or what he calls the *principium individuatonis*, which he appropriates from Schopenhauer.
[81] BT (1) p.14.
[82] BT (1) p.15.
[83] Ibid.

'If we add to this dread and blissful ecstasy which, prompted by the same fragmentation of the 'principium individuationis', rises up from man's innermost core, indeed from nature, we are vouchsafed a glimpse into the nature of the 'dionysiac', most immediately understandable to us in the analogy of 'intoxication'. Under the influence of the narcotic potion hymned by all primitive peoples, or in the powerful approach of spring, joyfully penetrating the whole of nature, those Dionysiac urges are awakened, and as they grow more intense, subjectivity becomes a complete forgetting of the self.[84]'

The Dionysian, then, in prefiguring a "forgetting" of the self comes to represent a return to nature on a primal level; what Nietzsche refers to as a 'Primal Onenness'. By considering this Dionysian 'unity' as 'pain and contradiction', Nietzsche emphasises the inherently *tragic* nature of existence and the way in which these fears and horrors are sublimated – affirmatively – as a celebration of life by the Greeks[85].

Accordingly, then, art is conceived as a tension between these two underlying forces, which unfold and conflict as a series of psychological and physiological 'states', which Nietzsche identifies within a philosophical naturalism. This is what he is claiming in *The Will to Power as Art*, for example, when he talks about the feeling of "intoxication" as being "strongest in the mating season", or suggesting that art "reminds us of states of animal vigor [86]"; however much he employs hyperbole in so doing.

To consider how this might prove productive in assessing the role of anonymity, as a paradox of 'presenting' whilst 'retreating' within painting, it seems critical to stress the particular divide that distinguishes the 'I' of the Apollonian rational self, from the 'self-negation' and dissolution of the individual that defines the Dionysian. This is the distinction: the Apollonian is ultimately a bound force, constrained by the 'I', by virtue of the self-awareness that defines it:

"This deification knows but a single law, the individual; that is, the maintenance of the boundaries of the individual, the *moderation* in the Hellenic sense. Apollo, as an ethical deity, demands moderation from his followers and, in order to maintain it, self-knowledge. And thus, the

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[84] Ibid., p.16-17.
[85] Ibid., p. 22.
[86] The point I am making here is that Nietzsche identifies the Apollonian and Dionysian in the making of art within a philosophical naturalism of *natural* forces. Although Nietzsche does not address this so much in *The Birth of Tragedy*, it cannot be divorced from how he substantiates this claim in *The Will to Power as Art;* albeit rhetorically. See Nietzsche and Kaufmann, "The Will to Power as Art." 802 (Hereafter referred to as WP)

admonitions 'Know thyself' and 'Nothing to excess!' coexist with the aesthetic necessity of beauty, while hubris and excess are considered the truly hostile spirits of the non-Apolline realm[87]'

This image of the individual, in which reason and consciousness police the self through *appearance*, sits in stark opposition to the Primal Unity of Dionysian 'intoxication', which Nietzsche identifies through the mythological image of the satyr: the half man, half goat, drunken woodland god that he champions throughout the *Birth of Tragedy*. It is through this figure of the forest, that Nietzsche counters the image of Apollonian individuation with the Dionysian, representing a state of disintegration, in which the latter appeals to nature and a return to primal instincts; as Nietzsche suggests:

"The satyr was something sublime and divine: that's how he must have seemed especially to the painfully broken gaze of the Dionysian man, who would have been insulted by our well-groomed fictitious shepherd. His eye lingered with sublime satisfaction on the exposed, vigorous, and magnificent script of nature; here the illusion of culture was wiped away by the primordial image of man; here the real man revealed himself, the bearded satyr, who cried out with joy to his god. In comparison with him, the man of culture was reduced to a misleading caricature.[88]"

What is being considered here, then, is the idea that the question of anonymity surrounding Bengtsson's paintings within the context of this thesis is poised precisely at that distinction between the Apollonian, on the one hand - in which rational forces define the individual, and anonymity is determined through reason and the deployment of conceptual devices – and the Dionysian, on the other, in which emotional strength takes precedence and the individual is *dissolved*. Moreover, it is within the context of the latter - and the notion of primal 'Oneness' that fuels it - that anonymity is achieved and can be seen as a form of *retreating*. It is with this in mind, that I shall now address four of Bengtsson's paintings, by considering them in relation to the same number of examples by different contemporary painters.

2.4 Oktoberceremoni

Although the second part of this chapter is not structured chronologically, I will nevertheless start by considering Bengtsson's *Oktoberceremoni (October Ceremony)* (1963) (Fig. 12) as an

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[87] BT (4) p.26.
[88] BT (8) p.40-41.

early example within Bengtsson's production. One of three versions the artist made[89], I will be exploring its corruption of surface, as it might be considered in relation to Luc Tuymans' *Body* (1990) (Fig. 13). One of the primary reasons for doing so, is to illuminate its precedence within the canon, in terms of the central role that surface and materiality play, as well as to establish how it might be possible to read Bengtsson through other artists that came after him. Whilst these two paintings appear more experimental in nature than later bodies of work for both artists, representing early stages in their development, what is more significant is how both pieces, in markedly different ways, fabricate the appearance of age in their treatment of surface. With *Oktoberceremoni* in particular, what is residually present in the destruction of surface at the disposal of the iron, is barely legible; marking it out quite literally from any other painting that Bengtsson produced[90].

Arranged through a constellation of fragments, which scattergun and disparate in formation, appear like a thumbed together entry from a scrapbook, *Oktoberceremoni* sits in contrast to the graphic clarity of *Body*, which as a single fragment and pallid torso can be discerned in its headless state almost immediately. Outlining the bust of a child's zip-up pyjama case - disguised as a doll – *Body* appears as a sexless prop, differentiated solely by the zip fasteners that cut horizontally on either side of the torso. However, it seems important to note, that had Tuymans not stated that this was the case, the dark marks would read more readily as simply ambiguous incisions. Defining the painting's tonal range at the heart of the picture, one can't help feeling that if these blackish applications were absent, the cracking surface would overwhelm the spectacle; creating the impression that their primary function is to rein in any surface monopoly.

Oktoberceremoni, in contrast, offers no discernible sense of focus or narrative beyond the fleeting presence of local details, exacerbated in part by the shallow space and muted tonal range that filter through the surface. What is significant about it, however, is less the collaging of elements in its pictorial strategy, than the sheer aggression of its surface defacement.

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[89] All 3 versions of *Oktoberceremoni* were made in 1963. Although they differ slightly from each other in composition – albeit the same iconographic elements recur - they retain the same dimensions. Nevertheless, the surface of the one discussed here is by far the most damaged, in which the disclosure of the white Masonite support beneath is pervasive.

[90] The point being that no other painting that Bengtsson made is as compromised in its surface imagery as this version of *Oktoberceremoni.*

Fig. 12 Dick Bengtsson, *Oktoberceremoni (October Ceremony)*, 1963, Oil on panel, 116 x 89cm. Courtesy of Moderna Museet, Stockholm.

Fig, 13 Luc Tuymans, *Body,* 1990, Oil on canvas, 47.6 x 38.3 cm. Collection Museum of Contemporary Art, Ghent

In order to consider this destruction and start to assess how both pieces might be appraised, I want to turn to the question of fabrication that both paintings revolve around. With *Oktoberceremoni* and *Body* – albeit in dramatically different ways – the question of fabrication is used with rhetorical effect: there is a deliberate *toying* with the properties of surface. In both cases, the act of painting is presented as something self-conscious and performed, in which the materiality of surface doubles-up as a form of critique. The 'literal' illusion, in that sense, defining the support and the picture plane, is shown *itself* to be an illusion; screening the respective artists' critical agendas[91]. On both counts, what is displayed has been highly reasoned and presents itself through a desire for conceptual clarity *(The surface needs to satisfy the illusion of age… The surface needs to be acknowledged as doing this).* At the same, this rationale is somewhat harder to gauge where its consistency is arrested by certain elements, that in their appearance, point towards a more emotionally infused Dionysian tension. Although the battered surface of *Oktoberceremoni* is designed around the laboured Duchampian move to annihilate the surface with an 'iron', it feels like it is has been caught mid-flow in an emotional onslaught. And even though one recognises the graphic clarity of *Body* immediately, the painting's raw handling, coupled with its sense of imminent expansion *(The torso seems like it wants to supersede the frame)* does not feel wholly anticipated.

In that sense, both paintings differ fundamentally from Van Meegeren's example, in which illusion is pitched mimetically as a championing of skill, in order to maximise the power of the false on that level[92]. Van Meegeren is much more sincere in the nature of his deception and more predictable in what can be seen as a pervasively Apollonian endeavour. In this scenario, however, both artists move away from the mimetic value of craft towards the

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[91] As I outlined on page 49, Bengtsson's 'Forged Reality' and Tuymans 'Distrust of the image' – that fuelled his notion of 'authentic forgery' that I address in Chapter 3 – are both developed as critiques, which in different ways tap into deeply philosophical questions concerning appearance, deception and truth, through an aesthetic strategy of semantic obfuscation and personal *distance*. This is what I mean by 'critical' agendas.

[92] The *Powers of the False* are being adapted here from what Deleuze identifies as the creation, manipulation and 'simulacra' of all images. Determined between what he characterises, on the one hand, as the 'organic' regime, where images unfold through 'truthful' narrations (which develop according to legal connections in space and chronological time), and a 'crystalline' regime, on the other, in which such coordinates are undermined and the distinction between what is 'true' and 'false' collapses; my point here is that Van Meegeren's championing of skill remains crystalline, precisely through his earnest desire to present the perfect copy. In other words, it is through their *anachronism* as paintings, that in confusing the viewer, Van Meegeren undermines the 'organic' regime of the false. See Gilles Deleuze, "Powers of the False," in *Cinema 2 the Time-Image* (London: Continuum, 2009). p.126-155.

amateur; nurturing a calculated sense of 'aesthetic indifference[93]', in which the *forging* of 'craft' through the forging of the 'amateur' undermines any traditional agenda elevating the value of skill.

This question of how art draws attention to itself through different forms of *self-staging,* finds its historical precedent in the Dutch and Flemish paintings of the 16th and 17th centuries in which, as Victor Stoichita suggests in his meta-pictorial analysis *The Self-Aware Image*, paintings came to *think* the critical conditions of their own illusionism[94].

With *Oktoberceremoni* and *Body,* however, any such flagging up is not attributable to a specific detail or moment - which proves to be the case in Stoichita's study - so much as the whole surface. This is part of their rhetorical force: that the 'cracks' in *Body* and the 'blisters' in *Oktoberceremoni* dictate the state of play, conflicting continuously with the imagery that they work through. If the momentary becomes present in these works, it is only in relation to the speed at which Bengtsson deployed the iron or Tuymans treats the surface with a cracking agent[95].

What this conflict between the 'cracks' and 'blisters' and the iconography in each painting opens up is a question of *time*. There is a marked contrast in how the craquelure in *Body* appears as a strategy deployed from the outset – engendering it with a sense of subsequent and burgeoning decay – in counterpoint to *Oktoberceremoni,* in which the iron's presence appears as its crescendo. Both strategies retain a rational basis in their deployment, but the effect that they create can be read in opposition to each other. The roles are cast very differently: *Body* presents a prologue to *Oktoberceremoni's* final act; their respective performances governed by contrasting agendas. Where the former hinges on that which is internal to the artwork and *continuous*; the latter is governed by that which is external to it,

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[93] Duchamp's notion of 'aesthetic indifference' developed from his claim to have chosen everyday objects "based on a reaction of visual indifference, with at the same time a total absence of good or bad taste….". It was from this assertion that Duchamp paved the way for Conceptual art - work that was "in the service of the mind," rather than the eye. See Marcel Duchamp, Elmer Peterson, and Michel Sanouillet, *The Essential Writings of Marcel Duchamp* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1975). p. 141-142.

[94] This idea is examined in different ways according to different pictorial devices throughout the text although Lorenzo Pericolo summarises the idea very succinctly in his introduction: What is Metapainting? *The Self-Aware Image* Twenty Years Later. p.12. Victor I. Stoichiță, Lorenzo Pericolo, and Anne-Marie Glasheen, *The Self-Aware Image* (London/Turnhout: Harvey Miller Publishers, 2015).

[95] The point here is that in early works such as *Body*, the influence of Van Meegeren in making paintings look 'old from the start' is more apparent. Tuymans would have used a compound, such as Bakolite, that mixed in with the pigment – like Van Meegeren – would create a suitably irregular *craquelure*, which in contrast to its subsequent *ageing* effect, would have taken seconds to administer.

shaping it by *force*. But just as importantly, the cracks in Body *impersonalise* the painting, imbuing it with a remoteness that the iron's work in Oktoberceremoni reverses, leaving it highly personalised.

For Tuymans, this question regarding the former was synonymous with his technique from the outset:

'we have to point out the visible working of time: craquelure, yellowing, crumbling and so on. As a consequence of this ageing process, which takes place in parallel with real life, this loss is in fact inherent in the painting from the start[96].'

Tuymans' thinking is entirely measured. There is no sense by what he says and how *Body* appears as an artwork of Dionysian abandon. Despite the loose handling – which itself conflicts with the craquelure by retreating from any associative 'old masterly' rendering – one does not feel that the artist ever lets go or 'forgets' himself in the act of making.

Oktoberceremoni, on the other hand, is less straightforward: here the iron's drag coupled with the severity of its markings, reflects a flow of bodily movement more synonymous with excess and annihilation than cerebral reflection. In stripping the artwork back to its bones at its moment of completion, in order to cut through its history, each visual element that is left in *Oktoberceremoni* becomes present within a confused temporality. There is a complex tension between the remnants of imagery collapsing between layers and their local conflict with the blisters and scrapes that pepper the surface. The panel's damage forms an incidental but nevertheless *indifferent* relation to the imagery which it tarnishes and enframes. *Body,* by comparison, engenders a similar relation in its craquelure, striating through the surface as a pattern of background noise, but here indifference gains power over that which it passes through, asserting its presence with more authority. What adds to the confusion is the disparate nature of the iconography. Where the description of ancient pottery in *Oktoberceremoni,* sitting beneath what appears to be a sultan's profile, satisfies a reading in sync with the painting's weathered surface and archaeological overtones, the vignettes of constructivist graphics and Nordic folk motifs work to undermine any such aesthetic logic they propose.

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[96] Tuymans, Ruyffelaere, and Searle, *On & by Luc Tuymans*. p. 46.

Navigating an acidic palette, from which the industrial varnish creates a yellowing film, Bengtsson intensifies this chromatic range further still, generating the feeling that the artwork had been left in a pond or dredged through a river. This makes for a brutal and repellent toxicity, engendering the artwork with a feeling of contamination and disease. What is curious about the lacquer's deployment is how rich and consistent it is in contrast to other, later pieces, such as or *Hatt och Mössfabrik (Hat & Cap Factory)* (1969) or *Utsikt - Bron (Views – Bridge)* (1974), where the ritual of surface fakery is relegated to a more tepid state of affairs, appearing half hearted and slight, as if the artist could not be bothered to carry it through or had simply run out of the stuff.

This distinction of manipulating the surface patina to different degrees, in order to critique its historical precedent as an illusory device - which works to engender paintings with both age and formal synthesis - arrests any assumptions that might be placed on its function in any one painting. Bengtsson is constantly moving the goal posts, presenting the viewer with different levels and *states* of illusion, where in one painting its presence is camouflaged within a more expected uniform consistency, in another it drips through the surface as a half measure – forming a stalactite - bringing attention to its value as a strategic ploy. This is to say, it is in the absence of what should be the varnish's characteristic invisibility, that in being casually administered, it takes on a more emotionally infused presence.

2.5 Hitler's Dream Kitchen

Unlike *Oktoberceremoni,* in which the surface defacement overwhelms the imagery that Bengtsson deploys, dramatically distorting its appearance, *Hitler öch Drômkôket (Hitler's Dream Kitchen)* (1974) (Fig. 14), made some 11 years later, is entirely legible by contrast. Mirroring its title, the painting's iconography reads clearly, verging on the graphic and the cartoon. Nonetheless, what singles the painting out from other examples in Bengtsson's production is the particular way in which the artwork experiences rupture. This sense of splintering and division recurs elsewhere in Bengtsson's paintings, as I discussed earlier, but not through the deployment of an oversized dream cloud. Similarly, there is no other piece that Bengtsson produced featuring significant numbers of figures, in which the bulk of those represented appear discernible in their facial expressions.

It is this question of rupture within an observable grouping that makes Mamma Andersson's *Travelling in the Family* (2003) (Fig. 15) a natural choice to consider *Hitler's Dream Kitchen* in relation to. As I have already noted, Bengtsson was a significant influence on Andersson and it comes as no surprise that his strategies and techniques find echoes in her work. But this pairing is more particular than that. In both paintings a defined social unit is present: a family in the former, a fleet of SS officers in the latter; both of which appear to be isolated and preoccupied from the respective presence of seeping black smoke and dreamt-up kitchen units. Furthermore, in both paintings the huddled assembly is met at the picture plane by a single figure with their back turned to the viewer, in the bottom right-hand corner of the panel.

So, on one level, although *Hitler's Dream Kitchen* and *Travelling in the Family* work through the unity of a centripetal force, in counterpoint to *Body* and *Oktoberceremoni* which champion the fragment - in both the singular and the plural respectively - at the same time, this sense of containment is ultimately undermined. Like *Oktoberceremoni, Hitler's Dream Kitchen* comes into conflict externally with the force of Bengtsson's iron, but here the scuffs and blisters take a secondary role, revealing a quieter presence than Bengtsson's earlier experiment.

In sync with several paintings Bengtsson made during the late 1960s and early 1970s, the political context of *Hitler's Dream Kitchen* is very particular in its fierce critique of post-war Swedish society. As a shrewd attack on the airbrushed veneer of the Swedish welfare state (Folkhem) and Social Democratic Party, with its underground policy of forced sterilisation that emerged at the end of World War II, *Hitler's Dream Kitchen* fits snugly under the *functionalism-meets-fascism* narrative umbrella, that I discussed earlier: the führer's momentary abandon - as he contemplates which formica unit will go where – burlesquing a political paradigm governed by cleanliness and order in the name of *progress*[97]. It is significant to note, given this broader political context and the nature of the image, that Ikea was founded in Sweden in 1943[98].

In contrast, *Travelling in the Family,* does not harbour any such political framing or historical reference points, which is not to negate the unsettling way in which the black smoke that

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[97] What I am trying to emphasise here is how the Nazi ideology and obsession with eugenics and racial hygiene was part of a broader plan to create a German Aryan "master" race in the name of progress.
[98] Widenheim, "Two Sides of the Same Coin."

Fig. 14 Dick Bengtsson, *Hitler och Drömköket (Hitler's Dream Kitchen),* 1974, Oil on panel, 120.5 x 90cm.
Courtesy of Moderna Museet, Stockholm.

Fig. 15 Mamma Andersson, *Travelling in the Family,* 2003, Acrylic and oil on panel, 92 x 122 cm. Larsen Collection, Stockholm.

burns out pockets in its surface, resonates in tandem with the stark menace of Hitler's kitchen vignette. However, before considering how this and the theme of rupture in both artworks might be appraised, I would like to begin by focusing on how the respective groups of figures occupying *Hitler's Dream Kitchen* and *Travelling in the Family* unfold, through a paradox of presenting whilst retreating, and reflect upon the theme of anonymity.

As I have already noted, both paintings are governed by a defined social setting, suggesting contained units. Moreover, it is only through the figures in the bottom right-hand corner of each picture, where their placement is cropped in from the real space of the beholder, that this sense of containment is threatened. In panning through the surface of Nazi officers in *Hitler's Dream Kitchen* on closer inspection, in order to gain purchase on their individual appearance, one becomes aware almost immediately of how this attendant unit of the SS starts to break down.

If one takes Hitler as the protagonist at the heart of the action, whose stony gaze is directed immediately to the officer on his right, this focus is met ambiguously by a lantern jawed lieutenant who appears to be asleep. Recalling Ludwig Wittgenstein's *duck-rabbit*[99] (Fig. 16) in his expression, the officer's eyes swing freely between open-eyed alarm, on the one hand, and oblivious slumber on the other, his eyes shut one minute, then open the next; the ambiguity taking effect the more one zooms back and forth from the surface. Creating a motion of presentation through retreat, there is the sense with this officer that he was either caught cat-napping – and this was what the Nazi leader was about to address - or was simply out for the count. And yet, if this is the case, an ironic transference takes place, whereby the officer illustrates the moment of interference that the daydreaming Führer himself experiences, as he imagines his kitchen.

This ambiguous moment of exchange creates a second focus of action that gravitates to the right of the Nazi leader, in which a further four Nazi officials huddle around the aforementioned one, anticipating their leader's response. The officer on the far right, at the back of the grouping, appears disconnected from proceedings, in symmetry, I would argue,

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[99] In addition to ambiguous sentences, Wittgenstein discussed figures that can be seen and understood in two different ways. Often, one can see something in a straightforward way; but, at other times, in noticing a particular aspect — see it as something else. To illustrate this point, Wittgenstein uses the example of the "duckrabbit", an ambiguous image that can be seen as either a duck or a rabbit. See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1958).p.194.

Fig. 16 Dick Bengtsson, *Hitler's Dream Kitchen* (detail). Image courtesy of the author.

with the officer on the far left, who, gazing downwards, appears pensive and self-absorbed. In front of him, on the right, a shorter officer focuses on Hitler - perhaps the only one present to be doing so – who is simultaneously cut off by the upright officer with his back to us, standing nearest to the picture plane. This leaves only one remaining officer, immediately to the führer's left, who, concealed by his sunglasses, is characterised by a smirk. There is a clear tension within the painting between the team's appearance representing collective action and each member's retreat into a subjectivity that undermines this, including Hitler himself. Individual agency is thus posed as a question, in which the anonymising device of the Nazi uniform contrives to misrepresent any sense of unity.

But how is the Apollonian and Dionysian to be thought within this narrative reading? What has been satisfied simply honours a particular narrative account on my part, but what is it that seeks translation? It is hard to gauge, in that sense, to what extent Bengtsson just *felt* his way through articulating the individual expressions of these figure through accident and whim, in relation to something involving more forethought. Furthermore, what this narrative description does not factor in is the extent to which *Hitler's Dream Kitchen* is perhaps the most brutal and awkward of all of Bengtsson's paintings. Chromatically, the painting threatens to fail miserably; the translucent build-up of a deep cerulean blue sky overwhelming the picture, leading the eye to take cover in local details. It is only through the umber-greys and blacks in the lower half of the painting and the yellowing screen of the varnish, which synthesises the painting's various elements, that this likelihood is redeemed. This sense of ugliness is similarly reflected in the orchestrating of the imagery; the foot of Hitler's dream cloud skimming clumsily against the edge of the near-horizontal wall containing the figures in the foreground. On the one hand, these various elements appeal to Apollonian instinct: the logic of *Hitler's Dream Kitchen* governed by a 'deliberate' badness and critical line that acknowledges – as Bengtsson would have understood it at the time - its contextual address, the likes of which I outlined earlier[100]. Even the iron's 'soiling' of the surface toes the line: its presence clearly not ramped up to the degree that it did in *Oktoberceremoni,* however much it defaces Hitler's kitchen in the dream cloud.

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[100] By referring to 'its contextual address' I am referring to the broader historical and political context of Swedish wartime Nazi collaboration and the post-war sterilisation programme of the Swedish Social Democratic Party that I outlined on page 47.

On the other hand, this argument loses clarity on closer inspection. The artwork's facture and colouration coupled with its raw surface appears direct and almost reckless; its design – however graphically delineated – threatening to explode beyond the confines of the support. There is an edginess and *skewed* detailing in *Hitler's Dream Kitchen,* in the articulation of its imagery, which works beyond any calculated sense of fabricating the amateur.

Travelling in the Family, in contrast, lacks any sense of comparable abandon. Although Andersson deploys similar strategies: utilising the mechanical re-construction of secondary sources through a fragmenting of the pictorial space, achieved through different translucent registers, in counterpoint to the presence of black (thereby playing off the light of the white surface beneath, like a watercolour), both the handling and the palette within this context appear more constrained. Furthermore, the tension fuelling the social setting of the family – in which those gathered around the table appear remote, disconnected and tense – although similar to *Hitler's Dream Kitchen* on that level, does not have a protagonist that the painting is designed around, akin to Hitler. If one takes the older female at the back of the table as a notional matriarch, her introspection appears to undermine any sense of her generational authority.

Nonetheless, however one 'reads' this dynamic, what seems as significant is the question of how the black smoke weaving its way through the scene – like Bengtsson's dream cloud in *Hitler's Dream Kitchen* – is to be thought with other elements within the painting, given its independence and lack of resolution on that front.

This is to say, the way in which Bengtsson's dream cloud and Andersson's black smoke experience rupture and come into relation with each other plays out very differently. Where, on the hand, Hitler's dream cloud represents a momentary thought, paradoxically monumentalised as permanent within the painting, the seeping black smoke in *Travelling in the Family* – like the craquelure in *Body,* is suspended in its continuity, presenting a fundamentally different relationship to time. If one were to consider the two paintings as unfolding scenes and return to them after a few minutes, Hitler's thought cloud would have disappeared, whilst the seeping black smoke would be eating up more of the picture. It is my contention that although the black smoke in *Travelling in the Family* appears as a deliberate move and gesture on Andersson's part to achieve an effect, its appearance

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represents something more ominous and Dionysian. Bengtsson's dream cloud, on the other hand, fails to generate the same feeling. Although Bengtsson's kitchen vignette retains an inherent tension, by the way in which the aggressive soiling of the surface arrests the image of domestic anonymity that the functionalist units suggest; the imminent darkness unfolding in Andersson's painting forecasts a different sense of anonymity altogether. There is something of Roy Andersson's[101] black-comedy and foreboding in *Travelling in the Family* - redolent of *Songs from the Second Floor*[102] - that in its existentialism, sits in contrast to the fantastical irreverence of *Hitler's Dream Kitchen*. Perhaps the distinction, then, lies more with how the Dionysian might be appraised: the jarring of Bengtsson's awkward materiality reading in counterpoint to Andersson's enveloping black void.

2.6 Hat & Cap Factory

Hatt och Mössfabrik (Hat and Cap factory) (1969) (Fig. 8), made five years earlier than *Hitler's Dream Kitchen* at the height of Bengtsson's swastika period, like the later painting, engenders a sense of fierce provocation. In tandem with several other pieces made at the time, such as Edward *Hopper: Early Sunday Morning* and *Kumla Prison,* that I discussed earlier, the artwork presents itself as a sign game, in which its primary use of imagery – in this case a lone modernist building - is played off against the antagonism of its strategically placed – floating – swastika insignia. One of several diptychs that Bengtsson produced, the painting reads as a mock-symmetrical repeat, deploying a 'spot the difference' logic to coax the beholder into assessing how the two panels work to echo and contradict each other, in counterpoint to the Nazi symbol that hovers beyond the picture plane. Like *Hitler's Dream Kitchen, Hat and Cap Factory* is one of the more familiar artworks to receive critical attention to date, unsurprisingly lending itself to the 'semiotic' arena of post-modern criticality that it, at least in the first instance, appears to validate.

Having discussed the various pitfalls in responding to Bengtsson's work on that level, it could seem a somewhat redundant and fruitless task to pursue an in-depth formal analysis of one of those paintings that is so readily championed as satisfying that particular

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[101] Roy Andersson is a Swedish film director, best known for *A Swedish Love Story* (1970) and his "Living trilogy," which includes *Songs from the Second Floor* (2000), *You, the Living* (2007) *and A Pigeon Sat on a Branch Reflecting on Existence* (2014).

[102] *Songs from the Second Floor* cemented Andersson's personal style of directing; characterized by long takes, absurdist comedy, and a stiff caricaturing of Swedish culture and the *Felliniesque* grotesque.

narrative. At the same time, given the current political climate of rising nationalist populism across the United States and Europe[103] and the unexpected reach of Brexit and Trump, re-assessing the problematic of the swastika through the question of anonymity - as a paradox of *presenting* whilst *retreating* - could not seem more timely. It is within this context and with this in mind, that I will be assessing how Bengtsson's *Hat and Cap Factory* and Wilhelm Sasnal's *Untitled* swastika print (2010) (Fig. 17) might be considered in relation to each other at this point. Needless to say, in contemplating this juxtaposition, one cannot ignore the post-war trajectory of painting that has taken the Nazi symbol as a central motif; albeit there is something particularly pertinent about this pairing - given the current political situation - within this tradition[104].

Before considering how the surface materiality and facture in *Hat and Cap Factory* might reveal an Apollonian-Dionysian tension and raise the question of anonymity, as it will be assessed in relation to Sasnal's print, it seems important to briefly sketch out its history and background.

The lone modernist building featured in the painting, that repeats as a mirror image between the two panels, is based on a photograph that Bengtsson found in the Swedish Encyclopaedia *Svensk Uppslagsbok*, (in what was then East Germany) of a hat factory in Luckenwalde, which had been published in a new edition after the war. It is significant to note, as a stockpile of systematically archived images, that the *Svensk Uppslagsbok* provided Bengtsson with much of the source material that he used in his paintings[105], feeding his practice with visual references obtained from an impersonal source. Designed by the German Jewish architect, Eric Mendelsohn, who became known for his expressionist architecture and dynamic functionalism, the hat factory had established the architect's reputation following its commission in 1921. Incorporating a modern ventilation hood to

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[103] My point here is that alongside Brexit and Trump, there has been a significant rise in populist nationalism and far-right governments gaining power over the last decade, including the election of Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil in 2018, the coalition of the Five Star Movement with the Northern League in Italy, as well the rise of the Alt-right in America, championed by Steve Bannon. This is why the question of anonymity and the problematic of 'presenting' whilst 'retreating' in this context, is so relevant and necessary to address. See Alexander Reid Ross, *Against the Fascist Creep* (2017).

[104] It is within the context of Footnote 103, that the juxtaposition of Bengtsson's *Hat & Cap Factory* and Sasnal's untitled swastika print are particularly intriguing, given the provocative and ambiguous nature of the former's take on 'sign' games. In contrast to a lot of artists who have featured the swastika symbol in their work (Jorg Immendorf, Sigmar Polke, Philippe Vandenberg, Martin Kippenberger, Jonathan Meese etc.) - in which the symbol satisfies particular meanings or agendas - Bengtsson's strength lies in his ability to suspend this strategy.

[105] Feuk, "Irony, Phobia, Mania: Houses of Birth and Death." p.18.

extract the fumes from the dyeing process, its unorthodox design ironically echoes a piece of headwear; and it is perhaps no surprise, given this, that Mendelsohn's own mother had trained as a milliner. Although it cannot be determined whether Bengtsson was fully aware of these details and knew of Mendelson's escape to London following the rise of National Socialism in Nazi Germany – whereby his name was struck from the Architects' Association list of members because of his ethnicity – a mesh of layers starts to emerge, given the Swastika insignia that inhabits the far corners of each panel. This takes on a particularly sinister edge when, as Cecilia Widenheim notes, the title is a nod to Sweden's first political parties, the Hats and Caps, that were introduced in the 18th century as royal power receded.

Unlike many of Bengtsson's paintings, which despite their idiosyncratic treatment employ largely mimetic colour schemas – referring to *this* world - *Hat and Cap Factory,* in contrast, figures almost entirely as an alien landscape.

The translucency of the viridian green wash which saturates the background in the top half of each panel, plays off an equally translucent ultramarine underpainting, elsewhere determining the structure of the design. On first studying the artwork in the flesh, this appeared to create a garishly green artificial sky, which, verging on fluorescence – partly accentuated by the yellowing varnish - was nocturnalised in the two halves by a pair of reflecting moons, which if they were absent, would leave this otherworldly scene with no discernible time frame whatsoever. The lunar crests might have signified nightfall, yet the picture failed to create any associative atmosphere. This, it appeared, was lost in reproduction and wholly misrepresented in the Moderna Museet catalogue[106], for example, where the dulled green-blue background read more legibly as a darkish tone evoking midnight. However, in returning to *Hat & Cap Factory* for a second time, two years later - under different lighting conditions – I became aware of how my earlier observations were circumstantially conditioned. Although I remain suspicious as to whether the artwork creates a plausible impression of nightness beyond the presence of the mirroring moons, my criticism of the Moderna Museet catalogue appeared with hindsight, somewhat excessive. Nevertheless, however one might 'read' the green sky - from one storage vault to

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[106] In studying Bengtsson's paintings in the flesh at the Moderna Museet in Stockholm in October 2015 and June 2017, I noticed that most of the paintings in reproduction (in the museum publication) were significantly duller and darker than in real life. With *Hat & Cap Factory* in particular, this fundamentally affects how one reads and responds to the piece of work.

the next - what this colouring does bring to the painting, irrespective of how time might be determined, is a remoteness, as if Mendelsohn's masterpiece were marooned on some cold distant planet.

If one takes this orchestration of alien coldness one step further, in sync with how it stages itself as a painting - akin to what I touched upon earlier - *Hat and Cap Factory* could be better understood as a studio lit fabrication. This is to say, it could be read simply as a stage set, in which a painted green screen complete with moons governs the ambiguous time-of-day as a theatrical backdrop; slowing down and confusing the process of ascertaining whether, as a beholder, one is looking on to Mendelsohn's modernist structure from inside or outside.

Of course, in attending to this question of colour, only one aspect of the artwork's construction is being addressed; the surface - as I discussed in *Oktoberceremoni* and *Hitler's Dream Kitchen* - is absolutely central, notwithstanding how the swastika makes its presence felt. And perhaps this is where the problematic of the Apollonian and Dionysian starts to emerge as an underlying tension: the iron's lacerations and scrapes, cutting through the surface to the support, are reined in and contained by the building's austere diagonals and functionalist geometry. In working the patina up through the industrial varnish, Bengtsson monumentalises this tension; magnifying the interarticulaton of the translucent layers through the beaten surface, as if by letting himself go, he backtracks to reason how this Dionysian violence should be framed. What this results in is a type of picturing that leaves the surface reading somewhere between an x-ray and a fossil, which in its encaging tension, attempts to domesticate the subjectivity that it presents. There is a power struggle: the *dumb* Apollonian conceptuality of the painting threatened by the rupture of a brute Dionysian materiality, as if the body of the painting is being ripped apart - like Dionysus himself[107] - leaving the painting's 'content' savaged by its materiality.

At the same time, this materiality sits in stark contrast to the Nazi insignia that punctuate the bottom left and right-hand corners of the panels, countering the artwork's translucent layers with discs of pristine opacity. This is where, thinking about how I introduced Bengtsson earlier in the chapter, the artist sets up the 'difficulty' and 'slowing down' of the

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[107] In Greek mythology, Hera, wife of Zeus and goddess of marriage, jealous of Zeus' infidelity with Dionysus' mother, Semele - and the fact that Dionysus was alive after her death - arranged for the Titans to kill him. The Titans ripped Dionysus to pieces, limb from limb, although Rhea brought him back to life.

painting's reading, through a sign game that opens up the division of its two distinct pictorial elements as a question.

In contradistinction, Sasnal's *Untitled* linoleum print operates through a completely different register. Perhaps, the first thing to note in its construction is its status as an edition, rather than a one-off; although, given the nature of *Hat and Cap Factory* as a mock symmetrical diptych, both artworks, in that sense, work through a process of imagery being repeated. By starting to assess Sasnal's print in relation to *Hat and Cap Factory* in those terms, an immediate distinction presents itself between the way in which Sasnal's print works through a process of external mutation - doctoring the lower right-hand stroke of the swastika into a limp penis, to satisfy a particular 'reading' – and the way Bengtsson performs an internal diagnosis of the symbol, by suspending it beyond the picture plane, whilst mirroring it within the painting, akin to a *Rorschach* test. In contrast to the earlier analysis surrounding *Oktoberceremoni* and *Body,* in which I argued that the internal materiality of Tuymans' craquelure in *Body*, presented itself as the prologue, to *Oktobercermoni's* final act, here the case is reversed; Sasnal's mutation presenting itself as a semiotic endpoint and a given. This sense of a defined meaning or 'reading' is confirmed by Sasnal himself in an interview, whilst reflecting on the nature of his decision making:

'I wanted to show the impotence of the swastika, a sense of embarrassment for Nazis who identify with the idea of male strength. They are ashamed of being weak so they hide their weaknesses underneath their swastikas[108].'

Needless to say, not all Neo-Nazis are by definition necessarily male and it is interesting how Sasnal's comments point towards a set of assumptions as to both *what* the Swastika represents and more importantly *who* it represents. Alluding to the retro aesthetic of Art Spiegelman's graphic novel *Maus*[109]*,* which features elsewhere in Sasnal's production, the swastika appears in the print as a lone anthropomorphic presence in the desert, quietly described by a low horizon and distant mountain range at the foot of the artwork. In this respect, Sasnal and Bengtsson both present the swastika through an image of extreme

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[108] culture.pl, "I Exclude Exclusion – Artists against Hate Speech," https://culture.pl/en/article/i-exclude-exclusion-artists-against-hate-speech.

