Digital Adaptations:
Plausibility in Representation Beyond the Frame

By

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Abstract

The research outlined in this document explores an aesthetic philosophical problem – the making and reception of visual representations – via an interdisciplinary methodology based in material-based studio art practice. The studio work took the form of a representative exercise in which a photograph's pictorial space is extended outwards into a larger handmade picture that continues the image's structural logic through new materials. Various material methods were tested and selected based on their effectiveness in continuing the picture beyond the boundaries of the photograph. This document questions the means by which an intentional visual representation, inherently requiring of the artist creative stylistic choices, is constructed and evaluated as successful. It was determined that plausibility in representation beyond the frame requires a certain adherence to the referent which is achieved through careful observation and reflection upon relationships between visual elements at every scale, as well as a delicate balancing of invention with repetition.

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Chapter 1: Picturing Unseen Forces

If one were to walk into my thesis exhibition and look at one of the artworks on the wall, *Untitled I* for example (Fig. 1), one might see a rather typical, flat, uninterrupted abstract painting. This rectangular, non-iconic, near-monochromatic, two-dimensional image, though it undoubtedly bears a certain style that is uniquely my own, does not appear especially remarkable. The viewer may note its dimensions (the piece is four feet tall and three feet wide) require some distance in order to apprehend the picture fully – a series of thick, pale beige trails of paint striping and spattering over a cloudy black expanse.

However, upon closer inspection, the viewer will notice that just to the left of the painting's center there is an expanse of smooth sheen, roughly the dimensions of a standard 8.5 x 11" sheet of paper, floating slightly raised above the rest of the picture plane. Stepping closer, it will become clear that a digital print has been superimposed over part of the painted surface. This same viewer may guess, based on the print's continuation of the surrounding colors, lines and shapes, that part of the painting has been photographed, printed to scale, and mounted onto the corresponding segment of the picture plane. In fact, the causal relationship between the painting and the print is reversed: the print is not obscuring an identical section of painting beneath – it was instead the print that formed the foundation around which the rest of the painting was designed. In other words, the painting's structure creatively extrapolates on the sample of visual information given by the print. But what processes led to the

painting taking *this* form rather than any other possible way the picture could have been continued? The means by which a plausible extrapolation are achieved is the theoretical problem my research explores.

The print in question comes from an image taken of the surface of an old rusty bucket. This bucket is one of many objects I have collected, photographed and turned into the foundation for representational works in this series. I was walking in a Toronto neighborhood and found the bucket in a dumpster outside someone's house. The high contrast pattern of the glossy black metal and the pale, dusty streaks running from top to bottom caught my eye and caused me to stop and briefly contemplate this object and, eventually, to pick it up and take it to my studio.

What is it about this bucket that captivated me so, especially when my eyes are constantly drawn to other complex imagery only to ignore it? As I move through the urban environment, I cannot help but pause at the sight of stained, decaying, visibly aging matter. The often visually spectacular variations in these otherwise commonplace, unremarkable surfaces caused my mind to begin to interpret and evaluate them aesthetically, as it would a painting or other image. This is not to suggest I am assuming any human agency in their appearance, but my imagination begins to work on them in the same way it works on an object created by an artist's intention, imagining what might have happened to make it look as it does.

Moments like this are what started me in the direction of this thesis project. Neurobiologist Margaret Livingstone writes that we are "as biological

entities… interested in obtaining information about surfaces around us" (2002: 58). This is important for everything from simple movement to complex reflections. According to her research, we are instinctively drawn to areas of high contrast and complex detail, as well as "items of biological significance" (78). This may explain why surfaces like that of the bucket catch my attention. However, in the contemporary urban landscape, there is no shortage of high-contrast, complex imagery competing for my attention. What was different about my process of interpreting the bucket and looking at, say, a corporate advertisement? Both are surfaces that reflect light into my eyes, my perception of which becomes meaning.

This process of visual interpretation is complex and not well understood, even by modern neurobiology. However, numerous theorists agree that sensory experience in the present cannot be separated from cognitive association with what has been perceived in the past (Arnheim 2004, Burnett 2004, Livingstone 2002). Therefore, interpretation will always, at least partly, be an imaginative extrapolation from what is simply seen. Ron Burnett writes that "engaging with images far exceeds the boundaries of the frame and involves a process of visualization that cannot be constrained (the mental space of the viewer) nor should it be" (2004: 16). I will introduce Burnett's concepts of reverie and visualization, which describe the viewer's active role in generating meaning out of images, in Chapter 2.7. Other theories of perception and cognition informing my research will be introduced in Chapter 2.5.

What might this process of visualization look like if one tried to depict it?

Each of my thesis works imagine a continuation of the visual field beyond, to use Burnett's words, the "boundaries of the frame." What are the limits imposed upon my creative extrapolation? How is this imagined extrapolation achieved materially with such convincing sophistication that it might not initially be perceived as a print embedded in a painting? Close analysis and a comparison of photograph and painting will reveal areas of repetition, modification and invention, some of which may strike the viewer as successfully representational of the image's characteristics and others not.

Before my thesis work, I had begun to consciously collect photographic images of found surfaces bearing the above characteristics. My motivations for doing so, initially, were twofold: to document the event as part of a continuously unfolding narrative of my travels (I began this practice while travelling through Asia), and to document the surface appearance in order that it might inspire later paintings (rather than specific renderings of my photographs, I had envisioned these paintings as extrapolations of the surface's coloration and patterning). However, as I viewed these cropped fragments of each scene, I noted how little of what I remembered from taking the photo was actually visible in the image – the subject matter was alienated from its physical context and often became ambiguous as a result.

As Hans Dieter Huber notes, any artwork we experience contains "many indeterminacies," for it is impossible to represent everything "that would be necessary for a precise identification of the meaning of internal elements or relations." As a result, viewers are "in a certain state of disinformation in front

of the artwork and the intentions of the artist" (Huber 1989). As the person who made the image, I could picture the larger scene from which each photo is a selection, but a viewer trying to do the same thing, even one familiar with the image's subject matter, would never be able to do so with the same completeness. In thinking about how these images could be used in my art practice, I imagined ways of interpreting them other than as a part of the physical context I could recall. The spontaneous, irregular, and complex patterning of the images allowed for relationships to be formed between perceived elements at a variety of scales, leading the image and different areas within it to be associated with my thoughts and experiences as my brain searches the picture for meaning.[1]

By carefully analyzing my images and allowing my mind to act on them, I found myself constructing interpretations for them – a particular pattern of rust would remind me of mountains, for example (Fig 2). It was this process that gave me the idea to make paintings from these photos, not by painting the photo's elements directly, but by painting a possible context for those elements that would continue their properties and relations beyond the cropped sample. I envisioned placing a photograph somewhere within a larger picture plane and

[1] Because we have a biological disposition towards organizing the visual field into a comprehensible whole, to simplify what we are seeing based on past perceptual experiences (Arnheim 2004, p.50), this can often result in erroneous 'recognition' of apparently clear subject matter in what is actually non-iconic imagery – a perceptual phenomenon called *pareidolias*. This was the title and theme of an exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art featuring the work of artist Nicolas Baier. Like Baier's work, my decentralized, non-iconic images of "aesthetically seductive surfaces" (MOCCA 2009) are ambiguous and open to interpretation for those actively searching them for meaning.

completing the picture based on the sample, beginning with the space around the photograph's edges and working outwards.

The active role of viewers in creating their understanding out of what they see is a defining factor in the relationship between humans and their environment. My research combines several critical fields of interest, one being this relationship (something I developed in the course of my undergraduate minor in geography and environmental studies). The physical, human-made world and the ubiquity of contemporary, screen-mediated methods of communication seems to put humans at a distance from natural systems we are in fact intimately tied to and depend on. Some of my past work has attempted to draw attention to the visible points of intersection between these two concepts, which are ultimately interconnected and separated at our peril.

In her essay "The Photographic Condition of Surrealism," Rosalind Krauss describes found objects as "instance[s] of objective chance – where an emissary from the external world carries a message informing the recipient of his own desire. The found object is a sign of that desire" (1981: 165). The disintegration of these objects signifies to me the fundamental impermanence of humanity's supposed dominance over its environment. These signs suggest that human constructions are ultimately in the hands of forces bigger than us, whose work we cannot literally see, but can only deduce from material encounters like my rusty bucket. As objects of contemplation, whether directly or through representation, these objects and surfaces signify that artificial constructions are not somehow removed from these processes of transformation (hydrology,

decay, entropy) and that the human environment and the 'natural' world are really one interconnected system. Therefore, this thesis project, undertaken in the context of an interdisciplinary studio MFA program, continues the trajectory of some of my past work through the transformation of my studio practice into a site of critical and philosophical investigation of the problem of representation and invention in materially depicting these unseen forces.

1.1 The Mimetic Imperative

Positioned at the intersection between material-based studio practice and aesthetic philosophy, my interdisciplinary, practice-led research explores the mimetic imperative, one of the oldest traditions in art[2] and the aesthetic philosophical concept around which the different branches of my research constellate. In Chapter 2.2 I discuss several lines of theoretical discourse that have informed my research around the concept of *mimesis* and representation, and its implications as an imaginative, cognitive activity responding to sensory experience.

While any artwork requires specific responses to the fundamental questions of what to make and how, *mimesis* entails a narrow objective: successful representation of some aspect of observed reality. *Mimesis* demands the artist make creative choices regarding media and methods. Thus, any

[2] In fact, Georges Bataille suggests that the production of mimetic representations is the event by which modern anthropology defines the birth of symbolic thought within humanity (2009: 89). His interpretations of the earliest known examples, the Lascaux caves, informed my understanding of the deeply-engrained nature of the human capacity for *mimesis*, though I ultimately decided they would not contribute directly to answering my thesis questions.

representation can be described as a translation. My discussions of *mimesis* and representation are supplemented in Chapter 2.4 with consideration of various theories that address the act of translation and adaptation of texts, including those of Walter Benjamin, Rosemary Hawker, and Linda Hutcheon. My research reflects on the act of representation by first asking: by what material and cognitive processes are visual experiences translated into material likenesses? What factors leads an artist to the choice of methods?

The fundamentally creative act of *mimesis* results in an artwork that can be interpreted by a viewer. While the idea that an artwork can fail or succeed is generally a matter of subjective interpretation, in order to succeed *as a mimetic image*, the visual representation must maintain a certain level of adherence to the referent, by which the knowing viewer evaluates the image's plausibility. My research focuses on this problem of plausibility, asking: How does an artist tackle the issue of plausibility in visual representation of an image, and what, if any, are the boundaries this imposes on creative invention? Where does copying end and inventing begin? What are the necessary steps in tackling this issue today? What exactly is being translated in a successful representation, and what is missing from an unsuccessful one – that is, can the internal logic of the image, the visual syntax that allows for a so-called plausible extension, be located in specific visual strategies?

This introductory section expounds the important aspects of my studio work and its background, as well as the main concepts with which my research is involved and how each of these will be approached in the rest of the paper.

The following chapters explore the project's key theoretical and methodological aspects in order to arrive at what is distilled in these processes of pictorial investigation. Through analysis of key literature, I contextualize my research and its underlying theoretical questions within contemporary art practice and critical discourse (Chapter 2). I then outline my project's interdisciplinary methodology and its relation to my theoretical framework (Chapter 3) before discussing the studio process (Chapter 4), some of my results (Chapter 5), and their implications for further scholarship (Chapter 6).

1.2 Beyond the Picture

My studio-led exploration approaches the above questions by way of a mimetic exercise in which the pictorial space of a photograph is extended outwards into a larger handmade picture that continues the pictorial logic at work in the image by way of completely different materials. Approaching this photograph (hereafter referred to as the 'sample') as a visual text, capable of being deconstructed into organized units of meaning, each piece in my body of work aims at discovering the necessary steps in producing a plausible representation by recombining these elements in an imagined pictorial extrapolation. Chapter 2.6 outlines some of the literature regarding this segmentation of the visual field, which significantly informed my studio process (discussed in Chapter 4).

My objective with this body of work was to achieve what I will call 'speculative verisimilitude' – a realistic representation that *continues*, rather than recreates, the sample's surface appearance. This required me to analyze

each sample carefully, first imaginatively extending its lines and patterns outward, and then executing this imagined picture in new materials, along the way assessing the results of my work in comparison to the sample. In this regard, the feedback loop generated between my subjectivity and the work's appearance was crucial in directing my actions within the studio. This concept is discussed further in Chapter 3.3.

Each one of the seven pieces in my final body of work started from a photographic image that I took from the surface of an object found while navigating my urban environment. The objects and samples I selected are discussed further in Chapter 4.1 and 4.2. For every piece, the photograph was placed on a larger substrate and the handmade representation was gradually built up around it, incrementally taking on the image's visual characteristics as I refined my material applications. However, extending the picture is not the same as copying it, so my handmade representation required me to make decisions about how to balance repetition and invention in the composition to achieve a plausible extension (discussed in Chapters 4.7 and 4.8).

This investigation is interdisciplinary in its approach, employing a materials-based studio practice in the exploration of the aesthetic philosophical problem of the mimetic imperative. My research is informed by relevant theoretical discourse, and driven by a combination of material experimentation, intuitive making, empirical observation, and critical reflection, thus exemplifying the inherently interdisciplinary character of art-based research (McNiff 1998: 62). My artworks, the products of my research,

embody this amalgamation of methods and generate fresh critical insights. I will discuss my methodology in further detail in Chapter 3.

I acknowledge that the project depends heavily on my own personal studio experiences, interpretation of the image, and assessment of results. Therefore, the observations and conclusions that define my research can never be separated from my specific subjectivity and position. What I hope to produce is a record of my research trajectory, in the hopes that my work will contribute meaningfully to contemporary literature in an area of practice that is under-theorized from an artist's perspective within the literature encountered during my research: the use of material-based studio process in approaching the aesthetic philosophical problem of *mimesis*.

In an age where Western society seems to rely more and more on communication mediated by screens, direct engagement with materials is in decline. Material contact means mess and unpredictability, qualities that are incompatible with digital technology the way it traditionally functions. My studio practice asserts this direct contact with the unknown, unpredictable nature of materials, and with the accidental effects created by intentional acts, through material experimentation. The material experimentation in which my studio work was grounded is discussed in Chapter 4.5.

While these works were created as part of a common theoretical thread, each required a unique methodology, based on the materials I found most suitable for each particular sample. My art practice, prior to this program was centered within the tradition of painting. My thesis work, in which I used a

variety of pigments to produce a pictorial representation, is therefore positioned within the lengthy tradition of painting and related material practice. Schwabsky (2002) identifies a change within contemporary art that sees painters less concerned with what painting is, and more focused on the problem of making. Like many of today's foremost practitioners, I am unconcerned with attempting to conform to a particular definition or set of material criteria for what painting is. My inquiry focuses instead on "how to use the materials, methods, concepts, of traditions of painting to make a work that should not necessarily be called a painting" (9).

Because this project takes place in a graduate program that demands interdisciplinarity, I made a decision to use new materials in the context of image-making that extend beyond my painting practice. I did not set out to intentionally use materials unconventional to painting, but I was open to exploring the boundaries of the possible materials available to the artist. Materials were selected, after an initial period of systematic experimentation, based on their ability to recreate the visual characteristics of the image. Thus, a supplemental objective of the project was to move beyond the materials and techniques that have defined my practice, testing the representative potential of new materials and challenging my existing skills as a maker in applying the material knowledge gained in the execution of my mimetic task. How can I apply my knowledge of paint to the exploration of new materials and methods in representing and extending my samples?

In addition to the bodily handiwork of painting, my work discusses its

relationship with photographic images, and the ontological assumptions that accompany these different media. While the photograph in each work bears a certain automatic, causal relationship to the object it pictures, my material representation acknowledges this empirical[3] reality by extending it outward based on my observation and material competence – a different kind of causal relationship that is distinctly not automatic. Thus, I am extending the tradition of painters like Gerhard Richter and Lucio Pozzi who explore painting's relationship to its referent (Krauss 1977). In particular, my project incorporates digital photography directly into the painting's image space, and thus it participates in a dialogue with painters like Albert Oehlen and Fabian Marcaccio who have explored the relationship between these two image forms and their limitations (Smythe 2012). My position in relation to art historical developments relevant to my thesis work are discussed further in Chapter 2.3.

Sullivan (2010: 76) and McNiff (1998: 51) observe that purely rational knowledge traditions are not sufficient to comprehensively explain contemporary experience.[4] Sullivan suggests artists now have a responsibility to "lead the way in producing and interpreting artistic discourse" (2010: 119). My research into the making and evaluation of visual representations is an

[3] McNiff describes the word 'empirical' as connoting "sensory knowledge, direct observation, and pragmatic procedure" (1998: 50). While traditionally associated with the natural sciences, and kept separate from all other modes of inquiry, McNiff points out that all of these characteristics are as inseparable from artistic process as introspection and subjectivity.

[4] McNiff points out that "human relationships, motivations, interpretations, reflections on experience, personal expressions, and the dynamics of the creative process" are not "subject to exact quantification" and so inquiry into phenomena must be accompanied by methods "capable of accurately articulating the processes being examined" (1998: 51).

important site of knowledge, not just about art but how it relates to life. My research demonstrates, through the act of mimetically extending a picture beyond the boundaries of a photographic image, using my newly gained material knowledge, how representative plausibility can be attained.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

I was interested in several areas of critical inquiry and material experimentation. Accordingly, my reading spanned several topics I deemed relevant to my research objectives. The areas I identified as key theoretical considerations within the project were: *mimesis* and representation through images; translation or adaptation from one medium to another; painting's changing relationship to other images since the birth of photography; and perception and interpretation of visual phenomena. This chapter will outline my findings within the literature speaking to these key research areas.

This literature review is comprehensive, but it is also particular to this project, and thus limited in its scope to what I encountered in my course readings, references within these texts, scholarly online searches, and various discussions with colleagues and advisors. However, in the course of my research, which explores a wide range of artists, art historians, and theorists, I did not encounter literature dealing directly with my particular object of inquiry – plausibility in extrapolation upon an image through visual representation. As my understanding within these key research areas grew, I began to identify theoretical concepts my work draws together, and thus the particular aspects of my studio work that build on and extend existing scholarship.

2.1 Aesthetic Philosophical Foundations

Greatly informing my project are Meyer Schapiro's theories regarding the viewer's interpretation of non-mimetic elements of an artwork, such as the boundary of an image. Schapiro observes that an image's boundary is "transformed into an element of representation" (1998: 31). He suggests that these finite physical limitations, especially where they transect objects and figures, come to stand for "the real boundaries of a proximate spectator's vision of the original scene" and that this leads to the assumption in viewers that the "picture-field" corresponds "in its entirety to a segment of space excerpted from a larger whole" (32). This cognitive extrapolation is a key concept within my studio-led research, as each work begins with a bounded rectangular image (representing a selection from a larger, continuous actuality) and extends it outward.

Schapiro believes this happens even in compositions that are wholly abstract, such as Mondrian's austere grids, where the abrupt conclusions of shapes and lines at the edges of the canvases give the impression that the viewer can see only a part of an infinite expanse whose pattern cannot be deduced from the fragmentary sample. However, Schapiro observes that these samples, though "ambiguous," possess "a striking balance and coherence" (32).[5] This implies that there are ways of extending the lines, shapes and colors of

[5] Schapiro interprets Mondrian's abstracts as an illustration of "one aspect of contemporary thought: the conception of the world as law-bound in the relation of simple elementary components, yet open, unbounded, and contingent as a whole" (1998: 32). While this idea does not factor into my thesis work, it has informed my overall worldview and the ways in which my artwork can be seen as articulations of that worldview.

Mondrian's abstracts that would maintain this coherence, and ways that would not. My thesis work explores how a successful or plausible extension of this sort might take place.[6]

2.2 Images, *Mimesis*, and Representation

As I began familiarizing myself with the broad range of literature on the subject of *mimesis*, I discovered that this term is far more complex than I had thought. The Greek word for "imitation," *mimesis* has traditionally been used not only within aesthetic philosophical discourse (where it was first discussed, albeit with different attitudes, by Plato and Aristotle) but also anthropological and psychological analyses of human behavior. Both uses of the term have informed my understanding of the mimetic faculty and its association with knowledge.

In *Mimesis and Reason*, theorist Gregg Daniel Miller describes the anthropological usage of *mimesis* as referring to the tendency within humans toward "*making oneself similar, speaking in the voice of another,* or *acting as another would act*, as in mimicry" (original italics) (2011: 14). Positioning mimetic behaviour as a counterpart to rational choice or "reason" (15), Miller describes *mimesis* as a "non-cognitive mode of bringing difference into identity" – an innate response to encountering forces in the world that one identifies as

[6] Other foundational works of criticism in my initial understanding of my research objectives include texts such as Edith Pasztory's "Thinking with Things" and Dorothy Walsh's "The Cognitive Content of Art." Each was important in initially establishing artworks as not only important communicative objects, but also as crucial sites of human knowledge construction (Pasztory 2005; Walsh 1962).[6] John Berger's *Ways of Seeing* and William J.T. Mitchell's "Intention and Artifice" (encountered during my first year of coursework) have likewise helped shape my understanding of images as communicative media (Mitchell 1992; Berger 1972).

different from oneself. Miller states that *mimesis* "signifies a fundamental continuity among things in the world and our knowledge of them" (24), suggesting *mimesis* is an important part of establishing an understanding of lived experience.[7]

The aesthetic usage of *mimesis*, closer in meaning to "depiction" (which connotes a pictorial construction, rather than imitation through bodily action or speech) refers to the tradition in visual art of representing real objects and scenes by way of images. Burnett asserts that images are "a fundamental part of human knowing" and that the production and interpretation of images have been instrumental in defining how humans relate to their experiences since "long before we understood why" (2004: 9). According to Burnett, our need to externalize our internal world is "as fundamental as breathing" and developed long before we learned to translate our experiences into language (20).

Burnett's work has been foundational in broadening my understanding of the ways in which images are inseparable from descriptions of reality, environment, and communication in modern Western culture. As architect Paulo Mendes de la Rocha notes: "always there has existed an interrelation between human needs for representation and survival... What we understand as symbolism is always connected to the historical comprehension of our

[7] For an even more thorough anthropological analysis of the ways in which mimetic behavior structures socio-cultural interactions based on ethnographic accounts, see Michael Taussig's *Mimesis and Alterity* (1993). Taussig draws heavily from theories on the mimetic faculty found in Walter Benjamin's "On the Mimetic Faculty" (1933) as well as Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947), both of which informed my understanding of *mimesis* as an innate human faculty crucial to early as well as adult learning and understanding of the world.

times" (2007: 143). Accordingly, *mimesis* – the construction of images of various aspects of our world – can be theorized as a strategy for knowledge formation and an important part of our cognitive evolution as a species.

In contrast, Miller argues that this second sort of mimetic activity, which necessarily involves conscious reflection on experience, actually creates a distance between the subject/knower and object/what might be known – a distance that does not exist in the case of the first sort of mimetic activity, which establishes a continuity between them (2011: 24). However, Susan Sontag argues that, while all art is founded on distance between subject and object – art is by nature artificial – this notion of distance is, as she notes, "misleading unless one adds that the movement is not just away from but toward the world" (1961: 30). "The overcoming and transcending of the world in art," she writes, "is also a way of encountering the world, and of training or educating the will to be in the world" (31). This critical stance has helped me greatly in positioning my studio-based research into mimetic representation as an important site of knowledge-creation.

Goldman provides an overview of contemporary theory on what defines mimetic representation, in order to argue for its aesthetic value. He defines such a representation as an intentional resemblance, and offers a thorough discussion of what constitutes resemblance. For the purposes of my argument, the word will refer to an object or image that, to use Goldman's language, "generates visual experiences similar to those generated by the object one intends to represent" (1995: 298). However, he points out, since

representations can be either successful or unsuccessful, intention is not a sufficient condition for a mimetic representation. This notion helped shape my research by opening up the question of what characteristics of an image define its representative success.[8]

While the subject of mimetic representation was thoroughly addressed within the literature I encountered, and gave me the knowledge and vocabulary to critically discuss the representative task I had given myself, I began to realize that the material extension of the photographic picture plane, while it involves characteristics of *mimesis* such as observation and production of resemblance, is not a strictly mimetic representation. Therefore, its success or failure would be determined by more than just resemblance to its referent's particular appearance – it would require resemblance through a kind of extension or extrapolation. I did not encounter authors discussing the production of resemblance through the extension of an image into a larger composition, as is the goal of my material extrapolations of the samples. Thus, my studio-based research contributes to aesthetic theory by analyzing one approach to constructing such a representation.

2.3 Photography and Truth-Value, Painting, and the Digital

As my studio work involves both painting and photography, I sought out the work of scholars whose works of criticism and art history speak to the

[8] Rosemary Hawker states plainly that "at the most fundamental level the 'success' of representation lies in its being *taken for* the object or idea it represents" (original italics) (2002: 552).

relationship between these two disciplines. Initial assumptions regarding the birth and rapid social uptake of photography came from Roland Barthes' *Camera Lucida* (1979), in which he reflects on his own viewing of photographs to explore and question their affective power. Through Barthes, I began to form a vocabulary around photographs as traces of their referents (80) and the accompanying ontological assumptions that have led to the social roles it now serves in governance and business (as identification), in the justice system (as evidence), and in mass media (as the presentation of real events).[9]

The critical literature on photography makes frequent mention of the beliefs associated with the medium and its resulting authority as a true presentation of reality. Because my thesis project explores the complex relationship between representations and their referents, I familiarized myself with the ontological claims about an extra-pictorial "reality" that tend to accompany various media. However, a metaphysical discussion of whether there exists such an objective reality is beyond the scope of this discussion.[10]

In most cases, this truth-value viewers assign to photographs is attributed to a presumed transparency attached to photographs (Berger 1980: 52) because of their indexical correspondence to physical reality.[11] In her well-

[9] Rosemary Hawker points out that photography is viewed as capable of presenting a record of events, "despite a well-established critical discourse existing around these issues" (2002: 549).

[10] Shaun McNiff points out that both advanced scientific understanding and Postmodern philosophy today help us realize "there is no absolute criterion for evaluation of experience" (1998: 52), suggesting that the positive existence of an objective world is less important (and less knowable) than our communication about the world we perceive.

[11] In Schwabsky's account of the artistic and philosophical developments of the 19th and 20th centuries, he is emphatic that it was this indexical character of photographic images,

known essay "Notes on the Index," art critic Rosalind Krauss defines an index as "a type of sign which arises as the physical manifestation of a cause, of which traces, imprints, and clues are examples" (1977b: 59). Referring to the work of late seventies painters like Lucio Pozzi and Ellsworth Kelly, Krauss illustrates the influence of photography's indexicality on abstract painting – for example, Pozzi's choice to transpose selections of the gallery's physical actuality (the arbitrary coloration of its walls) onto the painted surface.

Mitchell discusses the different conventional interpretations of paintings and photographs, but rather than simply highlighting their differences, he places photography and painting at different points on a single continuum ranging from non-algorithmic image-making methods, like sketching, to highly algorithmic methods, such as tracing a projection or taking a photograph. Rather than being constituted by thousands of tiny, individual movements of the human hand, guided by subjective interpretation of physical reality, photographs (whether chemical or digital) are produced by an algorithmic process that is automatic, mechanical, and only minimally influenced by human intention (Mitchell 1992: 30)[12]. Mitchell's continuum concept is an important reminder of the diversity of images that are referred to by terms like 'photograph' and 'painting,' and that both types of images can involve a mixture

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and not their accuracy or economy, that suddenly made them more desirable to the general public than painted likenesses (2005: 8). Other theorists attribute photography's uptake by painters to other factors – for example, the camera's capacity for clarity and its ability to "record the opposite, dispersal, vaporousness, atmosphere" (Gilbert-Rolfe 1996: 18).

[12] He acknowledges that human intention is responsible for many fundamental constitutive aspects of the photograph including the cropping and timing of the shot, as well as any darkroom/computer adjustments made to the image after the fact.

of algorithmic and non-algorithmic processes, each with their own assumptions regarding correspondence to physical reality.

By way of a summer painting seminar I had encountered several essays from *The Painting of Modern Life: 1960s to Now* (2007) and established a basic understanding of the relationship between photography and modern painting. In particular, Rugoff ("Painting Modern Life") traces the historical narrative of how early 1960s painters like Gerhard Richter, Andy Warhol, and Richard Artschwager began to translate photographic images into representational paintings. This practice re-contextualized the former while transforming the latter (devalued by modernism's emphasis on abstraction and photography's association with perfect representative accuracy) into a conceptual criticism of mass media imagery and its dubious truth claims, too-often unquestioned by its viewers (Rugoff 2007: 12).[13] The space of painting as a site for critical engagement with other kinds of images like photography was an instrumental concept in framing my own studio research.[14]

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[13] For a thorough analysis of the ways in which Richter's photo paintings draw attention to the idiomatic aspects of the medium of photography by citing them, see Hawker (2002). Hawker interprets Richter's citations as interrupting "the text's claim to totality" (544), calling into question any and all methods of representation more generally, since we are made aware that no medium can express everything. This idea, that translating one medium into another not only shows the limits of both (by showing that representation extends beyond what one medium is capable of showing) but the limits of all representation, has influenced my thinking late in my research.

[14] Many of the critical and art historical sources consulted for this work assert that contemporary painting would not exist as it does today without the persistent influence of photographic images and the critiques their perceived causal transparency drew from artists like Richter, Warhol and Celmins following World War II. This line of argument suggests painting has, since the 1960s, become more than just a system of conscious reflection on its own condition – that it has, in fact, become a medium for reflecting on the conditions of other media (Heiser 2001: 138). Luke Smythe places artists like Richter and Warhol into a "broader historical development which saw a host of painters of this period

Continuing Rugoff's line of argument, Herbert in "Rehearsing Doubt" suggests that what is significant in Richter's photo paintings, as well as later work in the same tradition by artists such as Luc Tuymans and Elizabeth Peyton, is not the specific image and its connection to reality, but the ways in which the painting process manifests the artist's subjectivity, thereby functioning as commentary on the interpretation of images (Herbert 2007: 44).[15] Schwabsky ("Sheer Sensation") illustrates how painters like Richter and Vija Celmins could only have learned to approach photographs as painterly subject matter through modernism's emphasis on explicit awareness within painting of its own limitations as a medium and the activity of viewing (Schwabsky 2007: 29). He suggests how, by way of the photo-based paintings of Richter, Celmins, and their contemporaries, representational painting reclaimed some of the critical status it lost with modernist criticism's focus on abstraction and medium specificity.

According to Schwabsky, these artists assert that painting's "correlative to the photographic gaze" was a surface that "erodes the potential pictorial organization of its imagery in favour of a dissolution into sheer texture, sheer sensation by means different from but just as effective as those of abstraction"

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endeavor to prolong their medium's vitality by drawing painting into dialogue with a range of other pigment-based forms of image-making" (2012: 106). Arguments in favor of painting's continued vitality have been posed to counteract ongoing criticism that suggests painting is dead The main threads of this discourse, as well as contemporary solutions to the problem, are well covered in Fogle (2001) and Bois (2001).

[15] This point is also convincingly made by Hawker (2002: 550).

(2007: 29).[16] Elsewhere, Schwabsky suggests photography "taught us the modern idea of the image" – an appearance that is somehow detachable from its support (2005: 8) – but that painting "allows us to internalize it" (9). This thinking has helped me position my painting practice within the tradition of makers like Richter and Celmins using sensuous material to create photo-based representations.

Reading more about Celmins' practice, I found it resonated with my own studio work: her choice of subjects inspired by perceptual experience, she paints from careful observation – often from photographs, but also, as in the case of her meticulous replication of found stones, from objects. Her compositions, while extremely detailed, often seem abstract because of the subjects' separation from their narrative and/or physical contexts (Whitney Museum of American Art, 2013). Like Celmins, I am using de-contextualized images taken from lived experience (in my case, close-up images of found object textures) as the basis for my artworks. However, while Celmins aims at closely reproducing an image or object as it appears, my work extends beyond the image while attempting to appear continuous with it.

According to Smythe, this dialogue between painting and other pigment-based methods took one of two strategic forms: one was mimicry, found, for example, in Richter and Roy Lichtenstein's reinterpretation of other pigment-

[16] What is strange about the last quote is the word "erodes," which implies there would be less pictorial organization possible, when a particular texture simply amounts to a different pictorial organization, with none necessarily having more or less potential for organization by a viewer. Like Burnett and others suggest, it is the viewer's unique sensory and imaginative experience of the imagery and its formal execution that determines the pictorial organization.

based imagery like photographs and comics; and the other assimilation, in which artists such as Robert Rauschenberg, Andy Warhol, and Blinky Palermo brought into painting's image space a range of pigment types not yet encompassed by the conventional definition of "paint" (printing ink, fabric dyes) (Smythe 2012: 107). I position my work as an integration of these two painting strategies. On the one hand, my works extend the pictorial space of the photograph by mimicking its appearance; on the other hand, I employ a wide variety of materials, many of which would not be considered paint on their own. My body of work affirms pigment-based image production's representational capacity as well as continuing painting's ongoing assimilation of and negotiation with materials outside of painting conventions.[17]

As I learned more about the history of painting's relationship to the growing numbers and kinds of images with which it must increasingly compete, I realized the need to speak to my project's emphasis on painting and other hand-manipulated, pigment-based material processes, positioned as it is within a contemporary culture increasingly mediated by digital images. Smythe describes the direction of painting since the postwar period as a move away from the medium's negotiation between its own specific characteristics and other pigment-based image production methods, towards material, pigment-

[17] Smythe points out that distinctions between paint and other pigment types have always been "open and negotiable," allowing for substances as diverse as powdered pigment (in the work of Yves Klein) and chocolate syrup (in the work of Dieter Roth) to be introduced into painting's image space "and on this basis come to be regarded as paint" (2012: 107). Smythe illustrates the difficulties overly rigid dictionary definitions of concept like paint and pigment can create in categorization of artworks (2012: 107). My idea of paint's fundamental structure as being a fluid containing, and allowing for the measured delivery of, solid pigmented matter comes from Elkins (1999: 1).

based image production as a category and its encounter with seemingly immaterial light-based images (2012: 105). Smythe acknowledges that the artists he mentions have not "chosen to rethink painting as a light-based rather than pigment-based undertaking" by assimilating screens or projection into their work[18] – instead they "engage with light-based forms of image-making indirectly, by working with and from their printed output" (2012: 110).

Whereas artists like Richter and Celmins distinguished their medium from media such as photography by re-appropriating its pictorial conventions within the space of painting, the following generation of artists are asserting the particular materiality of pigment (including paint) in order to distinguish it from the "hubris of the virtual" (118) – the apparent lack of fixity to the laws of matter (accident, decay, and death) that characterizes digital images. Smythe sees artists such as Fabian Marcaccio and Albert Oehlen as embracing the "unloved material dynamics of accident and entropy" and the "effects of impurity and adulteration to which they give rise" (118) through their lively, sensuous paintings and emphasis on the work of the artist's hand in contrast to the cold, slick rationalism of digital image production.[19]

Echoing the postwar strategy of assimilation, both Oehlen and Marcaccio incorporate digital prints into their paintings, surrounding them with

[18] There are, of course, examples of this kind of union, such as in the work of interdisciplinary artist Iain Baxter&, whose 2013 retrospective at the Art Gallery of Ontario included a series of landscape paintings on television screens which allowed for interaction with the underlying light-based images through the negative space between brushstrokes.

[19] The theme of technological advancement creating a divide between images and the material world is not new: Critics such as Sontag have called for a return to sensory experience, which she saw as being dulled by modern life's material excesses, overproduction, and crowding (1961: 13-14).

compositions that emphasize the unpredictability of working with material pigment and the singularity of pigment-based artworks (115). Smythe interprets Marcaccio's room-sized "paintants" (a combination of the words 'painting' and 'mutant') as a material counterpart to the seamless manufactured reality of "the CGI-saturated, effects-driven blockbuster" (114), countermanding its seamlessness through the disjunctions in imagery. His work juxtaposes close-up digital photography of the weave of a canvas with abstract, messy brushwork upon an enormous, contorted surface that draws attention to the painting's material support. Oehlen, in his collaborations with Jonathan Meese, sets up a similar contrast between hand-manipulated pigment's imperfections and digital technology's ability to construct and perfect imagery. *Storm* (Fig. 3) continues the crisp, precise lines of an image of two computer-modeled figures via rudimentary, almost amateurish, marks.