[109] *Maus* is a graphic novel created by American cartoonist Art Spiegelman which was serialized from 1980 to 1991. It depicts Spiegelman interviewing his father about his experiences as a Polish Jew and Holocaust survivor. The work represents Jews as mice, Germans as cats, and Poles as pigs. Critics have classified Maus as memoir, biography, history, fiction, autobiography, or a mix of genres. *Maus* is a recurrent theme and aesthetic in Sasnal's work.
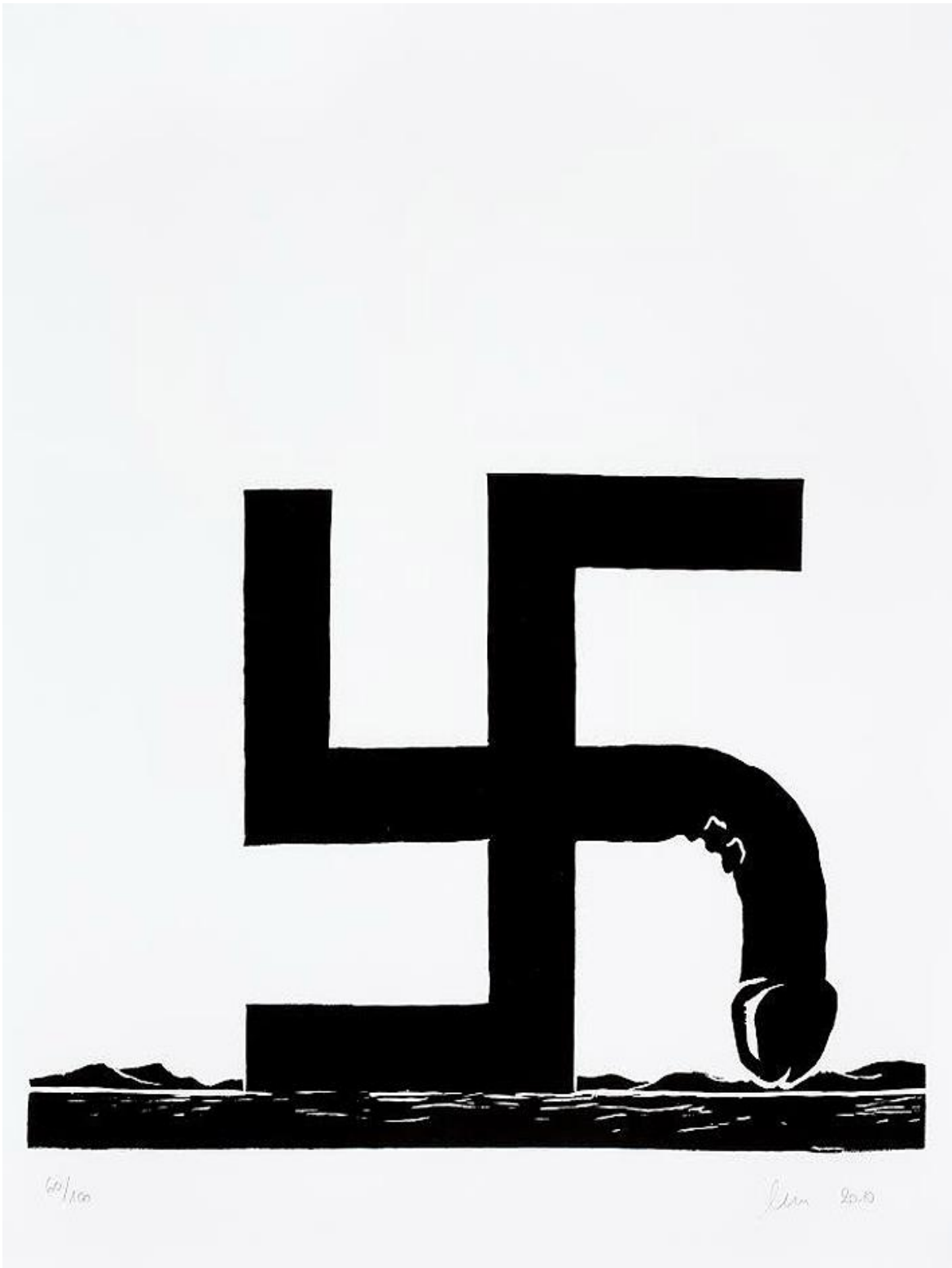
Fig. 17 Wilhelm Sasnal *Untitled*, 2010, linoleum print, 56 cm x 56 cm. Courtesy of Sadie Coles HQ, London.

isolation, emphasising its anomalous nature as a sign sentenced to indefinite solitary confinement; the difference being of course, that for Sasnal this is synonymous with a particular *type* of impotence. This is where I think it fails: the distinction simply being that Bengtsson presents the swastika in *Hat and Cap Factory* as a question and whatever happens in the future – thinking about the current political climate emerging since Sasnal produced the print in 2010 – as an artwork, it will always function as a question rather than a statement; this is its primary power. But it is not only that, *as* a question, *Hat and Cap Factory* presents whilst it retreats on that level, in contrast to Sasnal's print, which simply presents, satisfying and affirming a particular narrative. Furthermore, it is clear that for Bengtsson it was important that the swastika was presented as a question of anonymity; one directed outwardly towards the *real* world of the viewer and the viewer themselves - that is the whole confrontational point - as much as one that swings inwardly to address painting's status as a fiction and illusion. That is the value in considering Bengtsson's *Hat and Cap Factory* in relation to Sasnal's untitled print: with Bengtsson the question of anonymity is addressed at a political level and retains this sense of urgency, whereas with Sasnal the question of anonymity is simply directed at the title.

2.7 Richard in Paris

Thinking about this question of fiction and illusion and the role that the picture plane plays in bridging the painting's illusory surface with the real space of the beholder, I will now develop this theme in my final pairing and selection. In assessing how this relationship might be considered as a strategy that negates the viewer, anonymising their presence – whilst presenting the painting as something itself that retreats - I will now explore how Bengtsson's *Richard in Paris* (1970) (Fig. 18) might be appraised in relation to Victor Man's two *Untitled* (2012) portraits (Fig. 19 & 20). Although Man's two paintings were not conceived as a single work by the artist, featuring separately in his production, they nevertheless raise interesting questions in being treated as a single entity, where they rework the same image in different ways. In choosing paintings at the end of this second half of the chapter that present single figures akin to a conventional portrait, the emphasis within this juxtaposition is very much on fabrication and performance.

Designed around the diverted stare of the painting's sole protagonist, Bengtsson's *Richard in Paris* (1970) takes its central image from a film poster featuring psychopath Tommy Udo, as played by Richard Widmark in Henry Hathaway's (1947) crime thriller *Kiss of Death*. Squashed into the narrow support, the gangster's frame is cut off at the foot of the painting, forming a dark lip against which the oversized acronym 'P.C.F' projects out into real space. The accentuated format lends itself to both a coffin and a door, seconded by the formal dimensions which read in at 173 x 83cm. This creates a tension between the figure's presence, which occupies approximately a third of the surface area, and the limitations of the frame that contains it. All of Bengtsson's paintings prey on the claustrophobia that they generate in placing their subjects at the frontier of real space; it is this kind of teasing with the picture plane that they revel in. However, *Richard in Paris* is the only piece apart from *Venus med Cupido med sko 'Venus and Cupid with shoe'* (1970) and *Badbild 'Bath Picture'* (1974) to read more conventionally as a portrait. And significantly there is no other painting in his production that opens up the question of its spatial relations with the viewer, by deploying a larger than human scale. If Bengtsson's Udo were to step out of the panel, he would probably clock in at around eight feet.

Originally conceived as part of Bengtsson's contribution to the *Svenskt Alternativ* exhibition[110] held in Paris in 1971 – thus informing the double reference to 'Richard' in the title - the lettering within the artwork has been viewed by some as a reference to the 'Partie Communiste Francaise'. Nonetheless, its significance appeals more immediately to the embedded 'RIP' in the title and its potential for generating likewise abbreviations; allusively caricaturing any bearing the acronym might have on revealing something of the artwork's identity or that of its maker. What seems more critical to this effect are not the letters themselves as a source of actual meaning, but their inherently cryptic nature, as they hover beyond the painting's surface towards the viewer.

This sense of shuttling between worlds is mirrored in the picture's interior, where the presence of the curtain - which cuts behind Udo to the right – oscillates with the raw exposure of its surface history. Within this movement, which the iron and glaze reveal, the

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[110] *Alternative Suédoise / Svenskt Alternativ* was a two-part exhibition that took place between the Moderna Museet (Stockholm) in 1970 and the Musée d'art Moderne de la ville (Paris) in 1971. It featured several Swedish artists including: Lars Englund, Einar Hoste, Ulrik Samuelson, John-e Franzén, Olle Kaks, Lars Hillersberg, Dick Bengtsson and Ola Billgren.

Fig. 18 Dick Bengtsson, *Richard in Paris*, 1970, Oil on panel, 173 x 83cm.
Courtesy of Moderna Museet, Stockholm.

brush marks and licks that fashion the underpainting threaten to project out beyond the curtain's containment into real space. In creating a motion that swings between the artwork's surreptitious iconography and the crude disclosure of its physical conditioning, Bengtsson manages - despite the painting's tenebrous agenda - to illuminate every aspect of its material construction. There is a deliberate teasing with the surface as a window of illusion within what Stoichita describes as the 'negation of the wall'[111], that marks out the ambiguous deployment of imagery that Bengtsson exercises.

Banana-like and half cartoon, the hand gracing the curtain to the right-hand side of the picture – with which it both tugs and loses purchase - flags up the question of how action might be thought, drawing attention to its own stylistic difference and the question of touch that this opens up. However, Udo's sideways glance works to undo this attention; deflecting it back into the real space of the viewer; creating a continual discontinuity between the eye and the hand within the panel[112]. In negating the beholder, Udo's preoccupied expression reflects what Michael Fried would define as the 'supreme fiction', whereby the viewer's presence before the artwork is denied, as part of the 'internal absorption' that the painting - in its fiction - proposes[113]. Internal absorption can be taken here as that sense of preoccupation and introspection that figures demonstrate within paintings, to suggest that they are oblivious to the beholder's presence.

In contrast to *Richard in Paris*, Victor Man's portraits, which repeat the same central image in two different artworks, both titled *Untitled* (2012) - at 27 x 19cm - appear somewhat diminutive, inhabiting dimensions just shy of an A4 Notepad. On both counts, unlike Bengtsson, no patina is deployed. Alluding to Shakespeare's Hamlet[114], the miniature skull, which is lodged off-centre in both, on the back of the figure's right hand immediately in front of his corresponding eye, like Bengtsson's cryptic lettering, deliberately foregrounds itself in counterpoint to the figure's diverted gaze, delaying it further. However the handling of the imagery and the nature of its materiality is markedly different. Man's use of detailing

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[111] "All painting is a negation of the wall." Stoichiță, Pericolo, and Glasheen, *The Self-Aware Image*.p.68.

[112] The idea being that any sense of visual continuity between the hand and the eye in the painting is negated and lost, whereby both figurative elements deflect away from each other and cancel each other out.

[113] Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality : Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Berkeley [u.a.]: Univ. of California Press, 1980). p.103.

[114] In William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Hamlet's constant brooding about death and humanity comes to a (grotesque) head in the infamous graveyard scene in Act V Scene 1, where Hamlet holds up the unearthed skull of Yorick, a court jester that Hamlet knew and loved as a young boy. The skull itself comes to represent the physical reminder of the finality of death.
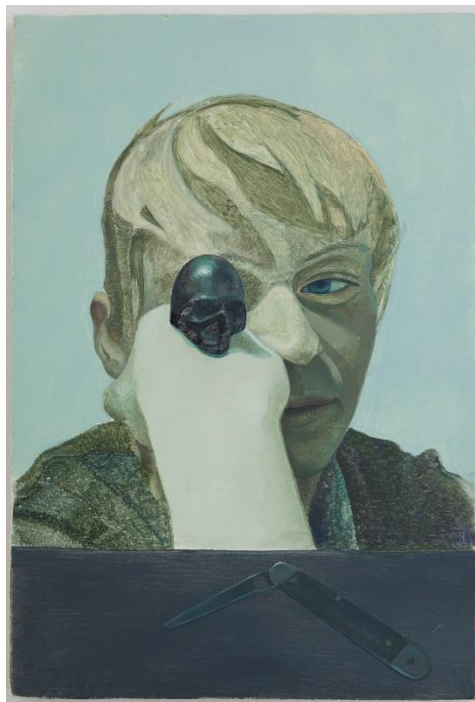
Fig. 19 (Top): Victor Man, *Untitled*, 2012, Oil on linen mounted on wood, 27 x 19 cm.
Courtesy of Gladstone Gallery.
Fig. 20 (Bottom): Victor Man, *Untitled*, 2012, Oil on linen mounted on wood, 27 x 19 cm.
Courtesy of Gladstone Gallery.

recalls the *Neue Sachlichtkeit*[115] sensibility of early Lucian Freud and there is a Holbein quality to the way in which the texture of the sitter's sweater has been described in both pieces. This engenders the portraits with an academicism which flies in the face of Bengtsson's more rudimentary cut-and-paste application. In what I will call the nocturnal version, Man has placed a sign reading 'titanik bar' in the background, which bounces off the lower region and foreground of the canvas, made up of a series of incomplete painterly marks that feed off the same chromatic range. In the other piece, where the figure's head is less screened by darkness, the skull appears more illusionistic – achieved through a higher level of contrast – a penknife slowly reveals itself with a comparable level of realism in the lower quarter of the painting. Complementing whilst inverting each other, through the contrast of light and dark that defines the foreground and background in each panel, Man's centrally placed figure – unlike Bengtsson's heroic crook – retains an androgynous presence in both pictures. On the one hand, this distinction seems of little consequence, where both Bengtsson and Man employ the same strategy of deflection to enable their respective characters to engage with the beholder's 'space' but *not* the beholder themselves; creating a psychological barrier. However, on the other hand, Bengtsson's villain and Man's de-gendered youth inhabit completely different realities. It is my argument that it is precisely at this level of iconography, that the Dionysian in *Richard in Paris* first makes itself known. This is not to suggest that other elements within the artwork do not retain a Dionysian tension, for although the iron's mauling of the surface is slower to read and more restrained here, than it is in *Oktoberceremoni* or *Hat & Cap factory*, as I have already suggested, the nature of its presence is still, nevertheless, central. But what cannot be discounted is the subterranean menace that Bengtsson's Udo presents. One does not need to have watched Hathaway's *Kiss of Death* to register the wayward threat that Bengtsson's portrait of Widmark embodies. Moreover, it is this particular quality of cruelty and intoxication that marks out the Dionysian from the Apollonian. When asked in an interview how his deployment of Udo within *Richard in Paris* reflected upon this sense of waywardness,

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[115] *Neue Sachlichkeit* (German: New Objectivity) refers to the movement and group of German artists in the 1920s whose works were executed in a realistic style (in contrast to the prevailing styles of Expressionism and Abstraction) and who reflected upon what was characterized as the resignation and cynicism of the post-World War I period in Germany. Major figures within the movement included George Grosz, Otto Dix and Max Beckmann amongst others. The term was fashioned in 1924 by Gustav F. Hartlaub, director of the Mannheim Kunsthall. The *Neue Sachlichkeit* influence characterises much of Lucian Freud's early paintings throughout the 1940s and 1950s following his family arriving in Britain from Nazi Germany.

Bengtsson suggested "Nearly all my school friends are either dead, in prison, or alcoholics sitting on park benches". This was followed up some years later, at his final exhibition in 1988[116], when Bengtsson went on to claim, when asked about the same painting:

'We know of course what modern art history looks like and about the difficulties many artists had with their social life: Modigliani committed suicide by jumping out of the window. Van Gogh shot himself in a cornfield.[117]'

Honouring the cliché of the tortured artist as romantic outsider – and notably it was Modigliani's wife that jumped out of the window, when she heard of her husband's death, not the artist himself[118] – Bengtsson's comments nonetheless touch upon a critical point within the painting; namely, the alignment of Udo as a criminal with the artist as a type. What Bengtsson affords in his characterisation of Udo, then, is a complexity commensurate with its presence within the painting as an amalgamation of masks, in which the image of death fuels a point of release. This is precisely the point that Bengtsson acknowledges: as a state borne of primal instincts and emotion, Dionysian force is not reined in by conditions or limits. However, in Man's portraits this quality seems entirely lacking where the unisexual head that is repeated appears vacant and hollow. In these paintings, the measure of death is expressed equally between the miniature skull that takes centre stage and the figure that props it up, which could easily read as a mannequin or waxwork. Although Man stages the 'idea' of the mask through this relation, collapsing the figure's gaze through the lens of the tiny head - which doubles up as a black eye and hole in the picture - only the 'idea' is retained. There is a sense with Man, like Sasnal, that only a *literal* deployment of signs within the artwork is being achieved on that level, and, as I suggested before, this is

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[116] This is taken from a translated version (Yvonne King) of Bo Karlsson's article 'Dick Bengtsson: Biographical notes' that featured in the special 'Dick Bengtsson' edition of the Swedish publication *Hjärnstorm* in 1988. p.10.

[117] Ibid.

[118] Amedeo Modigliani died on January 24, 1920, at the Hôpital de la Charité in Paris, following a battle with tubercular meningitis .A day later, his wife, Hébuterne was taken to her parents' home and there, inconsolable, threw herself out of a fifth-floor window, killing herself and her unborn child. Modigliani was buried in Père Lachaise Cemetery. Hébuterne was buried at the Cimetière de Bagneux near Paris, and it was not until 1930 that her embittered family allowed her body to be moved to rest beside Modigliani. A single tombstone honours them both. His epitaph reads: "Struck down by death at the moment of glory". Hers reads: "Devoted companion to the extreme sacrifice".

precisely what strengthens Bengtsson's case; that he refuses to reduce artworks to statements, even if those statements – like Man - appear outwardly ambiguous[119].

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[119] The point I am making is that although Man's paintings retain an ambiguous *look,* they are still reducible on one level, to a literal deployment of signs, in contrast to Bengtsson, whose paintings remain completely irreconcilable.

Chapter 3   Valuing Appearance

3.0   Chapter Introduction

Although Bengtsson's paintings prove inherently problematic in demonstrating where the tension between the Apollonian and Dionysian lies, what is nevertheless clear, is the extent to which they are designed around strategies of deception. In terms of the sign games that Bengtsson deploys, as well as in the materiality that he develops to maximise their orchestration, what is being championed is the value of appearance over "truth[120]".

In this chapter, I will be exploring this value in light of Bengtsson's canonic precedence, by considering two artists beyond him, who, within a post-conceptual trajectory of figurative painting, tap into the question of anonymity and the motion of presenting whilst retreating. However, in contemplating how Luc Tuymans and Martin Kippenberger do this, I will be drawing upon the thinking behind Nietzsche's *will-to-deception* that he details in the *Will to Power as Art*, in order to assess how this might be appraised. Furthermore, in respect of Kippenberger and the *Lieber maler, male mir (Dear Painter, paint for me)* series that I focus on, I will be turning once again to Nietzsche's conceptualisation of the Apollonian, in order to re-frame it within the *Alter-Apollonian*; taking account of how post-conceptual readings of the 'individual' – that Nietzsche suggests is central to the Apollonian - might be conceived by proxy.

Whilst I appreciate the pervasive extent to which Tuymans has shaped the canon over the last twenty years, appearing somewhat overly familiar, he does, nevertheless, seem important to identify within the context of this thesis and the theme of anonymity. Significantly, it is not only this and the influential bearing of Van Meegeren on his practice that he shares with Bengtsson, that makes his inclusion all the more necessary, so much as his relevance regarding my own art education and development as a painter at the Royal College of Art in the late 1990s. This is precisely where my discussion regarding Tuymans starts from.

However, it is also Tuymans' working method within what he described in his early development as the creation of an 'authentic forgery' - which bears natural sympathies with Bengtsson's 'forging reality' - that the conversation leads, where I consider how Deleuze's

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[120] "Truth" can be taken here to mean stable Platonic truth.

notion of *difference-in-itself* might shed some light on how Tuymans' forgery might be assimilated.

Taking this into consideration, this chapter develops over three parts. In Part 1, I turn to Nietzsche's *will-to-deception* to consider how the theme of falsity and illusion might be appraised beyond the *Apollonian* and *Dionysian*, in linking Bengtsson to Tuymans and Kippenberger within a post-conceptual trajectory of figurative painting. This becomes the point of departure for considering the influence of Tuymans within the canon, as well as on my own development as a painting student in Part 2, at which point I go on to assess how Tuymans' method might be evaluated in response to Deleuze's *difference-in-itself* and the power of the simulacrum. Finally, in Part 3, I re-frame the Apollonian within the context of the *Alter-Apollonian*, where I evaluate the role of anonymity and the motion of presenting whilst retreating within Kippenberger's *Lieber maler, male mir (Dear Painter, paint for me)* series. In contemplating how Kippenberger commissioned a Berlin sign-maker to make paintings in response to images and instructions he supplied, I assess how this forces the Apollonian into being re-aligned within a post-conceptual condition of painting.

3.1 Art as a Supreme Value

In the closing passages of the *Will to Power as Art*, in what was a fragmentary draft for a preface to be included in a new edition of the *Birth of Tragedy*[121], Nietzsche reflects upon his conception of the *Artist* and the value of "truth"[122]. Nietzsche's application of 'art' within the text is metaphysical; "Art" refers to an 'artistry' of the *soul* and therefore 'man's' ability to create and shape it: life is to be lived *as* art[123]. Although the passage functions as a crescendo to the chapter, it is important to recognise its value in lending itself to the theme of falsity and performance underlying this thesis and the discussion so far, beyond its rhetorical appeal. It is likewise necessary to register that Nietzsche's emphasis within the text is not directed at the making of art, as I've been exploring it within an Apollonian-

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[121] See Nietzsche and Kaufmann, "The Will to Power as Art." 853 (Footnote 161) p.451.
[122] See Footnote 113.
[123] This is the central point that Nietzsche makes in this closing section of *Art in "The Birth of Tragedy"* from the *Will to Power* 853 (I – V).

Dionysian duality, as to how that duality configures within a larger problematic of "truth" and *illusion*[124]:

'Truth does not count as the supreme value, even less as the supreme power. The will to appearance, to illusion, to deception, to becoming and change (to objectified deception) here counts as more profound, primeval, "metaphysical" than the will to truth, to reality, to mere appearance: - the last is itself merely a form of the will to illusion.[125]'

Nietzsche's ridiculing of "truth" within a championing of appearance resonates entirely with Bengtsson's project of 'forging reality' through using paintings to challenge how the question of truth might be identified. This is exactly what Chapter 2 suggested, as I argued.

But for Nietzsche the problematic of "truth" – or more significantly the underlying *will* for "truth" - is its negation of becoming and change. Nietzsche's point is that "Truth" is at the mercy of which truth dominates, and this is what he means when he says of the 'will to truth', that it is 'merely a form of the 'will to illusion'. Appearance in that sense, as the marker of becoming, accommodates for change through its inherently deceptive nature. This is where it gains currency 'as value' *against* truth and where 'art' by extension becomes the natural ally to appearance; simply *through* 'being' appearance. When Nietzsche talks about the will to becoming and change as "objectified deception", this for him becomes the only possible condition to any conceivable sense of an 'objective' experience; *through* deception. It is within this capacity, as the text draws to a close in the final passage, that Nietzsche claims art as ''stronger than pessimism, "more divine" than truth.[126]'

Considering this question of becoming and change in relation to how deception might be thought as a value of appearance over truth beyond Bengtsson, I will now reflect upon how Luc Tuymans and Martin Kippenberger respond both to this and the theme of anonymity. This will be developed, firstly, through assessing how Tuymans advanced within the canon whilst I was a student at the Royal College of Art in the late 1990s, in order to ascertain in

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[124] In sync with Footnote 113, "Truth" can be taken here within the context of stable Platonic truth, as distinct from how Nietzsche identifies truth within the *will-to-illusion*. See Friedrich Nietzsche, *On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense* (United States of America: Aristeus Books, 2012). & Friedrich Nietzsche, Reginald J. Hollingdale, and Michael Tanner, *Twilight of the Idols and the Anti-Christ* (London: Penguin Books, 1990). 'How the 'Real World' at Last Became a Myth' & WP 493 & 507.

[125] WP 853. For an alternative reading of Nietzsche's position on truth see Alain Badiou and Norman Madarasz, *Manifesto for Philosophy : Followed by Two Essays: "The (Re)Turn of Philosophy Itself" and "Definition of Philosophy"* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1999). in which Badiou identifies Nietzsche's reading of truth within an anti-platonic gesture of "Great Sophistry". p.97-101.

[126] Ibid.

what capacity his practice presents whilst it retreats; then readdressed through Kippenberger according to an altogether different strategy in his *Lieber maler, male mir (Dear Painter, paint for me)* series.

3.2   Authenticating Forgery

As a graduating student at the turn of the millennium, the question surrounding painting in response to photographic source material had been dominated by Tuymans throughout the 1990s. During this period a number of survey exhibitions had championed painting as a fragmented force of individual positions that worked beyond the medium specific narratives of modernism and the early post-modern legacy of neo-expressionism; it was within this context that Tuymans' critical response to the canon took shape. As Adrian Searle, co-curator of the Painting exhibition, *Unbound: Possibilities in Painting* (1994), which took place at the Hayward Gallery in London, said of painting in his catalogue essay at the time:

'Instead of technique, we have techniques, and instead of absolutes and essences, discontinuities, multiformity, differences. In the face of doomy presentiments concerning the loss of language and power – the loss of affect – a sense of language used with more self-consciousness and even awkwardness. Instead of new movements or revivals, a more heterodox way of thinking, a greater diversity.[127]'

This served to reappraise painting's canonic condition beyond the more familiar linear narratives that had attested to its death throughout the twentieth century. Featuring in the landmark painting exhibitions, *Der Zerbrochene Spiegel (Broken Mirror),* at the Kunsthalle Wien (1993), the aforementioned *Unbound,* at the Hayward Gallery, London (1994), as well as *Documenta IX* (1992), Tuymans had emerged as heir apparent to Gerhard Richter. And like Richter, Tuymans' practice fixated on painting's relationship with photography beyond a medium-specific modernism and the question of subjectivity and representation that this raised.

However, in contrast to the immaculate execution of Richter's squeegeed surfaces, Tuymans paintings employed an amateur handling and flimsy construction; utilising craquelure techniques and an anaemic palette to artificially age his pictures. In contrast to Richter,

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[127] Adrian Searle, Linda Schofield, and Gallery Hayward, *Unbound : Possibilities in Painting : Hayward Gallery, London, 3 March to 30 May 1994* (London: South Bank Centre, 1994). p.20.
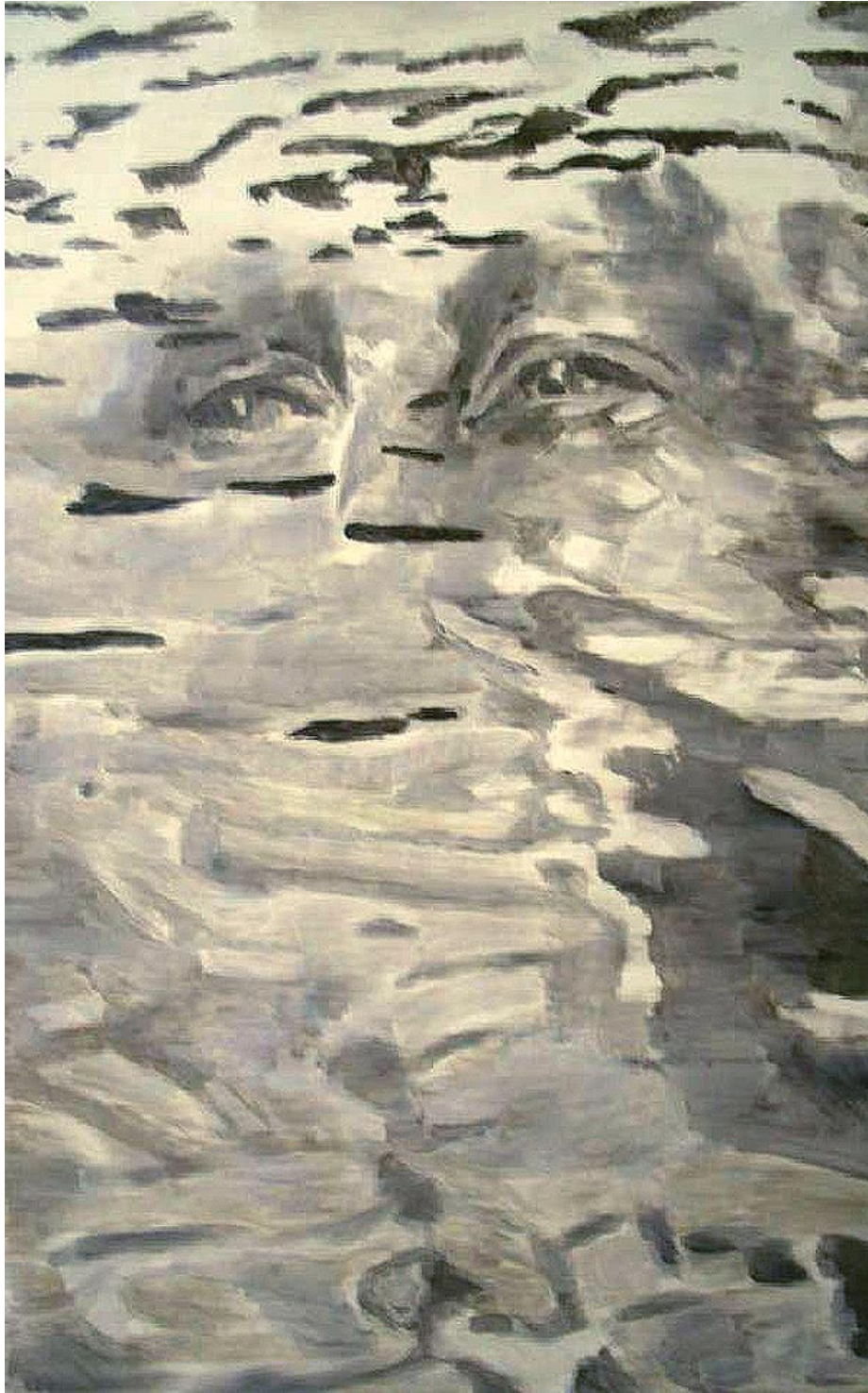
Fig. 21 Luc Tuymans, *Resentment*, 1995, Oil on canvas, 94.5 x 63.5cm. Collection Museum of Modern Art, Stadsgalerij, Heerlen.

Fig. 22 Luc Tuymans, *The Architect,* 1997, Oil on canvas, 113 x 144.5 cm. Collection Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Dresden.

Fig. 23 Experts inspect a fake Vermeer by Han van Meegeren. © Rob C. Croes, CC BY-SA

Tuymans' subject matter moved dramatically, playing off the banal and inconsequential on the one hand - through wallpaper patterns, everyday objects and the like - with historical events on the other; referencing the Holocaust, the politics of the Belgian Congo or the War on Terror. Within this approach, Tuymans would construct models which he would photograph and rework as paintings, occasionally interspersing them with pieces expressing abstract emotional states with concomitant titles, such as 'bitterness' or 'resentment' (Fig. 21). What remained constant was a detached understatement and flattening out of any distinction between different registers of contextual significance and in this respect they echoed Richter. Exploiting the potential of film editing techniques in the way space was organised: cropping, zooming-in and splicing frames; informed by that period in his education when he dropped painting altogether and turned to film[128], Tuymans' paintings delayed any immediate sense of identification, despite the literal – descriptive - nature of their titles. As artworks they undermined being 'read' in accordance with a modernist teleology, appearing old, anachronistic and clumsy; utilising this appearance of obsolescence, to allegorise the inadequacy of painting to represent the horror and destruction of the twentieth century, through the content they repeatedly drew upon (Fig. 22). Tuymans' practice functioned as a measured strategy of emptying out the image; whittling it down to a bare minimum and slight appearance, in marked contrast to the loaded and dark subject matter they purported to represent. [129]

What this strategy amounted to, on the one hand, was a self-conscious retreat, in which the archival titles (*'Bloodstains'…'Clouds'….'Pillows'….'Suspended'*) - which were often supplemented by a definite article, thus monumentalising what they described (*'The Correspondence'…'The Servant'….'The Cry'…'The Doll'*) - would be matched by a proportionate sense of economy in the paintings themselves; leaving the viewer at a certain distance from what was taking place. Where figures were present, their expressions appeared obscure, illegible and blank, in sync with the handling that elsewhere governed the painting. In this respect, as Stefan Beyst has suggested, Image is proposed within Tuymans' paintings through a logic of *understatement*, rhetorically exploiting this tension of

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[128] Following his initial training in fine art and painting, Tuymans took a degree in the History of Art at the Vrije Universiteit in Brussels (1982-86), at which point he dropped painting altogether to experiment with film.

[129] (Fig.22) *The Architect* illustrates this point perfectly, where the fallen skier – who is barely sketched in and whose face has been blanked out - is Albert Speer, Reich Minister for Armaments and War Production in Nazi Germany and Hitler's leading architect in realising his vision.

visual bareness[130]. But Beyst is also right to develop this in counterpoint to what he deems the problematic of *overstatement* within the work: namely, the role that language and text play in relation to the paintings[131]. This is, I argue, precisely where Tuymans can be seen to *present*, where a research-base of textual supports fuelling the work's raison d'etre has created a culture in which the paintings themselves compete with the contextual arsenal that brought them into being[132]. For Beyst, this leaves Tuymans' paintings functioning as 'mere occasions for a discourse that is essentially independent from the image[133]', but as I suggested through my material analysis of *Body* in Chapter 2, this is not always the case, or at least less so in the early work.

Citing the Dutch wartime master forger Van Meegeren (Fig. 23), who, as I referred to in Chapter 2, had swindled the Nazis with Fake Vermeer paintings during World War II, as a formative influence[134], Tuymans talked of his 'distrust of the image' and the treatment of his paintings as the creation of an 'authentic forgery'[135].

The idea had emerged, Tuymans claims, as an early response in his development to the problematic position that painting occupied; recalling the way that as an art student in the late 1970s, he was "very aware of the degree to which painting was then regarded as something that could scarcely be considered contemporary.[136]" It was in these terms, he imagined, that the possibility of painting as an "authentic forgery" would function, resulting in the creation of artworks that would look older, as if they had been made in a different time period.

This early emergence within Tuymans' thinking bears uncanny parallels with that of Bengtsson's notion of a 'forged reality'. Perhaps it comes as no surprise that for Tuymans, like Bengtsson, Van Meegeren was to feature significantly as an early influence, helping to

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[130] Stefan Beyst, "Luc Tuymans: A Misunderstanding," (2007), http://d-sites.net/english/tuymans.html.
[131] Ibid.
[132] My point here is that a culture of interest regarding the source material, context and research behind Tuymans paintings has become *as* significant, if not more so, than the paintings themselves; in part fuelled by the artist. This is the crux of Beyst's argument and it is within this context, I claim, that Tuymans can be seen to *present*.
[133] Ibid.
[134] Peter (ed) Ruyffelaere, *On and by Luc Tuymans*, ed. Iwona Blazwick (United Kingdom: Whitechapel Gallery and the MIT press, 2013). p. 20.
[135] Ibid.
[136] Ibid.

shape his methodology and artistic production, despite the twenty year age gap that separated the younger Belgian from the older Swede.

Art-historically, Tuymans' strategy was a critical response to what he perceived to be an exhausted medium-specific modernism. In the first instance, the idea of 'authentic forgery' prefigured failure, where the very notion of 'forgery' bypassed any direct engagement with history. In shifting the onus of a painting's creation on to that of a pre-existing image, it functioned at the same time, to bring attention to the fact that it was not a 'copy', since there was no 'original' model that one might return to in the search for truth. It was within this capacity that Tuymans' 'forgery' would achieve its authenticity and create an irreducible 'copy'. What this notion of authentic forgery reinforced – like Bengtsson's 'forged reality' that I discussed in the last chapter - was the *power* of the simulacrum in its own right. This is to say, by championing the 'copy' as 'authentic' - in the absence of any "original" model that it refers to - the simulacrum moves *beyond* the model, transcending any inferiority that it supposedly had to it, as its substitute. Within this movement, it cuts loose from truth; no longer referring back to any "original" *as* truth. That is the whole point with Tuymans paintings; they appear 'copy-like' and outwardly anonymous, on that level, whilst internally undermining that appearance.