I position my studio work as a part of the same tradition as artists like Oehlen and Marcaccio, although my mimetic task involves integrating the digital photographic print and the handmade into a single continuous image, rather than intentionally highlighting their differing material characteristics through juxtaposition. Smythe describes how painting's engagement with other prominent image forms has been ambivalent, intermittently taking the form of either a retreat or an embrace. Heiser suggests that contemporary painting is characterized by this "push-pull" attitude towards new media (2001: 138), and the blurring of boundaries between what is handmade and what is mechanically-reproduced (153). My project's use of both handmade and

photographic methods of image production in the composition of a single, unified picture can therefore be situated within contemporary painting practice.[20]

David Urban suggests painting is continuously evolving toward "greater complexity and inclusiveness," rather than engaging in "closed dialogue with its own theory," and that, "since the advent of digital imaging, everyone is painting again" (2004: 56). He attributes this not to painting's ability to depict "reality" but to its tangibility as a "site of struggle – the residue of physical and intellectual action" (56). Photography does not possess the same evidence of material encounter as a painting shows, and this can only be attributed to the nature of the substance itself – not mere pigment, smoothly applied by mechanical means, but the simultaneously evidentiary and mysterious nature of the painted surface. Despite photography's causal connection to the physical world, this "sense of contact is entirely subsumed into the seamlessness of the photograph's surface" (Schwabsky 2005: 9). For Schwabsky, contemporary painting's surface partakes of neither the photograph's homogeneity nor the heterogeneity of collage, but is instead "a place where both differences and similarities are consumed."[21]

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[20] Heiser presents the history of painting as a "robust interplay of repetition and differentiation within the boundaries of its limits" that has become "a matured discourse that makes it hard, and challenging, to contribute something new that enriches it" (2001: 155). The representative exercise that is central to my research also involves a balance of repetition and difference, between sample and material representation, in order to be an acceptable extension of the picture plane. In this way, my thesis problem can be seen as a microcosm of the task of the contemporary painter.

[21] Schwabsky's mention of modernist collage as the origin of the syncretic qualities in the work of prominent contemporary painters is especially relevant for contextualizing my

The notion that paint, as a substance, and painting, as an activity that unites often heterogeneous materials into an image, hold a particular fascination above other competing image-making methods has been expounded by James Elkins. In *What Painting Is* (1999), Elkins applies the language of alchemy to painting and its obsession with the behavior of substances and the chaos of making. Like Urban, Elkins dismisses the idea that paint's attraction as a medium is simply in its representational capabilities, emphasizing instead its oscillation between "distillation," in which the earthly matter appears to transcend its material base and becomes a seductive illusion, and the opposite process, which he calls "condensation" (125). These descriptions gave me a new understanding of paint's dual nature – the disjunction between material and representative dimensions that characterizes mimetic art and is an underlying theme of the project as I experiment with various materials and their ability to be pushed toward this "imperfect transcendence" (187).[22]

Elkins' theoretical framework for painting as a mode of thinking that demands "a mixture of rational control and intuitive freedom" (1999: 121), as well as his close analyses of the work of iconic painters like Claude Monet, were crucial in the development of my studio methods both in terms of representation and material application (this will be discussed further in

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practice, given the extreme heterogeneity of materials in some of my pieces. In this I must acknowledge my work's similarity to the paintings of Anselm Kiefer, who also employs, along with his paints, a wide range of materials not traditionally part of painting's image space, such as grass and shards of pottery.

[22] Schwabsky asserts that, since the beginning of Modernism, *all* paintings (not just those that are explicitly figurative) are seen as material objects first and pictures second (2005: 8).

Chapter 3). His observation that no substance can ever be completely understood and predicted in every circumstance encouraged me to experiment with materials and substances previously foreign to my practice.[23]

2.4 Translation and Adaptation

Much like many of the artists described above, my studio work incorporates photographic imagery and translates it into other media. The photographs themselves are translations of three-dimensional objects into two-dimensional representations, which then become a prosthetic directive for a handmade material extension. My research into scholarly theory on translation began with Walter Benjamin's discussion of linguistic transpositions in his 1923 essay "The Task of the Translator". This text was instrumental in deepening my understanding of the act of translation. Benjamin concludes that perfect translation is not possible, and that even where a close likeness is desired and achieved "the original always undergoes a change" (73). His discussion can be applied to visual language, where it can explain why one should expect discrepancies between a representation and its referent – the former, despite ties to the latter, is always a new creative act. In my studio research, I found

[23] According to Elkins, a "fundamental anxiety that has accompanied modernism since the decay of the academies at the end of the nineteenth century" is the fact that, while painting is "backed by [a] massive literature on technique and tradition," it feels as though the whole discipline "might collapse at any moment into ruleless experience" (1999: 177). The tactile engagement with materials, and the potential for feedback between matter and sensation, is mentioned by both Schwabksy (2002: 9) and Elkins (1999: 78) as an important part of painting's contribution to artistic thought, and a reason painting as an activity continues to spark the imaginations of artists and viewers. Photography and digital imaging technology cannot provide this tactile engagement, though an overwhelming and ever-growing body of evidence shows painters' continuous engagement with photographic imagery.

even highly algorithmic methods of image production like digital photography result in representations that diverge from their original subjects.

Building on Benjamin's writing on translation, Linda Hutcheon's *A Theory of Adaptation* (2006) addresses the process of adapting a text, whether told, shown or participatory, into a new medium. She states that, even when the adaptation shares the same medium as its source, transposition inherently involves some "re-formatting" that brings with it gains and losses of meaning (16).[24] These changes, Hutcheon suggests, are inevitable results of the nature of the process: because adaptation always involves both interpretation and creation (8), a text is automatically filtered through one's personal sensibility (18).[25] As Sontag notes, "[t]he task of interpretation is virtually one of translation" (1961: 5) in that to interpret is "to restate the phenomenon and find an equivalent for it" (7). Mimetic behaviour, a means of understanding one's reality, must therefore engage the subject's faculties of interpretation prior to any act of *mimesis*. At this stage in the process of representation, choices are made about what is important to include and what can be left out. These choices face the photographer no less than the painter or writer.

As painter Jonathan Lasker writes, "there is a lie in all mimesis," whether the image is constituted by hand in paint or by a camera in photochemical

[24] Drawing on the writings of Jacques Derrida, Hawker describes the translation of one idiom (for example, the idiosyncratic aspects of photography) into the medium of another (for example painting) as resulting in "idiomatic excess" – a kind of remainder that "cannot be accounted for in the second language" (2002: 543).

[25] Hutcheon emphasizes that in situations that demand "inter-semiotic transposition," or recoding of the text into a new system of signs and conventions, the degree to which the original meaning can be translated will depend on the destination medium (2006: 16).

processes or digital pixel information:

> In each case, neither a thing (a camera, a computer) nor an animal can know another thing other than through its own epistemological capabilities: mechanical processes for things and subjective perceptions for animals… [A] camera or a computer is no less a subject in relation to another object than is a human being. (Lasker 1996: 11)

Lasker cleverly neutralizes any debate about the truth-value of so-called algorithmic, indexical image production over the work of an artist's hand. However, he is careful not to place artificial intelligence on the same level as human consciousness. On the contrary, Lasker criticizes perceptions of truth that are "skewed to reflect the ultimate reality of our existence in nature" and warns against overvaluing "rationalistic, objective intelligence" (11). He suggests that material-based methods of mimetic representation, like painting, which "refers back to its constituent materials," partake of the same physical world they represent and perceive it *through matter* – that is, through actual pieces of the material world rather than a mere representation of it.

For Lasker, this kind of making is crucial because it keeps us connected to the "purely animal" side of our vision, the side that is capable of imagining and contemplating realities and possibilities beyond the particulars of what we are physically sensing (which mechanical intelligence is limited to). This theoretical position validates the use of paint as a research method in the increasingly immaterial world of mass media and digital technology, and especially in a studio exercise that involves pictorial extrapolation from a physical actuality. It also foregrounds the role of the imaginative extrapolation on sensory

experience that allows us to perceive the world.

2.5 Perception, Cognition, and the Imprecision of Sight

By exploring human perception and cognition, I initially sought to understand better the process of recognition and, through this, aesthetic judgments regarding success or failure in mimetic representations. However, I found that while contemporary neurobiology can account for the first few stages of vision, complex cognitive processes in which memory and emotion come into play – such as those that might lead one to recognize and accept imagery as plausible – remain poorly understood (Livingstone 2002: 9). Therefore, any theoretical conjecture on this topic can offer only imprecise descriptions of these processes that may not account for all significant factors involved.[26]

Livingstone has given me an understanding of the hidden complexities of vision and fundamentally altered my understanding of how the eye and brain work together. As I learned from Livingstone, my initial belief that the eye is like a camera that sends a reproduction of light information to the brain is a common misperception and is called the homunculus[27] fallacy, because it assumes there is another person in the brain that looks at the representation delivered by the eye (2002: 24). In other words, it assumes, incorrectly, that the eye and brain work independently.

[26] Burnett warns against forgetting our "inherent biases about eyes and vision," which risk letting us "think about seeing as a far more precise activity than it ever is or could be" (2004: 40).
[27] From the Greek word meaning "little man."

Instead, the visual system functions to interpret light information immediately as it comes in, in order to develop a sense of "what is out there in the world and how to act on it" (Livingstone 2002: 53) through our sensing of color, form, and positioning of objects and surfaces.[28] While the precision and sophistication of the eye is assumed in daily perception, leading to a spatio-temporal understanding of experience, there are a variety of ways in which this interpretation is the result of pre-conscious processes of translation over which the viewer has little control (101). Since our retinas are actually flat, what the brain receives are two flat images that must be combined and interpreted as three-dimensional space (100). In other words, our sensation of the world around us is an instantaneous translation from three-dimensionality to two-dimensionality, and our understanding of those sensations is a preconscious translation from two back to three dimensions.

These translations occur according to the interpretation of visual cues – patterns of color and luminance we have learned to read as depth and shading – and are more or less automatic, often escaping our awareness. Also automatic is the compression of information involved in the brain's process of encoding light information, which takes place in order to expend a minimum of the organism's energy. Since it takes energy for neurons to fire (55), the cells in the early stages of the visual system are not sensitive to absolute lighting, or even

[28] This interpretation is, of course, not a single event, but a constant process that updates my understanding of what I am seeing and its relation to me and to the environment we share.

gradual color and luminance changes, but to discontinuities – edges and contours, in other words.[29]

Thus, as with any translation, not all of the information is coded. Our interpretation is based on conclusions drawn from an incomplete representation of the total available light information. We have evolved to sense discontinuities in the visual field because this is what conveys the most information in an image (Livingstone 2002: 55, 92). Thus, the more discontinuities an area of the visual field has, the more likely our vision will be drawn to that area. We interpret a scene by moving our eyes around an image or scene, and Livingstone describes the different, equally important roles played by peripheral vision and foveal vision[30] in constructing what we see: it is the coarse, low-resolution peripheral vision that organizes the visual field into a larger whole, sensing areas of complexity to which to direct the more precise foveal vision (68, 78).

However, at the level of both peripheral and foveal vision, the visual system demonstrates a variety of imprecisions in its processes of interpreting light information. Foveal vision's resolving power is limited, which allows for artists to take advantage of techniques like optical mixing, in which adjacent

[29] This is the exact same job performed by compression algorithms like JPEG, which save memory by coding images not by recording every pixel, but by "defining the colors present and the borders of the shapes" (Livingstone 2004: 55). Clearly, there are some similarities that can be drawn between imaging technology and the human visual system.

[30] Foveal vision, or the center of one's gaze, has the highest concentration of cones of any part of the eye. It is the part of vision we use to sense complex surface details.

elements are too small to be resolved separately and blend together.[31] Peripheral vision is even less acute, often resulting in blurring and a loss of precise spatial information surrounding the center of gaze, so that the picture is completed in a slightly different way with each movement of the foveal vision (74).[32] In order to make sense of the whole picture, we constantly oscillate between interpreting objects of foveal vision (the local segments of the image) and peripheral vision (their overall organization into a cohesive whole). Thus an important area of my research in determining interpretation of an image (and thus evaluating its representative success) was how the brain subdivides the whole into local parts.

[31] Livingstone explains the difference between additive and subtractive color mixing. In additive mixing, the light from two separate colors (for example, red and green) is combined (in this case producing grey). This is the effect behind printed images and Pointillist paintings (whose individual dots of pigment are too small to resolve individually) (2004: 172). In subtractive mixing, different pigments are so close together that light hitting the mixture will reflect off both based on a combination of the pigments' differing light absorbances (like how mixing yellow and blue paint makes them look green) (171).

[32] According to Livingstone, this can result in what is called illusory conjunction, in which objects in our peripheral vision are erroneously correlated (for example, the color of one is assigned to the shape of another). She suggests illusory conjunction allows us to interpret the spatial imprecision of paintings by Impressionists like Monet as recognizable scenes because our brains organize the chaos of brushstrokes that fall outside the foveal vision into objects – indeed, Livingstone suggests this may give such paintings an added dynamism, since "the visual system completes the picture differently with each glance" (2004: 74).
This, she points out, is much more like the transient experience of sight (in which only what is in the center of gaze is clearly resolved at any given time, the rest being completed by peripheral vision) than a complex picture where every object is rendered in perfect detail, like a crisp, realistic painting or photograph, which tends to look static because we expect the scene to change as we move our eyes (76). No one could ever take in a whole scene with the level of detail that a photograph provides. As Hawker suggests, rather than being less informative, obscure images "can be seen to more accurately parallel perception and its limits" (2002: 551).

2.6 Structure and Visual Segmentation of the Field

My research into perception suggested to me that my representative task, the material extension of the sample image, and my investigation of pictorial plausibility would involve both close observation and awareness of the tension between the segmentation of parts and the unity of the artwork's whole.

Because my conceptual and material processes in the studio depend on being able to subdivide the visual field and analyze the relationships among different parts, as well as between parts and the whole, I decided to explore theories of perception that outline the identification of elements, their properties, and their relations. In other words, I sought frameworks for approaching images that would help me analyze their components *systematically*, in order that my material extensions beyond the photograph would adhere to each sample's unique visual parameters.

According to systems theorist Hans Dieter Huber, a system can be generally defined as an arbitrarily bounded series of elements ("which can be things, objects, components, parts, members") with certain properties, linked by relations ("which can be references, correlations, connections, bonds, linkages, couplings") (Huber 1989).[33] Structure, describing "the interrelations among components of a system,"[34] is a key concept within my process: my ability to perceive the sample's structure and compare it to the structure of my

[33] Rather than objective states of being, Huber emphasizes that systems are merely our descriptions of the world, which he argues "do not exist outside us in an independent reality" (Huber, 1989).

[34] This definition of structure comes from another systems theorist, Anatol Rapoport, who is quoted by Huber (1989).

material continuation determines the overall plausibility of the image.

Structure and segmentation within the visual field are discussed in Rudolph Arnheim's theories of perceptual psychology. Acknowledging, as Livingstone does, that "no two persons see the same thing in a work of art," Arnheim believes he is discussing visual phenomena (simplicity, segmentation, grouping) that are essentially independent of individual differences, assuming an unimpaired system in the observer, and that these "objective conditions in the stimulus will bring about predictable reactions" (2004: 81). While I acknowledge that my analysis can never be truly objective, colored as it is by my experiences and attitudes, Arnheim points out that, through empirical analysis and description, the interpretation of visual phenomena can be discussed in a way that is common to most observers.[35] This idea was an important guiding assumption of my project.

Arnheim presents shape and basic structural features as the "primary data of perception" (2004: 35).[36] He emphasizes that what one must grasp in representing something visually are the interactions between its "principal lines" (78), which may not refer to any of the object's actual contours. These lines form what Arnheim calls the "structural skeleton of a visual object," which

[35] In discussing art-based research, McNiff emphasizes the importance of balancing introspection (personal perceptions and motivations) regarding the work with empirical observation in order to avoid letting "one-sided autobiography" dominate the research (1998: 55).

[36] This shares similarities with Livingstone's neurobiological account of the physiological structure of the visual system and how it is activated by different optical stimuli (vision, according to this view, is constituted by binary neuron signals, indicating color and luminance information, that are organized into areas of continuity and discontinuity, or contours).

"consists primarily of the framework of axes and secondarily of characteristic correspondences of parts created by the axes" (79). Identifying and continuing the samples' "principal lines" and thereby extending their "structural skeletons" seemed like an important consideration in achieving a plausible representation beyond the frame of the photograph. Indeed, Arnheim asserts that the structural skeleton "establishes the identity of a pattern" and "indicates the conditions that must be observed if a given pattern is to resemble or represent another" (80). Unfortunately, Arnheim does not outline a strategy by which to identify this structure in an image. My work constitutes an attempt at arriving at such a strategy.

Regarding segmentation, Arnheim writes: "the extent to which a given area of the [visual] field is seen as a self-contained unit depends on the simplicity of its connection with the surrounding field" (2004: 61). In other words, "a part… is a section of the whole that under the given conditions shows some measure of separation from its environment" (65).[37] Arnheim describes the conditions for a kind of unity, in the sense of parts that "belong together," which he associates with "the degree to which parts of a pattern resemble each other" (67). Arnheim believes rules of similarity can "create unity among irregularly distributed items" and even "create connections across fairly large intervals as long as the given units indicate strongly enough a common pattern" (74, 75). By this theory, unity of the picture depends on the ability of different

[37] This ability to subdivide the visual field into units is how we translate light information into objects, surfaces, and their properties and relation to ourselves – it is thus "of the greatest biological value" (Arnheim 2004: 62).

parts (perceived by their difference from their surroundings) to relate to each other through similarities. As Arnheim reminds, similarity and dissimilarity are always relative (75). This was a crucial insight informing my material strategy, and will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

Similarity and dissimilarity are also at the core of Sontag's model for critically analyzing artistic form. In *Against Interpretation*, Sontag asserts that an artwork's form is analyzed in terms of "principles of (and balance between) variety and redundancy," and that "[i]t is the perception of repetitions that makes a work of art intelligible" (1961: 35). This suggests that, even in the spontaneous manifestations of matter I have selected as images, there is a system that can be employed to unify my extension of the picture plane with its source.[38] Plausibility will be determined, in this model, by finding the right balance between repetition and invention, though Sontag points out that representative conventions, while they may be correlated with historical developments, are ultimately arbitrary (32).

Many other theorists have spoken about this idea of deconstructing images into parts, especially in painting. Krauss describes painting as "a field of articulations and divisions." Paintings create meaning through signs produced "by disrupting the physical surface and creating discontinuous units… " (1971: 64). In other words, a painting is representatively successful to the degree that

[38] This idea of recognizable patterns determining the intelligibility of an image is consistent with Elkin's observation that, even in apparently pattern-less material, there is no complete chaos: "There is no such thing as absolute absence of structure, or pure randomness: if there were, we would be unable to perceive it at all, because it would have no form or color to understand. Everyday randomness usually harbours some secret order" (1999: 94).

it can be organized into intelligible elements, which will be interpreted based on their properties and relations.

In "Sheer Sensation," Schwabsky describes this conception of painting (as a series of disruptive marks) as having been put forward by prominent modernist critics like Clement Greenberg. According to this view, the act of painting "may have tended to disrupt or wound the unity of the blank canvas, but only in order to restore or heal it," and thus replace the "material uniformity" of the canvas with what Schwabsky calls the "intellectual unity" of the painting (2007: 26). This is the problem I am confronting in my thesis research: how to achieve a unified picture out of many individual tiny disruptions. However, while I am still aiming for a tension between intellectual unity and disruption, my picture plane will begin not from a state of material uniformity but one of disruption (between photograph and blank surroundings), approaching a sort of perceptual unity insofar as I am able to plausibly continue the picture plane.

This idea of unity has been widely discussed in aesthetic philosophy, but the language remains vague. Sontag describes the sense of "inevitability" produced by formally successful works of art. She suggests that critics try to justify the parts of the work by suggesting "that it could not be other than it is" (1961: 33), but that this sense "is not made up of the inevitability or necessity of its parts, but of the whole." According to Sontag, this "whole" to which we are responding is the quality of style, or form, of an artwork – "a plan of sensory imprinting, the vehicle for the transaction between immediate sensuous

impression and memory (be it individual or cultural)" (Sontag 1961: 34). This sort of formal unity is discussed by Gotshalk as well, who defines form as "the system of relations uniting the materials of the public object into a perceptual whole" – according to Gotshalk, artistic form is at its best when materials and their conflicting patterns are unified so that "a certain systematic self-completeness is installed" and the work of art "becomes for perception a tiny island universe" (1965: 201).

Mitchell suggests we interpret images and their coherence by using evidence of the parts to suggest possible interpretations of the whole, and vice versa (1992: 34). However, as Mitchell points out, evaluating images based on plausibility is not innate, but "constructed by our positioning with discourse (which directs our attention and sets boundaries on what counts as evidence and knowledge) and constrained by limits on our stores of relevant facts […]. Plausibility is relative to an ideological framework and an existing knowledge structure" (1992: 37). What this indicates is that the particularities of the viewer play a significant role in what is perceived or 'seen.'

2.7 Interpretation, Reverie and Visualization

Livingstone explains that, while we share more or less the same physiological equipment for vision (meaning the same light information will lead to the same neuron responses), "art depends ultimately on our brains" which are "built by both genes and experience" (33). Thus, everyone will perceive an image differently, in accordance with one's unique genetic make-up as well as one's

individual and cultural upbringing. This is why discussions of aesthetic qualities other than basic formal descriptions become so difficult: so much of perception (beyond basic color and luminance information) depends on the viewing subject's personal tastes and responses. The idea of perception combining present sensory input and past experiences has also been theorized by Arnheim, who suggests that vision is not a passive reception of information but is instead a creative mental activity that brings new images in contact with "memory traces of shapes that have been perceived in the past" (2004: 38).[39]

Like Arnheim, Burnett believes vision to be an active creation of meaning rather than a passive reading of it (2004: 13). Understanding of sensory experience takes place in the imagination, where the visual information gathered by the eyes interacts with memories and fantasies – this may be referred to as "suspension of disbelief," though Burnett prefers the term "reverie." He suggests this is "one of the fundamental ways in which humans are able to activate the relationships among their own thoughts and daydreams and the requirements of viewing and listening experiences" by allowing for what Burnett terms "visualization," the active role of viewers in generating what they see in images (14). According to Burnett, visualization, "an essential internal characteristic of human thought processes" and an "important way to picture human experience" (202), is about "embodiment and the transformation of information into knowledge and understanding through

[39] Arnheim also writes that the act of vision "involves the solution of a problem – the creation of an organized whole" (2004: 55), which draws on not only what is perceived, but also what has been perceived in the past.

human activity," and the "conversion of information and knowledge by humans into material and aesthetic forms" (202). Visualization plays a major role in my thesis project, from my initial perception of the found object, through every phase of the studio work of extending the picture plane.

For Burnett, it is solely in the creative activity of vision that images exist at all. Rather than being representations of reality or interpretations and expressions of human actions, a notion perpetuating the idea that images are vessels containing a particular content,[40] Burnett believes all images are constituted by their instances of experience by viewing subjects within particular media and social contexts and have no existence divorced from these moments (2004: 6).[41] He affirms that images are important, "continuous points of intersection" between knowledge and creativity, but that the common misconception that images are reconstructions of real events can obscure the fact that these events can only ever be *reimagined* by and through images, and that their experience is "contingent on the imagination of viewers" (23). Burnett warns against the assumptions that often accompany "the impulse to realism" in images, which risk a fictitious connection between viewing, experience, and interpretation on the one hand, and actual reality on the other. With this understanding of sensory experience in place, I will now turn to the methodological approach I used to investigate this representative task.

[40] Sontag convincingly refuted this notion in *Against Interpretation* (1965), calling for a greater attention in art criticism to formal description over claims of accurately interpreting the meaning of a work (1961: 11).
[41] Compare this with Hawker's assertion that "representation is only ever between the viewer and the object; it does not exist outside that relationship" (2002: 551).

Chapter 3: Methodology

I am an artist and the research methodology I have developed has been a result of my existing knowledge and my experiences with theoretical literature and studio process. Thus, my studio work constitutes not only the result of my research, but also one of its main investigative methods. This work has challenged me to apply my existing skills in exploring new techniques, and to do so critically, with a problem in mind – how to plausibly extend the image beyond its boundaries. While this problem has directed my studio practice, my methodology has from the outset had, to use Sullivan's words, "an open-ended, undetermined, procedural trajectory" (2010: 85). However, rather than surrendering to pure intuition, I attempted to keep my process "self-critical, self-reflective, and contextualized" (85), while remaining flexible to unforeseen changes in understanding. In this chapter, I outline the general characteristics of my research methodology and how its procedural structure fits together within my theoretical framework.

My qualitative research strategy has been art-based and self-reflexive. I am combining what Sullivan calls the artist's "implicit and tacit understandings" (Sullivan 2010: 67) with critical, introspective and empirical analysis in exploring questions concerning "the processes and products of artistic knowing." In this way, I become, as Sullivan notes, not only a researcher, but also an object of study (70). While Mats Alvesson and Kaj Skoldberg acknowledge that "self examination and self-reflection are to some extent

ingredients in all research" (2000: 242), they emphasize the necessity of interpretation and reflection regarding "the researchers themselves and their political, ideological, meta-theoretical and linguistic context" (2000: 241) as well as the intended object of study.

3.1 Self-Reflexivity

The work of Alvesson and Skoldberg in outlining a framework for comprehensively structuring reflection through reflexive interpretation (2000: 288) has proven central to my own work.[42] They make a demand for reflection in qualitative research "in conjunction with interpretation at several levels," including (but not limited to): "direct contact with empirical material, awareness of the interpretive act, clarification of political-ideological contexts, and the question of representation and authority" (2000: 238). The composite position they present for handling these different levels of interpretation is a meta-theoretical strategy they term reflexive interpretation.

According to Alvesson and Skoldberg, reflexivity allows the researcher to pay attention to each aspect of construction (the object being constructed, the researcher/constructor, and the social context that constructs the researcher) "without letting any of them dominate" (246). These different levels of interpretation "cannot be treated separately but must be continuously integrated" (253-4). They suggest that reflexive thinking allows one "to break

[42] Alvesson and Skoldberg distinguish reflexivity's "multidimensional and interactive nature" from mere reflection, which focuses on a single level of interpretation rather than interaction between multiple levels (2000: 248).

away from a frame of reference and to look at what it is *not* capable of saying," rather than being "imprisoned" within a single mode of thought (246). What this contributed to my research was an increased awareness of the importance of maintaining focus not only on the studio work, both material and conceptual, the thematic categories of theory with which I engaged, and the work of synthesis through writing and reflection, but also on the interactions between these aspects. This model for reflexivity was foundational in constructing my understanding of responsible research and for helping me maintain an awareness of how different levels of interpretation are structured by my spatio-temporal context, and the assumptions that are inherent within my language and culture.

3.2 Interdisciplinarity

Both Sullivan (2010: 65) and McNiff (1998: 49) present the idea that art-based research depends on the researcher's integration of rational and intuitive methods. McNiff, in particular, sees this as one of the strengths of art-based research and the main reason it is so important to understanding contemporary experience. He advocates "comprehensive study of varied types of research" in order to "enhance the natural emergence of an integrative vision" (49). My project demands material and theoretical exploration, meaning a critical investigation and subsequent synthesis of a variety of approaches. By familiarizing myself with a variety of texts and studio methods, I expected I would start to see ways they could be employed together for my investigation.

While my project is informed greatly by my engagement with contemporary and historical aesthetic philosophy and critical theory, my research is practice-led, integrating studio-based material exploration, empirical analysis, and heuristic reflection on the process of representation. My use of the word *heuristic* comes from McNiff, who defines it as "a method of learning through which knowledge is discovered through an inquiry based upon the examination of personal experience" (1998: 53). Heuristic methods, according to McNiff, place a focus on personal motivations and history with the subject, which are "important insights into the point of view operating behind the research activities" (54). He suggests one purpose of heuristic inquiry can be a better understanding of the personal bias of the researcher and its effects on theory and practice (53). Thus heuristic inquiry could be employed in the kind of reflection described by Alvesson and Skoldberg: a process of "question[ing] weaknesses inherent in the mode of thought one embraces" (2000: 246). Because the project relies so heavily on my own personal experience, heuristic methods play a crucial role in my research methodology.

McNiff's theories regarding art-based research have informed my studio practice as well. He writes:

> The delineation of the different aspects of a situation is fundamental to critical analysis as well as integrative thinking. The problem lies in assuming that these multiple factors exist in complete isolation from one another, an attitude which arrests their potential to create together (1998: 49).

McNiff is suggesting that dividing the world into things and concepts with apparent boundaries and differences is not only productive, but a prerequisite

for integrative thinking. However, these distinctions can obscure the potential relationships between terms. This was a fundamental principle I adopted in making these artworks. Rather than worrying about setting parameters on what materials I would use, or whether it was allowable to include the photograph as part of the finished piece, I attempted to arrive at new creative discoveries, to use McNiff's words, by "putting previously separated entities into new relationships with one another" (1998: 49). This is a general principle of innovation within visual art, as illustrated by, for example, painting's many historical encounters with other media (exemplified by painters like Richter, Lichtenstein, Celmins, Oehlen, and Marcaccio). Through combining materials and techniques through various experiments, I pushed beyond my existing skills and learned entirely new ones that often led to unexpected critical insights.

3.3 Artistic Feedback

One aspect of the project that has guided the work throughout is the feedback loop generated between my thoughts and actions and the work itself. This is what allows for realizations and adjustments made along the way to change the work by affecting later stages of production. It was an important factor in all phases of my studio work, where constant comparison between object and image, and later between image and handmade material representation, provided me with feedback on adjustments that were necessary. Also, throughout the making process, accidental discoveries would lead to a

refinement of representative methods and expressive techniques, as well as new insights regarding the task of representation.

The term "feedback" to describe this give-and-take relation between artist and artwork comes from Vesterby & Vesterby, who analyze the process of painting a portrait using a general systems theory framework. They suggest that, in the course of painting, "the process itself enables further creation" and that this process feedback "prompts the artist to add or subtract elements of the painting's design." According to Vesterby and Vesterby, this feedback can involve a variety of factors, such as additions and subtractions necessary to "support the composition," and, as such, feedback is a "high level form of process self-organization" (Vesterby & Vesterby, 2011). This is why my process depends so heavily on feedback in order to achieve plausibility in extending the sample – it allows me to see the compositional organization of the image and compare it to my material representation in order to see what must be adjusted for them to be continuous.

This phenomenon has also been discussed in art-based research literature such as Sullivan (2010: 110) and McNiff (1998: 55). Drawing on his own artistic experience with painting, McNiff asserts that motivations emerge through the physical making process that are sometimes unexpected, but that these can strongly impact the results: "I anticipate that the physical aspects of the painting process will have more of an effect on the final outcome than the inclinations I had at the beginning of the process" (56). By physical aspects, McNiff is referring to paint's concrete properties, as well as "compositional

problems and accidental occurrences."

I found feedback to be an important factor not just in the experience of the studio, where engagement with materials affected the work's direction, but also in reflecting on the work through the process of writing. Often by transcribing my hastily scribbled studio notes into complete, typed sentences, I would produce whole new revelations out of my experiences that would open up new directions for critical inquiry both in and out of the studio.

3.4 Research Design

My initial research focus was on material experimentation and how unconventional media could be put to use by a painter in extending an image beyond its boundaries. I had hoped to explore my own skills as a maker as well as the representative capacities and limitations of various materials, critically accounting for my choices and analyzing the results. This exercise required first a set of images to extend, so I collected objects from the urban environment and photographed particular selections of their surfaces that became my samples. Both objects and samples were catalogued (those used in my thesis body of work can be found in Appendix B) using both empirical and heuristic methods, in an attempt to understand what had attracted me to that particular surface and to develop a material strategy for extending the picture plane outward. Through careful analysis of the sample and spontaneous processes of visualization, followed by material experimentation, I arrived at what I deemed successful methods of representation for extending the image outward into a

larger, imagined picture.

As my studio work progressed, and I was able to analyze and reflect on the work, my focus moved away from an exploration of how to simply apply materials in constructing a resemblance to the interpretation of how these applications, and the samples, fit into a larger picture. I began to re-examine my process of extending the image, noting that the task required a complex balance of not just repetition but invention in order to produce what appeared to me to be a cohesive composition. This is the point at which I arrived at my research question of how to achieve plausibility in extending an image beyond its boundaries. Throughout the process of completing my works, I thought about every addition, erasure, and adjustment in terms of the relationship between the image and my overall extension, and experimented with stretching the resemblance between sample and material extension to the point of including elements that were nowhere to be found within the photograph, or were only hinted at.

Through this second phase of my research, I became much more conscious of the role played by my own interpretive faculties in constructing not only the mental image I was then executing in physical matter, but also the physical picture itself. Accordingly, I shifted my theoretical investigation away from *mimesis* to seek instead texts dealing with interpretation of images. I began to see, for example, how perceiving an image at different scales and distances can alter my judgments of what was working well and what was not. I became aware of the ways the mind organizes the visual field and the

simplifying effect this can have on complex phenomena. Gradually, I learned to use these realizations to my advantage. In Chapter 5, I will discuss my observations and how they were applied in greater detail. In the next chapter, however, I will describe the phases of my process and their significance.

Chapter 4: Process

I have divided my studio process in to the following phases, which I will briefly discuss, along with their significance, in this chapter: gathering the objects (4.1), cataloguing the objects and samples (4.2), printing the samples (4.3), analyzing and mapping the sample (4.4), material experimentation (4.5), mapping out the extended picture (4.6), applying layers of reproduction (4.7), applying layers of invention (4.8). Throughout my discussion, I will make reference to various process images (all found in Appendix A).

4.1 Collecting the Objects

The project had begun from an interest in found surfaces that display signs of aging matter in various states of transition, and I knew I wanted to use images of these kinds of found surfaces. However, while conceiving of my thesis project, I decided the connection between the images and the real objects from which they were derived would be most clearly illustrated in the exhibition by the physical presence of the actual photographed surface. By providing both the relationship between object and image and the relationship between photograph and handmade depiction, I intended to create a viewing experience that would go beyond simple apprehension of a two-dimensional surface and become an embodied viewing activity allowing the viewer to seek out the connection between objects and images.

To obtain these goals I had to go out and collect physical objects, instead

of simply taking photographs. This limited my search for samples to things I could move, eliminating things like architectural surfaces from consideration. I explored areas of the city where construction rubble and other disused objects are left to degrade or be removed for disposal. The six objects from which I took samples for this body of work were gathered from various construction sites around the city, either from dumpsters filled with other building waste or from piles of material awaiting removal scattered around on the site.[43]

As I mentioned in Chapter 1.2, the objects were selected according to my personal evaluation of their characteristics. They have several things in common. First, they were encountered by me, were light enough for me to carry by myself, and, based on their location and/or state of decay, assumed to be waste material. Second, all of the objects I collected for this project were human-designed, presumably for some practical purpose they no longer fulfill.[44] But the most important characteristic uniting these objects is their surface qualities. Each object's surface is disrupted by divisible parts, like the markings that make up the visual language of painting (drips, spatters, smears, speckles, cracks, and washes). These disruptions, as I mentioned in Chapter 1,

[43] In order to establish that these objects had been found, rather than constructed by me, I documented each one in its original location, before interfering with it in any way to analyze its surface properties.

[44] They were all at one point relatively homogenous organizations of matter, having been given order and uniformity by human design (characteristics like blocks of solid color, symmetry, flat surfaces, and right angles). Through their use and subsequent abandonment, they have begun to transition away from this state, at least on the surface where their material metamorphosis has led to a patina of increased heterogeneity. Throughout this discussion, I acknowledge that these descriptions of the objects indicate certain assumptions regarding their origins. It is beyond the scope of my project to ascertain the true origins of their appearances. What is important is only this surface appearance and how my mind creatively acts upon it.

indicate a kind of material transformation, one that is not predictable based on the surrounding material.