But for Deleuze, however, it is how the simulacrum 'as' the copy is identified that is critical, where for him – and let's consider how this resonates with Tuymans - 'the simulacrum is not just a copy, but that which overturns all copies, by *also* overturning the models: every thought becomes an aggression[137].' In other words, what is at stake, is the idea that the simulacrum is not just the return of the Same or the Similar - at the level of resemblance – but a freestanding element, as Deleuze notes, in 'those systems in which different relates to different by means of difference itself.' 'Difference-in-itself', then, is not concerned with how one thing, at the level of identity and resemblance *differs* from something else, but how that thing, 'virtually' as well as 'actually', engenders difference at an internal level[138]. One example that Deleuze gives to clarify how this might be thought is through lightning in a

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[137] Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* (London: Continuum, 2004). p. xix
[138] Deleuze develops the notion of 'difference-in-itself' as a force of virtuality and becoming outside of any a priori conditioning of how difference might be thought. Deleuze identifies such conditioning of representation through: identity in the concept, opposition in the predicate, analogy in judgement and resemblance in perception. In other words, Deleuze tries to *think* difference, as distinct from the Same, the Similar or the Copy.

night sky, which, he claims, distinguishes itself from the sky, which at the same time, does not distinguish itself from it.

For Tuymans, the process of making paintings - as has been well documented[139] - is developed in one form or another according to logic of *Chinese whispers*; a means by which the given secondary source that he is working from, for any one piece, is put through an editing sequence, in which a chain of preparatory studies and methods are deployed. For example, Tuymans will start by making a watercolour in response to the source material; take a Polaroid of the watercolour; create a drawing from the Polaroid; the final painting from the drawing; each time focusing on the minor differences that gradually emerge through the surface materiality within this sequence. Within this process, in which more often than not we only see the end product and final painting[140], 'difference' is still only achieved at the level of identity and resemblance: the final painting is slightly different *from* the drawing, which is slightly different *from* the watercolour, and so on.

On the other hand, any one iteration within this process – the watercolour created at the beginning or the final painting at the end – encapsulates difference, as it relates solely to that particular artwork. It is not just that the question of the virtual here, as it could be considered according to the becoming of intensities within any one piece, in line with Deleuze's thinking[141]; there is also the investment of labour embodied in the construction of any one piece, as it relates solely to that artwork. Each iteration is 'performed' in its repetition *differently,* as another actualisation of the power of the false that the simulacra fuel.

To consider the performative role of anonymity within Tuymans' authentic forgery, then, is to take account of this tension that manifests itself in the artist's desire to exploit the surface anomalies and differences, that present themselves within any given chain of 're'-

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[139] There are numerous references in the extensive Tuymans' corpus of what I call his methodology of *Chinese whispers*, in which he distils images through a sequence of different media and processes. See Tuymans, Ruyffelaere, and Searle, *On & by Luc Tuymans*. & Gerrit Vermeiren, Dieter Roelstraete, and Montserrat Albores Gleason, *Luc Tuymans I Don't Get It* (Gent: Ludion, 2007).

[140] This is normally the case but Tuymans does talk extensively about the development of his practice and the secondary sources he works from; often exhibiting polaroids, drawings and watercolours as well as paintings. See *Luc Tuymans I Don't Get It*. in which he describes his subjects and working processes, by referring to the archive of Polaroids, film stills and other source documents that he draws upon.

[141] What is being emphasised here is that the investment of labour - *as* labour - defining each iteration of the simulacra within each piece, only relates to itself, and that having already been experienced cannot be recognised as something that gains intensity in *becoming* – virtually and actually - which is Deleuze's point.

presentation - from the original source material to the final painting. What is being exploited and maximised within this process is the evolution of how simulacra *mutate* through different media *(Watercolour to drawing to Polaroid to painting and so on).* It is within this capacity that Tuymans' strategy can be seen to champion Nietzsche's notion of 'objectified deception' that I outlined earlier, where each iteration of the simulacra accommodates for change in its repetition.

Tuymans' practice resonates now, as it did when I left the Royal College of Art, because it confronts the question of working from secondary sources as a problematic of how simulacra function *as* illusions. Tuymans takes account of this through reflecting upon the surface materiality that manifests itself within the process of making, whilst acknowledging how this materiality is tied to the subject matter that it *appears* to 're'-present. Although my practice as a painter is very different from Tuymans, in both its methodology and content, it is how these two questions are posed and come into effect, that I will be exploring the ascetic hermit and corporate team building participant motifs within my own practice in Chapters 4 & 5.

However, what Tuymans' authentic forgery and working method exposes – and this is certainly the case with Bengtsson too – is the working assumption that the question of anonymity can only be considered intellectually: very little space is afforded within the 'doing' of painting, for the artist to 'lose' themselves within the activity; little provision appears to be made for the forces of 'making' taking over from the intellectual objective at hand. Or at least, this tension seems apparent. Perhaps on one level this is to be expected, given the nature of the forger's task, but this aspect of production and its manifestation within the resulting artwork, nevertheless, appears to be negated.

3.3   Reframing the Apollonian: Dear Painter Paint for Me

As I argued in the last chapter, one can see at a more general level how Nietzsche's conception of Apollonian and Dionysian forces configure within the making of paintings, however much the line distinguishing one from the other might prove inherently fraught. That is to say, where formal and practical reasoning is *rationalised*, on the one hand, by an

Fig.24 Martin Kippenberger, *Untitled Lieber Maler, male mir… (Dear Painter, paint for me...)*, 1983, Oil on Canvas, 200 x 130cm. Collection of Adam and Lenore Sender.

Apollonian instinct for clarity and order - accounting for judgements of colour, concept, construction, balance and so forth - as well as an awareness of how such elements 'make sense' in drawing upon particular cultural and political contexts *(That palette suits the apocalyptic theme….The coldness of her expression makes sense given what the painting is about);* the Dionysian, on the other hand, presents a counter-force, where instincts take over and 'feeling' presents a logic of 'making' and 'doing' beyond the constraints of reason *(I think she lost it in that section……I can't place what is going on there).*

However, this tension starts to collapse, or at least becomes confused, when conceptual art enters the equation and painting is reappraised within that context. By considering a conceptual conditioning of painting beyond Duchamp and the legacy of conceptual art, within what Peter Osborne might categorise as a 'post-conceptual condition' and *general artistic modernism*[142], or Jacques Ranciére, an *Aesthetic regime of Art*[143], where on both counts, in their different ways, artistic practice is conditioned by the primacy of ideas, 'aesthetic indifference[144]', and the forestalling of any historical claim to the value of craft or medium[145], the Apollonian and Dionysian become deeply entangled to the point of cancelling each other out, or simply perverted *(That painting looks 'deliberately' raw…That painting 'stages' indifference in its brushwork…..Is that painting a found object or did the artist create it?).* But it is not only at the level of Osborne's post-conceptual condition or Rancière's *Aesthetic regime* that is at issue here. Rancière's *Ethical Regime of Images*[146] also

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[142] Osborne defines three art-critical modernisms within recent critical debates, of which *Generic Artistic Modernism* is categorised as a nominalist critique of the ontology of 'art': a negation of historically received (= craft based) mediums; an affirmation of the enunciative logic of individual claims on the name of 'art'. The essential characteristic of this definition is that it is premised on the significance of Marcel Duchamp and his criterion of 'aesthetic indifference'. See Osborne, *Anywhere or Not at All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art*. p.81. & Footnote 93.

[143] The *Aesthetic regime of art (Le Régime esthétique de l'art)* abolishes the hierarchical distribution of the sensible characteristic of the representative regime of art, including the privilege of speech over visibility as well as the hierarchy of the arts, their subject matter, and their genres. By promoting the equality of represented subjects, the indifference of style with regard to content, and the immanence of meaning in things themselves, the aesthetic regime destroys the system of genres and isolates 'art' in the singular, which it identifies with the paradoxical unity of opposites: *logos* and pathos. See Jacques Ranciere, Gabriel Rockhill, and Slavoj ŽiŽek, *The Politics of Aesthetics : The Distribution of the Sensible* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013). p. 84

[144] See Footnote 93.

[145] See Footnote 93.

[146] Rancière describes his *Ethical regime of images (Le Régime éthique des images)* as a specific type of entity in which images are the object of a twofold question: the question of their origin (and consequently their truth content) and the question of their end or purpose, the uses they are put to and the effects they result in. Critical to this distinction is the idea that 'art' is not identified as such but is subsumed under the question of images. See Ranciere, Rockhill, and ŽiŽek, *The Politics of Aesthetics : The Distribution of the Sensible*. p. 16.

becomes critical, where it positions art in the same terms as everyday life[147], scrutinising how the readymade, for example, is both an everyday object but 'different'.

In this scenario, then, where art is evaluated and subsumed under the broader question of images by their end or purpose[148] - which Rancière takes from Plato's evaluation of the 'true arts' - the *Ethical Regime of Images* becomes a political vehicle for exploring the different relations between 'everyday' objects and discursive forces. In other words, art can be anything but at the same time not everything is.

The underlying conundrum with Nietzsche's formulation of the Apollonian, is that it does not - or cannot - take account of how these various regimes and conditions might play out and raise questions regarding the Apollonian-Dionysian distinction, because in coming before Duchamp, the heritage of conceptual art and 'aesthetic indifference' that lies at its heart does not enter the equation. This is to say, Nietzsche had not anticipated how the (Apollonian) 'individual' engaged in the act of making might be thought apart from the actual individual involved.

To consider the implications of this by example and assess how this might play out in accordance with the question of anonymity within the context of this research, let us consider the role of Apollonian force in Martin Kippenberger's 1981 series, *Lieber Maler, male mir (Dear painter, paint for me)* (Fig. 8)*. In this sequence of paintings, in which Kippenberger hired a Berlin sign painter (Mr Werner), to make paintings based on images he supplied, the notional 'I' of the individual, governing Apollonian force and reason in the making of art, is conceived by proxy. In this scenario, in which Kippenberger, as it were, 'sub-contracts' the execution of artworks to another party, the very supposition of Apollonian Individuality within a painting, that Nietzsche assumes in his analysis to be synonymous with the actual individual concerned, is undermined and subverted. Within this context, any tension that might unfold between the Apollonian and Dionysian within the physical artwork itself – in its appearance – is lampooned by the conceptual gesture and

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[147] Ibid.

[148] (Ibid.) In suggesting how the *Ethical regime* is determined by the end or purpose of images, Rancière – in referring to Plato – establishes how this is located within the 'true arts', as forms of knowledge that function beyond artistic simulacra that simply imitate appearances. In other words, Rancière understands images within the *Ethical regime* as retaining a political function in how they affect the ethos and mode of being of individuals and communities, through the purpose they serve.

'strategy' that Kippenberger deploys. This is to say, Mr Werner *presents* - in 'literally' making the paintings - whilst Kippenberger *retreats*; authoring the work indirectly.

Of course, the nature of intellectual calculation that underpins the series– the conceptual 'gesture' that Kippenberger deploys and the anonymous 'role' that he plays – however cerebral, is still the product of a physiological state, but unlike Nietzsche's analysis of the Apollonian in the *Birth of Tragedy* or the *Will to Power as Art*, where 'nature' is championed – albeit in rhetorical fashion - here this reconfigures within a different register. Kippenberger takes account of Nietzsche's objectified deception, but unlike Tuymans, where 'becoming' and 'change' is tightly sequenced within a series of repetitions, here they are anchored on the space hovering between Kippenberger's instructions as text and language, on the one hand, and Mr Werner's *visual* interpretation, on the other.

Nonetheless, what is clear is that Nietzsche's formulation of the Apollonian within this context needs to be re-framed in a way that takes account of this conceptual legacy of artistic practice, beyond the limitations of his original conception. It is within this capacity that I propose to re-frame the Apollonian according to what I will call the 'Alter-Apollonian': the measure of rational thought and appearance according to a dream world and *principium individuationis* beyond Duchamp[149].

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[149] I am paraphrasing this amended definition from the one that Nietzsche describes in the *Birth of Tragedy*, where he locates the Dionysian within a dream world of appearances according to Schopenhauer's *principium individuationis*: the manner in which a thing is identified as distinguished from other things. See BT (1) p.14-18.

Chapter 4: Askesis, Performance and the Ascetic ideal

4.0   Chapter Introduction

In the second half of this thesis I will be exploring the question of anonymity, as a paradox of presenting whilst retreating, through a different perspective and interpretive theme. Having explored it through the conflict that unfolds between the Apollonian and the Dionysian – which I examined through the example of Bengtsson and Kippenberger - I now intend to focus on how the question of anonymity unfolds within my own painting practice. Whilst I will retain the main argument here, in further considering how anonymity functions as something illusory and performed, this will be developed as it relates specifically to the ascetic hermit and corporate team-building participant within my paintings. To this extent I will be considering how the hermit and corporate team-building participant 'as' motifs might be thought, individually as well as collectively, as forms of subjectivity.

Nevertheless, I would like to make clear in evaluating how this will take effect, that this chapter is concerned, specifically, with the question of asceticism as it defines the hermit in art history. Although it seems important to point out, this will not be treated compendiously as an art historical survey, so much as a selective analysis in which particular themes and examples are drawn upon. Despite the fact that the second half of this thesis takes my practice at its centre, there are, nevertheless, clear and significant overlaps and sympathies with what has already been discussed. In tandem with the first two chapters, the emphasis here is very much on how anonymity is determined through opposing forces and how such forces work to both contradict and masquerade as each other. The ascetic hermit and the corporate team-building participant can be seen in this sense as unlikely bedfellows, in a similar way to how the Apollonian and Dionysian represent antithetical instincts. Similarly, both motifs revolve around an ambiguity of power, in much the same way - thinking about Bengtsson and Kippenberger – that the Apollonian and Dionysian *represents* an ambiguity of power. But there is also the way in which the nature of asceticism as a broader idea reflects the Apollonian, to the extent that both are concerned with rationality and the desire to control and retain order.

What is primary in moving away from the Apollonian and Dionysian towards the hermit and corporate team-building participant motifs, on the other hand, is how the latter, as a

pairing, revolve around a problematic of empowerment, in a way that the paradox of anonymity is turned in on the self and internalised. In that very particular sense, then, what is at stake in these last two chapters is exactly how the hermit and corporate team building participant present whilst they retreat *within* themselves, as they 'play out' anonymous roles.

Of course to begin with, the hermit and corporate team-building participant might appear, as I have suggested, as a seeming opposition: the voluntarily asocial on the one hand, met by the involuntarily social on the other. Needless to say, this is part of their intrigue *as* motifs in sharing the same platform. Furthermore, it is within this capacity, that my painting practice features images of corporate team building activities being performed within hermit landscapes taken from art history; the emphasis being very much on that single – situationally ironic - performance. And although this chapter develops around how this manifests itself through the subjectivity of the hermit, this lays the foundation for Chapter 5, in which the subjectivity of anonymity is reassessed in tandem with the corporate team building participant. Indeed, as these two motifs are addressed in these last two chapters, I will be exploring several examples from art history, as well as a small selection of my own paintings, in the attempt to gain a closer purchase on how the question of subjectivity and anonymity takes effect through the materiality and imagery of actual artworks.

However, in returning to the question of asceticism that this chapter is concerned with, what needs to be acknowledged from the outset is how different aspects of its meaning touch upon the motif of the hermit as an anonymous figure. There is no one determination of asceticism, in that sense, that accounts for its relevance within this context, creating an inherent difficulty in applying the term. One of the immediate hurdles to be faced when considering any broader definition of asceticism, is its propensity to be consumed by its own (historical) cliché, as a specifically 'religious' choice of spiritual self-discipline[150]. This does not get us anywhere, however much 'religious choice' and 'spiritual self-discipline'

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[150] This is paraphrased from Tyler T Roberts, ""This Art of Transfiguration Is Philosophy": Nietzsche's Asceticism," *The Journal of Religion: The University of Chicago Press* 76, no. 3 (1996). Although Tyler Roberts talks about this within the context of Nietzsche and how contemporary writers conflate asceticism with the ascetic ideal according to a specifically *religious* 'otherworldly' denial of life, this observation resonates with a broader tendency to treat asceticism solely from a negative religious perspective, thus negating its productive spiritual value.

might form part of the equation[151]. In recognising this, I will be looking to Wittgenstein's notion of *Family Resemblance*, to assess how the word 'asceticism' – like certain other words - is not governed by a single essence that encompasses its definition[152].

In considering how this issue of semantics unfolds within the etymology of asceticism as it lends itself to this thesis, I will examine how asceticism emerged from the word *askesis,* as the practice of self-sovereignty in the early centuries of the Greco-Roman period[153]. By focusing on this evolution and its mutation within early Christianity, in which asceticism became synonymous with a relinquishing of the self and the flesh, I will reflect upon Michel Foucault's appraisal of this transition in what he determined as *Technologies of the Self* and the late seminar lectures that he gave in 1982 at the University of Vermont. In parallel with the core theme of anonymity defining this thesis, Foucault builds on the contradiction that the condition of salvation within a tradition of Christian morality was self-renunciation, in contrast to its Greco-Roman heritage as self-possession.

By evaluating how Foucault's analysis exposes asceticism as something performed and constantly evolving, I will consider in concluding this chapter, how Nietzsche's essay *What is the Meaning of the Ascetic Ideals?* develops this further, systematically critiquing its 'meaning' as an ecosystem of human types and manifestations. In considering how key aspects of Nietzsche's assessment lend themselves to the subjectivity of the hermit within art history, I will reflect upon the illusory nature that the figure of the ascetic hermit represents. Moreover, as I address Nietzsche's study – exploring its contradictions and rhetorical force - I assess how its pluralist conception of asceticism echoes Wittgenstein's *Family Resemblance*.

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[151] My point here is that such clichés lend themselves to a particular reading of asceticism, that is both reductive and curtailing in how the term might be thought within the context of visual arts and painting in particular. Asceticism thus becomes synonymous with a certain type of inwardness, *perfection*, and purification of the soul; negating its performative and contradictory elements. For an example of the former, see Charles Riley, .A II, *The Saints of Modern Art: The Ascetic Ideal in Contemporary Painting, Sculpture, Architecture, Music, Dance, Literature, and Philosophy* (United States of America: University Press of New England, 1998).

[152] Ludwig Wittgenstein's theory of *Family Resemblance* argues that things which could be thought to be connected by one essential common feature may in fact be connected by a series of overlapping similarities, where no one feature is common to all of the things. See 4.1 Etymology and Family Resemblance p.106-111 & Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*. p. 32.

[153] This is a common theme regarding the etymology of asceticism within ancient philosophy. See Pierre Hadot and Arnold Ira Davidson, *Philosophy as a Way of Life : Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault* (Oxford [England]; New York: Blackwell, 1995). p. 128, Michel Foucault and Paul Rabinow, *Ethics : Subjectivity and Truth* (London [u.a.: Penguin Press, 2000). p. 208, Geoffrey. G Harpham, *The Ascetic Imperative in Culture and Criticism* (The University of Chicago Press, 1987). Introduction XV. Gavin Flood, *The Ascetic Self : Subjectivity, Memory and Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). p.4.

Acknowledging these various points, this chapter develops over three parts in which the question of asceticism and the ascetic hermit will be systematically addressed.

In Part 1, I start by considering how the etymology of the word 'ascetic' was introduced in to the English language in the 17th century. By locating its genesis from the Greek adjective *asketikos,* meaning 'rigorously self-disciplined and laborious', as it pertained to the (noun) *asketes*, meaning monk or hermit; I map out its evolving meaning from its Ancient Greek roots in *askesis*, in which it denoted any kind of practical training[154]. In considering its original usage as synonymous with exercise and the development of self-discipline as a self-empowering of the spirit, I assess the underlying problematic governing its mutated meaning within asceticism. Through evaluating how Wittgenstein's theory of *Family Resemblance* lends itself to the question of defining the ascetic hermit in art history according to a 'family' of nuanced meanings, I explore this by example, identifying how this manifests itself in Jusepe De Ribera's *St. Onuphrius* (1640).

In considering this transformation of *askesis* into asceticism that I sketch out in Part 1 - as it fuelled the Christian practice of self-renunciation and raises the question of anonymising the self - I introduce Foucault's late *Technologies of the Self* lectures in Part 2, in which he explores this evolution. In assessing how Foucault analyses this change by highlighting how the earlier maxim "Taking care of oneself" was usurped by the Delphic principle "Knowing oneself", I reflect upon this mutation by assessing how pictorial devices deployed in the representation of ascetic hermits echo this shift. Within this context, I scrutinise how Northern European representations, such as Willem van Mieris' *Hermit Praying in the Wilderness* (1707), differ in their manner and restraint from Southern European representations, such as Alessandro Magnasco's *Two Hermits in Meditation* (1667) and Federico Bencovich's *A Hermit* (1677-1753), which appear more outwardly theatrical.

Finally, in Part 3, whilst acknowledging the value of Wittgenstein's theory of *Family Resemblance,* I explore how Nietzsche breaks down what the ascetic ideal means within a mesh of human manifestations and types in his essay *What is the Meaning of the Ascetic Ideals?* By considering how Nietzsche wagers his critique through the *will-to-nothingness* and the ambiguity of power that the 'ascetic ideal' represents in its various guises, I reflect upon some of the key characterisations that he builds. In contemplating how Nietzsche

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[154] See Footnote 153.

assesses what the ascetic ideal means for the Artist, the Herd, the Ascetic Priest and the Philosopher, I imagine how they might apply to actual paintings by looking at Jan Adriaensz van Staveren's *Hermit in a Ruin* (1650-68) and Joseph Wright of Derby's *A Philosopher by Lamplight* (1769), as well as other paintings I introduce in Part 2.

4.1   Etymology and Family Resemblance

Derived from the Greek word *asketikos,* the adjective 'ascetic' - meaning "rigorously self-disciplined and laborious" - first appeared in the English language in the 1640s. Taken from the Greek word *asketes,* which referred to a monk or hermit, 'ascetic' appeared shortly afterwards as a noun, describing the early Christians who retired to the desert to live a solitary life of meditation and prayer[155].

Before it was naturalised into the English language in the 17th century, 'ascetic' evolved from the Greek word *askesis* - meaning "exercise", which denoted any kind of practical training in Classical Antiquity. As a 'practical' exercise *askesis* would be supported by *mathesis* - the theoretical knowledge that underpinned it - therefore any kind of art or technique had to be learned by both, by theoretical knowledge and practical training[156]. Within this broader context, physical and spiritual exercise were seen in parallel. The *gymnasion* would be the place where physical exercise would be practised alongside philosophy lessons, encouraging a culture of spiritual gymnastics[157].

This is the primary distinction that marks out *askesis* from its later Christian meaning within asceticism: as a honing of spiritual 'self-discipline', it was not something requiring quarantine and special treatment – akin to the renunciation of self that it incurs within Christianity – but, an affirmative endeavour, that demanded continual practice and training. The nurturing of *askesis* was seen as an art of living[158], like other arts, in which one would work towards a state of self-possession and self-mastery. This is how *askesis* emerged within the philosophical tradition of Stoicism in the early centuries of the Greco-Roman period, as a skill, in which one would be prepared for action and a consideration of self

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[155] "Online Etymology Dictionary," https://www.etymonline.com/word/ascetic.
[156] Michel Foucault, "Discourse and Truth: The Problematization of Parrhesia. (Six Lectures Given by Michel Foucault at Berkely, Oct-Nov. 1983)," ed. Joseph Pearson (University of California1983). p. 55
[157] Parahrased from Flood, *The Ascetic Self : Subjectivity, Memory and Tradition*. p. 4
[158] See Footnote 153.

within the reality of *this* world[159].   However, as Christianity developed in what became 'asceticism', this art of living took on a fundamental transformation, referring to a renunciation of self and of reality[160]. The self came to be seen as an obstacle that needed to be overcome, in order to gain access to another level of reality[161].

This fundamental shift of meaning in which renunciation replaces affirmation - which I will be returning to and considering shortly through exploring key elements within Michel Foucault's *Technologies of the Self* [162] - is what underpins the ascetic representation of hermits within the western canon of art history[163]. This does change slightly over time as the image of the hermit is secularised and modernity approaches[164] - and I will be addressing these developments in the next chapter – but what I want to emphasise here, is that it is through this shift and the paradoxical desire to renounce the self in order to empower it, that the hermit appears within artworks as a figure who presents whilst retreating. By virtue of the fact that hermits are even present within paintings, given their role in renouncing themselves whilst withdrawing socially, they are materially (as painted illusions) and immaterially (in their iconographic reading), in that sense, entirely present whilst absent.

This is a very different conception of 'being present' than *askesis,* where the emphasis on self-sovereignty and progression towards a heightened sense of spiritual self-discipline - which I will return to shortly through Foucault's text – does not require the individual to become anonymous to him or herself within a process of self-renunciation. Similarly, this particular question of 'presenting' whilst 'retreating' that the hermit engenders, takes on a different meaning from the Apollonian and Dionysian conflict of forces surrounding Bengtsson's paintings, that I explored in the first half of this thesis. In that context, 'presenting' was concerned with the way an individual displays rational decision making within an Apollonian act of deploying particular tactics to achieve a result, whereas in this context, 'presenting' simply denotes the *appearance* of being present.

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[159] Foucault and Rabinow, *Ethics : Subjectivity and Truth*. p.239
[160] Ibid., p. 228.
[161] Ibid., p. 238.
[162] Michel Foucault et al., *Technologies of the Self : A Seminar with Michel Foucault* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988).
[163] This is my main argument: the representation of hermits in Western art history always prefigure one or more ascetic elements as a demonstration of *self-renunciation*, in contradistinction to the origins of asceticism within late antiquity as *self-affirmation* through *askesis*; notwithstanding how the representation of Diogenes – who as I discuss at the beginning on Chapter 5 – complicates this assumption, where both renunciation and affirmation both form part of the equation.
[164] See Chapter 5 Re: 5.2   How Not to Disappear Completely p. 151-159.

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Nevertheless, the original meaning of 'ascetic', as it was introduced into the English language in denoting the "rigorously self-disciplined and laborious" monk or hermit, does not itself tally entirely with other definitions. For Geoffrey Galt Harpham in *The Ascetic Imperative in Culture and Criticism,* asceticism is a 'sub-ideological' category common to all cultures, where, Harpham argues, "all cultures impose on their members the essential ascetic discipline of "self-denial," formulated by the Christian ascetics, as the resistance to what Augustine calls "nature and nature's appetites.[165]" Needless to say, 'self-discipline' is not the same as 'self-denial' – the former suggesting a level of, but not an absolute of, the latter. Significantly, several dictionary definitions emphasise the former, summarising 'ascetic' as 'severe self-discipline and abstention from all forms of indulgence, typically for religious reasons[166]' or 'not allowing yourself physical pleasures, especially for religious reasons; related to a simple and strict way of living', without any mention of self-denial. And of course, this is not to ignore how ascetic can be described in the second instance as meaning 'austere in appearance, manner, or attitude'. My point is simply this: there is no one definition of asceticism that encapsulates its essence. If one applies this conundrum to the ascetic hermit in art history, then one can see how this problematic plays out in paintings.

Take Jusepe di Ribera's painting *St. Onuphrius* (1642) (Fig. 25) for example: here, one is immediately struck by the wasted flesh of the saint inhabiting the bulk of the picture, forming the focal point. This sense of asceticism as a 'resistance to nature's appetites' – thinking of Harpham's citing of Augustine – is both direct and dramatic. There is a palpable sense that the flesh has been relinquished literally and spiritually as an 'ascetic' commitment that St. Onuphrius has made. This is accentuated by the hermit's diverted stare towards the top right hand corner of the panel, in which his eyes appear dark and deathlike; the dilated pupil squeezing out the white of the sclera, echoing the skull in the bottom right-hand corner. Engendering the painting with an anonymous expression in which the eyes appear hollow and blank, the face thus reads as a mask. The saint appears entranced – as if in prayer– but this is a performance, as if being present within the painting

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[165] Harpham, *The Ascetic Imperative in Culture and Criticism*. p. xi-xii.
[166] I found this to be the case with the following online dictionaries amongst others:
https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/ascetic，
https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/ascetic &
https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/ascetic.
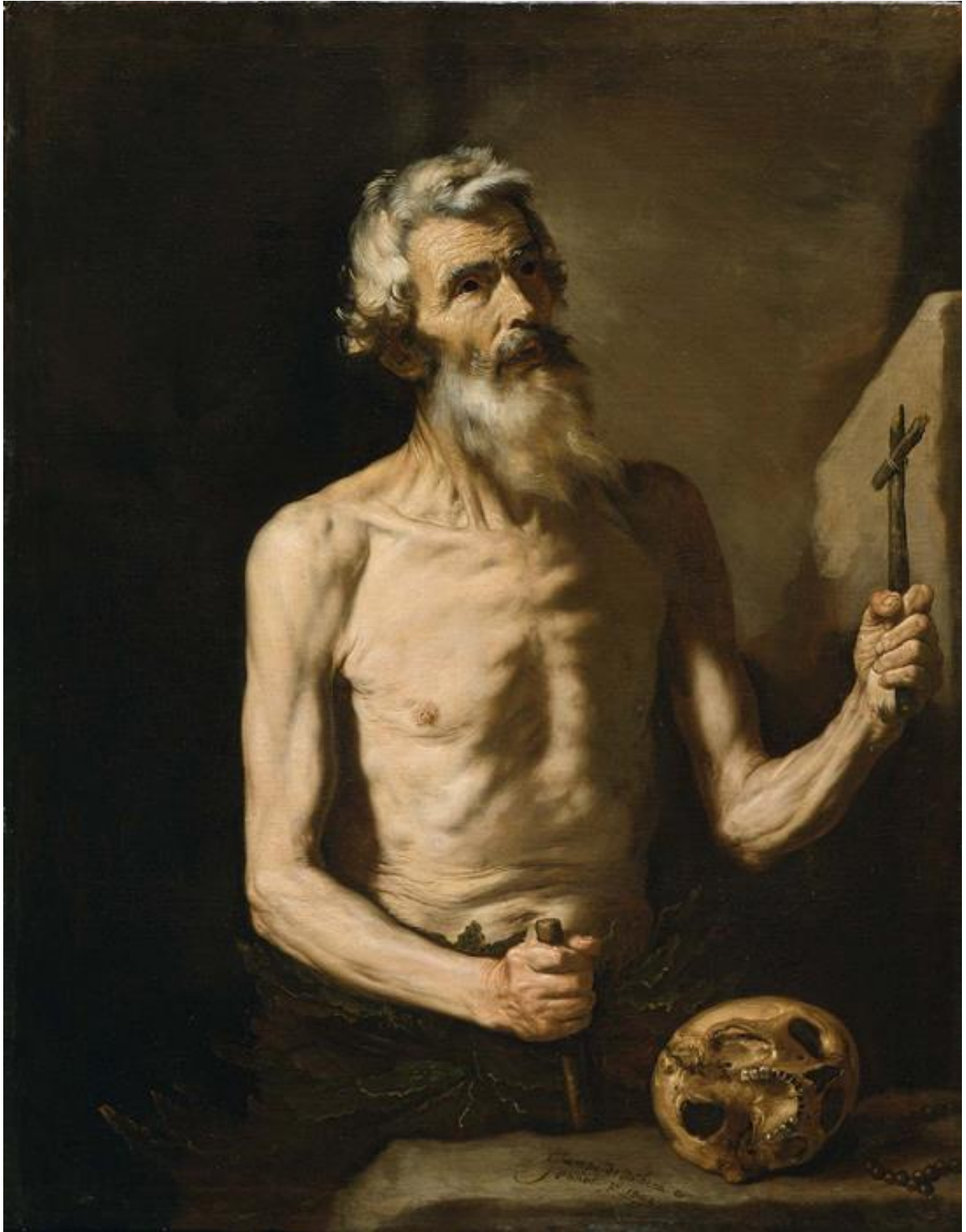
Fig. 25 Jusepe De Ribera, *St. Onuphrius,* 1642, Oil on canvas, 129.5 x 101.3 cm. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

the saint is, as it were, paradoxically - that is, spiritually – elsewhere. However, the saint is also alone in what appears to be a remote chamber or cave. This social withdrawal – this aloneness and isolation – is part of the saint's asceticism, but it is not the same thing as his relinquishing of the flesh. Similarly, the act of prayer, as an internal ascetic activity and meditative ritual that suspends the saint from the rest of the picture, is not the same as the physical conditioning of his body. If one takes this up within the painting itself, in how it works *as* a painting, an additional claim can be made for how the colour reads *ascetically*: a pared down palette governing how tone takes precedence over colour within a limited chromatic range. And yet, this appearance of an 'ascetic aesthetic' in its illusory atmospherics, is not reducible to, nor the same as, any other ascetic aspect that I have mentioned.

The point I am trying to make is that the asceticism characterising this painting and other representations of hermits within Western art history, as a question of how they achieve anonymity through a paradox of presenting whilst retreating,   is not reducible to a single *essence.* There are various 'ascetic' dimensions to be taken into consideration and I will be returning to this theme at the end of the chapter, when I explore some of the key areas surrounding the question of its meaning that Nietzsche reflects upon, in *What is the meaning of the Ascetic Ideals?*

What the word asceticism touches upon, then, within the context of the hermit – as well as within any broader application of its meaning - is what Ludwig Wittgenstein determined as the idea of *Family resemblance*[167]. For Wittgenstein, words acquire meaning from the thoughts of the person uttering them. But the problem arises where some words do not have a single essence that encompasses their definition nor an object that they stand for in reality. Within this context, Wittgenstein suggests, they retain a common feature *of* reality, or of the thoughts behind them, which is - as a single essence - the relationship between the uses of the word. It is within this capacity that Wittgenstein brings up *family resemblance* by highlighting the way in which family members resemble each other, not through a specific

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[167] The idea of *Family resemblance* occurs in Ludwig Wittgenstein's treatment of language in *Philosophical Investigations*. With family resemblance, Wittgenstein attacks conventional views on how words can have meaning. On the one hand, it attacks the traditional view that words acquire meaning from the thoughts of the person who utters them. On the other, it challenges Wittgenstein's own concept from his earlier *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus,* that words get their meaning by standing for objects in reality.

trait, but a variety of traits that are shared by some, but not all, members of a family[168]. So within the context of the hermit in art history, asceticism can be seen, inconclusively, to variously refer to:

- relinquishing the flesh

- sexual abstinence

- eradicating the will

- social withdrawal

- the surrendering of material possessions

- self-denial

- spiritual self-discipline

- continual prayer

- pleasure avoidance

- lack of colour

- disengagement from 'worldly' affairs

- purification of the soul

4.2 Foucault's Technologies of the Self

This question of assessing how asceticism applies to the hermit within art history through a variety of traits reveals the complex nature of the hermit as an anonymous figure. For it is through the individual elements of relinquishing the flesh, eradicating the will, purifying the soul, surrendering material possessions, social isolation and such like, that the hermit seeks anonymity. In order to evaluate how this came into being and extend the *askesis/asceticism* discussion further, I would like to introduce some of the key elements governing the problematic of presence and self-examination that Foucault evaluates in the late seminar series he gave at the University of Vermont in October of 1982, *Technologies of the Self*[169]. This will be developed in tandem with the broader argument I am developing, that the motif

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[168] Wittgenstein gives an example of family resemblance with the word 'game'. Although one may think of the term as having a definite meaning, Wittgenstein points out counter-examples to this idea. No single thing is common to all uses of the word 'game'. For instance, not all games are played for fun or as recreation; games like hockey and football are played professionally, and some casino games are played out of addiction. Not all games have scores or points, nor do they all have teams or any equipment that would define them as games and not some other activity. Wittgenstein says that rather than each use of the word 'game' having a relationship to a common feature of reality, or of the thoughts behind them, that is, to a single essence, the relationship between the uses of the word is more interesting. It is here that he brings up family resemblance.

[169] Foucault et al., *Technologies of the Self : A Seminar with Michel Foucault*.

of the hermit, as it is deployed within paintings, is determined through a performance in which the role of presenting whilst retreating is played out.

The *Technologies of the Self* was a concept that Foucault developed, to establish the means by which individuals, either by themselves or with the help of others, effected certain acts on their own bodies, souls, thoughts, conduct and way of being, so as to transform themselves. It was how these acts were performed in order to maintain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality[170] that Foucault takes up. Within this context, Foucault evaluates the concept of *askesis* as well as other techniques, as they existed within the stoic philosophical tradition in the first two centuries AD of the Greco-Roman period. This is established in contrast to their 'ascetic' transformation within Christian spirituality in the 4th and 5th centuries of the late Roman Empire[171]. What is central to Foucault's enquiry is the particular way in which – as I touched upon earlier - the practice of *askesis*, as well as the other techniques that he cites, as a spiritual training in self-sovereignty, were replaced by asceticism as a renouncing of the self. It is this fundamental switch, where the self is deemed impure and dispensable that Foucault is concerned with.