This last criterion is intimately tied to my thesis problem, pictorial plausibility. If a uniformly dull grey piece of metal develops a rust stain that begins to turn bright yellow, this is a significant interruption in or divergence from the continuity of the rest of the surface appearance. Because most people live in a culture where rust is a familiar and common occurrence, we have a rudimentary understanding of the process and this interruption is not questioned: none of these material changes appears to be out of place or inconsistent with the rest, nor do we question whether this mark 'makes sense' on that surface. It is simply taken as a physical fact – perhaps cognized as an indication of unseen material processes, but not incompatible with the more uniform areas of the surface, even where they generate a seemingly infinite variety of forms. I would argue this is because we do not evaluate such objects with human intention in mind – they are assumed to have occurred according to a set of physical parameters to which every square millimeter of surface conforms, regardless of whether any one sample of the surface resembles another. This new visual whole comprised of formal variation within a defined set of characteristics is what I am trying to explore through mimicry with my expanded handmade pictures.

4.2 Cataloguing the Objects and Samples

After a month or so of gathering, I had amassed a collection of nearly fifty

separate objects. I examined them thoroughly, in order to develop a systemic knowledge of each one. As I did so, I selected particular surfaces on each object to photograph and turn into samples. For each of the objects, I created a catalogue entry featuring photo documentation of its site of discovery, my field notes (the date, time, and conditions of this discovery), and a physical description of the object and its condition. Along with this information I included the sample chosen from that object and a detailed description of the image. This material is included in Appendix B, along with images, and will be made into didactic panels – one per object – to be presented as part of my exhibition with the corresponding object.

The samples that I have incorporated into my thesis work were taken from the surface of one of my found objects. Each was framed in order to de-contextualize the surface from the object on which it occurs. This entailed cropping out visual cues like holes (designed or accidental), bolts, shadows, corners and edges which may identify the surface and thus encourage a particular reading of the image, undermining my ability to re-contextualize it through my material representation.

I chose to use a digital camera, because it allows the user to visibly adjust the image without any time-consuming development: I can immediately see a rendering of the image I have taken, which allows the user to make necessary adjustments at the level of initial image capture (framing, focus, exposure) which is important for capturing moments I will not have a chance to shoot again (such as a found object before it is disturbed). As I make adjustments

using computerized imaging technology, I can view on the screen the approximate rendering of the effects these will have on the printed output. The digital files can be transferred to any computer and printed or distributed quickly and endlessly. In short, the digital circumvents the more or less blind material processing required by analog photography.

4.3 Printing the Samples

Printing my images was a very long, very educational process. It is where I learned, through trail and error, the basics of object photography: the use of consistent, broad-spectrum lighting, macro lenses, and high-resolution RAW file format (as opposed to compressed JPEGs) to reduce the visibility of image pixellation. Indeed, with the help of some online research on the topic of printing from Photoshop,[45] I also learned the importance of color management in translating my digital images to printed form. All of the above steps were taken to ensure the photograph was as close a resemblance as possible to the corresponding section of the object's surface.

Each image was adjusted on the screen to match the object under the assumption that this would produce a print with the corresponding luminance and coloration. The dramatic differences that often occurred between the light-based representation of the digital file and the printed output taught me this assumption was mistaken. While no pigment-based image can ever reflect the

[45] In this research I was greatly helped by the patient guidance of Hugh Martin, who works in the photography studio at OCAD University,

same range of luminance that a light-based image can (Livingstone 2002: 111), the use of ICC color profiles in Photoshop allows for outputs to be consistent.[46] After adopting this technology, I was able to eventually produce prints that would match the objects by test-printing several slight variations of a representative selection of the image (Fig. 4).[47] This illustrated for me one limitation of digital imaging technology – the images, and their manipulation, can only be viewed through the mediation of the screen.

The screen cannot show exactly what the corresponding pigment-based image will look like; it can only show an approximation. Prints that require adjustment can only be adjusted through this mediation, and so the process of achieving a very particular result can require a great deal of trial and error. The problem is made worse by the fact that changes made onscreen do not have correspondingly noticeable changes in printed form. In my case, this led to a change in my method of adjustment. I relied less on my vision to make adjustments and more on the numerical values assigned to each of the image's attributes (brightness, hue, and saturation primarily). By comparing the test prints to the object, I noted what general adjustments to the digital file were

[46] ICC (International Colour Consortium) profiles are data sets that Photoshop's Colorsync program uses to manage colour fidelity in digital printing. These data sets are unique to a specific printer model, paper brand, and paper finish and are designed to obtain optimal results for that particular combination. My test prints were done on Epson 3880 inkjet printers using Moab Lasal Exhibition Luster paper, with the ICC profile downloaded from the Moab company website.

[47] This use of 'representative' means 'standing for' in the same sense that any member of a group is representative of the general characteristics of that group (like a fabric sample). It was important for the segments of each sample selected for test-printing to contain the full range of the sample's colors to allow me to see the full effects of my adjustments.

needed to improve the printed output;[48] then, using Photoshop, I would make alterations based on multiples of the lowest numerical value that produced a noticeable change in the onscreen image.

From the more than one hundred images I took of object surfaces, sixty were color-corrected through test printing. Of these, seven were selected for incorporation into my body of work. These were chosen to display a wide range of color palettes and visual complexity. The samples were all printed on 11 x 17" paper, and sized so that each would have a long dimension of between 10 and 17 inches. My motivations for keeping the photos within this arbitrary range were to lend them cohesion, and also to be economical with my printing, wasting as little paper as possible. Each sample is large enough to be decipherable from many feet away, which enables an overall evaluation of my representative efforts as either successfully continuous or not.[49] The samples are also big enough to allow a close viewer to take in the nuances of the object and share in my appreciation of the intricate, spontaneous surface properties while comparing the photograph to my handmade pictorial expansion during closer examination. Because an artist cannot control the way viewers experience and approach their art, I believe it is important the work address viewing at multiple distances.

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[48] Generally, the images required similar adjustments – for a vast majority, a boost in reds and/or yellows was needed, suggesting that there is an absolute discrepancy between the color balance I see on my screen and the printed translation, which is disproportionately more blue.

[49] The site of my exhibition is the OCAD University Graduate Gallery (205 Richmond Street, Toronto), which is a large room approximately 25 feet wide and 34 feet long, allowing for wall-hung works to be viewed at a variety of distances (see Appendix C for exhibition documentation).

The printing was done prior to any decisions regarding substrate: my plan was to allow the images to suggest material methods to me and proceed with choosing a substrate based on these experiments. The chosen substrate would then determine the work's final dimensions. Placement of the sample within this expanse was decided by the larger composition it was to be fitted into, first visualized in my imagination, and then executed after sufficient material exploration.

4.4 Analyzing and Mapping the Sample

Once I had a set of images to work with, I analyzed them closely by slowly moving my eyes around the picture, allowing my highly acute foveal vision to fill in fine details while my peripheral vision covered the rest of the field, completing the picture slightly differently with each shift of gaze (Livingstone 2002: 74) with whatever interpretation seems most simple and appropriate to the given information (Arnheim 2004: 54).[50] The result of this movement is twofold: it improves my understanding about the whole image, and it permits the visual elements (again, apprehended at the local and global levels) to suggest different combinations depending on what part of the picture is being processed and by which part of my vision, fine or coarse detail.

As part of this analysis, I divided the images up into regions of similarity.

[50] Arnheim writes: "According to the basic law of visual perception, any stimulus pattern tends to be seen in such a way that the resulting structure is as simple as the given conditions permit. This tendency will be less apparent when a strong stimulus controls the pattern to be perceived." Because my images generally contain ambiguous stimuli, this tendency is apparent in my perceptions.

While studying each sample, I made notes on my process of visualization, making lists of the associations that were inspired by the image or by parts of the image. Though the non-iconic imagery allows for ambiguity, here and there visual elements seem temporarily definitive, even representational, as my imagination and memory become actively involved in creatively interpreting the formations (Burnett 2004: 13). Some of these associations led to material analogies, which were factored into my experiments (discussed below) while some of these analogies led to thematic concepts that ended up guiding my pictorial extension of the sample later on. This analysis was open-ended, designed simply to open my mind to the myriad ways of interpreting the visual information in the image and how its elements could be perceived in different relationships at a variety of scales.

4.5 Material Experimentation

A precise handmade representation requires a certain level of competence with materials, which can only be acquired by first making things that are extraneous to the final work of art. Therefore, a critical step in my process was experimenting with materials that were unfamiliar to my practice in order to discover new techniques and applications. The vaguely symbolic interpretations served as the initial impetus for my choices of material experimentation. Through analogies that my mind drew between the image's various components and my own material experiences, I developed a strategy for recreating and extending that particular visual language in new materials

that shared certain characteristics, such as texture and colour. From these initial ideas, some experiments were successful, while some were not, but they provided a good jumping off point from which to develop and refine my techniques. Throughout my studio work, methods were chosen for their expediency and effectiveness in representing the sample.

I will illustrate this process via an example. In one of my early pieces, I was examining sample HMB1S6 (Fig. 5) and thinking of ways to represent the white flecks that were scattered around the image. I was reminded of a time when I was younger and learned how to make spitballs by biting off a piece of toilet paper and balling it up in my mouth to be delivered into one end of a straw and shot out the other end. These spitballs would stick to walls and other surfaces often staying affixed to the surface of impact even after drying. The white flecks reminded me of a wall in one of my old classrooms where my friends and I practiced shooting spitballs, which had become covered in constellations of these tiny wads of toilet paper. I tried wetting small pieces of toilet paper and mashing them into different shapes on the picture plane, but the results were unsatisfactory – the clumps looked too much like wads of paper applied by hand. They were too round and smooth looking, and showed folds and dents where my fingers had pressed them down. They did not have the same rough-looking texture or spontaneous distribution as the white flecks in the sample.

I then remembered an event from early 2010, when I was traveling through Laos. In Laotian guesthouses, toilets typically have hoses attached to

them that are used for the same function that a bidet performs. Some of them have rather powerful water pressure. One day, while staying with a friend, I noticed our bathroom had become a bit of a mess. Toilet paper had come unrolled and was sitting in wet clumps all over the floor, which had a drain to allow the entire room to double as a shower stall. Seeing the hose and wanting to make the cleaning lady's job a little easier, I began spraying the toilet paper with water, propelling it towards the drain. What I discovered was that the force of the water sent the wet toilet paper clumps splattering into the air. Within seconds, the floor and walls looked just like the wall in my classroom with small wads of wet toilet paper clinging all over the place. In my memory, these spatters looked exactly like the white flecks in the image. I revised my method, tearing up pieces of toilet paper and soaking them, then daubing them onto a brush and flinging them at high velocity against the surface of the picture. The process proved surprisingly efficient at producing the desired effect (Fig. 6).

Occasionally, my associations with the image would suggest more than one technique or material. In cases like this I would try as many as I could, comparing each one to the segment of the sample by which I had been inspired. In thinking about ways of recreating a small region of sample MCC3S2 (Fig. 7), my imagination ran wild. It reminded me of many different material experiences and I tried as many as I could. Each one seemed close, but not quite right, though every technique I tried opened up new ideas for different substances to manipulate and combine. Eventually I settled on a method that

drew on many of my experiments prior, and the results benefited greatly from such uninhibited yet systematic material exploration (Fig. 8).

Although I did not start to work on a final piece until I had developed a material strategy for every region of the corresponding sample, there were always new discoveries made in the process of making. These developments would inevitably build on my previous material experiments. Thus the feedback loop between artist and work was an important source of creative inspiration and technical refinement, and a crucial factor in my research.

4.6 Mapping Out the Extended Picture

Once I had my material strategy in place, the next step in my work process was to begin to imagine where my picture would go beyond the borders of the photograph. This was another point at which visualization came into play. Throughout my life as an artist (which, I am fairly certain, encompasses most of my life) I have had a very active visual imagination. My mind constructs pictures out of the things I see in ways that seem to be largely out of my control. This imaginative extrapolation, as I mentioned in Chapter 1, was the inspiration for the structure of my thesis work, mentally expanding upon the visible signs of material metamorphosis to picture the unseen forces at work. This sort of cognitive activity was also instrumental in helping me map out the extended pictures around the samples.

In each case, the image would suggest to me a certain structure, much like the "structural skeleton" described by Arnheim – a series of axes and

relationships (2004: 79) – that I would imagine continuing past the boundaries of the image. In each case, I extended the structure of the sample (for example a region of markings with a specific pattern, or even a distinct contour, where these could be found) so that it moved the eye away from the edge of the photograph, becoming increasingly complex a short distance beyond the transition from printed image to handmade representation so that the viewer's peripheral vision would instinctively direct their gaze to parts of the picture other than the sample's boundary.

This, I found, made for a more seamless transition between the sample and the picture beyond. Transitions were very important in my material process, both in how the work was imagined, and in what eventually emerged in the making. I was constantly aware of how regions of difference were meeting and what that encounter looked like, taking cues from similar points of intersection in the image. If a dark area changed to light abruptly in the image, my dark area must also have an abrupt transition to light. If a series of spots in the image dissipated gradually, eventually disappearing altogether, this formation was continued in my imagined extrapolation.

My thinking was helped in this regard by a discussion I had with Professor Sylvia Whitton of OCAD University, under whom I did an Independent Study in the summer of 2013. She suggested I approach my material extension the way a musical composer would, starting out with a simple melody (the sample), and continuing the structure or 'rhythm' while

allowing the melody to transform slightly here and there.[51] It is difficult to explain what exactly was happening when I mentally pictured my extension, as I am sure it is for a composer to explain how he or she hears how a melody will sound before it is composed. It is an intuitive process of imaginative activity, which gives me an answer to the problem of ambiguity (what to do with the blank space) and a direction in which to begin working. Once the work begins, feedback from the process tells me what needs to happen next based on where my eye 'trips' and fixates on an area that does not fit in with its surroundings, rather than flowing over the composition.

4.7 Applying Layers of Reproduction

My first step in extending the picture plane outward, in every case, was to reconstruct the colours and patterns present in the image over the expanse of the substrate not covered by the sample. In order for the material extrapolation to seem plausible, a certain level of resemblance is required and so it was of the utmost importance to begin with achieving near perfect resemblance between the surface in the image and the surface of the substrate. By 'near perfect' resemblance I mean that what I was aiming at was not exact replication of the various elements in the sample, in the sense of perfectly copying their

[51] Music is, of course, appreciated and interpreted in a very different way than an image. Because a piece of music is experienced durationally, the transitions are experienced one at a time and so less total cohesion is required – as long as each part flows logically from the next, the listener can easily follow the melody. In contrast, a painting is totally visible all at once and any part can be stared at for as long as is desired. To me this means that the transitions need to make sense not just locally, from one area to the next, but also in terms of the whole picture.

properties and relations, but slightly reshaping and redistributing them in a way that closely recreated their overall structure in the sample. According to Arnheim's principle of grouping, this resemblance should contribute to the overall unity of the image, even if regions of similarity are spatially separated (2004: 74-75).

Having made many paintings in the past, I have a competent working knowledge of how to deduce a material procedure from an image in the interest of attaining a particular finished surface appearance. In other words, I know how to layer pigment so that it produces specific results with minimal effort. Because of my commitment to interdisciplinarity, and the fact that many of my samples suggested to me a heterogeneous arrangement of matter, I had to study the arrangements of colour and luminance information and develop an order of operations for arriving at that sort of pattern without relying entirely on paint. The representative limitations of paint as a medium will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

In every case, this began with deciding upon one of the colours (or, if there were no solid colours, one of the patterns or regions of similarity) to extend as the 'field' upon which the rest of the painterly and material actions would accumulate.[52] From there, I must separate the image into imaginary layers, as though the various colours were lying one on top of the other with the visible ones on top. This is another stage of my process that is largely

[52] Because of my cropping, the colour I assign as the 'field' may not make sense as the 'field colour' in the case of the actual object, but this is irrelevant to my aims.

intuitive - after sufficiently studying the image, it is clear to me what colours or patterns need to be laid down first (usually those with the most relative coverage of the image) and what needs to be applied on top of that, finally finishing with those marks or flourishes that are especially scarce.

As my work developed, I became increasingly aware of the importance of constantly revisiting the photo while making. Marks were created, compared, adjusted, compared, and adjusted again, before moving on to a new area. Observing the relationships between the photograph's different visual elements closely, at various scales, was crucial in order to echo these relationships within the photo's immediate vicinity within the picture plane. The farther from the photo's edge I worked, the less I had to compare it directly to the photo, but I was no less rigorous in ensuring it made sense regionally (fitting in with its immediate surroundings) and comprehensively (fitting into the larger whole). Ultimately, I aimed at a partial distribution in the new picture plane of every group of distinct visual characteristics present in the sample, in a unique but similar and continuous arrangement. By maintaining a balance between "variation and redundancy," as Sontag emphasizes (1961: 35), I would hypothetically avoid straight repetition while allowing the eye to unite the picture's disparate parts (both within the photo and outside it). However, as the next section describes, the work always does some of the steering – my results were not always what I expected to make.

4.8 Applying Layers of Invention

Many of my earlier works in this series were completed according to the methods outlined above without me attempting to push very far beyond the visual information in the photograph. This is a result of the change in my research focus that I described in Chapter 3.4, at which point my thesis questions turned to the problem of plausibility and the limitations this imposes on formal invention in extending the picture beyond the boundaries of the photograph. Some of these works I have revisited, in the interest of exploring this problem. Nonetheless, adding pictorial elements to my handmade representations that are not pictured, or are only very subtly hinted at, in the sample was in every case the final phase in my studio process.

In many ways, this phase went against my aesthetic instincts. Through my work with Professor Whitton, I was encouraged, in my final project in our Independent Study, to allow the 'melody' to transform into something new. To use her language, where before I was making a 'solo' or a 'duet' (one or two main pictorial elements), this was to be an 'orchestration' – a grand synthesis of many techniques that would take the composition beyond the sample, though still through a logical progression. In this regard, transitions again became of vital importance.

Like my other pieces, the orchestration (*Untitled VII* – Fig. 9), once appropriate material methods had been established, began with carrying the identifiable regions of similarity into the rest of the picture plane in similar relations to those in the sample. However, in the process of exploring different

techniques, I ended up not only reconstructing and redistributing parts of the picture, but also intensifying elements that were subtle in the image, as well as introducing new elements by way of incremental transformations that occurred gradually across the space of the picture plane. Generally, these kinds of innovations were placed away from the sample boundary, around which the greatest care was taken to accurately and consistently extend the colours and patterns presented by the sample.

Some of these innovations were the result of accidents, some of them were consciously motivated, and some of them were an indeterminate mix between intention and sensing what was needed to 'complete' a region, or the picture as a whole. This last phase in my process will be discussed at greater length in Chapter 5.2 by way of my analysis of the final piece in this series, *Untitled VII*.

Chapter 5: Results

The results of my research, beyond this written discussion, are the works of art I have produced through material exploration and intuitive making in the studio. In order to elucidate the critical insights gained through my investigation, I will analyze two of my works, one created at the beginning of my research (which I feel is less successful), and one created at the end (which I feel is extremely successful). Out of these analyses I will demonstrate what was distilled in this pictorial investigation and how the overall process has changed my understanding of the thesis problem.

5.1 *Untitled I*

At the beginning of Chapter 1, I briefly described *Untitled I* (Fig. 1) in order to introduce the structure of my studio-led research. I will now analyze this piece in greater depth. However, I must first point out that anyone reading this paper without having the ability to see the work first hand will, arguably, be at the mercy of whatever reproduction of the painting to which they have access. It is my experience that neither light-based, nor pigment-based images of the work are able to capture the degree to which the print blends into its surroundings. This is an unfortunate result of appreciating art through reproductions: there is only so much information that can be conveyed by a photograph. What does this mean in a world that increasingly defines one's art practice by the images that are accessible online and in publications? Should

artists be tailoring their work to its eventual photographic reproduction?

In many ways, *Untitled I* is a successful example of what I was trying to achieve with this work. The photograph is convincingly concealed within the painted expanse that surrounds it. The colors are matched, the lines are continued, and the feeling of spontaneity in the arrangement of ghostly trails, spatters, smears, and flecks of rust is attained in a number of areas. However, *Untitled I* suffers from a few problems that are indicative of the early stages of an investigation. First, it shows a lack of material experimentation. It is a painting, made rather simply on a wooden panel using acrylic paint and nothing else.[53] In the particular case of this sample (which can be found within Appendix B, on p. 113), this is not an inappropriate choice. The trails of what appears to be a dried liquid on the bucket's surface do resemble dripping paint. However, as I mentioned in Chapter 1, one of the goals of my inquiry was to push my practice beyond the materials and methods that have defined it up until this point. This piece, while pictorially successful to a degree, does not succeed as an exploration of the materials available to the artist.

Second, close comparison between the characteristics of the sample and the rest of the painting reveal certain oversights on my part in the painting process. For one, the sample contains a white region above the middle on the right side that, when compared to the object, is revealed to be a spot of glare

[53] Both of these materials are quite familiar to me. I opted to use hard surfaces as substrates for these works, because they have less give than stretched canvas and so allow for more pressure to be applied. I was also concerned about the prospect of gluing my images to canvas, because of its tendency to become slack with sustained pressure.

from my lights, rather than a lighter patch of surface like the regions above and below it. This announces my inexperience with shooting shiny objects, as well as my inattentiveness in vetting my samples early on, before including them in larger works. If I had noticed it, I could have perhaps incorporated its signification into my painting by transitioning here and there from the lusterless acrylic on wood to something more glossy, or at least created the illusion of similar sheen elsewhere in the painting with an application of white.

In addition to this mark, the sample contains a level of complexity that is not followed into the rest of the painting. I cannot blame this on anything save insufficiently meticulous observation. Perhaps because this piece did not involve the material experimentation that was instrumental to making the other pieces, I did not develop as comprehensive an awareness of the different kinds of visual information present in the sample. While any one of my marks taken on its own makes sense in a larger scheme that includes this sample, their combined effect lacks the sample's diversity of shape and tone. While I achieved a successful continuation of the haphazard directions of various scratches and spatters, as well as the thicker vertical stripes running down the bucket's surface, several of these lines are continuous with the sample only at the very edges. For example, one of my thick trails starts at the bottom, just left of the center, as though out of thin air with no corresponding trail in the sample, though the very edge of the image does have a mark of the same light beige as the other trails contain. Other lines that extend across a significant portion of the sample are only continued a short distance beyond its borders. My brights

are too bright and my darks not dark enough.

What can this piece illustrate regarding the artist's process of making a plausible extension of picture? It shows one of my fundamental realizations about the process of representation that could only have been discovered by making these works: the closer to (speculative) verisimilitude I bring the work, the more things about the image I become cognizant of. This is, again, a sign of the importance of feedback between my subjectivity and the empirical features of the artwork in guiding the representative task. As I extended more and more of the sample's elements into the painting, my perception of the elements became increasingly sophisticated, and I responded with an increasingly sophisticated representation, until I could no longer see any marks in the sample that were not also present in the painting.

However, as I have mentioned, my analysis of the piece now, at the end of my research, is that these perceptions were not sufficiently meticulous. Too many of my painted marks look as though they are painted marks – liquid applied with a brush (or spattered with one), rather than the gradual accumulation of spills and abrasions that characterizes the sample. It will not serve my analysis to continue to list reasons this piece is unsuccessful, but there is a certain ineffable quality that the sample possesses which my painting does not, despite my relatively careful attention to recreating the distribution and characteristics of the photograph's visual elements. My theory is that I became too fixated on the local relationships and did not pay enough attention to their cohesion.

What does this work reveal about the relationship between painting and (digital) photography? While both media can incorporate a variety of methods ranging from highly algorithmic to non-algorithmic (Mitchell 1992: 30), there is a kind of learning that takes place in the process of *re-making* the image that does not take place with the simple press of a camera's button. Representing something through painting, it turns out, is a very good method of understanding visual phenomena in a systematic way, through analysis and recreation of its elements and their properties and relations (at a variety of scales). This explains painting's long tradition and continued use as a means of depicting human experience. No matter how much detail may be instantaneously captured within the photograph, and despite the lack of a supposed indexical relationship in the painting, the process of making, and the feedback loop generated between the artist and the work allow for an incrementally more sophisticated knowledge of the subject.

Finally, my analysis of this piece illustrates what Livingstone has identified as a defining factor in perception and thus interpretation: viewing distance (2002: 184), which is what determines whether local or overall/global perception of the image dominates.[54] From several meters away, the photograph and painting appear continuous, with none of the above discrepancies interrupting the seemingly continuous picture plane. This is

[54] Livingstone describes how, for a short time hundreds of years ago, paintings were viewed through a small hole in a curtain some distance away to maximize the illusion of pictorial space by limiting the information able to reach the eye (2004, 140). It seems strange to think of imposing such strict viewing conditions on the experience of paintings, which offer so much to the eye up close as well as far away.

because, at a distance, the difference between perceiving the parts and perceiving the whole is smaller than when one is standing very close.

The ability to divide the visual field is how a picture becomes intelligible (Arnheim 2004: 62). These divisions are more difficult to make at a distance because the eye's resolving power is limited, and so our lower-resolution peripheral vision completes the picture in what appears to be the most simple reading of the given information (54): that the picture is an uninterrupted, cohesive whole. As one approaches the piece, the eyes become increasingly able to resolve the fine details and the discrepancies I have listed become more apparent (though perhaps not as apparent to the average viewer as they are to the artist).

In the following analysis, I will summarize the material knowledge I gained in the period between *Untitled I* and *Untitled VII*, and how it has significantly altered my perspective about the act of painting. I will then assess the effectiveness of these new techniques, as they are manifested in *Untitled VII*, for continuing the picture plane. I will conclude this chapter with how this piece embodies my learning about the problem of plausibility in imagining and representing beyond the frame of the photograph.

5.2 *Untitled VII*

From Elkins' definition of paint as fluid and "stone" or pigment (1999: 1), I began to see the medium as a much more heterogeneous art form than I had previously imagined. By this definition I began to see processes like crumbling

crayons onto a board and melting them into a desired shape as a form of painting. Painting does not require brushes, nor does it require what we traditionally term 'paint' (that is, something you buy from a store that says 'paint' on the label), for the act of painting lies simply in the arranging of colored substances. Even when paint itself is rigidly defined, the act of painting involves an ever-growing diversity of materials and methods, as Smythe points out (2012: 107).

However, getting paint to behave in a particular way to achieve a specific result can be, as Elkins notes, an extremely difficult and time-consuming process: "as a way of telling stories or depicting objects, it is almost outlandishly inefficient. Practically anything would be faster" (1999: 184). Indeed, through my studio work one of my major discoveries was the limitation imposed on the work by conceiving of paint as a two-dimensional medium, which requires that every change in colour and luminance be individually applied by hand. Through material experimentation, I realized the efficacy of choosing the right substrate, and treating this surface before painting to allow for actual textural relief to provide some of the variations needed to extend the image. With the right painting surface, paint application can be much looser and more sparing, while achieving the same level of representative accuracy as I had been doing through painstakingly small, incremental applications of individual variations.

Untitled VII makes the most liberal use of this principle, with a variety of materials providing for me a texture on which to apply pigment including

fragments of torn Masonite, wax-soaked felt, and glued-down coffee grounds and lint, and even mulch scraped off the street. Because of the diversity of visual information in the sample image used in this piece (Fig. 2), I explored an enormous diversity of material analogues and applied them so that they continued the tiered structure that appears in the image. These materials were selected because of their texture and color, allowing me to achieve accurate representative effects without relying so heavily on the meticulous application of pigment. Pigment was applied, of course, but loosely and more subtly, in order to disrupt the 'field' created by the different materials, thereby introducing and distributing the necessary variations to bring my handmade extension in line with the sample.

Achieving a plausible level of variation was one of my greatest challenges. As I mentioned in Chapter 4.5, when discussing my attempts to represent the sample's white flecks through hand-distributed wads of toilet paper, it is extremely difficult to achieve a seemingly spontaneous distribution of marks that does not appear repetitive or deliberate. Elkins acknowledges the difficulty painters encounter in trying to achieve "real directionlessness" (1999: 11) and thus attain the "rich and confusing aspect" (14) that a painting acquires when its marks are not instantly readable as the work of the human hand.

Painters, he suggests, must "work hard against their own anatomy to make sure that one kind of mark does not overwhelm the others" (11), which can be done by "smearing… brushstrokes into uniform areas, or else

miniaturizing [them] so they fall below the threshold of normal vision" (12).[55] I found these techniques effective, but gradually began to supplement them with less controlled applications of material (such as spatters), gradually moving towards the surface variations inherent in heterogeneous mixtures of material (for example, the expanse of mulch and coffee grounds extending along the middle of *Untitled VII*, grazed here and there with crayon for a bit of much-needed pigment).

A close reading of *Untitled VII* offers an opportunity to explore what this piece can offer my thesis inquiry. Rather than restate the underlying methodological principle guiding my extension, I will focus on the innovations this piece provided for my research problem. As mentioned in Chapter 4.8, this work was designed to push beyond what was pictured in the sample, to create a logical progression or transformation into something new. I approached this in three ways: through increasing the presence of very subtle visual elements in the sample, through allowing my materials to exist in their raw, un-

[55] By "normal vision" I assume Elkins is talking about the naked eye, but not the "casual eye" as he uses it in this passage: "Any pattern must be defeated before it grows large enough to be seen by the casual eye" (1998: 12). What Elkins means is that our eyes quickly pick up on repeated elements in a picture when we consider the whole, so if great care is not taken to vary the marks, a viewer will easily see their human origins. This "casual" aspect may refer to a brief glance, or viewing from a distance, and connotes a kind of general human experience, as opposed to that of an expert (as in the expression "casual observer"). In any case, it is a transient casualness: unless the observer moves on to another piece of art, the gaze is sustained, and more and more specific information is gathered; often the viewing distance is shortened to within inches of the painted surface, and even inexperienced viewers will begin to draw conclusions based on what their eyes tell them about a painting. The casual eye, in other words, is rarely the only kind of eye trained on works of art – why then is it the casual eye to which painting must appeal? I argue it is because the visual system is so sophisticated, it can only be tricked casually. Through the understanding gained between first looking at a work and closer investigation, the viewer engages in active contemplation of their perceptions as they attempt to identify the material causes of the perceived effects.

manipulated state, and through the introduction of a bright colour I felt was missing from the composition. I will now briefly describe each of these methods and what they say about plausibility.

By increasing the presence of subtle elements within the sample through my material extension, I adjusted my level of adherence to the referent by dramatically changing the proportional distribution of the sample's characteristics. This was the first step in going beyond the picture and occurred first with my noticing a tiny purple fleck in one section of the sample (Fig. 10). In extending the sample's pigmentation pattern outwards from the edge of the image, I decided one way to transform my work while remaining plausible in relation to the whole would be to use incrementally more of this purple moving away from the edge of the sample.

I found that, even though there was almost no purple in the sample, my moderate applications of purple elsewhere seemed to fit perfectly in the larger picture. I did the same with the sample's forest green, extending its presence and, this time, adding slight variations that made the green brighter and more vibrant than it appeared anywhere in the sample. Like with the purple, the hint of green in the sample was enough to unite the disparate but similar areas of the picture. The same principle was used to transform the faint clouds of white near the sample's top right corner (Fig. 11), into the twisting and curling wisps of gessoed felt at the far right and left edges.

While exploring the use of materials like Masonite, lint, mulch, and coffee grounds, I experimented with how to transform them to suit my representative

objective. They were also, however, quite useful in their unchanged, raw state. The Masonite, for example, was the same color as the light brown mottling the sample's upper middle region, while the mulch and coffee were almost identical in hue to the dark region below this. Even some of the lint I acquired from my dryer could be applied raw and incorporated into my picture along the top of the image where the earth-tones give way to a smoky greyish-blue. By varying the degree to which these materials became transformed and blended into their surroundings, I created a whole new set of variations that went beyond the visual information in the sample, but which appeared to fit because of the gradual and incremental metamorphosis from completely indistinguishable to virtually untouched material. This also provided my piece with an interesting variety of textures, unprecedented in my practice prior to this piece.

The sample's bottom band of grey is starkly separated from the rest of the image by a crisp horizontal line that my mind instantly read as a horizon when the image was oriented vertically. The tiered regions of pigmentation and their rocky texture reminded me of the landscapes I had seen in southern Thailand, where monumental limestone formations have led to large tidal caves you can swim in, walk through, and climb on. I used that image as a jumping off point for the composition, with the bottom grey band as an imaginary water line. When I had completed most of the other parts of the picture, this part of the painting seemed unfinished, and rather dull, so I decided to add some bright greens to balance those above. This is yet another example of the kind of "self-organization" (Vesterby and Vesterby 2011) that results from artistic feedback.

By breaking up any areas of formal repetition (such as marks of the same shape and orientation) and visual homogeneity with slight variations, and instead presenting a surface filled with discontinuities, I have found a plausible natural spontaneity can be achieved without having to intricately render every element. These methods prevent the eye from ever having a precise field of significant size to compare with other areas of the picture, causing the mind to weave together the points of similarity within this confusing disorder of variations and ultimately creating pictorial cohesion by uniting disparate regions (both within and outside of the sample).[56]

[56] I discovered that my perception was extremely sensitive in this regard – the slightest hint of pigment is enough to make all other regions of similar pigmentation seem a great deal more intense and domineering within the composition.

Chapter 6: Conclusions and Recommendations for Further Research

Through my studio-led research, I have produced a set of artworks and a supporting document, both of which constitute a record of my interdisciplinary approach and what was learned in the process. My artworks are evidence of my engagement with new materials and studio methods, while this paper demonstrates my theoretical exploration of the literature around the making and interpreting of visual representations, and the application of key theoretical concepts to my studio practice in the interests of investigating an aesthetic philosophical problem. The material experimentation in the studio was informed by my readings, and in turn provided me with new theoretical avenues to explore within the literature. Thus, they are inseparable from one another, as are the empirical observation, intuitive making, and critical reflection that are involved in my studio process. I will now revisit the questions posed in the first chapter of this investigation, in order to summarize the critical contributions my research has made to the problem of plausibility in extending an image beyond the boundaries of the frame, via mimetic representation.

I started by asking: By what material and cognitive processes are visual experiences translated into material likenesses? What factors lead the artist to their choice of methods? In approaching a mimetic task, the artist is faced with the problem of ambiguity – what to represent and how. Through my literary research, I have come to understand that *mimesis*, even though it may draw on

reality, is a fundamentally interpretive, creative act. My studio work confirmed this as my empirical observations were at all times accompanied by imaginative associations that propelled my exploration of material methods. Through experiments developed from these imaginative associations, I tested a variety of media and techniques previously foreign to my painting practice, selecting those that were most effective at creating a resemblance to the samples. I also acquired valuable knowledge regarding digital image capturing and processing.

My primary research focus was the aesthetic philosophical question of how an artist tackles the issue of plausibility in visual representation of an image, and what boundaries, if any, this imposes on creative invention. Drawing on my experience as a painter, my interdisciplinary studio work in this MFA program, and what critical literature I could find, I developed a methodology for exploring this question through a representative exercise in which I continued the visual characteristics of an image beyond its boundaries into a larger picture. I asked where copying ends and inventing begins – what I learned is that even copying requires interpretation, because it is a translation of visible phenomena into an equivalent form (Sontag 1961: 7). Thus, my approach required a mixture of introspective and empirical methods, as art-based research theory says it should (Sullivan 2010: 65; McNiff 1998: 49).

I asked what the necessary steps are in tackling this issue today. Drawing on contemporary art history and criticism, I acknowledge the diversity and heterogeneity of art practices within the discipline known as 'painting,' as well as the many artists exploring the integration of unconventional materials and

digital imaging technology into the image space of painting. However, I position my work as an important contribution to this field through its illustration of how handmade material practice and digital technology can be used in tandem to approach a critical problem, rather than opposing one another and setting up unproductive distinctions. Also necessary to tackling this issue is a constant awareness of the artist's motivations throughout the studio process, in direct engagement with the materials, and in imaginative extrapolation from sensory experience.

Finally, I asked what exactly is being translated in a successful representation, and what is missing from an unsuccessful one, and whether the internal logic of the image that allows for a plausible extension can be located in specific visual strategies. My research into neurobiology and perceptual psychology found that vision depends on a tension between similarity and dissimilarity, allowing for the perception of discontinuities that we translate into an interpretation of individual surfaces and objects. Though this translation involves a simplification of the available information, it allows for complex visual phenomena to be organized and associated with past experiences quickly, in order to ascertain its significance for the viewer. In order to be intelligible as a mimetic representation, the artist must maintain adherence to a set of parameters by which the referent is defined – its pattern of contours, for example.

However, plausibility demands more than just a recognizable representation – it requires a balance between variation and redundancy

across the picture plane, allowing for the elements and their properties to cohere at multiple levels from local relationships to the picture as whole, such that the "structural skeleton" is extended (Arnheim 2004: 80). My studio work showed I was able to invent within the set of possibilities suggested by the image, and even go beyond this set, without this invented pictorial space appearing disconnected from the space of the actual – the photographic subject.