In mapping out this transformation, Foucault locates its emergence within the absorption of the principle "to take care of yourself": *epimeleisthai sautou* into the Delphic principle to "Know yourself" *gnōthi seauto*, as it was commonly recognised in the ancient world. Foucault goes on to note how the "care of the self" was one of the main rules for personal and social conduct in late antiquity, as it related to the art of life. Foucault's argument here, in highlighting this distinction, is to emphasise how the former became obscured over time, where the latter took precedence, despite it being implicit, originally, in all Greek and Roman culture, that in order to "know yourself" one had to take care of oneself first, in order that the Delphic principle could be brought into action[172]. It is this priority of 'knowing' above and beyond 'caring', that Foucault suggests has become central to Western culture[173] and – in the context of this study – the movement towards asceticism within the practice of self-examination.

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[170] Foucault and Rabinow, *Ethics : Subjectivity and Truth*. p. 225.
[171] Ibid., p. 226.
[172] Ibid.
[173] Ibid., p. 228.

However, it is how this 'care of the self' translates as an attending to the soul, that the ascetic hermit rejects through attempting to *purify* the soul and relinquish the self, that the theme of anonymity, I argue, evolves from. For how could it be possible for the ascetic hermit not to remain anonymous within and to him or herself, through the act of systematically purifying his soul for another world and realm of reality? As an individual, the hermit - the person with a name, a history and a past - is precisely the thing which has to be erased and overcome. At the same time, there are two accounts of 'soul' to be taken into consideration here. On the one hand, there is 'soul' as it is taken from Greek: "ψυχή psūchê", of "psukhein"; meaning "to breathe"; which constitutes the incorporeal essence of a living being's mental abilities: reason, character, feeling, consciousness, memory, perception, thinking, etc.[174]. *(This is what I feel....This is what I think…This is how I see the situation…How do you see it?)* This sense of the 'soul-as-substance' can be aligned with Aristotle's notion of the *form* or *essence* of a living thing[175]. However, there is also the soul as *activity.* This is the sense of soul that Foucault focuses on in locating how the 'care of the self' was to be determined:

'How must we take care of this principle of activity, the soul? Of what does this care consist? One must know of what the soul consists. The soul cannot know itself except by looking at itself in a similar element, a mirror. Thus, it must contemplate the divine element. In this divine contemplation, the soul will be able to discover rules to serve as a basis for just behaviour and political action. The effort of the soul to know itself is the principle on which just political action can be founded[176],

Significantly, both definitions of soul are central to the subjectivity of the hermit and corporate team-building participant that I will be discussing in Chapter 5.

This is the first distinction that marks out *askesis* from the ascetic shift towards anonymity that defines the hermit in art history: here the soul is conceived as something that has to be

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[174] This more general definition of soul is taken from Wikipedia https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soul; which is not to negate the complex way in which it configures and seeks appraisal within different philosophical and religious traditions. What is central here – outside any theological emphasis on the soul as *immortal* - is that soul is that which is immaterial and accounted for within a *living* being. This is the foundation for considering Aristotle's assessment of soul as substance, in order that the *activity* of the soul, that Foucault discusses through Plato's *Alcibiades I*, might be considered beyond it; and likewise returned to in Chapter 5 in respect of the hermit and corporate team-building participant.

[175] Aristotle and Hugh Lawson-Tancred, *De Anima (on the Soul)* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986). My point here is that a soul needs to be recognised as being an essential part of a *living* (human) being for the idea of soul as *activity* to be recognised. The latter cannot exist without the former.

[176] Ibid., p. 231.

recognised and owned by the individual[177]. It is for the individual to take responsibility for the soul as a 'caring' of the self through reflection and divine contemplation; however much the latter, whilst resonating ambiguously, does not incur a 'surrendering' of soul, akin to Christianity[178]. So with ownership, in that sense, goes identity: there is no relinquishing of the soul through purification that would render it nameless and thereby anonymous[179]. There is no retreating from oneself through surrendering the soul to god; there is only the activity of self-examination as being present to oneself[180]. The soul is part of the individual. Within this context, Foucault is very particular in using the term *Self* as a reflexive pronoun, that it retains a double meaning in denoting *Auto* – meaning the "same" – as well as conveying the notion of identity[181].

Foucault builds on this question of the 'soul' by analysing how the principle of "Taking care of oneself" emerges within Plato's dialogue *Alcibiades I*[182], *in* which the theme of caring for the self first develops. My purpose here is not to explore Plato's text, but simply to consider the latter part of Foucault's comments in recognition of this analysis, and the idea that the founding principle of caring for the soul is a political one[183]. It is through the soul recognising itself, which is to say, it is through the individual recognising their own soul that a 'caring for' and 'knowing' the soul can emerge as a form of political self-awareness. This is the point that is being made. On one level, this notion of self-recognition empowering the individual as a political choice is absent with the ascetic hermit, where the question of the individual as a choice of affirming the self is rescinded, and replaced by the need to purify the soul, in

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[177] In other words, there is no dis-owning of the soul through the ascetic desire to purify it; the soul needs attention and consistent maintenance. Foucault likens this maintenance of the soul to a farmer tending to his farm or a king to his citizenry; the emphasis being on taking pains with one's holdings and one's health as an ongoing activity not just an attitude.

[178] Although it is unclear what Socrates has in mind when he says that one must 'know the divine', the central argument here is that (a) it is not directed at any monotheistic (Christian) concept of 'divine contemplation' and (b) that one must individually confront and take account of one's soul. The emphasis here is on *ownership* as a pathway to self-knowledge. For a compelling account and reading of 'divine contemplation' within Plato's *Alcibiades I* See Daniel Werner, "The Self-Seeing Soul in the Alcibiades I," *Ancient Philosophy*, no. 33 (2013). p.1-25.

[179] What is being emphasised here is the idea that one's identity is achieved through recognising one's own soul. By surrendering one's soul to god, one would in effect be left without an identity and become anonymous.

[180] I am developing this notion of being 'present to oneself' in light of how Foucault discusses it within the context of the Stoic technique of *askēsis* (Ibid p.239)

[181] Ibid., p.230.

[182] Ibid., p.231.

[183] My point here - beyond the citation in Footnote 169 - is that Foucault's broader evaluation of 'Taking care of oneself' through recognising one's soul, throughout the text, is a political one. Furthermore, it is this political dimension of the soul that frames how I address it in the context of the hermit and corporate team-building participant in Chapter 5.3 Locating the Soul p.171-172.
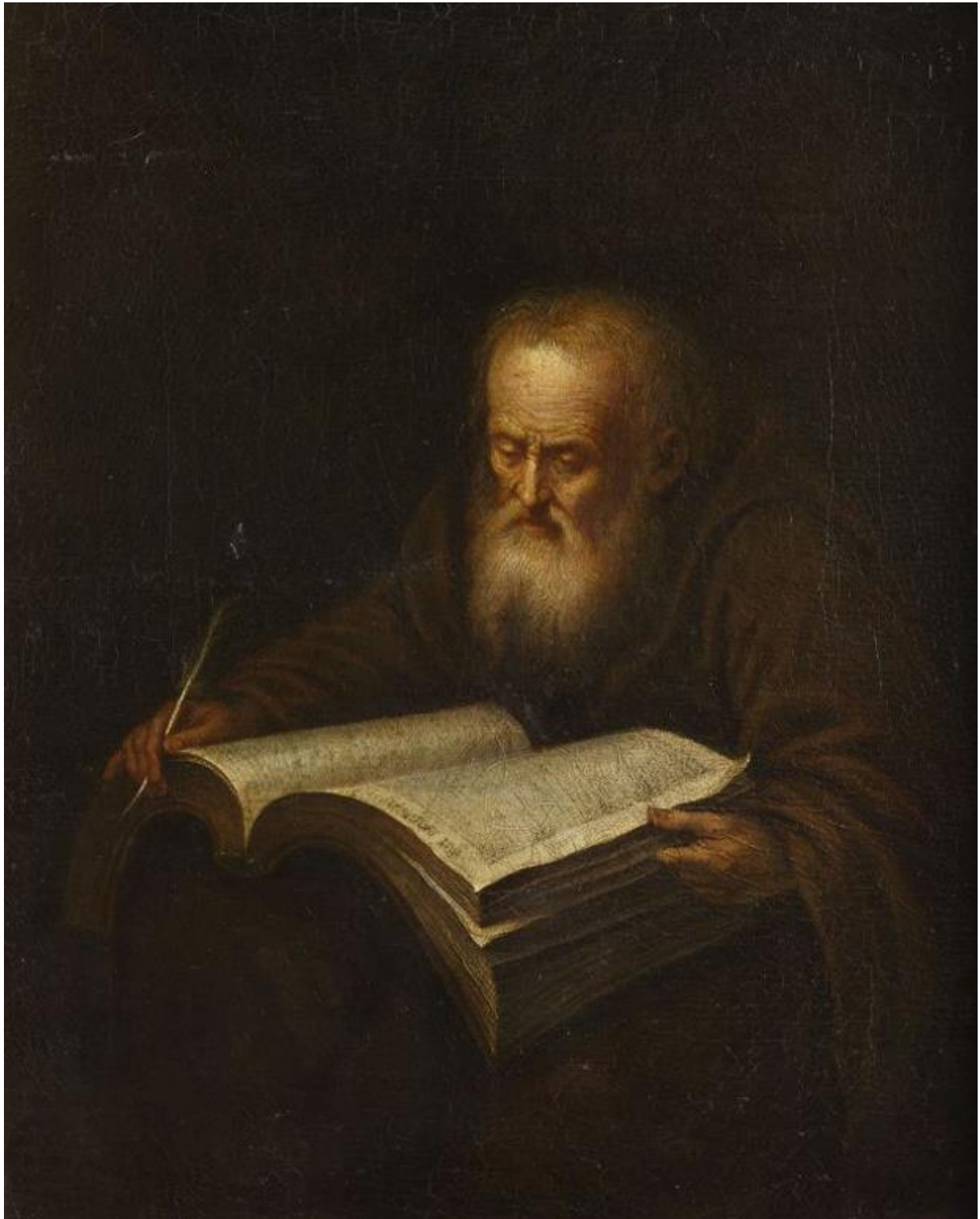
Fig. 26 Gerrit Dou, Hermit Reading the Bible, after 1635, Oil on canvas, 27.7 x 23 cm.
Israel Museum, Jerusalem.
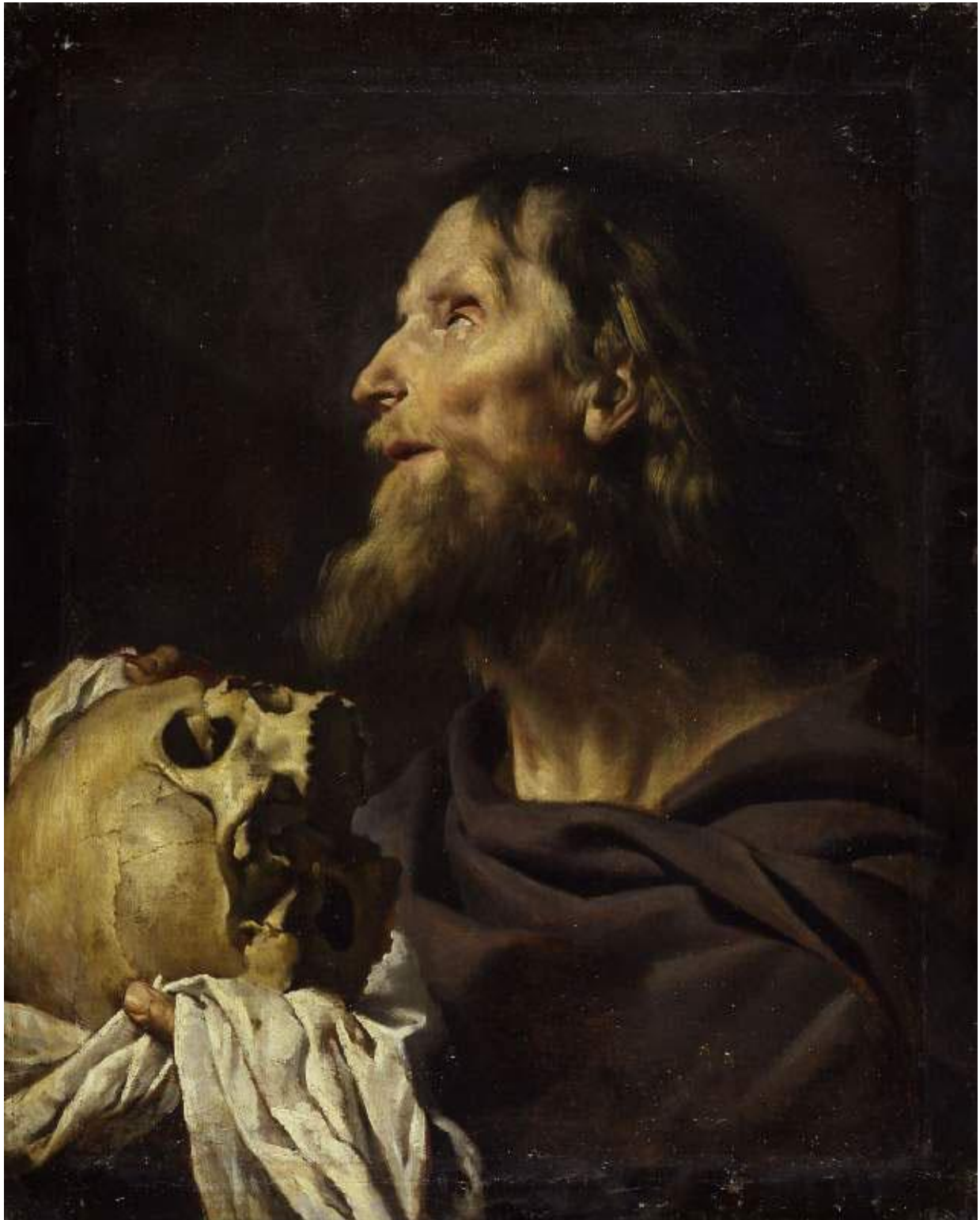
Fig. 27 Federico Bencovich, *A Hermit,* 1677-1753, Oil on canvas, 72.7 x 61.2cm.
Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.

Fig.28 Alessandro Magnasco, *Landscape with Two Hermits in Meditation,* 1700-1710, Oil on Canvas, 94 x 73 cm
Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archaeology, Oxford.
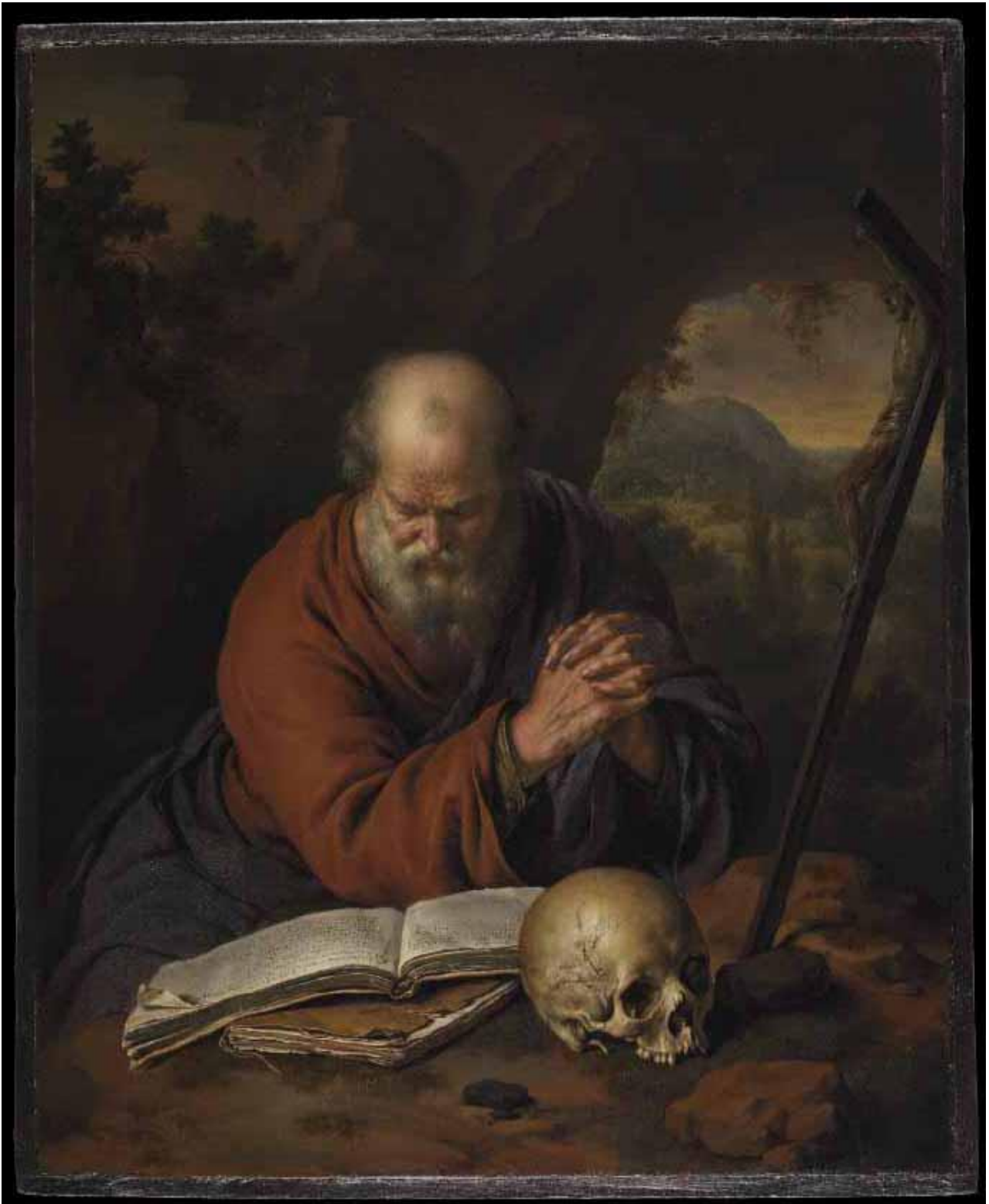
Fig. 29 Willem Van Meiris, *Hermit Praying in the Wilderness,* 1707, Oil on Panel, 21 x 17.4 cm. The Leiden Collection.

order to 'surrender' the self. Although it could be argued, on the other hand, that the initial decision to commit oneself to a life of ascetic practice and remove oneself from society is, at the same time, a political choice. Nevertheless, for Foucault there is a fundamental distinction to be made between how askesis was ritualised and performed alongside other techniques within the stoic philosophical tradition of the first few centuries AD and its mutation within Christian asceticism. In citing letters by Seneca and Marcus Aurelius[184] that examine details of daily life, the movement of the spirit, self-analysis, reading and nuances of mood, Foucault highlights, firstly, the importance of writing in the 'care of the self' during this period, but secondly - and perhaps more significantly - how they stress what the individual *did*, not what they *thought*. As an examination of daily activity and conscience, the taking care of and the knowing of the self was, Foucault claims, more of an exercise in stock-taking administration and a balancing of the books - between what was done and what needed to be done and better next time – than a ritual performed to seek out what was 'hidden' and impure, as it emerged in its later Christian variation.

With this in mind, it is significant to note, how the representation of hermits in the Western canon of art history rarely incorporate the activity of writing. There are exceptions of course[185], St. Jerome being the primary example[186], but the majority of artworks present the image of the hermit – whether as a particular saint or more generically, as a nameless ascetic – reading, praying or deep in thought. The emphasis is nearly always on what the hermit is either thinking or *imagining*, rather than where they are or what they are doing within the context of where they are. Gerrit Dou's *Hermit Reading the Bible* (After 1635) (Fig. 26) is perhaps atypical in this respect, where the enclosed anchorite holds a quill in his right hand anticipating the making of notes, however much his gaze is focused on the activity of reading. Most representations, like Jusepe di Ribera's *St. Onuphrius* that I discussed earlier, emphasise how the hermit portrayed is oblivious to, or entirely absent from, their surroundings on a psychological level. Whether this painted backdrop is simply a

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[184] Ibid., p.237-8.

[185] There are obviously some representations of hermits in the Western canon of art history featuring the activity of writing, beyond the anomaly of St. Jerome, but in the main this is rare.

[186] St. Jerome, (in Latin) *Eusebius Hieronymus*, pseudonym Sophronius, (born c. 347, Stridon, Dalmatia—died 419/420, Bethlehem) was a biblical translator, theologian and monastic leader, traditionally regarded as the most learned of the Latin Fathers. He lived for a time as a hermit, became a priest, served as secretary to Pope Damasus I, and about 389 established a monastery at Bethlehem. His numerous biblical, ascetic, monastic, and theological works profoundly influenced the early Middle Ages. He is known particularly for his Latin translation of the Bible, the Vulgate, and is considered a doctor of the church.

dark colour field that they have emerged from, like Dou's painting, a particular landscape, or simply its suggestion, there is nearly always a contradiction between the presence of the hermit in the painting as its focal point and the impression that they are *remote* and spiritually elsewhere. But it is not only that, there is often dramatic licence in how this spiritual preoccupation and worldly abandon is articulated within the painting as a performance. Various devices are used to maximise this effect: eyes are fixated upwards towards the heavens or downward towards a skull, hands are clasped anxiously in prayer, arms are waving, skies are tempestuous and dark, and shallow depths of field are deployed to accentuate the claustrophobia and intimacy of the spectacle (Fig. 27, 28 & 29).

That said, there are clear differences in how these devices are deployed and the extent to which they are deployed. For example, Gerrit Dou's *Hermit Reading the Bible,* like Willem van Meiris' Hermit *Praying in the Wilderness* (Fig. 29) reflect a more restrained - less theatrical - Northern European (protestant) sensibility. There is no outward sense of catharsis or release in the expression and handling of the hermits in these paintings; they appear relatively calm and the execution measured. Even Van Meiris' treatment of the skull and clasped hands seems more about demonstrating a certain proficiency of skill and accuracy of detail than it does about attempting to infuse the painting with an inner tension of spiritual entrancement and worldly rejection. Here the treatment is markedly sober and if anything seems to embody the image of self-sovereignty that Foucault associates with the stoics and *askesis*, more than it does anything approaching the self-denial of Christian asceticism. This is a very different reading of the ascetic nature of the hermit than the theatrics evident in Federico Bencovich's *A Hermit* (1766 – 1753) (Fig. 26) or Alessandro Magnasco's *Two Hermits in Meditation* (1667) (Fig. 27), in which, on both counts, the spiritual engagement of the hermits appears more dramatic.

Nevertheless, there is a sense in how these pictorial devices caricature the ascetic representation of the hermits in these paintings, that in so doing, the hermits are *present* on the one hand whilst *retreating* on the other; seeking to erase themselves and will another (higher) reality into existence. Foucault is very particular, considering this last point, in assessing how this performance of disclosure – either to god or to others in the community -

emerges in the Christian tradition in contrast to that of Stoicism[187]. Suggesting how penance operates as an effect of change and rupture with the self, past and world, Foucault goes on to contrast its ritualistic theatricality as a form of dissociation, with the emphasis within the Stoic tradition to achieve self-knowledge through an applied discipline of superimposing truth about the self through memorising rules and applying them. Dissociation can thus be read as an anonymising of self, achieved ritualistically, through a strategic desire to shatter one's consciousness and identity. Within this capacity, Foucault describes how the practice of *askesis* – as a specific Stoic technique, revolves around the art of anticipating real situations and modes of conduct through mental rehearsal and remembering, as a method of preparation, in order to know how one should act and respond in life. This notion of performance as a rehearsing and training of the self - as a means to empower - reads very differently from the ascetic hermit, where the emphasis is on forgetting and erasing rather than remembering.

However, as paintings, there is another role that forms part of the ascetic contradiction in these artworks. The presenting whilst retreating that the hermit ritualises is played out in front of a viewing audience. We are present. This is to say, given our role as beholders, a certain irony emerges in the showcasing of a hermit willing his own absence in a painting, in which this appearance – dramatically – contrives to negate the fact that we are party to this event. There is a sense, thinking back to what I touched upon earlier whilst discussing Bengtsson's *Richard in Paris,* of what Michael Fried describes as the *supreme fiction:* the falsification of the viewer's presence before the artwork being denied, as part of the 'internal absorption' that the painting fictitiously proposes[188].

4.3 What is the meaning of the Ascetic Ideals?

In developing this question of contradiction that the hermit plays out ascetically through different roles - and how these might be assessed as a form of subjectivity - I would now like

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[187] Stoicism is a school of Hellenistic philosophy founded by Zeno of Citium in Athens in the early 3rd century BC. The name derives from the porch *(stoa poikilê)* in the Agora at Athens decorated with mural paintings, where the members of the school congregated and their lectures were held. While Stoic physics are largely drawn from the teachings of the philosopher Heraclitus, they are heavily influenced by certain teachings of Socrates. Stoicism is predominantly a philosophy of personal ethics informed by its system of logic and its views on the natural world. According to its teachings, as social beings, the path to happiness for humans is found in accepting the moment as it presents itself, by not allowing oneself to be controlled by the desire for pleasure or fear of pain, by using one's mind to understand the world and to do one's part in nature's plan, and by working together and treating others fairly and justly.

[188] See Footnote 113.

to consider Nietzsche's third and final treatise *What is the Meaning of Ascetic Ideals?* from *On the Genealogy of Morals*. Whilst as a piece of moral philosophy, Nietzsche's text differs significantly in its analysis from Foucault's *Technologies of the Self,* where Nietzsche's 'ascetic' exposition is concerned with how the ascetic ideal becomes a value as an endpoint, both philosophers build their argument through recognising how asceticism functions as a performance.

It seems important to note, that whilst Nietzsche's *What is the Meaning of Ascetic Ideals?* is conceived as a critique of Judeo-Christian morality[189], which is not my interest here within the context of this thesis, it nevertheless lends itself in its thinking of ascetic types, to the figure of the ascetic hermit within art history, as he appears in various guises. This is its value. Part of the broader argument I will be developing, is that the hermit in art history can be seen to engender several of these ascetic archetypes simultaneously, thus affecting how one reads the hermit as an anonymous figure.

Developed as a systematic critique of what Nietzsche largely viewed as the arrested development of Judeo-Christian morality, *On the Genealogy of Morals was* first published in 1887 and forms part of his later body of writing. In building his argument through what he perceives to be the role of misplaced guilt and *resentment*[190] underlying Western culture, Nietzsche sets the scene in the first two essays for his dissection of selflessness which crescendos in the final text[191].

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[189] Although Nietzsche only makes explicit reference to the term 'Judeo-Christian' in WP 181, describing Christianity as 'emancipated Judaism', Nietzsche identifies the evolution of what he determines as a *slave* morality (BGE 195) as a 'Jewish revaluation' that Christianity inherited (GM 7). This is what is being emphasised here. However, this is not to negate beyond Nietzsche and the secondary sources that surround his writings - which liberally deploy the term 'Judeo-Christian' - that this remains a highly contested term.

[190] Ressentiment is a vengeful, petty-minded state of being that does not so much want what others have (although that is partly it) as to want others not to have it. Similar to the English word resentment, Nietzsche uses it throughout *On the Genealogy of Morals* in its French form, and defines it as the essential motor of a slave morality (see Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. R.J Hollingdale (United Kingdom: Penguin Classics 1973). 260 p.175-179. Nietzsche sees ressentiment as the core of Christian and Judaic thought and consequently the central facet of western thought more generally. In this context, ressentiment is more fully defined as the desire to live a pious existence and thereby position oneself to judge others, apportion blame, and determine responsibility.

[191] On The Genealogy of Morals is made up of three essays, all of which question and critique the value of our moral judgments based on a genealogical method whereby Nietzsche examines the origins and meanings of our different moral concepts. The first essay, "'Good and Evil", "Good and Bad" contrasts what Nietzsche calls "master morality" and "slave morality." Master morality was developed by the strong, healthy, and free, who saw their own happiness as good and named it thus. By contrast, they saw those who were weak, unhealthy, and enslaved as "bad," since their weakness was undesirable. By contrast, the slaves, feeling oppressed by these wealthy and happy masters, called the masters "evil," and called themselves "good" by contrast. The second essay, "'Guilt,' 'Bad Conscience,' and the like" deals with these particular ideas in those terms. Nietzsche traces

In assessing the question of asceticism beyond its heritage within a Judeo-Christian context, Nietzsche speculates how the *ascetic ideal,* as a metaphysical choice of 'life' or 'anti-life', applies in a number of different cases throughout human history. This examination is wagered dialectically between the ascetic ideal representing denial against the world, on the one hand, which is the main argument that Nietzsche builds, and its value in encouraging positions of spiritual growth, on the other. As this question is tackled head-on and broken down, Nietzsche locates its meaning within a number of human *types* and manifestations.

Starting with an exploration of what the ascetic ideal might mean for the 'artist', in which Nietzsche foregrounds Richard Wagner as a case in point[192], Nietzsche works through how the question of the ascetic ideal takes on different meanings for the Artist, the Philosopher, the Ascetic Priest, the Herd, the Scientist and the Noble[193]. Although it is important to recognise how the different types that Nietzsche evaluates are not necessarily mutually exclusive from each other and overlap in parts throughout the text. The purpose of my investigation is not to systematically assess how Nietzsche makes these distinctions and develops his thesis - which is more than a doctoral study in itself and can be tackled any number of ways - but simply to identify how he characterises those ascetic types that shed some light on the representation and subjectivity of the ascetic hermit in art history and the discussion so far. As I outlined in the introduction, this will involve looking at the Artist, the Herd, the Ascetic Priest and the Philosopher in particular.

It seems important to establish that Nietzsche's notion of the ascetic ideal is not commensurate with a broader conception of asceticism and is very particular in the nature

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the origins of concepts such as guilt and punishment, showing that originally they were not based on any sense of moral transgression. Rather, guilt simply meant that a debt was owed and punishment was simply a form of securing repayment. Only with the rise of slave morality did these moral concepts gain their present meanings. Nietzsche identifies bad conscience as the tendency to see ourselves as sinners and locates its origins in the need that came with the development of society to inhibit our animal instincts for aggression and cruelty and to turn them inward upon ourselves. This culminates in the third essay, "What is the meaning of ascetic ideals?" which confronts asceticism, the powerful and paradoxical force that dominates contemporary life. Nietzsche sees it as the expression of a weak, sick will. Unable to cope with its struggle against itself, the sick will sees its animal instincts, its earthly nature, as vile, sinful, and horrible. Unable to free itself from these instincts, it attempts to subdue and tame itself as much as possible. Nietzsche concludes that "man would rather will nothingness than not will."

[192] Nietzsche, "What Is the Meaning of the Ascetic Ideals?." 2 – 5. (Hereafter referred to as GM III)

[193] For a thorough examination of the ascetic archetypes that Nietzsche delineates in the text see: Aaron Ridley, *Nieztsche's Conscience: Six Character Studies from the "Genealogy"* (United States of America: Cornell University Press, 1998).

of its enquiry[194]. However, it is worth considering how Nietzsche's thinking of ascetic 'types', taps into Wittgenstein's notion of Family resemblance and the idea of responding to the ascetic hermit through a variety of 'traits', that I discussed earlier.

On one level, Nietzsche's analysis can be seen to operate within a largely reductive framework of a perceived Christian morality, to which he was vehemently opposed to and sought to undermine. One in which, as I have already mentioned, he was essentially concerned with how life was valued or dismissed. Although it is important to recognise, at the same time, how the rhetorical force of these assertions are misleading. Nietzsche's assessment of Christianity was subtle and highly nuanced within what he recognised as its complexity[195]. Furthermore, Nietzsche retained a deep ambivalence towards the ascetic ideal which remained a multi-faceted proposition for him; one to which he felt a certain affinity as a philosopher and, not least, when it came to matters of the spirit and individual empowerment. One need only look so far as the arch ascetic, Zarathustra, to get a sense of how distance and isolation becomes fertile ground for the thinker:

'Flee, my friend, into your solitude! I see you deafened by the uproar of the great men, and pricked by the stings of the small ones. Forest and rock know well how to be silent with you. Be like the tree again, the wide-branching tree that you love: calmly and attentively it leans out over the sea.[196]'

Despite his ambivalence towards the ascetic ideal, Nietzsche was acutely aware, like Foucault, of how Christian asceticism differed fundamentally from its roots in late antiquity. A significant part of Nietzsche's thinking was concerned with how Christianity had managed to usurp the affirmative and aesthetic nature of Ancient Greek culture by misplacing and devaluing its rich historical precedent, as a set of values in how to live.

Defining his broader notion of the ascetic ideal as the 'will-to-nothingness', 'nothingness' came to represent for Nietzsche a process of internalisation, in which sensuality and

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[194] This idea of a selective account of the meaning of asceticism in Nietzsche's thinking is developed from Tyler Roberts paper: Roberts, ""This Art of Transfiguration Is Philosophy": Nietzsche's Asceticism." which critically evaluates the particular anti-Christian sentiment that governs Nietzsche's formulation of the various ascetic ideals.

[195] I am thinking in particular of how Nietzsche recognises the psychological complexity of the ascetic ideal within the *slave morality* that underpins the Herd and Ascetic Priest (See Friedrich Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, trans. R.J Hollingdale (United Kingdom: Penguin Classics 1973). 260 p.175-179. But also in how Nietzsche untangles Christianity's history and morality from the figure of Jesus and what attributes as its more productive elements. See Nietzsche, Hollingdale, and Tanner, *Twilight of the Idols and the Anti-Christ*. 33 – 37. p.157-161.

[196] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. R.J Hollingdale (United Kingdom: Penguin Classics, 2003). Part one: Of the Flies of the Market-Place p.78. (hereafter abbreviated as Z)

outward desire is resisted and internal suffering is treated as an endpoint. In championing the gulf that emerges between intention, on the one hand, and it means of expression, on the other, what preoccupied Nietzsche was how this 'ideal' retained an ambiguity of power, and more particularly, how that power played out in giving suffering a *meaning*. Therefore, in claiming that the ascetic ideal was "an expression of the basic fact of the human will, its *horror vacuum* - it needs a goal - and it will rather will nothingness than not will[197] " in the opening passage, Nietzsche highlights the essence of its teleological nature:

'What is the meaning of ascetic ideals?- In the case of artists they mean nothing or too many things; in the case of philosophers and scholars something like a sense and instinct for the most favourable preconditions of higher spirituality [....] in the case of the physiologically deformed and deranged (the *majority* of mortals) an attempt to see themselves as "too good" for this world [....] in the case of priests the distinctive priestly faith, their best instrument of power, also the "supreme" license for power [....] *That* the ascetic ideal has meant so many things to man, however, is an expression of the basic fact of the human will, its *horror vacuum. it needs a goal - and* it will rather will *nothingness* than *not* will.[198]'

4.4   The Artist as a Type

In picking up the discussion from where I left it at the end of *Foucault's Technologies of the Self*, in which I considered how the ascetic hermit 'willed' his own absence from paintings in the presence of the beholder, I want to start by responding to the Artist as a type. Nietzsche's claim that Artists are not worth bothering with, because for Artists the ascetic ideal represents 'nothing or too many things', is a veiled attack on his former friend, the composer Richard Wagner. Moreover, it is with Wagner that Nietzsche characterises the Artist more generally, and who he subsequently lampoons in the first part of the text for naively taking up celibacy in old age under the philosophical influence of Schopenhauer[199]. Nietzsche's point in scrutinising Wagner is to show how it makes much more sense with artists to go straight to the source of that authority in the first place, rather than wasting time directly with the artist themselves:

'Let us, first of all, eliminate the artists: they do not stand nearly independently enough in the world and against the world for their changing valuations to deserve attention in themselves! They have at

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[197] GM III, 1.
[198] GM III, 1.
[199] GM III, 2-3.

all times been valets of some morality, philosophy, or religion [….] They always need at the very least protection, a prop, and an established authority: artists never stand apart; standing alone is contrary to their deepest instincts.[200]'

As he goes on to delineate the Artist as a type, Nietzsche rhetorically describes what he perceives to be their preoccupation with appearance and inherently false nature:

'whoever is completely and wholly an artist is to all eternity separated from the "real," the actual; [….] one can understand how he may sometimes weary to the point of desperation of the eternal "unreality" and falsity of his innermost existence.[201]'

However, this question of falsity that Nietzsche claims defines the Artist as a type, is precisely what I want to take up. My interest lies, firstly, with how the ascetic ideal for the Artist as Nietzsche describes it, is more about appearance and performance than it is reality and, secondly, how the Artist as a type is therefore identified.

Within this context several points merit consideration. Firstly, the ritual of self-renunciation that the ascetic hermit routinely demonstrates in art history appears within the illusory space of the painting itself - *not* reality. As a self-renunciative *appearance*, therefore, this takes place 'as' an illusion in front of and in recognition of the viewer. Although there is a case for Friend's notion of *supreme fiction,* which was the point I made at the end of *Foucault's Technologies of the Self*, there is also a case for this self-renunciative ritual simply being false through it being represented within the painting 'as' a painting. This is to say, even if the hermit engaged with the beholder, in recognition of the fact that they were self-renouncing and willing themselves out of the artwork, this would still only be from the illusory context of a picture. This is the case with Jan Adriaensz van Staveren's *Hermit in a Ruin* (Fig. 29), for example, where unusually – for hermits almost never engage with the viewer - the enframed monk meets the gaze of the onlooker. In this scenario, the fiction of the hermit's presence is, as it were, shared *with* the beholder, whereby the staging of the hermit's retreat from the world is held up as a sham. Moreover, the hermit *knows* that we know that he is a painted illusion. What this illusory exchange between painting and beholder sanctions is a form animism in which the painting *appears* to court our attention,

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[200] GM III, 5.
[201] GM III, 4.

recalling WJT Mitchell's critique of how images engender desire and make demands on us, beyond what they otherwise mean and do[202].

At the same time, if one suspends the illusory status of the painting to begin with, to focus solely on the iconography of the ascetic hermit as a form of subjectivity, is there not also a case for the falsity of the ascetic hermit *being* an Artist through the theatricality and dissociation of self, that the ascetic hermit performs in the event of self-renunciation? Obviously, this is less outwardly apparent in Van Staveren's case, where this ritual is internalised and the painting reflects a more sober Northern European (Dutch) handling of the iconography, akin to what I discussed earlier. However, in thinking back to where I cited Foucault earlier and the way in which he highlights this pattern of performance within the Christian ascetic tradition: could this not be viewed as an inherently false *artistic* procedure? My point here is not to detract from the primary role and identity of the ascetic hermit as a religious figure, but simply to assess the illusory and performed nature of this role and how this resonates, by the way in which ascetic hermits become present within artworks.

In considering the role of the ascetic hermit as a religious figure, however, it seems important to ascertain exactly how the ambiguity of *power* that governs Nietzsche's assessment of the 'the *majority* of mortals' in the opening passage - in what he otherwise refers to as the 'herd' – plays out. (Nietzsche's use of the term 'herd' can be read here as a reference to what Nietzsche perceives to be 'most' people, in their blind and unreflective obedience to the mass, or what he calls the 'mob'). As I noted earlier, in detailing how Foucault identifies 'asceticism' with self-renunciation, in contrast to its self-empowering roots within *askesis*, it is the paradox of empowering the will in order to give up the will that lies at the heart of this ambiguity. For Nietzsche, however, the crunch comes in establishing how this paradox can be understood and grasped as a position of power. Nietzsche's point here is that in the event that the ascetic ideal comes to represent "self-contradiction" – whereupon life is devalued and denied – this is experienced as a power surge and jouissance in which suffering is celebrated: 'We stand before a discord that wants to be discordant, that

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[202] W.J.T Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want?* (United Sates: The University of Chicago Press, 2005). Preface XV.

Fig. 30 Jan Adriaensz van Staveren, *A Hermit in a Ruin,* 1650-1658, Oil on panel, 36.5cm × 30.5cm. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

enjoys itself in this suffering and even grows more self-confident and triumphant the more its own presupposition, its physiological capacity for life, decreases. "Triumph in the ultimate agony" [203]'

In this sense, "triumph in the ultimate agony" as an empowering and mastering of the will and life's conditions, comes to represent a defining quality for the ascetic hermit, bestowing them with a particular identity. Ascetic hermits, therefore, do not remain anonymous on that level within a "state or quality of being nameless", where this state of empowerment is achieved, however much it is driven by a need to maximise self-inflicted 'suffering' and eradicate the self. That said, this empowerment takes on a different appearance in art history. Within an art historical context, in which the representation of suffering or its lack is expressed outwardly *through* the painting, this aspect of the hermit's subjectivity as an 'achievement' cannot be reconciled in what is visually present. The "triumph in the ultimate agony" as an internal and therefore immaterial state of empowerment is not the same as, and cannot be reduced to, the appearance of suffering, pain or introspection, as it might appear in an artwork representing a hermit. All the paintings discussed so far characterise suffering, pain or introspection in different ways, and yet all of them engender the same "triumph" that Nietzsche refers to. For, example in Willem van Mieris' *Hermit Praying in the Wilderness* (Fig. 28), the enclosed monk appears serenely absorbed in the ritual of prayer, echoing the measured sense of calm defining the rest of the scene. This ascetic representation, however, is markedly different from Alessandro Magnasco's *Two Hermits in Meditation* (Fig. 27) or Federico Bencovich's *A Hermit* (Fig. 26) in which this serenity is undermined where, on both counts, the hermits appear pained and possessed in their spiritual preoccupation.

Evaluating the paintings I have discussed according to an ambiguity of power in these terms, reveals the complexity and depth of ambiguity that the role of the ascetic hermit embodies. And, as I have suggested, this affects how one reads the ascetic hermit as an anonymous figure who presents, on the one hand, whilst retreating, on the other. However, there is another ascetic type that Nietzsche explores that enriches and extends this ambiguity, reframing how the subjectivity of the hermit might be appraised.

For Nietzsche, the ascetic priest represents the most problematic of all the ascetic types that he examines. Determined through a need to make the herd aware that they are to

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[203] GM III, 11.

blame for their 'suffering', the ascetic ideal for the ascetic priest represents "their best instrument of power, also the "supreme" license for power". Although Nietzsche's characterisation of the ascetic priest suggests a religious figure and 'literal' priest in that sense, Nietzsche also refers to the early image of the philosopher as an ascetic priest, in his 'gloomy caterpillar form[204]'. What is more critical and particular to the ascetic priest as a type, then, is their ability to lead with 'religious' authority and be believed by the herd, irrespective of whether they are actually religious, or for that matter represent a philosophical or ideological belief system. Within this capacity, the relationship that emerges between the ascetic priest and the herd can be identified through what Nietzsche perceives to be a question of 'health' and 'sickness'[205]. This is to say, that in their 'denial' of life in which they blame themselves for their suffering, the herd are *sick* and need to be made better. However, the ascetic priest, whose work it is to 'heal' their illness - which he does in order to strengthen his own power base - only makes their sickness worse, through reinforcing their need to blame themselves:

'The idea at issue here is the valuation the ascetic priest places on our life: he juxtaposes it (along with what pertains to it: "nature," "world," the whole sphere of becoming and transitoriness) with a quite different mode of existence which it opposes and excludes, unless it turn against itself, deny itself: in that case, the case of the ascetic life, life counts as a bridge to that other mode of existence. The ascetic treats life as a wrong road on which one must finally walk back to the point where it begins, or as a mistake that is put right by deeds-that we ought to put right: for he demands that one go along with him; where he can he compels acceptance of his evaluation of existence.[206]'

My argument for considering the ascetic priest as a type, is that whether one is responding to and assessing De Ribera's *St. Onuphrius* (Fig. 24) for example - in which a saint and Desert Father with a particular history is represented - or Bencovich's generic portrait *A Hermit* (Fig. 26), both paintings moralise at the level of representation, that the herd are to blame for their 'suffering'. In both cases, reference is made to the need to atone and surrender to god through a process of self-renunciation, whereby "life counts as a bridge to that other mode of existence". Although both hermits represent the herd on one level, through demonstrating their will of 'life *against* life' – to the extent that they represent their *own*

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[204] GM III, 10.
[205] GM III, 15.
[206] GM III, 11.

'suffering' as they are witnessed as figures by the beholder – as images, they work to empower themselves through confronting the viewer with this 'ascetic reality' as a course of action that should be followed, embodying a passive-aggressive tension. This is achieved in part through their animistic power as painted objects in conveying a *message,* but also, significantly, through their symbolic power within history, in which as portals of meaning they work and have worked, generatively, as paintings to do likewise. It is important to recognise how the ascetic priest, like the herd, comes to represent 'sickness' for Nietzsche, wherein he suggests, it is through this common theme and identification that both parties are able to understand each other[207]. Of course, what is being considered here, again, is an anthropomorphism and the *demand* that the paintings 'appear' to make on the beholder 'as' pictures, as Mitchell lays claim. Taking this into consideration, then, perhaps a case can be made away from this animistic scenario, for De Ribera's *St. Onuphrius* (Fig. 24) and any other artwork referencing particular hermits in history (Fig. 29) - beyond the paintings themselves – in championing ascetic priests through indexing their actual or claimed existence.

Ultimately the ascetic priest represents a complex and curious figure. On the one hand, he is anything but anonymous to the herd where his identity and purpose is clear. Even within the illusory context of being represented animistically within paintings - as I have been discussing - this much is true. On the other hand, however, the way in which he identifies himself within his role, in assessing how he presents whilst he retreats, is less straightforward. In this sense, his inclination to identify with the herd and recognise their need to blame themselves for their suffering clouds his own sense of judgment in who he is and how he empowers or renounces himself.

In bringing this chapter to a close, however, I would like to reflect briefly upon what the ascetic ideal means for the philosopher and how Nietzsche identifies this characterisation. As I touched upon earlier, in introducing the broader critical context in which Nietzsche conceived of, and wrote, *What is the meaning of the ascetic ideals?,* it is here that the ascetic ideal is viewed productively as coming to represent 'the most favourable preconditions of higher spirituality' and here that Nietzsche's ambivalence towards the ascetic ideal – reflecting his own position as a philosopher - reveals itself. Within this

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[207] GM III, 15.

Fig. 31 Joseph Wright of Derby, *A Philosopher by Lamplight (A Hermit Studying Anatomy,* 1769, Oil on canvas, 128.2 cm × 102.9 cm. Derby Museum and Art Gallery, UK.
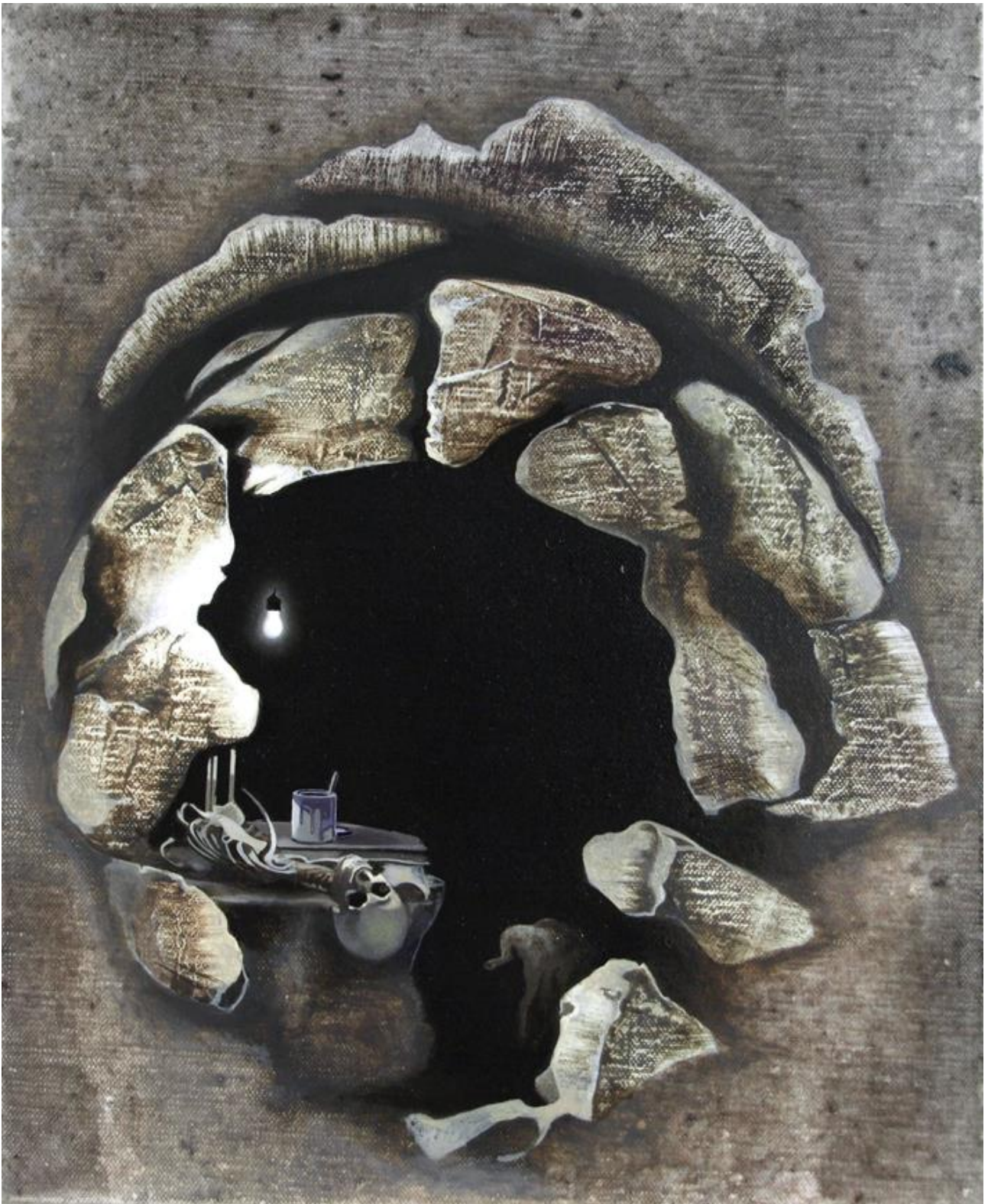
Fig. 32 Simon Willems, *Special Forces (After A Philosopher by Lamplight (A Hermit Studying Anatomy by Joseph Wright of Derby),* 2010, Oil on canvas, 35 x 30cm. Courtesy of the author.

context, then, the will-to-nothingness can be seen less as a 'will' to 'nothingness', than a stepping stone to a higher spiritual reward and necessary pre-requisite for sound thought and critical reflection. As Nietzsche summarises what this entails by way of rhetorical introduction, what he describes are the optimum conditions through which the philosopher can retain as much *distance* and independence as possible:

 'What they can least do without: freedom from compulsion, disturbance, noise, from tasks, duties, worries; clear heads; the dance, leap, and flight of ideas; good air, thin, clear, open, dry, like the air of the heights through which all animal being becomes more spiritual and acquires wings; repose in all cellar regions; all dogs nicely chained up; no barking of hostility and shaggy-haired rancour [....] all in all, they think of the ascetic ideal as the cheerful asceticism of an animal become fledged and divine, floating above life rather than in repose.[208]'

Unlike the 'triumph in the ultimate agony' underpinning the herd and the demonstrative megalomania fuelling the ascetic priest, the ambiguity of power characterising the philosopher is measured. Applied to the hermit in art history, the philosopher as a type reads as a role powered by indifference and detachment. Furthermore, as a figure who presents whilst retreating through camouflaging himself, the philosopher can be seen to anonymise himself through all available means, as Nietzsche goes on to detail: 'A voluntary obscurity perhaps, an avoidance of oneself; a dislike of noise, honour, newspapers, influence; a modest job, an everyday job, something that conceals rather than exposes one[209]'.

However, the role of the philosopher is no less *artistic* and concerned with appearance and performance than any of the other types I have discussed; it is just that within this context *appearance* and how it is played out is achieved more phlegmatically than it is emotionally.

This sense of contradiction that the philosopher represents through being entirely *distant* whilst close at hand, is the paradoxical tension that Joseph Wright of Derby builds on in *A Philosopher by Lamplight: A Hermit Studying Anatomy* (1769). In this scenario, an oversized hermit philosopher is caught dozing by two diminutive figures to the right of the picture, who appearing somewhat startled and arrested by the scene, have just stumbled upon him. However, it is not just this immediate contrast of scale that makes for the seeming

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[208] GM III, 8.
[209] Ibid.

claustrophobia that the painting reveals. The shallow lamp lit grotto in which the philosopher rests is significantly close to the picture plane, to the extent that the rocks lining the foreground beyond it, to the right, encroach upon the actual space of the beholder. The proximity of the giant thinker to the figures contained within and to us as the audience in real space is threatening, and yet the philosopher, despite his menacing proportions, appears unconcerned and peaceful in his slumber. Wright's painting succinctly illustrates how the philosopher type, as Nietzsche identifies it, persists indifferently in his remoteness at the same time as being present.

Whilst my assessment of some of the ascetic types that Nietzsche examines, as they apply to the hermit in art history, is by no means conclusive, and comes to reflect a strategic and selective engagement with the text itself, what it does reveal is the complex and multifarious nature of the hermit motif as a form of subjectivity. Clearly, the ascetic hermit cannot be read as inhabiting one, so much as several, roles at any one time. As I have shown in responding to Nietzsche's text within the context of actual paintings, one is dealing with artworks as vehicles of illusion; and the Artist as a *type* that Nietzsche delineates - in which the ascetic ideal should not be taken too seriously because it hinges on a preoccupation with appearance and performance - finds its natural home here. Similarly, in recognising how this question of fiction is motioned and comes into effect, it seems important to take stock of the role that animism and anthropomorphism play in courting the beholder. We, as the viewing audience, in that sense, set the ball in motion. Nevertheless, it is not just the way in which appearance and performance operate through the artworks 'as' artworks, that is at stake here. A more profound dimension of the theme of falsity that Nietzsche builds upon is the way in which the Herd, the Ascetic priest and the Philosopher all reflect the mask-wearing instincts of the Artist. These roles are just as much concerned with the question of appearance and how it is performed as the Artist him or herself.

On a final note, whilst thinking about the question of anonymity and the paradox of presenting whilst treating that this research is concerned with, what Nietzsche's scrutiny of the ambiguity of power in its various guises identifies within asceticism, is the inherent tension that exists for the hermit between an ambiguity of power orchestrated by emotion and *feeling,* on the one hand, and its more detached and calculated equivalent, on the other.

Chapter 5 – The Hermit and the Corporate Team-building Participant

5.0 Chapter Introduction

In Chapter 4, I explored how the meaning of asceticism underlying the representation of hermits in art history emerged from the word's Greek roots in *askesis*. By showing how *askesis* denoted a training of the self, designed to empower the individual through a nurturing of spiritual self-discipline, I contrasted this with its later meaning within Christianity, in which asceticism came to represent its opposite: self-renunciation. By considering Foucault's *Technologies of the Self* through Nietzsche's *What is the Meaning of the Ascetic Ideals?*, I demonstrated how the nature of ascetic subjectivity fuelling the representation of hermits in art history, although defined by an ambiguity of *power*, was not so much singular in its ambiguity as multifarious. This is what the different characterisations of the Artist, the Ascetic Priest, the Herd and the Philosopher applied to paintings reveal: the ascetic ideal cannot not be assessed as a contradiction, in which hermits *present* whilst they *retreat*, so much as a contradiction that raises the question *how* and in what capacity do they present whilst they retreat. At the same time, what became apparent in wagering this distinction, was how the all the ascetic types that I discussed, took on the role of the artist by prefiguring the value of *appearance*.

This performative element within asceticism as an ambiguity of power engendering different traits and agendas, according to different roles, was important to establish in order to ascertain exactly how the hermit as a motif configures within my research as a form of subjectivity. At the same time, it is essential to recognise that hermits are not necessarily ascetic[210]and that they do not mean one and the same thing. Nevertheless, in the context of art history hermits are nearly always represented ascetically[211]; this much is critical. Keeping this in mind, then, whilst considering the ambiguity of power thematic that is central to this

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[210] There are numerous representations of hermits that don't correspond with the idea of asceticism. *Bartleby the Scrivener*, for example; the short story by Herman Melville about a lawyer on Wall Street who employs a law-copyist named Bartleby, who gradually resists all requests of work and compliance with the simple reply "I would prefer not to' - whereby he lives in isolation in the office and refuses to leave - offers an alternative image of solitude; bypassing the more familiar ascetic cliché. Similarly, in Joris-Karl Huysmans *Against Nature (A Rebours)*, the decadent aesthete Jean Des Essientes, who decides to seek reclusion from the debauched excess of his former Parisian life, retreats into his own home as a means to indulge in his own fantasy world, in order to refine his catalogue of tastes; spending days luxuriating over his collections of art and literature.

[211] Or, at least until the 18th century when the secularisation of hermits gained momentum. See Re: Chapter 5.2 The Emergence of the Hermit, p. 145-151.

thesis, I will be assessing how the hermit motif emerged within my research in tandem with the corporate team-building participant.

By referring to 'corporate team-building', I am referring to the collective term denoting various types of activity – indoor, outdoor and 'event' based - that are used within organisations to strengthen social relations within teams and help define roles, often involving collaborative tasks[212]. However, in so doing, I am referring specifically to 'corporate' team-building, as distinct from team building more generally; needless to say, there is a different emphasis in how team-building activities might be thought and deployed in the NHS, than in say Google or Unilever; however much such activities might appear outwardly similar.

As I have already suggested, the hermit and corporate team-building participant appear somewhat irreconcilable, on one level, where they represent contrary interests. Moreover, for the hermit, the decision to withdraw from society remains a choice, however much that choice – ascetically – might appear ambiguous in its *power*. Although the same cannot be said for the corporate team-building participant, who, under a certain obligation, has to perform. This is where the involuntary, that is, compulsory sociality of the team-builder is fundamentally distinct from the *voluntary* asociality of the hermit.

At the same time, what this points to, on both counts, is a problematic of empowerment, which is to say, there is an inherent tension between commonality and opposition that underlies these two motifs, accounting for why I situated corporate team-building activities within hermit landscapes from art history within my paintings in the first place. What is at stake in both scenarios is how the will of the individual is, or is not, in that sense, erased. Furthermore, it is within this capacity, I suggest – above and beyond any seeming opposition that they outwardly present – that these two motifs mirror each other. What I am claiming, then, is that when it comes to the question of subjectivity, the corporate team-building participant is as much defined by an ambiguity of power as the hermit is; resistance and subversion playing a pivotal role in reframing any coercion and involuntary sociality that the

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[212] The development of 'team-building' can be traced to the human relations movement that emerged in America in the 1920s and a series of experiments that were undertaken by Harvard professor of Industrial management, Elton Mayo. Carried out at the Hawthorne Works Plant outside Chicago in what came to be known as 'The Hawthorne Experiments', this landmark study which took place over a nine year period, focused on worker behaviour at the Western Electric plant and became instrumental in establishing the importance of intergroup relations within organizations, the influences of teams on their members, and the importance of informal groups in influencing work related behaviour.

team-building participant has to experience. It is in these terms, that in building my argument, I will be focusing on how the hermit and corporate team-building participant present whilst they retreat in playing out anonymous roles, although this is not to suggest that the ambiguity of power fuelling the team builder is, therefore, ascetic. Nevertheless, what the ambiguity of power underpinning both figures does tap into is the *soul*, and in taking this question as central to their juxtaposition, I will be responding to it towards the end of the chapter.

On that particular note, it is worth considering before I assess how the hermit and corporate team-building participant might be addressed as forms of subjectivity, what criticality they respectively engender. As I have already suggested, the decision to become a hermit is, in itself, a political choice, and, as I showed through Nietzsche's summary of the Philosopher as an ascetic type and Joseph Wright's *A Philosopher by Lamplight: A Hermit Studying Anatomy,* one that can be read – at least in certain contexts - to encapsulate a necessary critical distance from society. Although what this image of the hermit philosopher suggests, is that a critical rather than a *literal* distance from society is the main priority. This is what Wright of Derby's painting lays bare: the remoteness of the Philosopher as an ascetic type contradicted by his closeness to the viewer and those that stumble across him. As Nietzsche suggests, the Philosopher is best served by a spirit able to camouflage and conceal itself[213]. But this strategy is not particular to the hermit, as the desire for self-concealment as a means to critique the conditions in which one finds oneself, is the ideal position from which the corporate team-building participant can similarly reflect[214]. The question is then pitched at exactly how the team-building participant recognises this in the first place, in order to do so.

As I established in Chapter 4, the ambiguity of power fuelling ascetic subjectivity - what Nietzsche defined as the 'will-to-nothingness' - is created in the sharp distance that exists between 'intention', on the one hand, and its means of 'expression' on the other. It is within this capacity that the 'I will' of ascetic of intention – ironically – seeks to erase itself, where the will is focused solely on the objective of overcoming the will. Irrespective of whether the

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[213] See Chapter 4.3 *What is the Meaning of the Ascetic Ideals?* p. 124 -128. & GM III, 8.
[214] My point here being that the corporate team-building participant - like the hermit – is determined through a need to hide in order to function; and it is through this hiding – as a form of *presenting* whilst *retreating* - that on both counts, an ambiguity of power manifests itself in different ways.

power base of this ambiguity reflects one or more of the various ascetic types that I discussed, the will of the hermit in art history hinges on this paradox. Nevertheless, as I have also suggested, the preoccupation with ascetic *appearance* that underpins the Artist – that Nietzsche dismisses from the outset - can be seen, in its performative qualities, to extend to the other ascetic types that I have explored[215].

This theme of responding to the paradox of ascetic subjectivity as something performed, is the question that theologian Gavin Flood takes up in his analysis of how the ascetic self becomes a 'performed' self[216]. Although for Flood, this contradiction is pursued less as a genealogy of types and how they embody power, than it is in how ascetic subjectivity takes effect as a highly ritualised performance within different religious traditions[217]. Nonetheless, Flood's emphasis on the ways in which different ascetic practices serve as enactments of memory - as they relate to particular traditions within a community - suggests a productive parallel for rethinking the ritual and enactment of corporate team building activities, which I will return to later.

What is critical to the irony of ascetic intention[218], is that it reveals rupture where the gulf between 'intention' and its means of expression emerge. Within this space, subjectivity, which can be seen as a discipline focused towards inwardness, is not directed on the ascetic's individuality or 'identity' as such, but on its own reinforcement *beyond* the self, leaving the ascetic individual anonymous. This is the case whether that ascetic intention - and therefore its ambiguity of power – is concerned with any of the ascetic types that I explored. What is significant about the idea of ascetic subjectivity to begin with, then, is that it prefigures empowerment, but where this empowerment is interiorised and rooted *against* itself[219].

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[215] This is not to negate how this question of *performance* could also be applied to the Noble and the Scientist, which are the other ascetic types that Nietzsche discusses within the text.

[216] This is Flood's central claim. See: Flood, *The Ascetic Self : Subjectivity, Memory and Tradition*. p.2.

[217] Flood's study is primarily concerned with how the ascetic self becomes a *performed* self in various Christian, Hindu and Buddhist traditions. Although he also explores the example of 20th century religious and political philosopher Simon Weil, as well as the question of how the ascetic self might configure and be appraised within modernity.

[218] This notion of the 'irony' of ascetic intention is paraphrased from Flood's text. (Ibid., p.3.)

[219] For a highly detailed and nuanced analysis of *how* empowerment is interiorised within the individual and turned 'against itself', beyond Nietzsche, see Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power : Theories in Subjection* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1997).

In stark contrast, the question of subjectivity surrounding the corporate team–building participant is governed entirely by one relating to its extrinsic *productive* value, rather than any interiorised ritual seeking to empower the individual. Of course, this is true of team-building more generally, where the fantasy of the 'collective' over the 'individual' works at the individual's expense. But what marks out the corporate team-building participant as distinctive, is that other forms of collectivity are not premised on the need for profit. Here subjectivity is wagered purely in its degree of contribution to the team, as a means to secure economic efficiency and productivity. This is where the corporate team-building participant differs fundamentally from the hermit, whose subjectivity is neither economic nor heteronomous in these terms. For the corporate team-builder, the 'production' of subjectivity, as it relates to him or her becomes a question of how it is subsumed within a process of late capitalist production[220].

At the same time, this does not mean that the team-building participant is rendered passive, incapable of resistance, quite the contrary, and it is important to recognise how the wider image of corporate team building within the public consciousness, tends to be one of bemusement and ridicule[221]: how could 'designed' fun ever be *real* fun? This is precisely where the ambiguity of power underpinning the corporate team-building participant reveals itself: at that moment when subversion works as a counterforce to those in a position of power. Nevertheless, what it does mean - and this is critical - is that the question of subjectivity is not pitched primarily at the degree of contribution that the participant makes to the team, but the *nature* of it. For what corporate team building activities feast upon and mirror in caricatured form, is the absorption of the individual's personality, affects and social relationships into a late capitalist culture of 'work' that does not appear to be work. That is their modus operandi: that corporate team building activities mobilise and

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[220] I am taking this idea of how subjectivity is produced and subsumed within a process of late capitalist production from Maurizio Lazzarato. However, it seems important to note that Lazzarato develops his thesis from Felix Guattari. See: Maurizio Lazzarato, "Immaterial Labour," in *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics*, ed. Paolo Virno and Michael Hardt (Minneapolis, Minn. [u.a.: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2010). & *Signs and Machines: Capitalism and the Production of Subjectivity*, trans. Joshua David Jordan (United States of America: Semiotext(e), 2014). & Guattari, *Chaosmosis : An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm.*

[221] I am thinking in particular of the success of TV series such as Ricky Gervais' mockumentary sitcom *The Office* – which I discuss later in the chapter - which ran from October 2001 until November 2002; as well as the more recent fly-on-on-the-wall documentary series *The Call Centre*, (BBC3 2013 – 14), which followed the staff of a call centre in Swansea. In both cases the pervasive image of corporate team building activities comes to reflect one of subversion and resistance within the public imagination.

manipulate a regime of affective and emotional labour[222] in the workplace through the vehicle of *play*. It is in these terms, that the deployment of humour and aesthetic enticement that underpins corporate team-building activity, presents a microcosm through which to interrogate the 'touchy-feely' tactics of a neo-liberal strategy in its affront to individual empowerment. That is their satirical value in being represented in artworks. Furthermore, it is within this context that my interest in corporate team building activities lies more with what they become a vehicle 'for', and emblematic 'of', politically, in their strategy, than anything else. Needless to say, the hermit does not entertain any such scenario in art history, however much his role (as I established in assessing different ascetic types) can be seen as one governed by a dynamic of emotional and affective labour[223]. In feeding on emotion and affect, what corporate team building activities magnify and demonstrate is what Maurizio Lazzarato and Antoni Negri have termed immaterial labour[224]. Immaterial labour can be taken here more broadly as the production of goods, which in their 'immaterial' status, remain physically intangible as discrete objects[225]. Critical to a Post-Fordist[226] economy, immaterial labour – at least in this scenario (which both thinkers define as its second face[227]) - prizes the production of emotion and affect as central to production. The question is then poised at *how* this production manifests itself in the first place, and to what extent it negates and disempowers the individual, on the one hand,

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[222] *Emotional labour* is the process of managing feelings and expressions to fulfil the emotional requirements of a job. More specifically, workers are expected to regulate their emotions during interactions with customers, co-workers and superiors.

[223] By extension, *Affective* labour is work carried out that is intended to produce or modify emotional experiences in people.

[224] 'Immaterial Labour' is a type of labour concerned with producing the *immaterial* content of a commodity. For Maurizio Lazzarato and Antoni Negri this can be determined on two fronts: (Firstly) as it relates to the "informational content" of a commodity; namely, skills involving new technologies, computers and cybernetics etc., and (secondly) activities relating to the production of the "cultural content" of a commodity; through activities that are not normally recognised as "work"; such as those defining and fixing cultural standards, fashions, tastes, consumer tastes and public opinion. My concern in this thesis is with the "cultural content" and the *affective* face of immaterial labour. See Lazzarato, "Immaterial Labour." & Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000). p.281-303 & Franco Berardi, *The Soul at Work : From Alienation to Autonomy* (Los Angeles; Cambridge, Mass.: Semiotext(e) ; Distributed by the MIT Press, 2009).

[225] Ibid., p.293.

[226] Post-Fordism is the dominant system of economic production, consumption, and associated socio-economic phenomena in most industrialized countries since the late 20th century. Post-Fordism brought on new ways of looking at consumption and production. The saturation of key markets brought on a turn against mass consumption and a pursuit of higher living standards. This shift brought a change in how the market was viewed from a production standpoint. Rather than being viewed as a mass market to be served by mass production, consumers began to be viewed as different groups pursuing different goals that could be better served with small batches of specialized goods.

[227] Ibid.

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whilst enabling them to find ways to resist and critique this process, on the other. What is being considered here, then, is the idea, that on both counts, anonymity lies at the heart of any appraisal and retains a performative role.

Considering this framework, this chapter develops over two parts: In Part 1, I reflect upon the hermit and corporate team building motifs, as they have unfolded within my practice and research project. I start by introducing the figure of the hermit through the narrative of the *Leopard Man of Skye,* which became the primary source material for the exhibition *How not to Disappear Completely* that I had at Gallery SE in Bergen (Norway) in 2010. This is examined retrospectively through one of the paintings I made as part of that series, *Not before Time (After Moritz Von Schwind) (2010),* and the question of formation/dissolution that it raises. This lays the foundation for considering theologian Gavin Flood's claim, that the ascetic self is a *performed* self and the question of 're-enactment' that he explores, as it relates to both the hermit and the corporate team building participant. Following this, I discuss how corporate team building activities and the notion of 'structured fun' - which underpinned my solo exhibition *You must enjoy it like this* at Galerie Polaris (Paris) in 2006 - became an appropriate research topic for investigation at the beginning of my PhD. Through considering how 'structured fun' might be appraised, since its early embodiment in the BBC series, *The Office,* I assess its more recent configuration within the ubiquitous 'like' culture of social media and a neoliberal agenda designed around gamification and positive psychology in the workplace. Finally, in Part 2, I consider how Isabelle Graw's thesis, *Painting as a Thinking Subject and Highly Valuable Quasi-Person* creates a productive space in which to reflect upon the question of anonymity and the subsumption of personality, affects and social relationships within the new economy[228]. This is developed in conclusion through the problematic of 'subjectness' and the question of anonymity within my recent practice, with a particular focus on the painting *The Terms of our Engagement* (2016).

5.1   The emergence of the hermit

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[228] The *New Economy* refers to the on-going development evolving from notions of the classical economy, as a result not only of the transition from a manufacturing-based economy to a service-based economy, but also through the new horizons that resulted from the constant emerging of new parameters of new technology and innovations. This popular use of the term started from the dot-com bubble of the late 1990s, where high growth, low inflation and high employment of this period led to overly optimistic predictions and many flawed business plans.

The figure of the hermit within the Western canon of art history, as I have shown in my assessment of ascetic subjectivity, revolves around a paradox of presenting whilst retreating. Although the decision to live apart from society, as a political choice and motion of 'retreat' – literally and/or critically - can be seen as a resistance to the values of that society; needless to say, this is implicit within every representation. To that extent, one is reminded of *Diogenes the Cynic*[229], whose simple yet unorthodox ascetic life-style in the ancient world was committed to challenging the established values of Athenian society[230], whereby the philosopher would sleep in a ceramic jar in the marketplace, behave anti-socially, eat wherever he pleased, and regularly mock Plato on his interpretation of Socrates[231] (Fig. 33). Diogenes can be seen, in that sense, to represent all the ascetic types that I outlined previously: the founding Cynic maximising the value of appearance through a programme of shock tactics, to frame his own critical position, in order that others may recognise their errors – take responsibility - and follow suit. Further still, Diogenes' provocative strategies, deployed from the vantage point of a seeming critical distance, mirror Bengtsson's method in confronting the viewer with a panoply of sign games and swastikas from the tactical anonymity of a homespun forgery. Both figures represent a type of empowerment in which their societal distance is determined simply by their degree of criticality. Although this is not to negate how the trade off in deploying such confrontational methods is that, in both cases, one appears anything *but* anonymous.

Nevertheless, at the level at which they are read as icons within paintings, where they are sanctioned within animistic scenarios, as well as the level at which this is represented as a

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[229] Diogenes was a Greek philosopher and one of the founders of Cynic philosophy. Also known as Diogenes the Cynic, he was born in Sinope (modern-day Sinope, Turkey), an Ionian colony on the Black Sea, in 412 or 404 B.C. and died at Corinth in 323 B.C. Diogenes was a controversial figure. After being exiled from Sinope for debasing the currency there – where his father minted coins for a living - Diogenes moved to Athens and criticized many cultural conventions of the city. Modelling himself on the example of Heracles, Diogenes believed that virtue was better revealed in action than in theory. He used his simple life-style and behaviour to criticize the social values and institutions of what he saw as a corrupt or at least confused society. In a highly non-traditional fashion, he had a reputation of sleeping and eating wherever he chose and took to toughening himself against nature. He declared himself a cosmopolitan and a citizen of the world rather than claiming allegiance to just one place. Diogenes made a virtue of poverty. He begged for a living and often slept in a large ceramic jar in the marketplace. He became notorious for his philosophical stunts such as carrying a lamp during the day, claiming to be looking for an honest man. He criticized and embarrassed Plato, disputed his interpretation of Socrates and sabotaged his lectures, sometimes distracting attendees by bringing food and eating during the discussions. Diogenes was also noted for having publicly mocked Alexander the Great. See Diogenes and Robin Hard, *Sayings and Anecdotes : With Other Popular Moralists* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).
[230] See Footnote 229.
[231] See Footnote 229.

denouncing of selfhood within particular religious traditions, hermits can be seen to *present* whilst they *retreat*, retaining an ambiguity of power. In taking this Janus-faced problematic and the question of individual empowerment, or lack of it, that it raises as central, I will now introduce how the hermit motif evolved within my practice and research.