The highest degree of rigor in replicating and extending the logic of the photographic image is around the perimeter of the image. The farther from the image my representation goes, the more it transforms, because more intervening space has led to more minor incremental innovations, distributed strategically so that the overall transition is gradual. As long as colours and forms are repeated in different parts of the image, they validate each other by drawing the eye across the distance between them. By distributing similar visual elements across the picture plane at irregular intervals, I make transitions from familiar to novel elements appear gradual, and less abrupt (and therefore noticeable). The composition is unified. Does this suggest that the character of the eye's movements is a determinant of plausibility? Could *any* color or form be used and assimilated into the logic of the picture, so long as it is repeated with some regularity? This is an area for further research.

Verisimilitude, it turns out, is a goal without definite rules – there are an infinite number of pathways to achieving a plausible representation. I selected the methods I used in this thesis project because of my personal preferences, experiences, and cognitive associations, but they could have been approached

in any number of completely different ways. What seems necessary in every case, however, is a constant awareness of the empirical qualities of the work and the relationship between image and referent. While interpreting images and visual phenomena in general is a subjective process, it is grounded in matter that we generally apprehend using the same basic equipment and so critical insights can be gained from artistic research and its resulting sites of knowledge: works of art. In the case of painting, this knowledge is embodied in the struggle with matter, and the learning that is recorded within the layers of material, upon which the viewer imaginatively extrapolates – much like I did in picturing the unseen forces at work in my found objects. As with any painting, this interpretation is rooted in surface characteristics, which, as Livingstone suggests, are how we determine our understanding of the world we occupy. Surface is the basis of visualization – an engagement with visual phenomena that "far exceeds the boundaries of the frame" (Burnett 2004: 16).

Sontag suggests that every artistic style "embodies an epistemological decision, an interpretation of how and what we perceive" (1961: 35). She continues, however, by pointing out that "all the contents of consciousness are ineffable. Even the simplest sensation is, in its totality, indescribable. Every work of art, therefore, needs to be understood not only as something rendered, but also as a certain handling of the ineffable" (36). The process of making is intimately tied to the process of interpretation. Both are combinations of the visible and the unknown mental processes that extrapolate on the visible, on the unseen properties and forces at work. Burnett suggests how "weaving

trauma into art, images, and aesthetic forms is part of bearing witness to occurrences that cannot be understood or experienced in any other manner" (23). What exactly is the experience, the interpretation of human perception, the trauma that my project addresses?

The project comes from an awareness of the material change that takes place all around us. Even art objects within institutions dedicated to their preservation are gradually disintegrating, leaving the structures humans have given their material components, to eventually return to the heterogeneity of nature. What my research during this project has shown me is that all that we perceive as stable and fixed is in fact much more ambiguous than we would like. Our existence and productivity within the world depends on our ability to subdivide it into discrete units, objects, concepts, and systems. However, like the hidden heterogeneity of a seemingly cohesive painting (the indeterminate mixtures of different substances, the hundreds or thousands of individual tiny actions that constitute the marks making up its surface) these are simplified descriptions designed to organize what is fundamentally a great disorder.

This work serves as an analogy for ambiguous processes of interpretation and visualization that allows for connections to be made between cognitive processes and sensory experience. The parts of the image are united by the proximate viewer's active participation in the search for meaning, which involves the interrelated processes of vision (which connects us to the real) and cognition (which connects this sensation to our existing understanding of the world). In each work, the mechanically-produced, immaterial digital image (in

printed form) which is derived from light reflected off a real object (one which is available to be seen a short distance away in the gallery) is co-present with an artificial likeness that is nonetheless composed of actual matter taken from this same world. The work juxtaposes the "hubris of the digital" (Smythe 2012: 118) with the materiality of pigment-based images in a way that forces one to complete the other in a near-seamless perceptual continuity that is disrupted as the viewer gathers more information about the image, eventually showing the limitations of photography and of my own capacity to create a plausible representation.

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Appendix A : Figures

The following are images referred to in the body of the document as Fig. 1 through 11 (page references are included so readers can easily return to the text from the image), along with some information regarding materials used, date, and/or image origin.



Fig. 1 Nick Sweetman, *Untitled I* (2012)
(ref p.1 and 73) Acrylic and inkjet print on birch panel



Fig. 2 Nick Sweetman, *MCC3 Sample 2* (2013)
(ref p.5 and 80) Digital photograph of object MCC3 (see page 125)

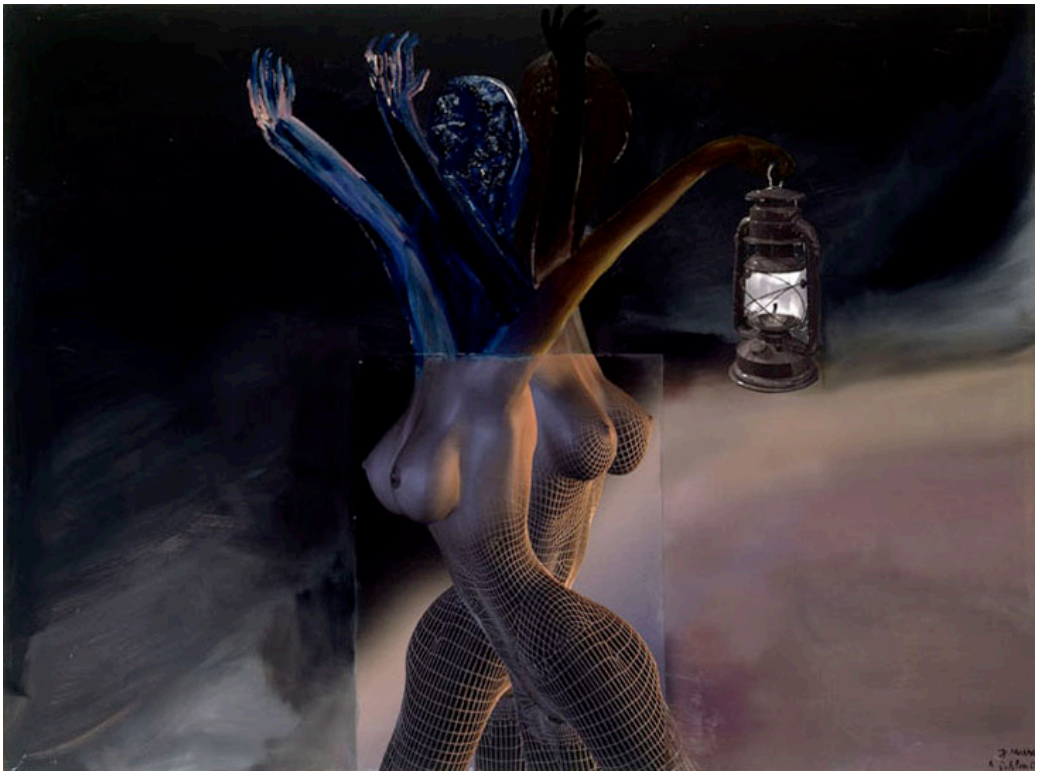


Fig. 3 (ref p.28)

Albert Oehlen & Jonathan Meese, *Storm* (2004)
Saatchi Gallery. Accessed on December 15, 2013 from <http://www.saatchigallery.com/artists/artpages/oehlen_Storm.htm>

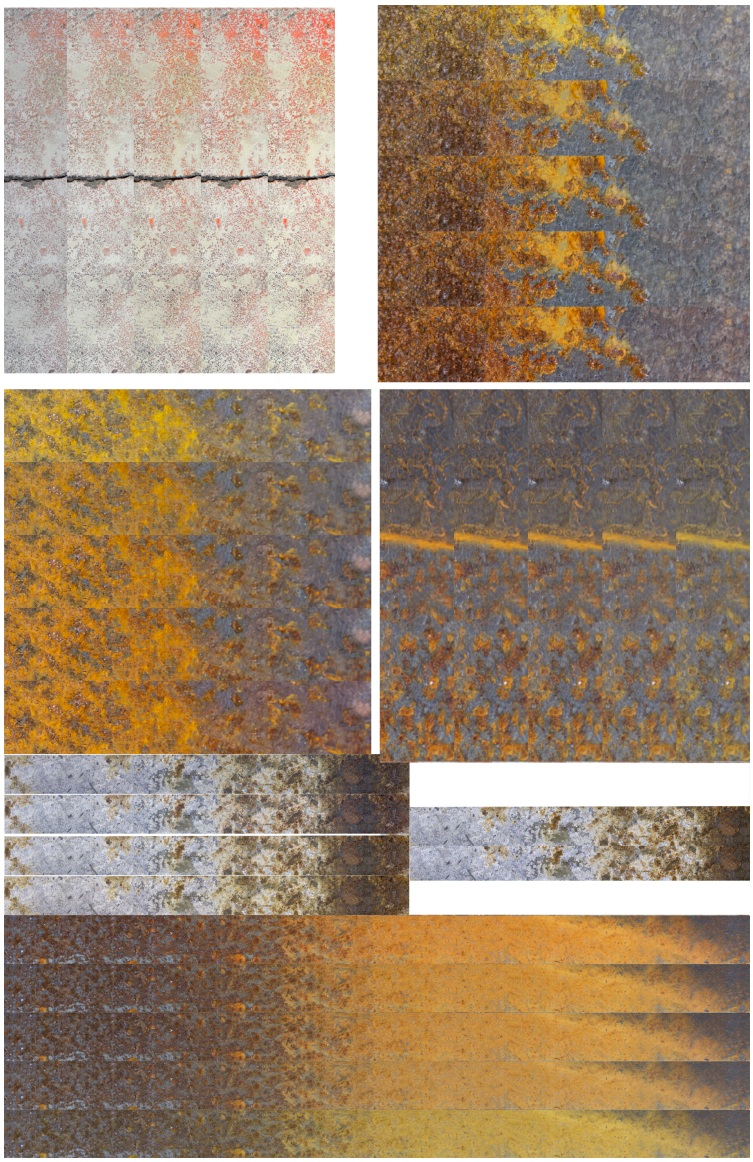


Fig. 4 Nick Sweetman, *Test print 26* (2013)
(ref p.60) Photoshop-adjusted variations of samples

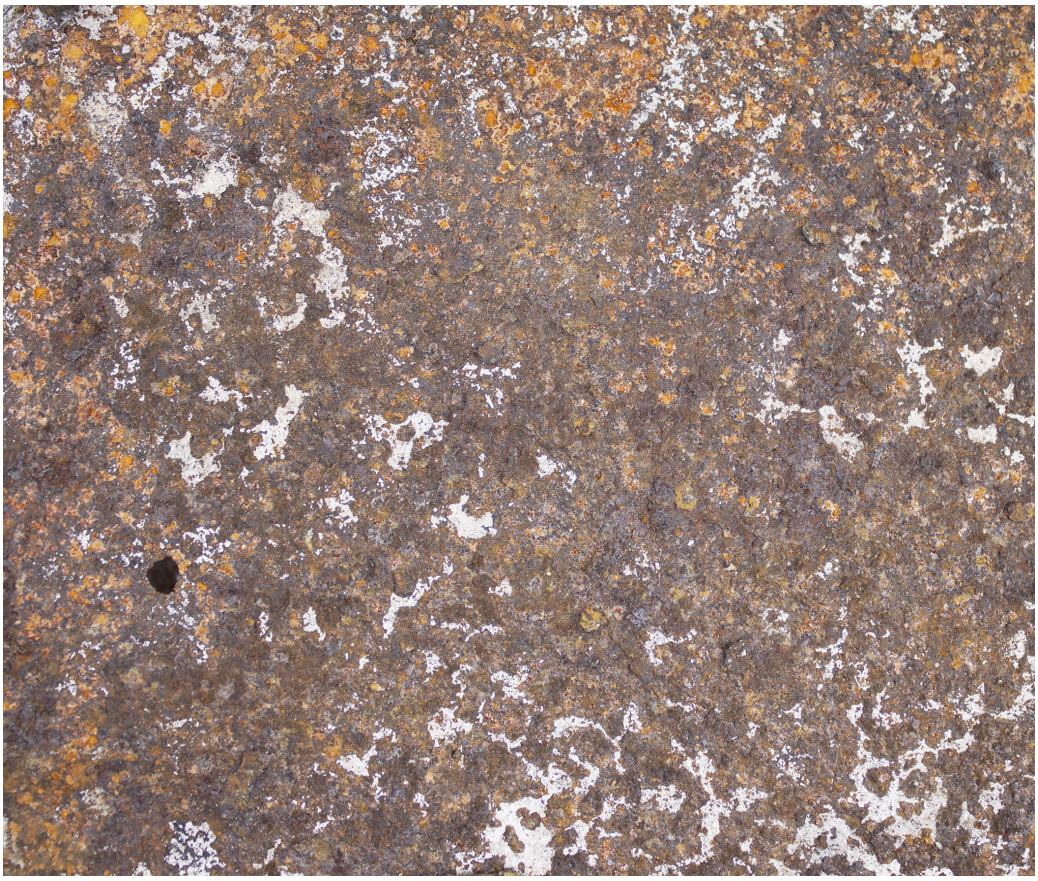


Fig. 5 Nick Sweetman, *HMB1 Sample 6* (2012)
(ref p.64) Digital photograph of object HMB1 (see page 108)

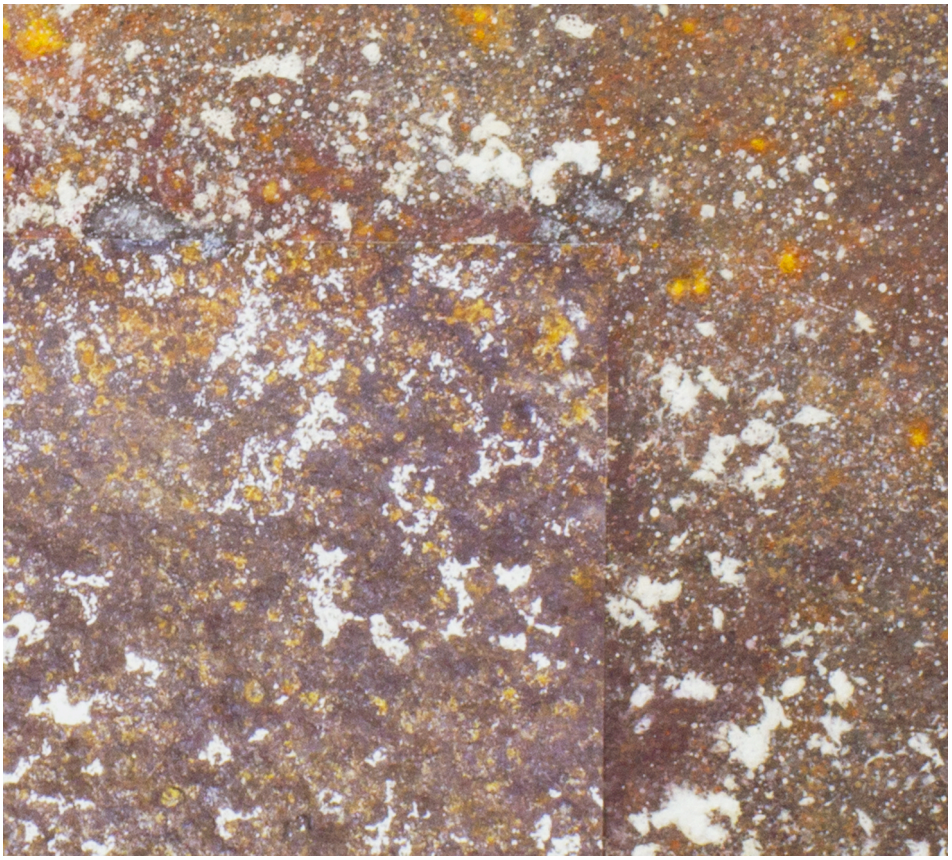


Fig. 6 (ref p.65)

Nick Sweetman, *Untitled II (detail)* (2012)
Acrylic paint, toilet paper, and inkjet print on board.