In 2008, I came across a newspaper article in *The Guardian*[232] about the late Tom Leppard (who died in 2016 and whose real name was Woodbridge) and his remote life in Scotland. Otherwise known as 'The Leopard Man of Skye' for his wildcat tattoos[233] – from which he sought publicity as a means to fund his isolation – Leppard had decided, then at the age of 73, to surrender 20 years of self-imposed exile on the Isle of Skye, in order to seek retirement in a care home (Fig. 34). As a soldier in the *Special forces* prior to living as a hermit, Leppard had decided upon leaving that he wanted to escape the city and live alone in the highlands of Scotland. Through TV appearances and photographs taken for the Guinness Book of Records - in which he featured as the most tattooed man in the world[234] - Leppard managed to finance his seclusion in a derelict bothy beside Skye's *Loch a Beiste*[235]. Receiving both local and international attention, Leppard sustained this lifestyle for more than two decades.

What interested me about the *Leopard Man* story beyond its absurdity was the thinking that lay behind Leppard's actions and the course of events that culminated in his eventual retirement. On one level, Leppard's decision to isolate himself functioned, as I've suggested, as a form of *resistance*. And yet, on another level, that choice was conditioned by a fabrication, in which 'The Leopard Man' could only be sustained through cunning entrepreneurship and counter-intuitive exhibitionism. This raised the question as to how Leppard's life-choice was critically informed in the first place, where in resisting society he was still sustained by it.

Leppard had made it quite clear when interviewed in 2001 and 2008, that the publicity shots

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[232] Neil Stephen, "The Cat Who Came in from the Cold," *The Guardian*, Tuesday October 28th 2008.

[233] Tom Leppard, (born Tom Wooldridge) also known as the Leopard Man of Skye, (14 October 1935 - 12 June 2016) was an English-born soldier, previously considered by Guinness World Records to be the world's most tattooed man and later recognised as the most tattooed senior citizen. He is said to have spent £5,500 on his extensive body modifications, which covered his skin nearly entirely with a leopard-like coloured pattern.

[234] See Footnote 233.

[235] Held up by a make-shift metal roof with no windows, electricity, or heating, Leppard slept on a bed made up of polystyrene board; cooking canned food on a Primus stove, which he stocked-up on from weekly 5-mile round trips to the mainland.

Fig. 33 John William Waterhouse, *Diogenes,* 1882, 208.3 x 134.6 cm, Oil on Canvas.
Courtesy of Art Gallery new South Wales.

Fig. 34 *Leopard Man of Skye,* Guinness World Records ©

he was paid for were a necessary evil that he had to endure in order to supplement his pension[236] and not something he enjoyed. Similarly, other aspects of Leppard's seclusion suggested a more familiar ascetic image; as a devout Catholic the former serviceman prayed religiously every day for three hours. However, despite expressing a keen disinterest in others and desire to live alone, which was supported by next to no contact with his family[237], Leppard proved popular with nearby communities on the island[238].

The *Leopard Man* presented a mesh of contradiction. Like the hermit paintings I addressed in Chapter 4, Leppard *presented* on the one hand – routinely showcasing his tattooed body in order to court publicity and make some money - whilst *retreating* on the other, otherwise isolating himself. As a contrary state of affairs, this was accentuated by the way in which the former soldier's ascetic discipline in lengthy daily prayer, evidenced a more serious commitment within his life choice. However, unlike a hermit represented by dead matter in art history, Leppard's agency and artistic ingenuity took on a different meaning. Leppard's self-exploitation resonated with the theme of falsity that Nietzsche claims defines the artist: appearance being prized at a premium above and beyond reality[239]. But it also resonated with what Lazzarato and Negri describe as immaterial labour: a means by which Leppard's publicity and *affective* interaction created an intangible product in its generation of feelings, in which Leppard exploited *himself*[240]. Furthermore, there was no question of Leppard's life choice entertaining a "life" or "anti-life" scenario, where his thinking was simply directed at *appearing* to withdraw, not actually withdrawing. Leppard represented an artist-hermit, but one in which the theme of anonymity diminished as soon as he had to take to the stage. This was markedly different from Diogenes, where in contrast, Leppard's actions splintered in different directions to satisfy immediate needs. However, what Leppard's story also suggested, on another level of anonymity altogether, is that his decision to live alone

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[236] Stephen, "The Cat Who Came in from the Cold."

[237] Ibid.

[238] As Neil Stephen noted in his *Guardian* article on Leppard in 2008 (See Footnote 232), one such local, Darren Wainwright from Kyleachin who paid him regular visits even explained how tourists in the summer months were shocked to see The Leopard Man waving at them from the rocks in nothing more than a gold thong.

[239] The point being that *appearance* – above and beyond reality - is what is important here and central to the Artist as a type. This is what I explored through Nietzsche's *What is the Meaning of the Ascetic Ideals?* and established in Chapter 4.

[240] The 'self-exploitative' dimension of immaterial labour is something that Lazzarato in particular explores in depth (See Footnote 224). However, See also Byung-Chul Han and Erik Butler, *Psychopolitics : Neoliberalism and New Technologies of Power* (London; Brooklyn, NY: Verso, 2017).

depended on the socio-political reality that however much one may wish to withdraw from society and *resist*, one is still implicated in capitalism.

5.2   How Not to Disappear Completely

My initial response to the article about *The Leopard Man* and the questions it raised, culminated in an exhibition of paintings I had at Gallery SE in Bergen (Norway) in 2010, titled *How Not to Disappear Completely,* from which this thesis and research project takes its name. As a body of work this emerged through a database of images I set up and sourced from the Internet, which featured different representations of hermits from art history. At this point, my thinking focused primarily on the notion of Leppard's retirement and the performative nature of his isolation honouring a particular career strategy, from which he did indeed withdraw.

To begin with, this research into different representations of hermits from art history was largely arbitrary. What seemed more critical to my thinking at this stage was simply that if a hermit was present within a painting they could – like *The Leopard Man* - just as easily withdraw and be erased from the artwork. What seemed more important than assimilating the various historical and cultural details that contextualised each painting that I was sourcing, was an underlying concern with their performative nature. The *act* of erasure became the driving conceptual force behind the project, omitting the sole detail that the rest of the picture was designed around, exposing the atmospherics that remained. This was what the work was about, as I understood it at the time, and *not* the particulars governing each original painting.

Of course, this act of appropriation raised the question as to how the original artwork, would be treated in my subsequent reworking of it: what would be left and added to within that process of erasure? In evacuating the hermit landscapes, only the backdrop would remain: but what would this space now become within this 'presence of absence'?

The project became about the least important part of the painting – the *mise en scène* - which in most cases accounted for most of the artwork's surface area. However, in recognising this aspect as the focal point of the series, and bringing attention to the painting as a stage, allowed me to identify the absent hermit's status as a *performer*. Within this

context, the various details contained within the painting, either derived from the original artwork, or achieved through my subsequent intervention with it, would serve as 'props'.

As my archive of hermit painting images grew and I spent more time with individual pieces, I realised that the differences between them could not be ignored *beyond* the primary conceptual gesture to remove the hermit from each painting. This was critical: the image of ascetic isolation, as I perceived it in different artworks, morphed and reconfigured over time according to different historical and cultural variables.

As Foucault made clear in *Technologies of the Self, askesis* changed over time. If one considers, for example, the representation of solitude in David Teniers the Younger's *The Temptation of Saint Anthony the Hermit,* (1600 – 1640) (Fig. 35), where the saint appears shaken and trapped by the demons that surround him - or Jose de Ribera's *St. Paul the hermit* (1640) (Fig.35), where St. Paul lies in a cave with his hands clasped at his emaciated chest, whilst he stares intently on a centrally placed skull - the association of solitude with sin and self-mortification respectively, is entirely satisfied. In these scenarios, both protagonists come to represent the herd and the ascetic priest. However, if one turns to later representations, such as Joseph-Marie Vein's *Sleeping Hermit*[241] (1750) (Fig. 37), a different emphasis is revealed, in which any such identification with penitence is undermined, beyond which, the skull's presence appears unobtrusive and dislocated at the edge of the canvas. In Vein's painting, the unconscious monk that inhabits the bulk of the panel appears blissfully asleep, having unwittingly released the violin he was playing beforehand. Centrally placed, the hermit's presence appeals to a narrative of peaceful slumber and the pleasure of music, thus suspending any former ascetic image of internal torture. Similarly, in Carl Spitzweg's *Hermit in Love*[242] (Fig. 38), in which the hermit monk leans over a seated woman to his right, as if to kiss her or express his feelings, the underlying (ascetic) principle of surrendering sensual desire is entirely dispensed with. There is no "triumph in the ultimate agony" here, where the role of the monk is to simply

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[241] Born in Montpellier, Joseph-Marie Vien (1716 – 1809) was a French Neo-classical painter. *Sleeping Hermit (Ermite Endormi)* is one of the paintings that Michael Fried considers for its themes of absorption in *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot.* See also Nathaniel Owen Wallace, *Scanning the Hypnoglyph : Sleep in Modernist and Postmodern Representation* (Brill/ Rodolphi, 2016).

[242] Carl Spitzweg (1808 –1885) was a self-taught German romantic poet and painter. He is considered to be one of the most important artists of the Biedermeier era. Spitzweg returned to the hermit motif several times. What is significant and distinct in Spitzweg's handling of the subject matter, is the way in which he infuses images of retreat and asceticism within an idyllic image of human contentment and sentimentality.

honour being present. What is intriguing in these later pieces, then, is how the outward *aesthetic* of Christian monastic solitude remains constant from earlier representations, through the appropriate accoutrements[243], and yet conflicts internally with the display of human desire and contentment. There is a noticeable distance between the religious 'role' that the respective hermits in these paintings are supposed to inhabit and the activity they are actually engaged in and work to display. Both figures satisfy the image of *being* the hermit, whilst retreating from that appearance.

It is worth considering the evolving secularisation of hermits within broader European society during this period. As historian, Gordon Campbell, explores in *The Hermit in the Garden: From Imperial Rome to Ornamental Gnome,* a fashion for ornamental live-in garden hermits, located on the edge of large country estates, flowered throughout the Georgian period in the United Kingdom and Europe[244]. Within this context, landowners would advertise in newspapers for suitable candidates[245] to indulge in the fantasy, if they did not entertain it themselves, which would be reflected, similarly, by aspiring hermits seeking prospective employment[246]. In what can be seen as an eccentric fad and absurd novelty, Campbell locates the ideological foundations of such secularisation to the philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau, whose advocacy for an uncorrupted natural world was matched by his cultivation of wild and untamed garden landscapes[247] that championed that ideal. (Fig. 39) Although I am reticent to claim any direct relation, linking what can be seen as in increasing humanisation of hermits within art history, with a burgeoning curiosity for their quirk and appeal as live-in performers within country estates, what is clear is that some level of change from the tortured image of the Christian ascetic hermit to that of a secular one was taking place.

Moritz Von Schwind's *A Player with a Hermit* (1846) (Fig. 40) was one of the earliest artworks to form part of my research and a central part of the *How Not to Disappear Completely* exhibition. Born in Austria in 1804, Von Schwind was an early Romantic who

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[243] Accoutrements can be taken here as meaning everything specifically religious in this context, such as the monk's robes, the copy of the bible, the presence of a skull and all details that pertain to a traditional Christian image of monastic asceticism.
[244] See Gordon Campbell, *The Hermit in the Garden from Imperial Rome to Ornamental Gnome* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). p.2.
[245] Ibid., p.55.
[246] Ibid., p.56.
[247] Ibid., p.31.

Fig. 35 David Teniers (the Younger), *The Temptation of St. Anthony,* 1600-1640, Oil on panel, 48.58 x 63.82 cm. Minneapolis Institute of Art, USA.

Fig. 36 Jusepe de Ribera, *St. Paul the Hermit*, 1640, Oil on canvas, 143 x 143cm. Museo del Prado, Madrid.

Fig. 37 Joseph-Marie Vien, *The Sleeping Hermit,* 1750, Oil on canvas, 228 x 148cm. Louvre, Paris.

Fig. 38 Carl Spitzweg, *A Hermit in Love,* 1875, Oil on canvas, 33.5 x 40.3 cm (unable to verify location).
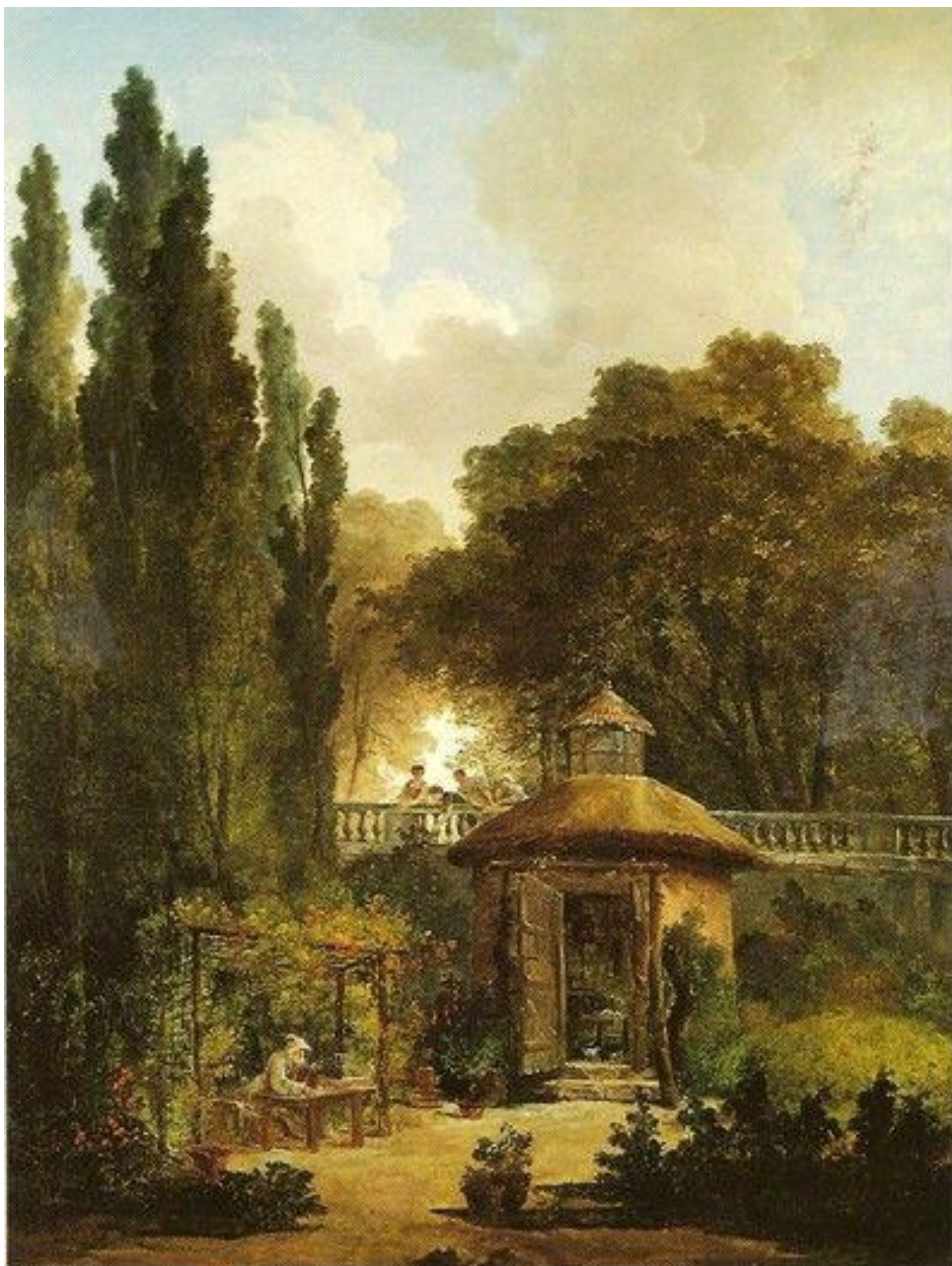
Fig. 39 Hubert Robert, *A Hermit in a Garden*, 1790, Oil on canvas, 228 x 148cm. Speed Art Museum.

drew heavily upon folklore and chivalry, in order create lyrical scenes that mythically referred to an idealised Austria[248]. Within this context, the pipe player, who sits at the heart of the picture playing for the hermit, mirrors the otherworldliness that penetrates the scene, as if caught in a moment of reverie. Echoing the changing sentiment and paradoxical nature of religious solitude that I highlighted in *Sleeping Hermit* and *Hermit in Love,* what became significant about Von Schwind's painting, at this early stage of my research, was that it represented the motif of the hermit, again, through an image of pleasure.

This was critical: unlike most previous representations of hermits within the Western canon of art history, which hinge upon a Christian image of penitence and guilt, here the ascetic recluse allows himself to be drawn to the music in order to *enjoy* it. What is nascent to this effect – what is at stake – is the idea of pleasure as a licence for self-empowerment. What becomes significant about the idea of pleasure for the hermit within the Western tradition at this point, then, is that for centuries - as I have shown - pleasure had been treated as something to be overcome and denied. This is, I would argue, why it matters that the ascetic recluse is drawn to the music, however much his presence might appear unobtrusive and indirect.

5.3   Not Before Time

My response to *A Player with a Hermit* became a reworking of it titled *Not before time (After Moritz Von Schwind)* (2010) (Fig. 41). In my version, both hermit and player, in accordance with my original plan and the performative nature of Leppard's retirement, would be taken out of the picture. What would remain – and this was the governing principle at the time that defined the whole series – were details replacing the figures, indexing an image of *remoteness,* whilst referring to a technology that could overcome it. So the satellite dish that leans against the tree - that in the original painting marks out the edge of the hermit's world, where he opens the gate to listen to the player – was an attempt to satirise the fabricated nature of isolation that the Leopard man story revealed, whilst at the same time burlesquing the 'absent' presence of the pipe player at the heart of Von Schwind's painting. What was important, as I discussed earlier, was that this detail functioned as a stage prop

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[248] Born in Vienna, Moritz von Schwind, (1804 – 1871) was an Austrian-born German painter and a leading early Romantic portrayer of an idealized Austria and Germany, in which images of knights and castles often feature.

Fig. 40 Moritz Von Schwind, *A Player with a Hermit,* 1846, Oil on cardboard, 61 x 46cm. Neue Pinakothek, Munich.
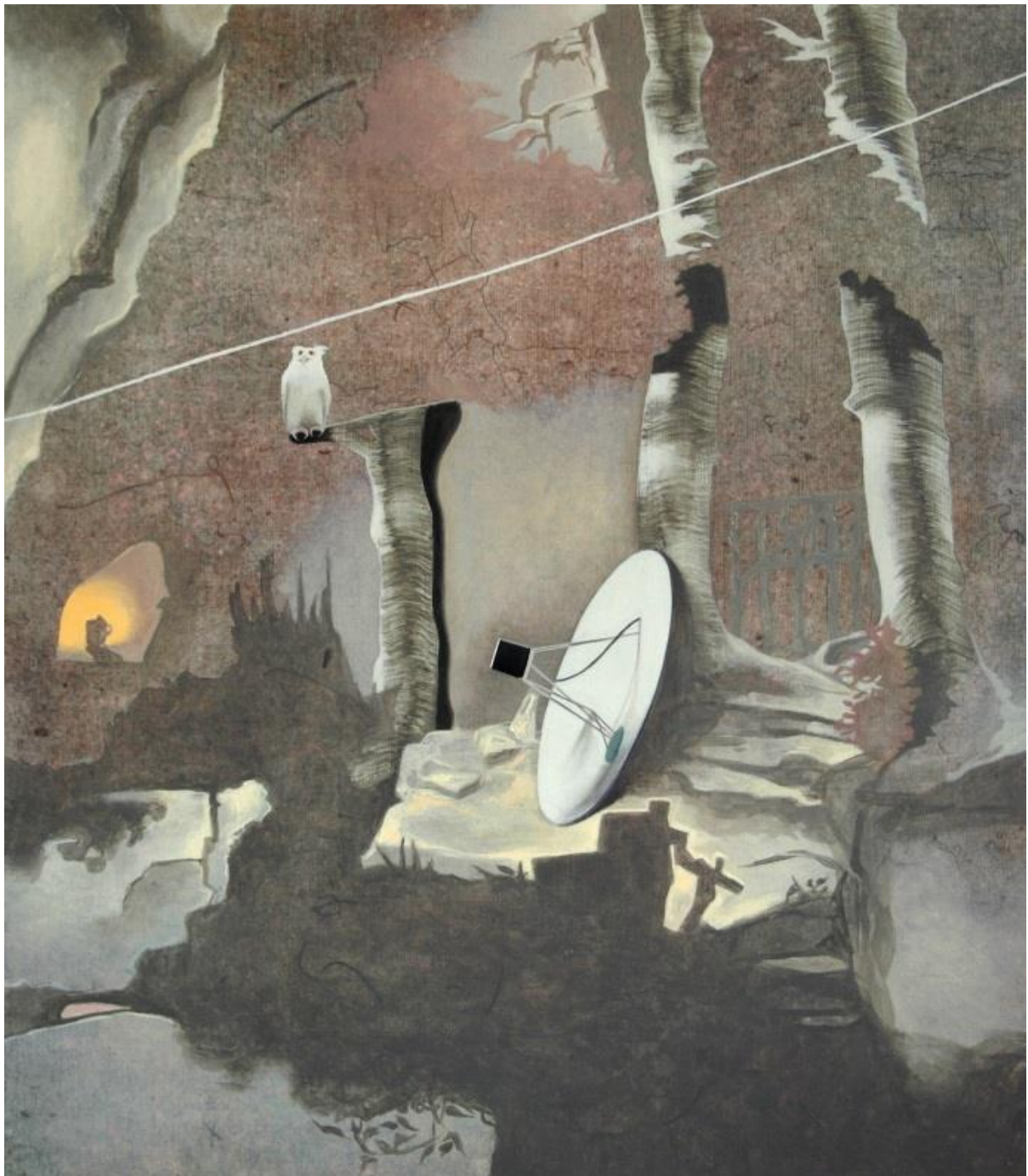
Fig. 41 Simon Willems, *Not before Time (after Moritz von Schwind A Player with a Hermit* 1846*), 2010, Oil and Acrylic on linen, 80 x 70cm. Image courtesy of the author*.

within the vacated landscape and took on a performative role. Within this context, the satellite dish as a transmitter of communication would retain a double function: appealing to the fictitious world of the painting, whilst courting the real world of the beholder.

Formally, *Not Before Time* clinically repeats the pictorial space and most of the detailing that governs *A Player with a Hermit*. Achieved mechanically, using an overhead slide projector to transcribe the essential drawing structure from the original artwork's reproduction on to a blank canvas, this strategy remained constant throughout the series. However, the idea of creating a simulacrum, which would then feature additional details or omissions from the original image seemed problematic. In simply recreating the appearance of *A Player with a Hermit,* in its historical style, and interposing it with other (figurative) elements, the painting would become a 'quotational[249]'exercise. It became vital that any 'reading' in these terms of what I was doing should be avoided, so that the materiality of the paint worked, in its presence, to slow down the process of art-historical recognition in the first instance, however much I was referring to specific paintings from particular periods. What was central to my thinking was that as paintings, firstly, my work would not engage *fully* with all aspects of the original artwork, as they presented themselves, in terms of facture, colour and so forth, and , secondly, that the materiality of the paint as a substance articulating the image within the painting, would dilate and contract throughout the surface. What I wanted was a visual statement conditioned by an ambiguous emerging/submerging material presence of paint, which worked *beyond* the appearance of a simple representational strategy.

So although, as an image, *Not Before Time* delineates much of the representational features of *A Player with a Hermit,* such as the silhouetted foreground, the three trees and the make-shift stove that cuts into the rock-face, other aspects of the surface take their illusory cue from the material properties of the paint, which emerge from an earlier stage in the painting's development. What manifests itself as a result is a push-pulling with what

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[249] Within this context of the work becoming a 'quotational' exercise, I am thinking in particular of the kind of appropriative strategies deployed by British painter Ged Quinn. Much as Quinn's technically accomplished transcriptions from art history demonstrate great skill and playful conceptual cunning in their allegorical appropriation of 'contemporary' imagery, they nevertheless plateau as paintings in their desire to check-list their own art-historical credentials. Through engaging in this way meta-pictorially - according to a differential of style - they threaten to sell out reductively to their own semiotic end point. It is my contention that Quinn's paintings are unable to see beyond their own desire for representational finality on that level and therefore suggest their own limits.

determines the figure-ground relationship within the picture, where the foliage of the tree emerging from the landscape above the player in the original painting, can only be determined in my version through its relation to the grey opaque areas of cliff and crag that are described around it. This 'toying' with the surface, which lends the foliage a spectral presence and outward quality of reading as negative space, collapses into the diagonal shadow containing the stove towards the left-hand side of the painting; suggesting a development of, or disintegration of - depending upon how you read it - the painting's image. It was this particular surface tension of confusing the temporal reading of the painting's construction, as a means to open up the question as to whether its representational structure was developing or evaporating, that I wanted to exploit.

5.4   Formation contra Dissolution

This ambiguity of an emerging yet disintegrating material presence of paint manifesting itself through the artwork's image, became central because it hinged on a tension between opposing forces: *formation* on the one hand, *dissolution* on the other. Any notion of what was being 'represented' within the painting would be poised somewhere between these two registers. What became critical was that this ambiguity between formation and dissolution would satisfy another dimension of becoming and change, beyond the one suggested within the materiality of the painting's image: the ascetic ambiguity of power underpinning the hermit.

In parallel with Nietzsche's *will-to-nothingness* and the various forms of ambiguous power accounting for the ascetic subjectivity of the hermit in art history, what needed to be established was a symbiosis, between the presentation and erasure of materiality within the painting and the narrative of the hermit more generally. What this would create would be a connection, in which this exchange within the artwork could be seen to relate to "illusion", as a kind of erasure - or at least the pretence of an erasure - of the *real.* What would be taken as primary within the paradoxical motion of the *will-to-nothingness* to form and empower the individual through self-annihilation, would be the idea that is only ever the acting out of self-annihilation in the first place. This is what the painting in its physical body and materiality attempts to allegorise.

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Of course, this did not necessarily mean that all aspects of the painting would synthesise with the same level of appearance or disappearance within each piece. The owl and the satellite dish in *Not Before Time,* for example, figure with much sharper clarity than the foreground does, but simply that an ambiguous process of becoming and change was present within the artwork, according to its iconographic and material reading. Besides, what the various forms of ambiguous power fuelling the ascetic subjectivity of the hermit shows, is that different ambiguities are in play, requiring different tensions and levels of realisation.

5.5 Re-enactment, Memory and Ritual

For theologian, Gavin Flood, the ambiguity of the ascetic self, which as I've shown becomes apparent through the synchronic forming and dissolving of the will, is performative[250]. In *The Ascetic Self: Subjectivity, Memory and Tradition* Flood explores the single claim that the ascetic self is performed; that it performs the memory of tradition and it performs the ambiguity of the self[251]. To be clear, Flood's thesis focuses on this notion of *performance*, as it relates specifically to various religious traditions within Buddhism, Hinduism and Christianity. Furthermore, Flood is very particular that such performative analysis only applies where asceticism might be called 'cosmological'; the distinction being that only in the context of cosmology does asceticism perform the memory of tradition. Cosmology can be taken here to mean a way of explaining the origin, history and evolution of the cosmos based on the religious mythology of specific traditions. Within this context, Flood states: "asceticism is always set within, or in some cases in reaction to, a religious tradition, within a shared memory that both looks back to an origin and looks forward to a future goal.[252]"

What is curious about Flood's study, however, is the way in which the argument he develops around the role of 'ritual' and 're-enactment', within the context of a 'shared' *memory* of tradition regarding the ascetic self, resonates beyond the immediate religious context and various traditions that he locates it within. And much as my interest in Flood's thesis is concerned ultimately with the unlikely pairing of the hermit and the team-building participant in this respect, I also recognise Flood's parameters and it is not my intention to

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[250] Gavin Flood, "The Ascetic Self : Subjectivity, Memory, and Tradition," (2004); *The Ascetic Self : Subjectivity, Memory and Tradition*. (Hereafter referred to as AS) p. 2-3.
[251] Ibid.
[252] Ibid. p.2

distort them. However, whilst acknowledging this, it seems necessary to experiment with and to *test* the terms of Flood's characterisation of ascetic performance, in tandem with that of the team-building participant, given the parallels that emerge.

Before proceeding to do so, however, I first want to briefly reflect on the role that irony plays within ascetic intention and consider how it finds echoes in the plight of the corporate team-building participant. To be clear, what I want to assess – and therefore map on to the scenario of the latter – are the terms 'shared memory', 'memory of tradition' and 're-enactment', as Flood deploys them. What I want to explore, then, is how these terms might be applied to the perspective of the team-building participant, in recognition of their extrinsic *productive* value and subjectivity in being incorporated into a culture of late-capitalist production. In other words, is there a space in considering the ambiguity of power underpinning the team-building participant for their subjectivity to be considered *ironically*? The broader argument I am trying to build here, is that it is within this ironic context of intention versus expression, that both the hermit and corporate team-building participant become *anonymous* in presenting whilst retreating. Acknowledging this, I would like to consider the following statement that Flood makes:

'The 'I will' of ascetic intention, which ironically seeks to erase itself, creates an interiority that is particular and bound to a specific, historical, temporal frame, to a specific narrative identity, and to location within a specific tradition[253].'

But how would this read if the word 'ascetic' is replaced with the words 'corporate team-building'? Now, Flood's assertion takes on a completely different meaning:

'The 'I will' of corporate team-building intention, which ironically seeks to erase itself, creates an interiority that is particular and bound to a specific, historical, temporal frame, to a specific narrative identity, and to location within a specific tradition.'

What is being considered here is the idea that the 'good' team-building participant is the one who *pretends* to take the task seriously. This is to say, *resistance*, conceived as an ambiguity of power fuelling the corporate team-building participant's actions, takes on a *philosophical* surreptitious form. At the same time, the semantic emphasis on the word 'tradition' raises a number of questions, for a religious tradition going back centuries cannot be identified in the same terms as a culture of corporate team-building activities going back

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[253] Ibid. p.14.

a few decades. Similarly, this might also apply within the context of how one identifies 'a specific, historical, temporal frame' and locate the cosmological question of asceticism within the memory of tradition that Flood highlights. There is a case, in that sense, for what Byung-Chul Han determines as the difference between *non-time*, on the one hand - as an endless flitting between points without duration and narrative, encapsulating the ahistorical temporal frame of corporate team-building activities - and the repetitious *historical* time of ascetic subjectivity, underpinning the hermit in art history[254], on the other.

In taking account of this distinction and the cross-fertilising nature of this experiment, then, why would the 'memory of tradition' within corporate team building necessarily have to be cosmological and furthermore centuries old? Who is to say that a tradition cannot evolve over a very short period of time if the condition of repetition which define it *as* a tradition becomes apparent. Such would be the case with a music festival, for example, which can become a tradition in a matter of years. Critically, then, what tradition comes to mean within the context of training workshops and corporate fun days etc. – and therefore how corporate team-building activities might be thought ironically - is that it is based on the *pretending* of taking something seriously, which is to say, it is through the *honouring* of mission statements and the like, and proving that you are a 'good' employee that the corporate team-building participant can be seen to be complying. This is to say, it is within this larger *game* as such, that the team-building participant, on one level, becomes anonymous. And this is the point: for although the practice of asceticism is fundamentally distinct in virtually every respect from corporate team-building, and the word 'tradition' comes to suggest markedly different things for both, the *ironic* relation between the enactment of 'ritual' within 'tradition' satisfying the *memory* of tradition remains constant for both.

If one recognises this in accordance with the logic of reading Flood's claim, as representative of both the ascetic hermit *and* the corporate team-building participant, then an interesting exchange between the two motifs starts to reveal itself. As Flood goes on to detail:

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[254]This is the narrative crux that underpins Han's reading of time (which he develops from Heidegger), where he claims we have lost any recognition of the value of time as narrative and duration and that which repeats within a vacuum of *non-time*, leaving us groundless. My point is that this distinction resonates, similarly, through the ascetic hermit and corporate team-building participant in this context. Byung-Chul Han and Daniel Steuer, *The Scent of Time : A Philosophical Essay on the Art of Lingering* (2017). Chapter 1: Non-Time. p.1-11.

'Tradition is not passively received but actively reconstructed in a shared imagination and reconstituted in the present as memory. It is more than the passive conserving of information, it is the active enlivening of the present through links with the past. Although in one sense tradition is constructed in a shared imagination, this is not to say that the tradition (of the team builder) is made up and unreal, but rather is in a constant process of (re)construction in the flow of temporal continuity from the past[255].'

What is central here, is the identification of how irony becomes apparent for both the corporate team-building participant and ascetic hermit by 'the active enlivening of the present through links with the past' and the 'constant process of (re)construction in the flow of temporal continuity from the past'.

Finally, before proceeding to consider how the corporate team building activities motif has unfolded within my research project, I would like to finish this section by reflecting upon one further piece of text, in which the word 'ascetic' has been replaced by the word's 'corporate team-building':

'Enacting the memory of tradition reveals a particularity of existence that is subjective yet not individualistic. To practise corporate team-building is not an act of individuality: it is an act of subjectivity and an intensification of the subjective. The non-individualistic particularity of the corporate team-building life is reflected in the linguistic structure of the addresser, the addressee and the discourse or third presence. Thus, the corporate team-building participant's life is linked to the wider community and tradition not only through the body, but also through language. Indeed, corporate team-building speech is a controlled speech and a controlled discourse that expresses the story of the tradition and recapitulates the memory of tradition. Corporate team-building selves become indices of tradition.[256]'

To take team-building seriously is – as I have already suggested – to *pretend* to take the idea of the 'team' seriously. What this performance makes for is a meta-performance that demonstrates, through acknowledgment, that the whole team-building structure has been performed *correctly*. What is significant to this structure, is that it is 'subjective yet not individualistic' and therefore that the individual's contribution on that level remains anonymous.

5.6 You Must Enjoy it Like This!

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[255] Reworked from AS p. 8.
[256] Ibid., p.15.

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Corporate team-building activities first appeared in my work in 2005, initially in response to a photographic image I found featuring a crowded speedboat full of laughing faces bouncing across a stretch of water. I became aware via the jpeg's google search listing, that it had been sourced from a website advertising adventure weekends away for company workers. What struck me about it to begin with was the contrived image of pleasure that it satisfied, where, as much as the picture presented a rush of adrenaline junkie euphoria, there was a sense of retreat, that any outward sense of enjoyment had been *performed*. The notion of 'designed fun', although still vague in conception as a motif that I could develop (and not explicit in any actual artworks at this point), thus informed the thinking surrounding the title, *You Must Enjoy it Like This!*, which was a solo exhibition of paintings that I had at Galerie Polaris in Paris in 2006.

The only direct reference to team-building activities at this stage was limited to a small series of watercolours I made in response to the aforementioned image, which were not included in the Paris exhibition, featuring densely populated speedboats cutting through the surface, with variously captioned slogans appearing on the boat's side, where the vessel's name would normally appear (Fig. 42). Unfortunately, as other projects took priority in the years that followed, the idea of 'contrived fun' took a back seat.

5.7   Structured Fun

However, in returning to these artworks, as I started to think about the representation of anonymity within my painting practice at the beginning of my PhD, I came across Simon Critchley's brief passage on corporate team-building in *On Humour* (2002). In the text, Critchley anecdotally recalls the experience of having breakfast in a hotel in Atlanta, whilst being surrounded by various groups from the same company engaging in hopscotch, Frisbee and kickball[257]. Considering the notion of what he described according to management consultant speak as 'structured fun', Critchley critically reflects upon the importance companies place on organising leisure pursuits and team-based activities as a strategy to produce greater social cohesion, efficiency and productivity in the workplace. In assessing how such measures utilising 'humour' and 'play' are met with resistance through ridicule,

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[257] Simon Critchley, *On Humour* (United Kingdom: Routledge, 2002).p. 12- 14

Fig. 42 Simon Willems, *Create Your Own Country,* 2006, Watercolour on paper, 25.5 x 34cm.
Image courtesy of the author.

backchat and gossip by company workers, Critchley wagers in conclusion how humour is developed as a management tool, but also as a tool against the management[258].

Critchley's observations raise a significant point: however much the manipulation of emotion and affect might govern the coercive strategies of mobilising 'fun'; subversion and humour will always play a meaningful role in response. Although this raises the question as to *how* subversion on that level really plays out. Can one really say that outwardly undermining the powers that be *empowers* the individual within this context? This is where the corporate team-building participant's ambiguity of power reinforces itself, because to what extent is humour really a 'tool' against the management, if it only works to make them more aware of who causes trouble. Published in 2002, Critchley's critique of structured fun tallies with what at that time was fast becoming a pervasive phenomenon in the workplace, although the term itself can be traced back to the early 1990s[259]. The mockumentary sitcom *The Office*[260], which was also produced in the early Noughties, echoes this burgeoning culture and resistance to the 'soft' approach strategies deployed within corporate culture to loosen up the workforce. Ricky Gervais' complex - yet entirely odious - characterisation of office manager David Brent, at the fictitious Slough-based paper merchants, Wernham Hogg, has become the iconic embodiment of this ambiguity of power. Emanating from the top down*,* subversion works through self-parody, where the eternally 'daft' Brent works the floor, pandering to the cameraman and the subversive instincts of others that reflect his own, whilst reluctantly 'playing ball' with management hierarchies. As office manager, Brent is neither a grassroots employee nor middle management. However, what Brent challenges, significantly, is the idea that humour cannot be controlled and can easily get out of hand. This is what he demonstrates in Series 1 (episode 4), when he undermines the training session taken by Rowan with his guitar solo of *Free Love Freeway*[261]. Fifteen years on from *The Office*, the image of structured fun - although now somewhat dated – still resonates within a work culture geared largely towards the production of services. Although it seems

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[258] Ibid.
[259] The term 'structured fun' was coined by Gordon, J. (1992) "Structured Fun" Training, 29 (9) pp. 23 – 30. See Warren, S. 2005. *Consuming Work: An exploration of organizational aestheticization*. PhD, University of Portsmouth. p. 103.
[260] See footnote 221.
[261] Series 1, Episode 4 of *The Office* is the "Training Episode", in which outside facilitator, Rowan, has come to educate the Slough branch of Wernham Hogg about customer care. 'Free Love Freeway' is one of four songs that Brent plays on his guitar towards the end of the session to undermine Rowan.

important to note, that however much Negri and Lazzarato's appraisal of immaterial labour lends itself to corporate team-building activities and the tertiary sector, not all work is by nature tertiary[262]. In the main, corporate team-building is associative with a particular *type* of worker and certainly not everyone. At the same time, the success of more recent productions, such as the fly-on-on-the-wall documentary series *The Call Centre*[263], which ran from 2013 – 14 on BBC 3 and followed the staff of a call centre in Swansea, does attest to this.

That said, what seems different now, however, beyond the global financial crisis of 2008 and the austerity that has followed since, is the pervasive role that social media platforms such as Facebook, Linkedin and Twitter play in this space between work and non-work. It is interesting to consider Byung-Chul Han's comments in what he perceives to be the digital panoptica that social media presents in watching over the social realm which, he claims, exploit it mercilessly[264]. For Han, such mediums create the illusion of total freedom within an affirmative 'Like' culture of a neoliberal regime that deploys supple, subtle forms of technology. Applied to the workplace, it is easy to see how the 'soft' approach and 'buddy' speak of corporate management and structured fun directives from a decade or so earlier, resonate within these various platforms that work to erode the delineation between work and leisure time.

Concealing oneself at a deeper level of *resistance* through playing along may offer empowerment, equipping individuals with the means to counter the anonymising effects that the shepherding of affective and emotional labour sets out to impose, but at the same time, perhaps there is another way of thinking about structured fun and how it manifests itself, that does not hinge so bluntly on the question of management coercion.

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[262] This is central to the critique of immaterial labour: that it is developed by Italian thinkers within the Post-Autonomist *Operaismo* tradition as representing an *absolute* shift in the nature of labour and production, thus negating the particular tertiary economic context in which it largely manifests itself. See Ben Trott, "Immaterial Labour and World Order: An Evaluation of a Thesis," in *Ephemera: theory & politics in organization* (2007).& Steve Wright, "Reality Check : Are We Living in an Immaterial World?," *metamute.org* (2005).

[263] Like *The Office*, the narrative structure of *The Call Centre* was designed primarily around the centre's manager, Neville 'Nev' Wilshire, whose authority and style can be seen in parallel with that of the fictitious Brent.

[264] Han and Butler, *Psychopolitics : Neoliberalism and New Technologies of Power.* p. 8.

For Management Professor, Samantha Warren, whose doctoral thesis explores *organizational aestheticization*[265], the question of 'structured fun' can be assessed in relation to Zygmunt Bauman's notion of the 'aesthetic ethic of consumption[266]', in which the late sociologist suggests that the same aesthetic-hedonistic principles driving our desire to consume have begun to govern the choices we make about work[267]. Within this context, Warren argues, work can be tested in relation to its ability to generate pleasurable experiences for a society of consumers and assessed according to its 'aesthetic value'; rather than it fulfilling a sense of duty, 'calling' or moral ennoblement[268]. Work, thus conceived, is built around the notion of 'prosumption'; the idea that the person 'consuming' the product is also the person 'producing' it[269]. In this scenario, then, individuals 'as' consumers within the workplace have a stake through which to make choices and empower themselves 'aesthetically'; and the idea of structured fun by extension can be seen – despite its lack of appeal and contrivance - as a by-product of this *aestheticised* consumer-focused societal fabric. Whilst assessing the exploitation narrative from various academic sources in her doctoral research[270], that appeals to the necessity of resistance that Critchley outlines, Warren goes on to make following point:

'In these critical readings of structured fun, there is an implicit assumption that `management' inflict these practices on their `poor defenceless employees'. But as I have already argued, if structured fun, office makeovers and closer relationships between business and `the arts' are seen as a manifestations of an aestheticization of work then we should look for broader, cultural legitimations for these practices rather than purely organizational ones. It may be that they are better conceptualised as responses to employee demands for aestheticized working environments rather than `straightforward' management oppression and exploitation[271].'

Thought about like this, the question of resistance is less straightforward and the problematic of agency within the context of structured fun, harder to discern, if by

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[265] Samantha Warren, "Consuming Work: An Exploration of Organizational Aestheticization" (PhD, University of Portsmouth, 2005).
[266] Ibid. p.3
[267] Ibid. p.18
[268] Ibid.
[269] A prosumer is a person who consumes and produces a product. It is derived from "prosumption", a dot-com era business term meaning "production by consumers". These terms were coined in 1980 by American futurist Alvin Toffler, and were widely used by many technology writers of the time. To see how this applies in this context see: University of Essex, "An Exploration of Structured Fun - Professor Samantha Warren," (online: University of Essex, 2012). https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tmEk_WKBU5o
[270] Warren, *Consuming Work*, p.108.
[271] Ibid.

extension, the work environment of the corporate team-building participant reflects a paradigm of consumer-focused aestheticisation, evident in the team-building activity itself. At the same time, it is interesting to note Warren's research trajectory and publications to date, which have focused beyond this single observation, to be fiercely critical of management coercion and manipulation in the workplace. In Warren's *Humour as a management tool? The irony of structuring fun in organizations*, Warren systematically dissects the way in which strategies of structured fun negate the uneven distribution of power and complex social relationships that exist within the workplace, oppressing employees with a heterogeneity of humour that abuses emotional labour, anonymises the individual and commodifies human feelings. Similarly, in *What's wrong with being Positive?[272]* (2010), Warren builds a robust case against the application of positive psychology (PP) in the workplace; highlighting its strategic intent to appropriate and valorise human qualities that should remain out of reach of the capitalist labour process; what Cederström & Spicer elsewhere develop in *The Wellness Syndrome* (2015)' as the moral imperative of 'wellness' according to a neo-liberal ideology of free-market economics[273].

As I have been establishing throughout this chapter, the corporate team-building participant and the ambiguity of power that they embody, can be seen as part of a much larger game that they are playing. The immediate team-building task that they have to perform is only the vehicle through which the social relation that lies at the heart of Post-Fordist production is caricatured and becomes a cliché. Moreover, corporate team-building activities are *designed* to caricature this relation. What is being played out is a meta-performance and the question of resistance that surrounds the team-builder, therefore, cannot be pitched solely at 'ridicule, backchat and gossip' and a *reactive* instinct to – as it were - stick up two fingers.

If a broader ever more sophisticated neo-liberal agenda of *positivity* and self-optimisation pervades the workplace and imposes itself on the line between work and non-work, then

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[272] Samantha Warren, "What's Wrong with Being Positive?," in *The Oxford Handbook of Positive Psychology*, ed. Shane J. Lopez and C. R. Snyder (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

[273] Carl Cederström and André Spicer, *The Wellness Syndrome* (2015). Cederström & Spicer make this claim through citing Alenka Zupančič's definition of what she calls biomorality, in which Zupančič identifies how 'Negativity, lack, dissatisfaction, unhappiness are perceived more and more as moral faults.' For Zupančič this spectacular rise of what she calls call 'bio-morality' promotes the fundamental axiom: a person who feels good (and is happy) is a good person; a person who feels bad is a bad person.' p.5. See also William James Davies, *The Happiness Industry : How the Government and Big Business Sold Us Well-Being* (London: Verso, 2016).

the dangerous illusion that *performance* must be sustained at all costs in every aspect of one's life gains momentum. This is the plight of what Han terms the *achievement* subject: the self-exploiting individual who deems himself a *project* under the burden of freedom[274]. Considered through the lens of corporate team building activities, such a scenario works to complicate the team-building participant's ability to *pretend* to be taking the event seriously as a form of critique. This is to say, the instinctive counter-measure to present whilst one retreats as a means to strategically *anonymise* oneself is compromised. In this context, the corporate team-building participant, as an achievement subject, can be seen in stark contrast to the hermit, who as a *prohibition* subject self-exploits through that which is denied.

Central to the achievement society that Han outlines, which finds sympathy elsewhere with Cederström & Spicer, is the notion of 'gamification', in which the logic of playing games is applied to life and the working world.

Within this context, above and beyond any immediate activity that the team-building participant is engaged with, productivity is heightened and teased out through the emotional capitalism of 'success' and 'reward'. The idea being, that where a worker is more emotionally invested, the result is a higher performance and a greater yield[275].

5.8 Locating the Soul

What this examination of structured fun within the context of the team-building participant shows, is that the ambiguity of power fuelling their subjectivity, like that of the hermit, is multi-faceted. It is not enough to simply consider resistance at the level of *pretending* to take something seriously, where other complex factors such as *positivity* and *gamification* form part of the equation at a deeper cultural level. In the same way that it is not enough to offer resistance simply at the level of ridicule, backchat and gossip. The danger of the technologies of power that a neoliberal regime imposes is that, as Han suggests, they escape all visibility[276]; the subjugated subject is not even aware of his or her own subjugation. What this points to is a problematic of the *soul,* which is to say it is how the

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[274] Han develops his analysis of the *achievement* subject in Byung-Chul Han and Erik Butler, *The Burnout Society* (2015). And then returns to it in *Psychopolitics* Chapter 1: The Crisis of Freedom p.1-13.
[275] Han, *Psychopolitics,* Chapter 10: Gamification p.49-54. See also Cederström and Spicer, *The Wellness Syndrome*. Chapter 4: The Chosen Life (*Game Over*) p.108-116.
[276] Ibid., p.14.

team-building participant thinks, acts, makes decisions and perceives what is going on, that is at stake. Performance, thus conceived as a strategy of presenting whilst retreating – in recognition of, but also above and beyond, any team-building task at hand - becomes at best confused and at worst redundant, where a continual demand is being placed upon it. This is not to suggest that the team-builder is left wholly disempowered, but simply that the ambiguity of power that they respond to faces different challenges.

Nevertheless, this is also the case with the hermit, whose ascetic subjectivity similarly points towards a problematic of power and performance. Outside of any conception of soul that the ascetic hermit might identify with and aspire to theologically, they too still have to think, act, make decisions and perceive what is going on around them, even if they think they are channelling – that is sublimating - this through a different *spiritual* agenda. On both counts, the role-playing and performing takes place on an internal, as well as an external, level. As I showed through the various examples from art history, this takes place externally in different ways: different painting traditions, in that sense, representing different levels of drama. And as I illustrated through the image of the adrenaline junkie speedboat and is evident by any Google Image search on 'corporate team-building activities ' that one might run, the team-building participant is similarly challenged by how he or she *outwardly* performs; the whole purpose of team-building activities prefiguring this display of emotion and affect.

But it is perhaps on an internal level, that the role of emotion and affect resonates most profoundly, as it fuels both of these figures. It is within this context, that the 'triumph in the ultimate agony', that empowers the ascetic ideal for the Herd, produces what Nietzsche describes as "orgies of feeling[277]", where orgies of feeling can be taken as the displacement of familiar experiences of vulnerability and powerlessness, that the *rush* of overwhelming emotion staves off. This is the point: despite the fact that any comparable display of feeling that the corporate team-building participant might experience, manifests itself through the coercive measures of the given team-building task, *(I felt on top of the world as we sped away on the quadbike….That bungee jump was awesome!),* the aim of any such rush*,* is that it likewise works to anaesthetise the soul.

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[277] GM III, 11.

5.9   Painting as a Thinking Subject and Highly Valuable Quasi-Person

To consider the question of the soul, as it relates to the hermit and corporate team-building participant as motifs and forms of subjectivity, is to take account of the different registers and means by which both figures present whilst they retreat in playing out anonymous roles. This is where an ambiguity of power makes its presence felt. Staying with this theme, I would now like to explore Isabelle Graw's essay *Painting as a Thinking Subject and Highly Valuable Quasi-Person* in order to assess how paintings, as objects of production, point to their own physical presence and material substance through the absent *trace* of their maker*.* Whilst part of this exploration is concerned with how the question of *presenting* whilst *retreating* resonates, in that sense, with the *presence-through-absence* that paintings engender and the problematic of subjectivity that this raises, I am also interested in how key aspects of Graw's text tap into the theme of anonymity, as well as the need for painting to retain a reflexive criticality. Furthermore, it is in light of Graw's argument and the discussion so far, that in bringing this thesis to a close in Chapter 6, I will be reflecting upon my recent practice - and the paintings that form part of my final exhibition in particular - as a means to consider the indexical and conceptual value of the ascetic hermit and corporate team-building participant within my research.

For Graw, painting in a contemporary context is less a practice defined solely by its medium, than a highly personalised activity concerned with the production of signs[278]. Taking this claim as central to her position, in *Thinking Through Painting* (2012), Graw highlights how the strong bond that exists between the product and its maker is central to painting's specific indexicality and the tendency people have for treating paintings as if they were alive and 'thinking subjects'. By framing painting as an indexical sign in this way, Graw scrutinises the power painting has as an object in referring to its *subject* - the artist who made it - in order to critique how we attribute value to them[279].

Condensing ideas that she first explores in *The Knowledge of Painting: Notes on thinking images, and the person in the product* (Texte Zur Kunste 2011)*,* and then expands upon in the lecture *The Economy of Painting - Notes on the Vitality of a Success-Medium,* that she

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[278] Isabelle Graw, *Thinking through Painting: Reflexivity and Agency Beyond the Canvas* (Germany: Sternberg Press, 2012). p.50.
[279] Ibid., p.54.

gave at the Jewish Museum in New York (2015), as well as in her recent publication, *The Love of Painting: Genealogy of a Success Medium* (2018), Graw locates the question of 'subjectness' within a Marxist problematic of value and labour[280]. By foregrounding how painting is particularly well equipped to satisfy the longing for substance in value – which Graw feels marks painting out from other mediums – she considers how painting demonstrates value, as it is grounded in something concrete; the living labour of the artist[281].

Developing this question of value in tandem with that of subjectivity, Graw briefly summarises how subjectivity became central to the philosophical discourse surrounding painting within the western tradition. Citing Leon Battista Alberti's *Della Pittura* (1453) as the first systematic treatise on painting, Graw maps out its evolving treatment by Louis Marin and Hubert Damisch in the 20th century, via Hegel; interrogating what she perceives to be a propensity to reify painting within 'vitalist projections[282]'. In challenging how such vitalistic fantasies confuse the painting itself with the *persona* of the person who produced it, Graw's point, critically, is to show how such projections hinge on the illusion of the author's presence *as an effect*; rooted in a pool of methods and techniques that fabricate this impression.

In going on to argue that all artworks possess this quality of 'subjectness', Graw claims that only in painting does this sense of an artist's trace figure so directly, creating the impression that paintings have their own agency and operate, she suggests, like a 'quasi-person[283]'. Echoing Stoichita's *The Self-Aware Image,* as well as WJT Mitchell's *What do Pictures Want?,* that I discussed earlier, Graw scrutinises how artworks foster the illusion that they produce their own knowledge and retain their own agency[284].

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[280] Ibid.

[281] Ibid., p.56.

[282] This is quoted from the lecture Isabelle Graw gave at the Jewish Museum in New York (2015). See The Jewish Museum, "Isabelle Graw: The Economy of Painting - Notes on the Vitality of a Success-Medium," ed. The Jewish Museum (The Jewish Museum, 2015).

[283] Ibid. p.51.

[284] Although it seems important to make a distinction here between meta-painting, on the one hand, in which painting is consciously designed around a reflexive discourse in which it critiques its own illusionism and the more general idea that painting engenders a sense of *self-agency*. In the latter case, the emphasis lies more with 'vitalist projections', as Graw claims, outside of any desire, necessarily, on the painter's part, to strategically exploit any reflexive discourse within the painting itself, whereas with the former, this awareness is factored into the painting from the outset.

Despite Graw's deployment of "subject" and "subjectness" suggesting that of a hypothetical individual, with no inference made as to how that 'subject' might be thought theoretically, what seems central to Graw's thesis is that 'subjectness' is the site of human action – and – as she goes on to examine *labour*.

Although the various sources that Graw draws upon, attest to what might otherwise read as a familiar narrative regarding the question of agency and subjectivity within painting[285], Graw locates her argument specifically within a Marxist context. And, in this way, takes account of the economic realities of late capitalism as a central component in how the problematic of value and subjectness underlying painting might be appraised. As Graw acknowledges in *The Knowledge of Painting: Notes on thinking images, and the person in the product* (Texte Zur Kunste 2011):

'Still, the question ultimately arises whether the quasi-subjectivity '[....] does not appear in a different light once we discuss it with a view to the new form of capitalism that, as is well known, has massive designs on the incorporation of personality, affects and social relationships. If painting no longer merely serves as a provider of aliveness [....] but is now declared to be a sort of self-acting being, does it not deliver exactly what the modern form of power seeks to domesticate – subjectivity? And should it not ideally reflect on these circumstances, which would once again lend it a semblance of "reflective subjecthood"?[286]'

Graw's call for painting to take account of its "reflective subjecthood", as a form of critical resistance to the subsumption of 'personality, affects and social relationships' within late capitalism – in the illusion of its subjectness – is what marks out the strength of Graw's project. Whilst she acknowledges, on the one hand, that the question of subjectness, as it relates to any given painting is, in itself, illusory, Graw concedes at the same time, that if we suspend judgement and accept this *subjectness*, then what is important is that it retains a criticality in reflecting upon its political and cultural, that is - economic - conditions.

In locating the crisis of subjectivity within the new economy in this way, Graw reframes Maurizio Lazzarato's critique of *immaterial labour,* as it might be applied directly to painting. By identifying how the incorporation of 'personality, affects and social

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[285] By referring to the 'familiar narrative', I mean the different ways in which writers draw upon the 'aliveness' and animism of painting in order to respond to the question of subjectivity. Graw, *Thinking through Painting: Reflexivity and Agency Beyond the Canvas*.p.53-54.

[286] "The Knowledge of Painting," *Texte Zur Kunste*, no. 82 (2011). p.124.

relationships' within a Post-Fordist economy are central to the nature of production, Graw recognises how this situates the *socio-creative* capital of artistic production and painting more specifically. However, although Graw draws on Lazzarato's work in this capacity, and actually cites him in her lecture at the Jewish Museum in 2015, Lazzarato rebuffs the production of art within 'ready-made works or aesthetic objects'; instead championing the 'conceptual, aesthetic and social instruments through which are re-appropriated the videographic, computational and linguistic orders of expression[287].' Clearly, for Lazzarato, painting cannot figure as part of the equation, where it becomes synonymous with the production of a commodity.

Nevertheless, what drew me to Graw's thesis, and the immaterial labour debate in the first place, was the way in which a parallel could be drawn between the ambiguity of power underpinning the corporate team-building participant in my work, and the problematic of 'personality, affects and social relationships' fuelling Graw's call for a 'reflective subjecthood' in painting. In that sense, the corporate team-building participant, as a model example of the late-capitalist subject within a Post-Fordist economy – albeit in caricatured form – prefigured the same problematic of empowerment that Graw was at pains to highlight. What interested me in establishing this connection, then, was the idea that in situating corporate team-building activities in hermit landscapes from art history within my paintings, the allegorical value of this unlikely exchange would index the broader question of disempowered agency that a Post-Fordist economy of production raises. It was this 'reflective' subjecthood - of which the painting itself forms part - that Graw championed, that was at stake.

But, it was not only that. Both the figure of the hermit and the corporate team-building participant as motifs and forms of subjectivity, as I discussed earlier, revolve around a problematic of value and labour, as much as they do an ambiguity of power. This is what they share with the artist; notwithstanding the distinction that prevails between the economic value of the artist and corporate team-building participant, on the one hand, and the spiritual value underpinning the hermit, on the other, whose emotional and affective labour retains no economic worth. Although as the example of the Leopard Man showed,

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[287] Maurizio Lazzarato, "Art & Work," *Parachute*, no. 122 (2006).

there are anomalies, where the value of Leppard's living labour and the emotional and affective labour that this incorporates, retains an economic basis.

However, assessing the role of labour more generally as it plays out for the artist, the corporate team-building participant, and the hermit in art history, cannot be divorced from the problematic of the *soul* that I addressed earlier. In all three cases, the soul - as that which accounts for feeling, thought, perception, memory and action etc. - is central to any labour undertaken. This does not mean, in respect of the artist, that any one painting - as the spectral presence of its maker - *represents* his or her soul, but simply that various aspects of the soul were drawn upon and mobilised in creating the artwork in the first place. In that sense, on one level, the artist, like the hermit and team-building participant, is in a position to navigate and consider, how and to what extent they wish to present whilst retreating within the act of making; although to what extent this is always achieved consciously remains a moot point. Surely, that is what the earlier analysis into the Apollonian-Dionysian tension with Bengtsson's paintings exposed, albeit it is certainly central to my position as an artist, in the need to deploy particular motifs within my paintings that attempt to reflect this. Nevertheless, whether I, or for that matter any other artist, choose to engage with this, the desire to present whilst retreating in the act of painting, is not the same as the way in which a painting embodies the *absent* presence of its maker. In the latter scenario, as Graw suggests:

'Painting [….] fosters the illusion that we can grasp what it represents but by the same token it withholds its presence from us. It thus suggests a presence and at the same time confronts us with an absence, an absence that can be representative of its creator who is often projected onto the work.[288]'

This is to say, the contradiction of absence through presence that the painting itself engenders, exists as a projective effort, outside of - and apart from - any decisions and qualities that the artist brought to its making in the first instance. The artwork is literally *not* the fantasy of *subjectness* that the beholder imagines. However, in another way, this projective effort, as a ritual deployed in the attempt to locate some kind of meaning – in its performed and illusory nature – can be seen in parallel with those that the hermit and corporate team-building participant ritualise in different ways within their respective roles.

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[288] Isabelle Graw et al., *The Love of Painting : Genealogy of a Success Medium* (2018). p.51.

Furthermore, it seems important to point out, that any vitalistic projection cast on to a painting is not limited to the hypothetical beholder, but includes the artist themselves before, during and after the process of making.

Chapter 6   Research Impact

6.0   Chapter Introduction

Having considered in different capacities within each chapter how the question of anonymity might be posed as a form of subjectivity and double movement of *presenting* whilst *retreating,* I would now like to reflect upon the impact that this research has had on the paintings themselves which forms part of my practical research and final exhibition. It is precisely within this context in constituting a central part of this practice-based doctoral project, that this body of work can be assessed in relation to the research question: *how does a paradox of 'presenting' whilst 'retreating' characterise the representation of anonymity within contemporary figurative painting, and how might this double movement be appraised as a form of subjectivity?* Furthermore, it is within this capacity in sync with my methodology, that what is reflected upon and established here hinges on the question of paradox, as it fuels the various facets and aspects of what I have already discussed. In reflecting upon the sentiment and spirit, but also the strategy, of responding to and making sense of Bengtsson's paintings in Chapter 2 through first-hand formal analysis, what is primary to this pursuit is the disclosure through direct observation, of tensions grounded in the materiality of the artworks, and not a 'conclusion' aimed at finality or resolution.

Taking this as central to my analysis, this chapter responds to four paintings[289]. To begin with, I address *Neverending Lanyard (after The Sleeping Hermit by Joseph Marie-Vien 1750)* (2019)*,* as sourced from Vien's painting, *The Sleeping Hermit*, that I discuss in Chapter 5. This is followed by *Shell (after Landscape with a Hermit by David Teniers the Younger)* (2019)*,* which is the only other piece within this selection where figures are explicitly present; beyond which, I assess *Burnout (after Saint Paul the Hermit by Nicolas Poussin 1637-38)* (2018) within a reworking Poussin's *Saint Paul the Hermit*, where I consider it as a woodland backdrop for a game of team-building paintball. The theme of paintball is then further developed and re-examined in its present-whilst-absent figuration in *Deadbox (after Mountainous Landscape with Two Monks and a Hermit by Marco Ricci* (2019).

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[289] The four paintings discussed in this chapter form part of my final PhD exhibition that was held at *Elephant West* (London) in July 2019, which comprised of nine paintings in total, including an installation of mounted postcards and a bowl of customised lanyards. It is because these four pieces represent the most significant developments within my most recent work - upon completing my research - that they are discussed here.

6.1   Neverending Lanyard

As its title suggests, *Neverending Lanyard (after The Sleeping Hermit by Joseph Marie-Vien 1750)* is appropriated from Vien's *The Sleeping Hermit* that I discuss in Chapter 5. However, in reworking the artwork within the context of this research, it feels important to emphasise that Vien's painting was already on my radar before undertaking doctoral study, and in coming across it in Michael Fried's *Absorption and Theatricality*[290] and Nathaniel Wallace's *Scanning the Hypnoglyph*[291] during my research - where both writers reflect upon the question of sleep in different ways[292] - the need to explore the artwork further within my painting practice was simply reinforced. Nonetheless, it was only in writing about and contextualising the painting directly within this thesis, in how - as I argued - it reframes the ascetic image of the hermit in art-history by presenting it as one of contentment and pleasure, in paradoxical contrast to its outward appearance of Christian monastic solitude, that this exploration was actualised. Of course, the first thing to note in its appearance - in sync with my retrospective analysis of Not *Before Time, (after A Player with a Hermit by Mortiz von Schwind)* in Chapter 5 – is its *resistance* to any replication of the original painting's historical style[293]. There is a deliberate shift away from the original for all the reasons I gave earlier[294], despite the fact that the articulation and *drawing* of the hermit, as an image, remains constant from the original, as do sections of its detailing. This lends the painting an anachronistic quality, where its soporific and solarised colour schema – which was deliberate on my part in acknowledgment of what the hermit is *doing* in the picture - undermines its historical placement. Furthermore, this is where the theme of paradox first enters the equation, fuelling the surface's pictorial illusion within an atemporal tension: the painting both *resists* being read along the lines of the original, whilst shadowing it sufficiently as a 'copy' for a strategic connection to be made.

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[290] Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality : Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot*. p. 28-31.

[291] Wallace, *Scanning the Hypnoglyph : Sleep in Modernist and Postmodern Representation*. p. 63.

[292] In assessing the various responses to Vien's *The Sleeping Hermit,* by 18th century critics (Laugier, La Font, Estéve & Huquier), Fried uses the painting and the representation of sleep to champion his broader claim regarding the theme of *absorption* that runs throughout the book. Nathaniel Wallace, in contrast, whilst citing Fried on this point, highlights how the painting illustrates the Enlightenment reflection on the recuperative benefits of sleep, following its earlier denigration as an experience.

[293] See Chapter 5.3 Re: Not Before Time. p.159-163.

[294] As I suggested in Chapter 5, there seems little point in responding to existing artworks by reducing them (in the act of appropriation) to a 'quotational' exercise, in which their historical style is simply replicated to satisfy a semiotic game at the level of representation. See Chapter 5.3 Re: Not Before Time. p.159-163.

Fig. 43 Simon Willems, *Neverending Lanyard (after The Sleeping Hermit by Joseph-Marie Vien 1750),* 2019, Oil, acrylic & crackle paste on linen, 90 x 70cm. Courtesy of the author.

At the same time, what this summary negates – or at least withholds - is the painting's materiality. For a start, the actual support upon which all of this takes place was originally conceived as another painting altogether. Furthermore, what was central to this earlier episode in the artwork's construction, was the building up of the surface with an acrylic crackle paste, which administered with a palette knife, gives the painting a distinctly *weathered* physicality. One of several pieces that I made and experimented with at the time, in attempting to rethink my earlier observations regarding the fabrication of age that I assessed through Bengtsson's and Tuymans' work in Chapter 2[295], what was central to these investigations was the idea of creating an ageing surface that could be contained within a small section of the canvas. The thinking here, then, was to *play* with the orchestration and disclosure of illusion, such that by the time the crackle paste had reached the edge of the canvas, the fissures would have disappeared. So, in contrast to Bengtsson and Tuymans, where the fabrication of age within the corruption of surface becomes *continuous* in meeting the painting's frame (and the real space of the viewer), in mine they would become *discontinuous*; affirming their staging within a localised area, suggesting growths and symptoms, rather than blanket conditions.

However, as I discussed earlier in examining Bengtsson's *Oktoberceremoni*, the cracks form an incidental but nevertheless *indifferent* relation to the imagery which they tarnish and enframe[296]. And in creating an image of the sleeping hermit on a treated surface, directed in its corruption at a different starting point and moment in time, a paradoxical tension ensues between the puckered surface running through the hermit's beard, right arm and shoulder - *indifferently* - and the figurative depiction of those elements that work to negate it. Thus, where, on the one hand, the hermit is present as an image, the physical reality of the surface *retreats* from this illusion[297].

At the same time, this illusory assertion of the painting as an image, in sync with the palette, is, as I said, strategically oneiric: the hermit appears more phantasmatic than he does physically present, suggesting imminent dissolution. And although this is also the case with earlier pieces within my research such as *Motivational Pull (after Hermit Praying in a*

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[295] See Chapter 2.4 Re: Oktoberceremoni p.60-67.

[296] See Chapter 2.4 Re: Oktoberceremoni p.66.

[297] I'm thinking in particular here of Tristan Garcia's claim, that I reflect upon in Footnote 3, in which the illusory surface of an artwork *as* representation can be seen to *absent* its present matter and spatial dimension.

Fig. 44 Simon Willems, *Motivational Pull (after A Hermit Praying in a Landscape by Carlo Bonavia),* 2015, Oil on linen, 60 x 60cm. Image courtesy of the author.

Fig. 45 Simon Willems, *Universal Solutions Incorporated (after Landscape with Saint Anthony the Abbott and Saint Paul the Hermit by Salvator Rosa 1660-1665),* 2014, Oil and acrylic on linen, 100 x 150cm. Courtesy of the author.

Landscape by Carlo Bonavia) and Universal Solutions Incorporated (after Saint Anthony the Abbott and Saint Paul the Hermit by Salvator Rosa 1660-1665), there has been a decisive break, chromatically, within more recent works, where the palette has become lighter and more colourful, whilst appearing less outwardly realistic. As this shift manifests itself within the painting, it unfolds through different registers. This is to say, where the bulk of the surface is designed around a muted complementary play-off between a translucent yellow ground and a purple that swings between lavender and violet hues, the rest of the painting – namely the snaking lanyard and the hermit's fiddle - assumes more contrast and a deeper translucent pitch. This works to separate the two elements, whereby the former appears to *fade* as a trace, whereas the latter gains presence. This contradiction, as a temporal tension, reads *through* the surface materiality of the painting which, at the same time, as I have already suggested, brings its own temporal contradictions as physical matter before any *subsequent* interconnecting imagery becomes part of the equation. Nevertheless, it is precisely this tension of the lanyard as an enveloping force, but also as an element seeking continuity with the real space of the viewer, that is central to this piece of work. It seems important to flag up and highlight how the lanyard as a motif – whilst not squaring with the idea of corporate team-building activities directly in the first instance[298], and featuring too late in my research to be addressed directly in this thesis, is one that I claim - and have explored elsewhere[299] - similarly revolves around an ambiguity of power and paradoxical tension of *presenting* whilst *retreating*. Like the problematic of 'Structured Fun' that fuels corporate teambuilding activities by appealing to emotion and affect, the lanyard is also the product of a Post-Fordist culture pitched at aesthetic enticement and the value of *play*[300]. But if one contemplates exactly how the lanyard makes its presence felt within the painting as a motif and object, it is hard to discern whether its 'enveloping force' reads as one of

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[298] My point being that where the corporate team-building activities motif has been central to my practical research as an *event* that takes place within the paintings, the lanyard (as a recent development) is simply a physical object and 'detail' within them seeking depiction. The main point, here, however - in bringing them together - is that both motifs are the product of a Post-Fordist economy, in which the question of immaterial labour is primary, and the value of *play*, humour and aesthetic enticement are maximised.

[299] *Presenting whilst retreating in the age of the corporate lanyard*, written in collaboration with Professor Samantha Warren of Portsmouth University, is due to be published in the Journal of Organizational Aesthetics in the Autumn of 2019.

[300] My argument here, which I acknowledge in both Chapter 5 (see Chapter 5.7 Re: Structured Fun p.169-175), and develop specifically in relation to the lanyard in the article due to be published in the Journal of Organizational Aesthetics in the autumn of 2019, is that the lanyard is also the product of a Post-Fordist culture and 'service-based' economy. The primary difference with the lanyard, however (as distinct from the way this becomes apparent within 'structured fun' and corporate team-building activities), is the particular fetishization that the lanyard incurs as a (body-based) work-time accessory and object.

impending suffocation or burgeoning support. Although both the hermit's face and the ID badge clipped to the lanyard beneath his foot suggest a flattening of identity where the lanyard's particulars and the hermit's expression seek occlusion – sanctioning retreat - it is the lanyard itself which can be seen, in that sense, to *present*.

6.2   Shell

In tandem *with Neverending Lanyard, Shell (after Landscape with a Hermit by David Teniers the Younger),* forms part of a significant move away from the appropriation of paintings in art history in accordance with their historical style and colour schema. This is perhaps even more the case here, where Teniers' original reflects a Flemish Baroque sensibility governed by cold browns and chromatic restraint. In sync with its religious subject, one can see how the original painting, like De Ribera's *St. Onuphrius,* reflects what I determined in Chapter 4 as an *ascetic aesthetic.* The primary decision to reframe Teniers' landscape within a semi-translucent lilac ground, coupled with the omission of the hermit and stooping figure to the left, whilst neutralising this reading, still retains a sense of Teniers' remoteness. However, it is precisely the *nature* of this remoteness that is at stake. Like Bengtsson's *Hat & Cap Factory* that I examined earlier*, Shell (after Landscape with a Hermit by David Teniers the Younger)* accounts for *distance* 'literally' by appealing to the alien and lunar-like, in contrast to Teniers, where spiritual remoteness takes precedence, despite the isolated backdrop, which - as the passing figure and village in the background to the right suggest – is not that isolated on closer inspection. At the same time, where *Hat & Cap Factory* presents this image of remoteness within a determinate structure anchored by gravity - courtesy of Mendelsohn's functionalist geometry - *Shell* resists any such downward force; liquifying the landscape in its porosity. There is a double movement, then, that takes a more *physical* form, where the tension between the reflexive traces of the brush-marks and the flatter modelled areas dilate whilst they contract throughout the painting. It is this formal tension that underpins the way in which the various team-building participants that circuit the cylindrical vessel - in their attempt to hurl it over the yellow container - gain presence.

But it seems important to stress *how* this photographic image of an outdoor corporate team-building activity that has been arbitrarily plucked from Google *translates* within the

Fig. 46 Simon Willems, *Shell (after Landscape with a Hermit by David Teniers the Younger),* 2019, Oil and acrylic on linen, 100 x 105cm. Courtesy of the author.

act of painting, as it melts into Teniers' landscape. This is perhaps a good example of where Deleuze's notion of the *figurative-given* might be considered an inherent tension: fuelling ready-made perceptions and psychic clichés within *formal* 'representation', on the one hand, in counterpoint to unforeseen applications and accidents within the painting process, on the other. Although all the figurative elements within this assembled grouping work through the same chromatic range - and therefore do not undermine proceedings on that level - the way in which the middle figure, to the left, for example, coagulates, through several reflexive marks in the upper half of her body - in opposition to the softer formal modelling that surrounds her (including her limbs) – ruptures any sense of temporal linearity. There is a push-*pulling* with the imagery and an opening up in how it *reads* in its materiality*,* in that sense, that was not wholly anticipated outside of the painting process itself and is thus a direct result of it[301]. Whilst these marks acknowledge the painting as a system of sorts: figure/ground, purple/yellow, dilation/contraction, copy/original; they likewise work *against* it, recalling Didi Huberman's analysis of the power of the pan over the detail in Jan Vermeer's *The Lacemaker*[302]. Furthermore, this tension is accentuated in some areas where the flatter modelling – such as within the central vessel - has been sanded down to reveal the support, creating the illusion of age, in contradistinction to the elsewhere painterly gestures, which embody *moments*.

Within this handling of surface materiality, it is worth mentioning how this oscillation weaves its way through the various team-builders and raises the question of agency. Like *Hitler's Dream Kitchen,* this is opened up *as* a question through the appearance of 'unity' (*We are all pulling in the same direction….We will make this happen),* whilst at the same time, contravened by difference: there is no clear sense, necessarily, that they are *uniting (Best just to look like I am listening….Better to tread the path of least resistance).* As I have already argued, with *Hitler's Dream Kitchen* it was the Nazi uniform that created the lens through which anonymity was posed as a question and *form* of subjectivity, whereas in this

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[301] My point here is that as a time-based activity, painting is subject to the forces and influence of sensations, impulses and emotions in shaping what is materially present, as both physical matter and imagery. See Footnote 319).

[302] Didi-Huberman's point, here, as it relates to the central detail of the depicted thread in Vermeer's *The Lacemaker* (1669-1670), is that in its accident and difference as a pooling of pure pigment in the painting, it both transcends and undermines the system of 'details' and construction that the painting otherwise adheres to. Its role is paradoxical: it both honours *being* a detail within the picture whilst internally *resisting* this distinction by overpowering it. Didi-Huberman, *Confronting Images: Questioning the Ends of a Certain History of Art*, trans. John Goodman (United States of America: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005). p.229-271.

scenario, it is the paint itself - *as* paint and matter - in its different textual applications that both presents an image of *principium individuationis*, but one in which individual expressions give nothing away. Therefore, what is significant in thinking about how both paintings satisfy anonymity as a movement and contradiction, is that this does not have to foreclose how it is achieved, at the same time, through 'representation': surface flattening, lack of detail, blankness, functional depictions, obscured features and so on.

6.3   Burnout

Before proceeding to explore the last two paintings within this selection, however, it feels necessary to first address and bring attention to the way in which these final two pieces move beyond any explicit reference to figures engaged in an 'activity' - akin to what I have just described - and gain presence solely by implication. What is being considered here, then - whilst not negating how other aspects of the research still resonate within this analysis - is Chapter 5 and Isabelle Graw's *Painting as a Thinking Subject* in particular, as they lend themselves to the *present-whilst-absent-figuration* that the game of paintball represents.

For the sake of any confusion, paintball is still understood within this context as a corporate team building activity, but one that is, at the same time, designed around concealment: it is the art of *not* being seen by the opposing team and *hiding* that is central to the game[303]. And it is this dimension in particular – thinking about the theme of anonymity, Bengtsson and the figure of the hermit running through this research – that makes its exploration all the more necessary. Moreover, it is this distinction that makes paintball in its task, but also in its use and deployment of paint, as both matter and colour, particularly appealing within the context of this research. As a game, therefore, paintball relies on the imagination in order that the question of anonymity, as something performed, might be considered. One is obliged to *imagine* the presence of competing teams strategically concealed within the painting in combat wear and masks for this idea to be satisfied. It is within the remit of the imagination, in the absence of any discernible activity in which a team can be identified - and individual expressions assimilated - that this image of retreat gains purchase. However, it cannot be taken as given that this much is clear, irrespective of any clues or points of

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[303] What I am emphasising here is how *hiding* and the art of concealment resonates, in that sense, with the key problematics of anonymity underpinning this project, that I outlined in the Introduction to this thesis, and Bengtsson's paintings in particular.

Fig.47 Simon Willems, *Burnout (after Saint Paul the Hermit by Nicolas Poussin)*, 2018, Oil on linen, 95 x 130cm. Courtesy of the author.

reference that the painting's title offers up, where the artwork could just as easily be read as a trippy solarised landscape by an unsuspecting viewer.

Taking this into consideration, *Burnout (after Saint Paul the Hermit by Nicolas Poussin 1637-1638)* re-assesses how Poussin's painting might present itself as a backdrop for such an outdoor pursuit. Although it seem necessary to point out, to begin with, that certain liberties have been taken in reframing the original as they make sense in the process of production. For example, where Poussin's piece includes a significant recession of fields coupled with the horizon line, to the left, thus suggesting the woodland's edge, in cropping that out, mine re-presents it as a continuous space; a strategy of containment similarly deployed in the last example, *Shell*, where parts of Teniers' original were omitted, to the right. At the same time, in re-emphasising the critical point I made earlier, a paradoxical tension exists within the painting where it *resists* being read along the lines of the original, whilst shadowing it sufficiently as a 'copy' for a strategic connection to be made. Like the two paintings I have already discussed, this tension is maximised where any homage to the original, chromatically, is bypassed (bar the mountain and sky to the left which play off similar gradations of blue). But it seems important to register precisely how the colouration of *Burnout* developed *as* a painting. This is to say, although I had intended developing the piece in sync with a lighter palette that was elsewhere gaining momentum, it was the process of *making* itself, and the need to experiment with colours that naturally granulated - thus magnifying the surface materiality of the canvas - that was primary to this move. It was in these terms, then, and *not* in accordance with a semiotic strategy that the Germolene pink[304] that predominates, was achieved in recognition of how a semi-transparent red-ochre wash might best be utilised and modelled through subsequent layers. Nonetheless, what results is a muted tonal range, which in its monochromatic lightness confuses any 'positive/negative' reading of the space *photographically*. In addition, any visual contradiction therein is further complicated by the inflatable paintball bunkers to the right and centre of the painting that honour a conventional 'positive' photographic reading; notwithstanding how the tree's leaves in front of the blue bunker to the right of the painting *read* 'negatively'. What this makes for - in dialogue with the gestural reflexive brush-marks

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[304] Whilst this colour could be identified classically as a 'flesh tint, 'Germolene Pink' seems more exacting, whilst still alluding to flesh within a restorative *medicinal* capacity.

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which recur sporadically in defining the trees and tree-stump to the bottom right - is an arbitrary configuration of marks aimed at harmony *outside* of - and distinct *from* - the original painting. The painting is designed around formal balance, but in a way that this is achieved, paradoxically, through elements that themselves *unrelate* to Poussin's original vision: the diagonal of blue that runs from the top left to the bottom-right, the playing off between red-ochre and cadmium red flourishes with the Germolene pink underpainting, the balancing of raw umber within the trees that itself creates a counter-diagonal to the blue one, and so on. At the level of making a painting, and responding to photographic source material within that event, Osborne's *Double negation* is considered, here, as instructive, in how that 'photo/painting-painting/photo' problematic might be rethought, whilst at the same time, in a way that moves *beyond* the 'absolute' nature of his original assertion.

Whilst I recognise how the *act* of painting opens up inherent tensions and contradictions accordingly, and that the emergent materiality of paint through an unfolding of sensation and experience cannot be identified as mutually exclusive from the political, social and cultural conditions that surround it[305]; I would like to consider how *Burnout* attempts to respond to this tension in its deployment of iconography. What is primary, then, at the level of imagery – acknowledging Graw's thesis - is how the question of presence-through-absence and 'subjectness' within painting gains presence and takes effect. It is my claim, then, that a parallel can be drawn between the present-whilst-absent figure of the corporate team-building paintballer, as a form of subjectivity within the artwork, and the painting itself in presenting the trace of its absent maker. But this thematic extends beyond the concealed team-builder on the other side of the depicted inflatable, for although as a viewer, I am not literally part of the painting's composition, in a way that this might be implied in a Caspar David Friedrich or a Vilhelm Hammershøi[306], for example, where the beholder's role is pictorially factored in as part of the artwork itself, I am - in my absence - entirely present in witnessing the scene; and, in this particular way, come to *mirror* the hiding paintballer. However, what is central on both counts, is that this contradiction of presence manifests itself in the first instance through the painting as an *object*. Moreover, it

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[305] Which was the point I made in Footnote 301.

[306] The point I am making is that both Friedrich and Hammershøi provide good examples of where the beholder is implied within the painting itself, as part of its orchestration, to the extent the figure is seen from behind and takes a central role. See Caspar David Friedrich *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog* 1818, *Woman at the Window* 1822 & Vilhelm Hammerhøi *Interior* 1899 & *Interior Strangade 30* 1901

is in its status as an object that the painting, as Graw claims, 'thus suggests a presence and at the same time confronts us with an absence'. Furthermore, it is here, where the surface alludes to the question of *subjectness*, that the problematic of *value* and the lived labour of the artist presents itself.

Nonetheless, this cannot be discounted either, at the level of iconography, where the team-building paintballer and the hermit also allude to the question of subjectness and value in their surface representation. In whatever visual form they take - whether as hiding paintballers, explicitly described figures, or in the case of the hermit, the landscape they formerly inhabited (notwithstanding *Neverending Lanyard)* - a triad of subjectness emerges. There is a sympathetic exchange between my absent/present role as the artist-maker and the role of the hermit and corporate team-building participant within the paintings.

However, there is another aspect of labour that all three parties similarly share. As Graw rightly argues, what is central to the appeal of painting and the lived labour that it embodies, is its sense of *private* labour. It is within the context of private labour and that which is seemingly exclusive to the artist - which one experiences, *paradoxically* in its public disclosure - that the illusion of owning that experience is sanctioned. And likewise it is within this capacity, where lived labour appears to retain a concrete material basis within the artwork, that the possibility of grasping a fibre of it is sustained; this is where labour appears as something one can hold on to, as if it had been transformed into "objectified labour", as Graw suggests.

But this tension between the private and the public, as it manifests itself in the valorising instinct to feed off and own that private experience at the level of subjectivity within any given painting, also applies to the corporate team-building participant and the hermit in art history. On both counts, these figures similarly face a challenge as to how their subjectivity is valorised by appealing to a private and public space. This is precisely what Chapters 4 & 5 showed. However, the way in which paintings *themselves* can be seen to engender an ambiguity of power within a problematic of value and labour, in these terms, is very particular. On the one hand, paintings act as catalysts for the vitalist projections of subjectness that - as Graw talks about - imbues them with meaning and value (economically and culturally); while, on the other hand, the illusion of private labour that they generate

gives licence to the beholder's sense of experiential ownership. In this scenario, then - albeit at an illusory animistic level – both painting and beholder can be seen as mutually parasitic.

At the same time, it seems important to recognise how the question of private and public space fuelling the problematic of value here falls within the context of gamification that I touched upon earlier. This is to say, more is at stake in applying the logic of game-playing to painting as an object of production, than just the metaphorical value of paintball that *Burnout* expresses in the first instance. As I have already established, the question of subjectivity surrounding the artist and corporate team-building participant is determined by its economic productive value, however much that economic production might rely on a private space and set of qualities in its realisation. But of course, the danger with gamification as a neo-liberal strategy designed to maximise productivity - and this is why the mechanics of paintball as a game is so applicable - is that in making boring stuff fun through the incentive of rewards, as Cederström & Spicer have suggested, resistance is compromised or overcome. Furthermore, there is something about the way in which gamification exploits the individual through hijacking their desire for self-actualisation, freedom and autonomy, that resonates as much for the artist as it does for the corporate team-building participant. This is what is inherently problematic, on one level, about making art more generally in the current economic climate: that it is grounded on the same principles of independence, self-determination and freedom that a neoliberal agenda is so keen to usurp and de-politicise.

6.4   Deadbox

Clearly, much of the thinking and discussion surrounding *Burnout* also applies to *Deadbox (after Mountainous Landscape with Two Monks and a Hermit by Marco Ricci)* (2019), insofar as the presence-through-absence problematic of paintball is also central to its logic and realisation. Both paintings can be viewed and identified, in that sense, as part of a trajectory that has flowered in the latter part of this research project that takes this particular team-building activity motif with its 'presenting whilst 'retreating' credentials as entirely apposite. It is not insignificant how this development raises questions in respect of those paintings to date – made within this research project - where team-builders *explicitly*

Fig. 48 Simon Willems, *Deadbox (after Mountainous Landscape with Two Monks and a Hermit by Marco Ricci),* 2019, Oil on linen, 100 x 145cm. Courtesy of the author.

feature; notwithstanding how those pieces might otherwise have proved useful and productive in wrestling with the research question, or at least, contributed to its development. Of course, this is not to negate, on the other hand, how other recent pieces, such as *Never-ending Lanyard*, which is more a portrait of sorts than it is a landscape, revolves around a different agenda, in the first instance, where it deploys a lanyard motif, which is similarly in the early stages of development within my practice. At the same time, this should not be taken as read that both *Burnout* and *Deadbox* are reducible, by virtue of that, to each other. Of all four paintings that I address and explore in this final chapter, *Deadbox* is the one that squares most closely with the painting from which it is appropriated. Furthermore, it is probably the piece within this selection that likewise retains most of the original painting's detailing, where the other three, in contrast, work around a solarised monochromatic base.

But in thinking about *Deadbox as* a paintball painting in tandem with *Burnout*, significant differences are in evidence. In creating the painting after *Burnout*, I wanted to see, for example, how embedding the paintball splatters within the landscape, rather than localising them around inflatable paintball bunkers, might configure. This makes for a slower reading of what the paintball splatters might, in that sense, come to represent to the viewer, creating a more fluid exchange throughout the surface rather than one graphically apportioned into 'sections'. There is a very different quality in how this movement works though the landscape as an image, where, unlike *Burnout* - in which the bulk of the depicted woodland, whilst muted and dissolving, appears stationary (save the gestural modelling of the trees) - *Deadbox,* in contrast, allows such dynamics, achieved through the reflexive brush-marks, to bleed through the landscape itself. Both pieces suggest imminent dissolution, but propose different scenarios as to precisely *how* such dissolution might unfold and be thought. With *Burnout* one feels that something, perhaps apocalyptic, has already happened - and therefore what is being witnessed is the aftermath – whereas with Deadbox, there is still a sense of serenity in what is visually present.

Conclusion

In the introduction, I suggested that in order for the question of anonymity within contemporary figurative painting to be addressed, it needed to be recognised in its illusory nature as a *performance*. This is what the preliminary example of the Amish Bed & Breakfast series and my midweek encounter at Greenmarket in Manhattan in 2000 pointed towards. What was being identified was the idea that it was not enough for anonymity to be registered simply as a style or type of expression at the level of representation, in which a particular *look* is satisfied, but a form of subjectivity, that as a double movement, engenders an ambiguity of power. This was not aimed at revealing a single model of anonymity which could be universally applied to painting, so much as a multifarious one in which the notion of *presenting-whilst-retreating* could be seen to manifest itself in different ways throughout the study. In assessing the outcome of this research, then, it seems necessary to respond to the various research objectives that I set out in the Introduction in relation to this claim, ahead of assimilating their implications within a broader evaluation.

Before doing so, however, I would briefly like to reflect upon the significance of establishing the *figurative* nature of this project at a preliminary stage in its development. As I stated in Chapter 1, this was not directed at the question of anonymity so much as the term 'figurative', as it applied within the context of this thesis, in accordance with Deleuze's notion of the *figurative-given*. As a painter who uses imagery, but who, at the same time, does not identify with the term 'figurative', it seemed imperative that a more critical re-assessment of the term, in its deployment, needed to be determined, if this research was to concern itself with anonymity within the context of 'figurative painting', rather than the more attractive - yet misleadingly expansive - term 'contemporary painting[307]'. My argument in scrutinising this distinction, was that the figurative-given, as Deleuze describes it, presented a feasible space through which to *think* the term 'figurative' within contemporary figurative painting, without recourse to anachronistic, nostalgic and specifically craft-based agendas[308]. Furthermore, in deploying the term loosely – as it might traditionally concern itself with the human form and/or the 'representation' of figures and

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[307] My point here is that the term 'contemporary painting' suggests painting within an expanded field and post-medium condition, which is not what this research project is directly concerned with.

[308] Rancière's different regimes of art are instructive here, in recognising how this recourse to anachronistic, nostalgic and specifically craft-based agendas might be identified and critiqued. See Ranciere, Rockhill, and ŽiŽek, *The Politics of Aesthetics : The Distribution of the Sensible*.

objects – was to negate how the term 'figurative' had become redundant within a 'post-photographic' and digital culture of responding to, and (re)presenting, existing (reproduced) images[309].

Beyond locating the image-based nature of my research, my first objective was to consider how the paintings of Dick Bengtsson - as an appropriate and canonically under-exposed case study - reveal an inherent tension and ambiguity of power in Chapter 2, in their demonstration of anonymity as a *performance*. What was critical to this exploration – what was being proposed - was the idea that anonymity could be appraised as a form of subjectivity within the *doing* and *making* of paintings, by framing the investigation according to Nietzsche's duality of Apollonian-Dionysian forces.

However, in attempting to evaluate Bengtsson's paintings on that account, certain obstacles presented themselves. For example, the gesture that Bengtsson deployed in manipulating the surface of his paintings with an iron whilst the varnish was drying, as a signature and final act in the course of making, illustrates the difficulty in considering the Apollonian-Dionysian distinction. This is to say, the act itself can be read in its Duchampian heritage[310], as a highly conceptualized *rational* gesture, and yet its expression signifies the opposite; appearing random and emotionally charged; creating the illusion that this brandishing flies in the face of any rational clarity of judgment. The painting *Oktoberceremoni,* in particular, best illustrates this point, presenting its battered body as if it had been through a war. On all counts, what this creates is a certain type of Dionysian *look* (one imagines the energy, the emotions and the 'losing' of oneself) but to what extent was the Dionysian really experienced[311]? That was the primary rationale for considering the Dionysian in relation to the Apollonian in the first place; that the former represented a dissolution of self and could be seen in its primal instinct to satisfy a particular conception of anonymity, in contrast to the Apollonian, where it can only be achieved - consciously and rationally - by the individual

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[309] The point being that most image-based 'figurative' painters rely on photographic source material in one way or another. However, this is not to negate artists, such as Ellen Altfest, for example, who still adhere to traditional principles of working from direct observation.

[310] See Chapter 2.1 Re: The Case of Bengtsson p.46.

[311] What is being scrutinised here is the idea that the *appearance* of the Dionysian, in some capacity, is visually discernible. However, a feasible counter-argument might also suggest that this is not case where the 'Apollonian' and 'Dionysian' take place unconsciously. But this also raises the question of 'reading' the Dionysian according to *degrees* of reason being abandoned, which was my primary point in considering Nietzsche's duality as a 'paradoxical' rather than a 'dialectical' state of affairs.

strategically[312]. At the same time, perhaps the Apollonian-Dionysian duality in this context needs to be read more through a 'paradoxical' rather than a 'dialectical'[313] lens, where *Otkoberceremoni* – and any single gesture within it, or any other piece for that matter[314] – become 'both' Apollonian and Dionysian, at any one point, rather than 'one or the other'. Furthermore, evaluating the amateur as something staged within Bengtsson's paintings proves inherently problematic where Bengtsson was amateur from the outset, in contrast to Tuymans, whose fabricated clumsiness could be more clearly delineated from his professional training.

Nevertheless, despite the inherent problem in identifying how the terms of the Apollonian-Dionysian duality might read and apply here, what this research showed - irrespective of any self-conscious conceptualising on Bengtsson's part - was the value and power of ambiguity surrounding his paintings; both semiotically - in how they resist meaning and resolution - as well as *anonymously*, in how they raise the question of power[315]. Perhaps if the sign games that Bengtsson sets up were not slowed down by the complex materiality that his surfaces evidence, the ambiguity that they engender would be compromised and the paintings would seem more in sync with contemporary painters, such as Wilhelm Sisal and Victor Man, as I discussed in Chapter 2. In the latter case, on both counts, the orchestration of figurative elements satisfies the making of a statement, more than it does a visual questioning, and can be seen to operate solely at the level of language within a reading of certain cues. In fairness, maybe Bengtsson's intentions were similarly fuelled by a desire to play games and in one sense this might not matter, where a semiotic puzzle is simply being honoured and followed through. But at the same time, given the political potency of Bengtsson's work - and Sasnal's for that matter, in the example discussed - there is a certain difference in value and appraisal, between shutting a painting down by presupposing its message (swastika = male neo-Nazis = impotence) and opening it up for discussion where it refuses to give one (swastika ≠). Furthermore, in this case, a different time-base and duration in responding to the work as a viewer is created, where the indifferent and

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[312] See Chapter 2.3 Re: Defining Anonymity within an Apollonian-Dionysian Duality p.57-60.

[313] My point here is that although the Apollonian-Dionysian duality could be taken as a dialectic in its dichotomous form, a more accurate way to read it in this context, would be to acknowledge it as a paradox within any one element or gesture, in which both are simultaneously present to varying degrees.

[314] This is to say, the logic of reading the Apollonian-Dionysian duality *paradoxically*, here, applies across the board, beyond the given example.

[315] Taking the 'ambiguity of power' fuelling anonymity, here, within the context of the Apollonian-Dionysian duality as outlined in the Introduction. See Introduction 0.2 Re: Research Trajectory p.17 (Footnote 15).

obstructive nature of the materiality undermines the assimilation of imagery that it passes through *(What does this mean?.....Is this supposed to mean?....Where does this take me?)* This is why the example of Bengtsson within the canon in his manipulation of materiality is so instructive: that in its conceptual deployment, it is neither reducible to the semiotic game that it appears to propose, nor subservient in its provocation to a prescription of meaning. It is no surprise – and perhaps more broadly emblematic - that Bengtsson once made a painting titled *'Varken Det Ena Eller Det Andra (Neither This Nor That)'* (1971), in which an image of a university faculty building[316] plucked from an encyclopaedia, is reworked as an austere piece of Soviet-style modernism, complete with captioned title and floodlit up-lighting. Oddly it seems – and this is the ultimate paradox – thinking about the point I made in Chapter 2, the more Bengtsson coaxes and teases the beholder into *reading* a painting, the more it resists being *read*. And it is precisely this distinction of flirting with a semiotically reductionist agenda in order to resist its imposition that – notwithstanding the rich materiality that the artist deploys – makes Bengtsson's paintings so formidable and relevant in relation to much painting being made now. In circumnavigating meaning in this way, and framing painting to function as any one thing and its opposite, paradox enters the equation as a liberating force, in which the reductive shortcomings of *reading* painting according to a modernist teleology and a semiotically reductionist arena of post-modern criticality beyond it, are undermined[317].

Of course, the value of paradox as a force of liberation within painting also resonates in Chapter 3 where – in consideration of my second objective – I showed how Nietzsche's conception of the Apollonian within a post-conceptual condition of painting presented its own limitations. By showing how *Kippenberger's Lieber maler, male mir series* attested to this, whilst adding a new dimension to the thinking of anonymity within this thesis - in conceiving of the 'individual' that Nietzsche suggests is central to the Apollonian - by proxy, any one painting within Kippenberger's project becomes both *by* him and *not* by him. This was not something that I had anticipated before considering Kippenberger's example and thinking more specifically about how the Apollonian-Dionysian duality might play out within certain post-conceptual painting scenarios. Although Bengtsson did not pose the same

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[316] This picture, that Bengtsson sourced from the Svensk Uppslagsbok, forms part of the (UCL) University College London campus in London. See Feuk, "Irony, Phobia, Mania: Houses of Birth and Death." p.19.

[317] What is being emphasised here is that the notion of paradox becomes liberating, on both counts, as no linear art-historical resolution or finality is achieved where any one thing also becomes its opposite.

questions in this respect, where he did in effect make the paintings; at the same time, he did employ local school children to trace out the drawings that he had sourced on occasion, which would inform the paintings he would subsequently follow through to completion. But perhaps, more critically, what is at stake here, in respect of both artists, is how Rancière's *Ethical regime* resonates and enters the frame. It is the value of anonymity – understood here as a conceptual strategy – that speaks to both the question of origin and therefore its truth content (authorship and the value of authorship as authentic/inauthentic), and the question of an artwork's end or purpose, and the effects it results in (critique, provocation, recognition of discursive forces within the everyday and an ambiguity of power) that moves the conversation beyond the Apollonian in its original Nietzschean formation - connoting the *actual* individual involved.

Much as the second half of the thesis moved away from the Apollonian-Dionysian duality, towards the idea of asceticism and the representation of hermits in art history - as a reframing of how the question of presenting-whilst-retreating might be thought – the Apollonian preoccupation with rational self-discipline and measured thought still applied. This is what the exploration into the etymology of the word ascetic and Foucault's *Technologies of the Self* revealed: that *askesis* (as self-possession) and Christian asceticism (as self-renunciation) both prefigure the Apollonian instinct for order and control; however much the latter is where order and control, in that sense, finds its limits; the self turning *against* itself; leaving the individual ruptured by an ambiguity of power. That is precisely what Nietzsche's *will-to-nothingness* in its various types demonstrated. And furthermore, this was critical to pursuing my third objective in examining how anonymity, in this context, might be identified as a form of subjectivity. However, as with my analysis into the *nature* of asceticism, and how it manifests itself in different ways in the representation of hermits within art history, what was central to the various paintings I examined, was the role of performance in determining *how* the question of presenting whilst retreating might be evaluated. In other words, when applied to the illusory nature of painting, every ascetic aspect and ambiguity of power seeking appraisal manifests itself solely at the level of appearance; that is *the* reality. But as I showed in my assessment of *Foucault's Technologies of the Self* and Nietzsche's *What is the Meaning of the Ascetic Ideals?*, the performing of asceticism fuelling the hermit - and the various types that I reflected upon - was not pitched

solely at the sanctioning of animistic scenarios within paintings; asceticism is by nature illusory and staged. This is what Flood's assessment of ascetic subjectivity showed. What painting does is reveal *how* this performance of presenting-whilst-retreating takes effect within local art-historical traditions, exercising different levels of drama. Although my research into asceticism and the hermit in art history was by no means compendious, focusing on a small selection of works to think through the theoretical texts I was considering, what this limited study confirmed was how any one hermit painting within the Western canon remains highly complex and multi-faceted in its ascetic representation and the ambiguity of power this prefigures.

This emphasis on the multi-faceted nature of ascetic representation embodying an ambiguity of power laid the foundation for my final objective. By setting up my exploration into 'structured fun' and the corporate team building participant, through their emergence within my practice in sync with the hermit, allowed me to navigate what both parties shared beyond their seeming opposition. As I discussed at the time, a marked contrast exists between the voluntary asociality of the latter and the *obliged* social obligations of the former. But there is also the question of opposing temporalities that both motifs point towards; historically, in referring to different time periods (including the shift from a religious to a secular society[318]), as well as, philosophically, in how time might be *thought* - which was Han's point[319]. And this is not to negate how different economic realities underpin both figures, which was precisely the value in considering Graw's thesis of painting in its Post-Marxist context in the first place. At the same time, experimenting with Flood's text, into how the ascetic self becomes a *performed* self through substituting the word 'ascetic' for 'corporate team-building participant', enabled me to identify in what capacity corporate team-building activities might be appraised as a pretence of doing something seriously. It was this opening up of team-building as a *performance* - and the distinction between intention and its means of expression – which I re-appropriated from Flood that anchored the question of resistance which I addressed in the latter part of the chapter. In identifying how the ambiguity of power fuelling the corporate team-building participant was not as straightforward as the *them-and-us* scenario of resistance that Critchley suggested,

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[318] My point here is that the representation of hermits in the Western canon of art history pre-dates modernity, and is almost entirely religious in nature; in contradistinction to the *modern* secular nature of society surrounding the corporate team-building participant within a Post-Fordist culture of late capitalism.

[319] See Chapter 5.5 Re: Re-enactment, Memory and Ritual p.166.

Warren's critique of structured fun and subsequent research trajectory was instructive in helping me to establish where and *how* the question of resistance might be framed. Furthermore, it was within this deeper cultural question of how a neoliberal agenda of gamification, self-optimisation and positive psychology moves the goalposts that I was able to make a link with how the team-building participant and hermit configure and serve a function within my own work, in relation to my production as an artist. Moreover, it was here that I could identify how, in that sense, they were integral to my practice as critical devices that lent themselves to Graw's critique of 'subjectness' within painting in the final section of the chapter.

In considering how this came together and played out in the paintings themselves that form part of my final exhibition, Chapter 6 allowed me to respond to the impact of this research on my painting practice directly. What this analysis showed, beyond the differences and issues that each painting wrestled with and raised - in both their making, and the material that they drew upon – was how their construction depended on the workings of *paradox*. Of course, to begin with, a more expected argument presents itself, where, as I noted earlier, an internal resistance comes into force between the need to create a painting that references another one enough for it to be read accordingly, but which, at the same time, undermines this indexical association. This is the distinction: the painting *presents* in referring to another artwork in its 'original' form[320], whilst *retreating* through the nature of its appropriative gesture. But two things are at stake here: namely, the need to move beyond the kind of 'quotational exercise', I touched upon in Chapter 5 (where I cited Ged Quinn), in which a post-modern paradigm of 'check-listing' for its own sake becomes a cul-de-sac and means to an *end*; and, secondly, the need to recognise the reality of painting as a *process*, in which materiality and meaning emerge concurrently within the act of making[321]. Surely, beyond Bengtsson, this is precisely the value in considering the Apollonian-Dionysian

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[320] By referring to another painting in its 'original' form, what I am getting at is the idea that a sufficient degree of visual connection is made in relation to the original artwork for it to be recognised as such. But this does not mean, necessarily, that all 'original' features and elements are in place. This is precisely the point that I made in Chapter 5.3 Re: Not Before Time p. 162.

[321] Estelle Barret's paper 'Materiality, Affect, and the Aesthetic Image' is useful here in thinking about how knowledge is produced within the act of making, within what she determines as the 'aesthetic image' where, unlike images that operate in relation to established symbolic codes in their informational communication, the aesthetic image is *performative*; emerging through sensory processes that give rise to multiplicity, ambiguity and inderterminacy. See Estelle Barrett and Barbara Bolt, *Canal Knowledge : Towards a 'New Materialism' through the Arts* (London; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2013). p.63-72.

duality. And needless to say, painting is after all a time-based activity, a point which often seems neglected in a culture of appraisal rooted in the instantaneous and the semiotic. It is in respect of the latter, then, and the idea that painting honours an *emergent* materiality within a flux of sensations, impulses and emotions that often *conflict* with the painting's 'content', by virtue of their unforeseen-ness, that the notion of paradox is both truly maximised in counterpoint to the original artwork to which it refers, and liberating in moving painting forward. This is, I claim – beyond the hermit and teambuilding participant juxtaposition itself – where my practical research offers something new.

In thinking about how these two motifs come to embody different forms of *anonymous* subjectivity in response to the research question, however, various points merit consideration. As I showed in Chapter 4 and 5, both are fuelled by ambiguities of power achieved within a paradoxical motion of *present-whilst-retreating*. Although the way in which this translates within the imagery and materiality of the paintings themselves takes very different forms. More recent developments such as the literal representation of a hermit in *Neverending Lanyard*, which sits in contrast to the vacated hermit landscapes that have thus far provided backdrops for the various corporate team-building activities taking place within the paintings, demonstrate this. It is not only the unfolding presence of the lanyard ribbon as a new motif that reframes this *anonymising* tension. The phantom hermit could just as well be reclining within the picture splattered in paintball pellets, as he is sleeping within it, wearing the lanyard. In both scenarios, the zooming in of the image to reveal a portrait still works to emphasise the individual *as* an individual, rather than simply a differentiated element, which, at the same time, the lanyard in the actual painting similarly suggests. There is a marked difference, in that sense, between *Neverending Lanyard* and *Shell*, despite the fact that the figures in the latter are explicitly present. In the former, a more intimate proximity to the figure is assumed, seconded by the medley of personal items that surround him: the bible, the violin, the skull, and so forth. And likewise, there is a marked difference between the passivity of the unconscious monk in the former and the *activity* of the group of corporate team-building participants in the latter. (Hitler's Dream Kitchen & Chapter 4)

But even if one takes account of these differences, as I have already suggested, it is where figures becomes present by implication, that in their absence, the paintings, as both

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receptacles of illusion and spectral traces of *subjectness*, affirm a more vital relationship to the theme of anonymity as a form of subjectivity and double movement surrounding this thesis. This is where *Burnout* and *Deadbox* start to move beyond the more general team-building activities' narrative in prefiguring paintball as a more apposite activity that in its mechanics champions the art of concealment and retreat as an ideal quality. And this is where Graw's call for painting to reflect upon the modern forms of power and economic conditions that seek to domesticate subjectivity, resonates and gains purchase: in terms of the singular nature of painting as a problematic of economic and symbolic value, as well as how this might be thought allegorically in the deployment of particular motifs within paintings that reflect this. Although Graw takes the presence-through-absence of subjectness as primary, which, as an absolute, is not the same as, and cannot be reduced to the presenting-whilst-retreating paradox, which, as I have been exploring, ultimately translates as one of degrees and levels, both are critical to any appraisal of where contemporary painting finds itself within a late capitalist condition.

As I have demonstrated and shown throughout this thesis, regarding my own practice as well as Bengtsson's and the various artists that emerge after him, to consider the idea of anonymity as a performance and double movement, brings something new to its value and application within the analysis and practice of painting. In thinking about anonymity beyond the limitations of it *representing* a type of look or conceptual strategy - which is where this research started from - anonymity remains a *question* and retains an ambiguity of power. This *is* its power. In presenting a new idea as to how anonymity might be thought, my research acknowledges previous configurations and ideas regarding the 'distance' and *flattening* that connects critiques surrounding the flattening of contemporary life: the anonymity of printed and mass produced imagery; the move towards abstraction; the Warholian *surface* and so on – as flat. However, by engendering movement and contradiction, anonymity herein moves beyond this, I suggest, as a *paradoxical* gesture and restructuring of painting's address. Within this capacity, the meta figure of the hermit becomes a productive addition, then, to the toolbox of looking at, explaining, and working within the modes of production and presentation of contemporary painting, by serving as a motif that 'presents' whilst 'retreating', where anonymity and *flattening* are central concerns. Rather than anonymity being seen solely as an issue of 'representation' and *style*

of representing - or a commentary and critique on contemporary modes of reproduction within a post-photographic and digital age – it is all of these, as well as a psychologically *performed* expression and 'form of subjectivity'. This is where the position and act of painting in recognising anonymity in these terms, I claim, can be seen to link with the radically intensified experiences of 'presenting' whilst 'retreating' in contemporary neoliberal lifestyles.

Future Research

In considering how this doctoral study has explored anonymity as a form of subjectivity and double movement within contemporary figurative painting, a number of thematic strands present themselves as viable candidates for further research. Perhaps a good place to start, as I made reference to in Chapter 6, is with the corporate lanyard, which as a motif and object of investigation is one that I arrived at too late in this project to assess directly in this thesis. It is worth noting, beyond the way in which I frame it within the ambiguity of power thematic, that despite its ubiquitous presence in our daily lives since the early noughties, the lanyard has simply not been addressed as an object of aesthetic and political enquiry within contemporary art; its global reach as the 21st century work-time accessory *par excellence,* largely ignored. In thinking about how the lanyard raises questions about identity and empowerment, on the one hand, and aesthetic enticement, on the other, this resonates with the performative dimensions of gamification and 'structured fun' that this research has, in part, concerned itself with. But it is the particular way in which gamification mobilises a neoliberal agenda within the context of what Han determines as the *achievement* subject, and how this might translate within painting, that in thinking about Graw's critique of 'subjectness' in the current economic conditions, a space is created for further investigation within painting. Whether this develops through a similar lens, in which the *literal* depiction of corporate team-building activities and the like as *actual* games are central, or rethought through imagery of the everyday, remains to be seen. With this in mind, there is also a case, in my role as an image-based painter, for how my production and labour might then reflect upon and *represent* the economic conditions of a capitalist art world, in its desire for 'Personality, affects and social relationships'. Much has been made of *immaterial labour*, as it speaks to the question of artistic production within a Post-Fordist economy[322] but not specifically within the context of painting, let alone *figurative* painting. And although some of the reasoning for this might well lie with the Post-Marxist dismissal of painting, in its status as the ultimate art object commodity that, as I noted in Chapter 5, Lazzarato champions, this is all the more reason why this might be a good place to start.

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[322] I'm thinking in particular of the *Art and Immaterial Labour* symposium and *Untitled (Labour): Contemporary Art and Immaterial Production* conference that were held at Tate Britain in 2008 and 2012, respectively, as well as more recent events that address this question.

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