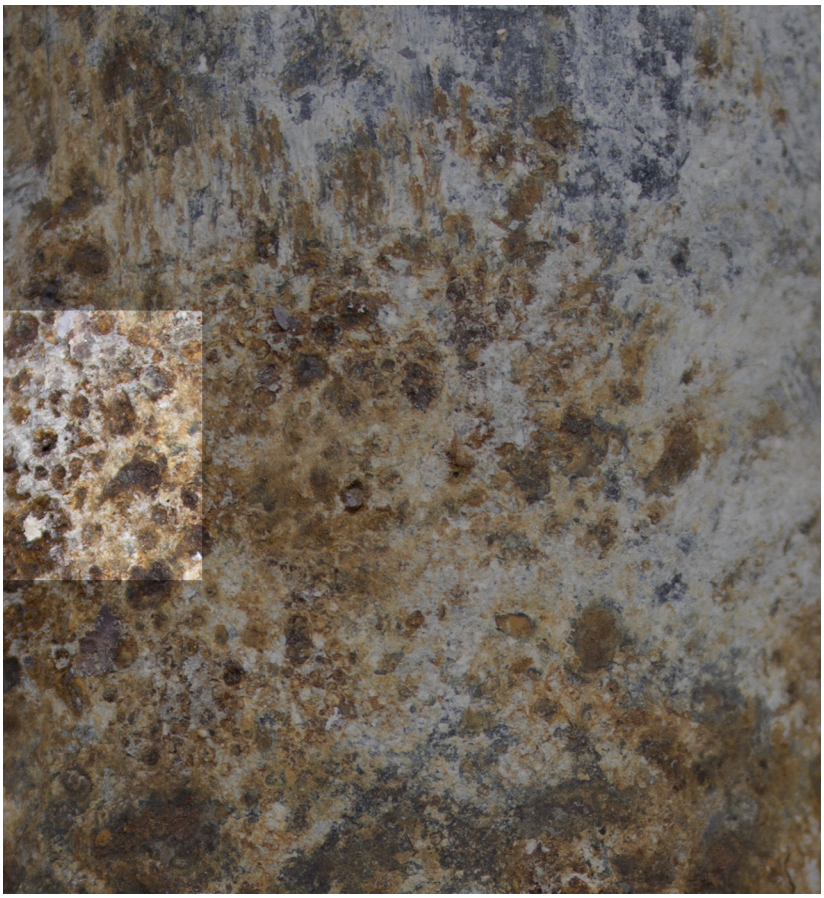


Fig. 7 Nick Sweetman, *MCC3 Sample 6 (detail)* (2013)
(ref p.65) Digital photograph of object MCC3 (see page 125)

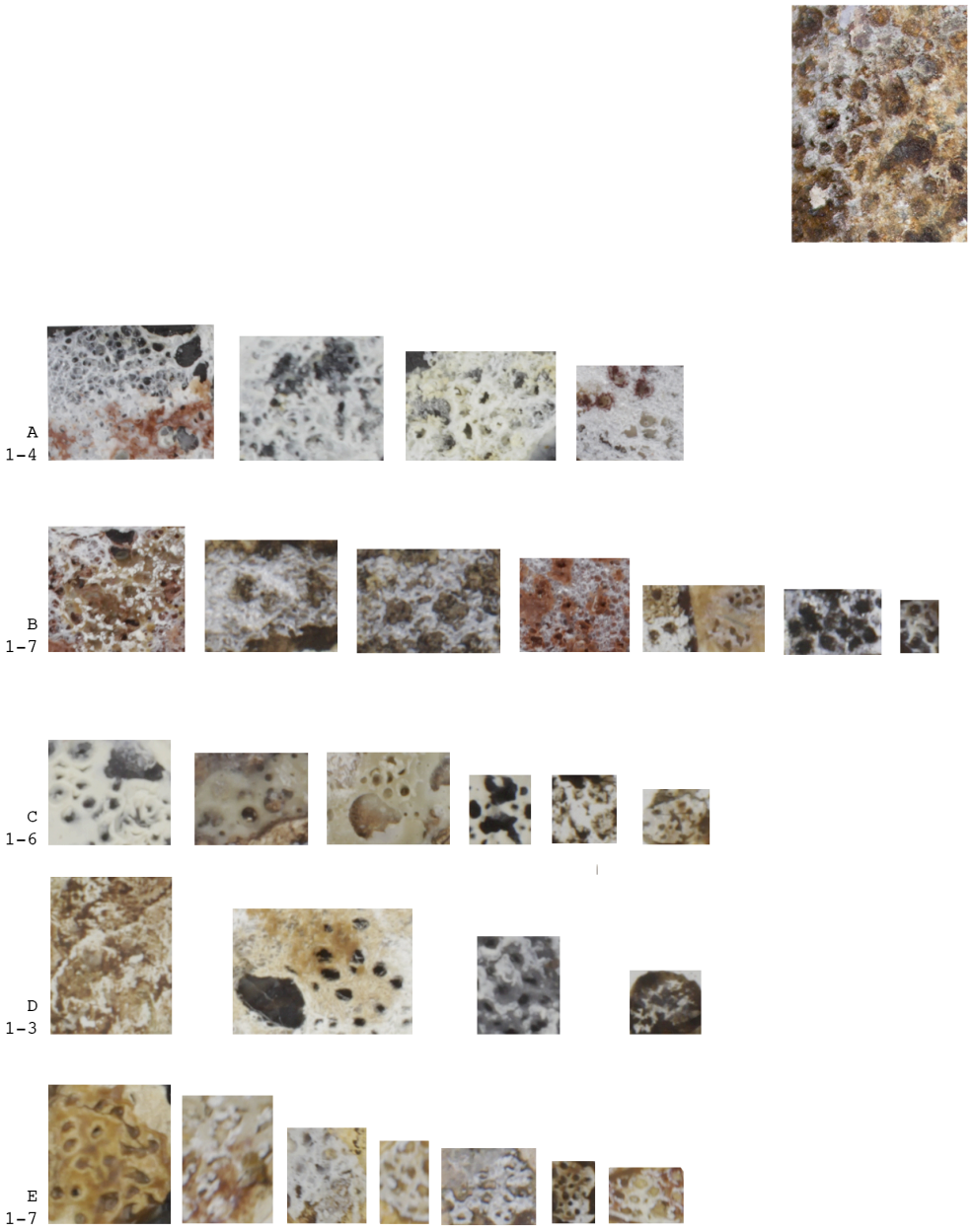


Fig. 8
(ref p.66)

Nick Sweetman, *MCC3 studies* (2013)
Beeswax, coffee grounds, crayon, felt, gesso, Masonite, potato, styrofoam



Fig. 9
(ref p.71)

Nick Sweetman, *Untitled VII* (2013)
Beeswax, chalk, crayon, coffee grounds, felt, gesso, lint, Masonite, mulch, styrofoam and inkjet print on wood panel



Fig. 10 Nick Sweetman, *MCC3 Sample 6 (detail)* (2013)
(ref p.82) Digital photograph of object MCC3 (see p.125)

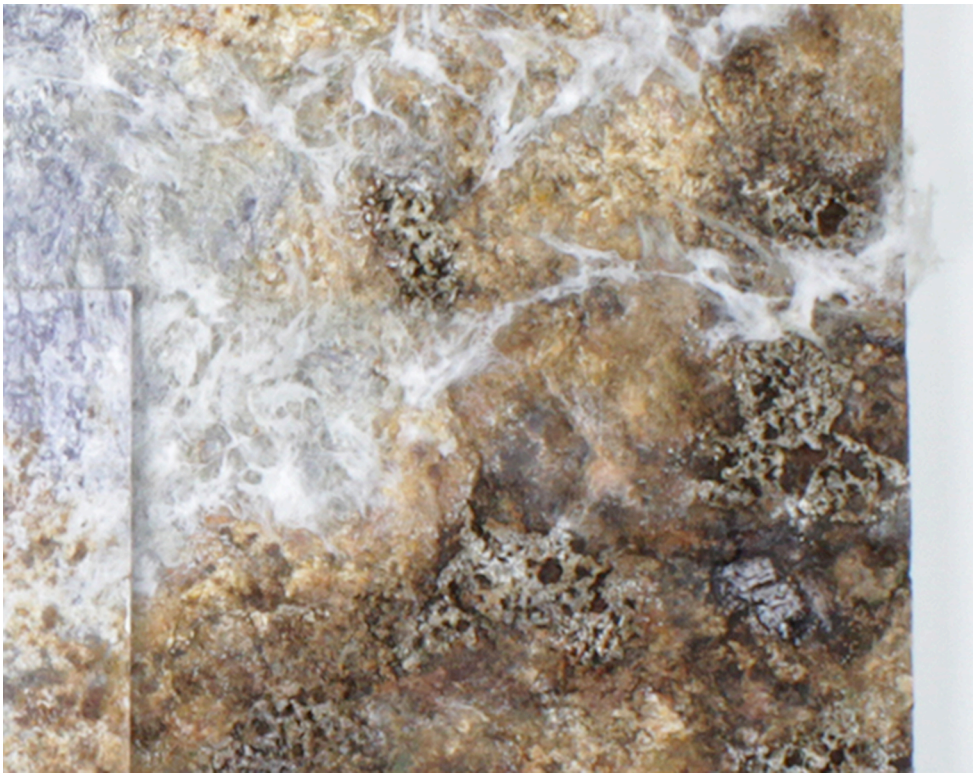


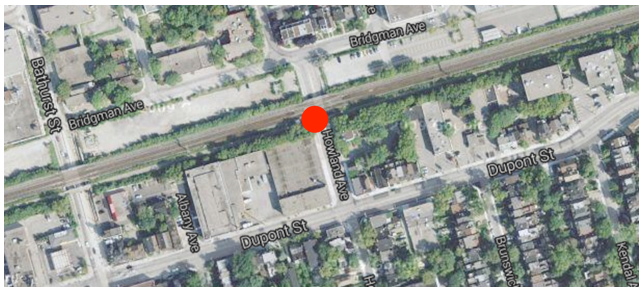
Fig. 11 Nick Sweetman, *Untitled VII (detail)* (2013)
(ref p.82)

Appendix B: Object Catalogue

The following are my field notes and observations regarding the objects I found and the circumstances of my findings, as well as written descriptions of the samples chosen for representation. Each text is supplemented with images of the object in situ, the object against a white background, and the sample.

HMB1

NOV 11/2012
3:43 PM



Discovery Notes:
Conditions overcast; no precipitation. Ground moist, but protected by bridge.
Seeing that the bridge was under construction and that there were a number of objects strewn around the site, I climbed down from the train tracks on the South side of the bridge, on the west side of Howland. I instantly began noticing the kind of objects I was searching for and gathered many of them after documenting them in their found locations.
The first object I saw, photographed, examined, and selected for collection was a jagged piece of metal sitting on a concrete block at ankle level near where I entered the site. I noticed its thin, rounded edges and threatening rusty points. Upon examination, it contained a surprising variety of colours ranging from tan, orange and gold to a variety of greys, browns and purples, edged here and there by a bluish silver.



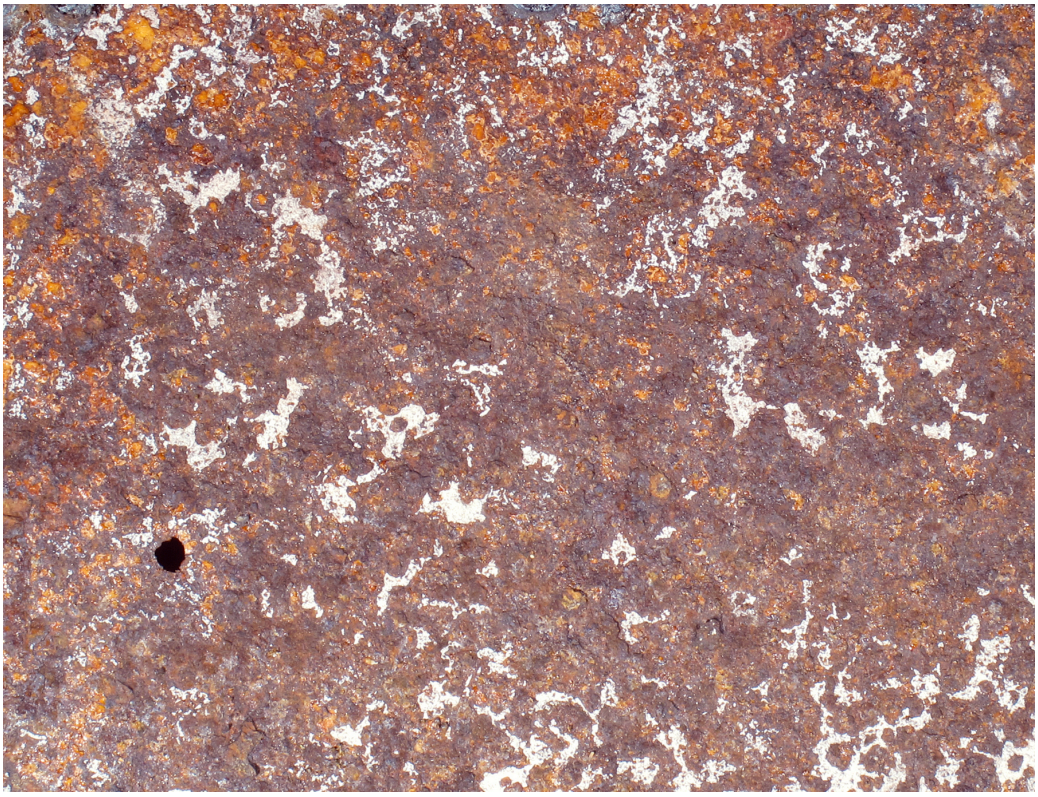
Object Notes:
Object HMB1 appears to be composed of three more or less rectangular planes of 0.75 cm thick metal, welded together. The largest piece is long and bent in half lengthwise at a 90 degree angle. It has one straight edge, while one is jagged from having been cut and two have corroded into sharp curves and points. It has 2.5cm round bolt heads spaced along its length, 5 along the straight edge and two near the pointed end on the opposite face.
Attached along the five bolts is a broader rectangle just over twice as wide and just over half as long as the first piece. It has three straight edges and one cut in a meandering line along the farthest edge from the bolts. Attached to this at a 45 degree angle, so that it extends just past the cut end of the long piece, is a narrow rectangle, the smallest piece. It is cut at a jagged angle at its outer extremity.
On the inside of the angle, the surface is rough and flaky and colored mostly brown, white and beige but also has regions of taupe, dull purple, and reddish brown. Along the edges of the broad rectangle and at the pointed, corroded end of the long piece are spots of vibrant orange and gold.
On the outer side of the angle, the surface varies from grey to tan and ochre, with the regions along melted edges becoming black, with spots of red and orange, as well as bright bluish silver. The melted edges are silver, lumpy, and rough.

L 50cm **W** 20cm **H** 30cm
Handling notes: Very heavy; Sharp edges and corners; exterior surface has begun to crack off



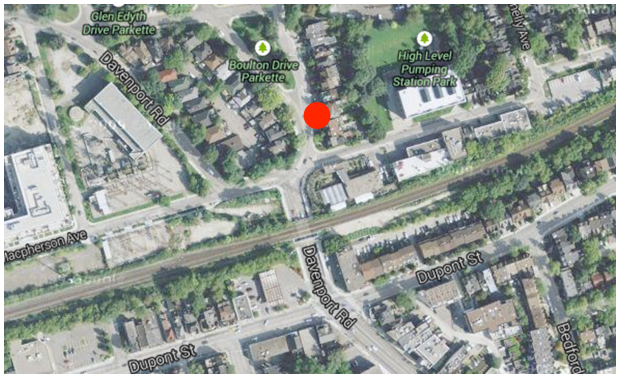
Sample 6

Notes:
The sample is covered in a dense amalgamation of dark grey, brown and purple with flecks of tan, ochre, and a pale taupe. Closer to the bottom of the image there is a higher concentration of these flecks, with slight dissipation in the upper middle left and right. Also interspersed within this dark expanse are larger round spots of pale and vibrant orange. The largest of these spots have bright yellow centers. These spots are especially concentrated the closer to the top of the image they occur, as well as on the left edge of the picture.
There are several large, pale bluish-grey chunks that are obscured by the cropping along the top of the image.
The sample is scattered with flecks of white as well, ranging in size from tiny grains and short, skinny trails to thick blobs. These forms are grainy where they are concentrated along the top and bottom edge, but also occur in more cohesive shapes around the middle of the image. Where the white encounters orange spots, there is always a border of dark purple between them.
The image has a mottled, rough look to it, like bark or granite. The white fragments resemble shards of bleached coral or tiny clumps of bleached paper pulp. Near the bottom left corner of the sample there is a large black dot that indicates a very small hole in the metal plate.



POP1

NOV 11/2012
2:14 PM



Discovery Notes:
Conditions overcast; no precipitation, but ground moist.
I had seen the dumpster already on one of my regular bike routes and at the time made a note to investigate its contents. As I walked near the dumpster, whose upper lip was 5 or perhaps 5 1/2 feet tall, I saw the bucket (POP1) inside. The object caught my eye because it was unlike the other things in the dumpster (mostly flat pale sections of drywall, chunks of fluffy pink insulation, and long, narrow lengths of wood or metal). The contrasting light and dark stripes created by the drips on the bucket also caught my eye against the spattered, rusty dumpster walls.



Object Notes:
POP1 is a metal bucket that appears to have been heavily used. Its curves are dented in many places and it is covered inside and out with marks of abrasion, many of which have begun to rust. The outside is covered in layers of dried vertical rivulets, most likely left by some sort of wet plaster or mortar. The bucket has no handle, but has two small, round protrusions where a handle must have been attached at one point.
The finish on the exterior is glossy black, but the dried beige film gives the black a smoky blue color, especially where the beige substance has been thinned and smudged.

L 35cm **W** 35cm **H** 45cm
Handling notes: The beige markings on the outside can be smudged and scratched off with too much abrasion or friction.



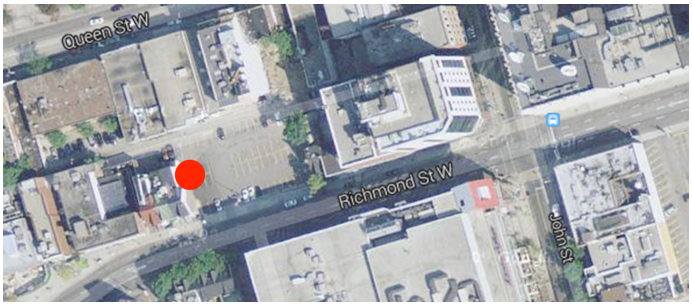
Sample 3

Notes:
The rivulets of beige snaking down the sides of the bucket give me the sense of something being plunged into a thick liquid that is spilling over (though these could be the result of tipping out the contents of the bucket as well). In many places something (presumably friction or abrasion) has partially rubbed off this liquid's dried remnants, leaving streaks and cloudy trails that break up the vertical lines. Here and there spatters of liquid of all shapes and sizes point in all directions giving the sense of vigorous activity.
The trails are inconsistent in length, thickness, and opacity. Here and there are tiny specks of pale rust. On the right near the top there is a spot of glare off the shiny surface.



RIC4

NOV 09/2012
3:58 PM



Discovery Notes:
Conditions overcast; no precipitation, ground dry.
I noticed this shard of brick amongst thousands of other similar shards on a construction site on Richmond between Peter and John. I could see a number of colorful chunks of material from outside the fence. I squeezed through a gap in the fence and began to examine the ground.
There were a number of pieces of brick that had similar characteristics, but the high contrast created by this brick's reddish-orange and the cracking sky blue paint led me to pick it up and examine it more closely where I was drawn to the bizarre system of cracks in the aging paint job. I found this face was actually spattered (fairly uniformly) with tiny dark dots and had a cloud of some chalky grey substance on one side.



Object Notes:
RIC4 appears to be a thin shard of brick that was part of the surface of a wall painted light blue. Its paint has chipped off in many places both along the rough edges and in sharp angled polygons throughout the bricks surface. The other face of the shard is simply raw, uneven brick. There appears to be a grey residue of some kind on the surface of the blue paint and exposed brick. Here and there the blue paint has small flecks of brick color on top of it, as though from another brick abrading against it.

L 15cm W 7cm H 2cm
Handling notes: Paint chips are very brittle and flake off if excessively disturbed.



Sample 1

Notes:
This sample is mostly occupied by the cracking paint job, which gives way here and there to an expanse of raw, reddish-orange brick. These areas vary in size and interrupt the light blue paint colour throughout, with a curved expanse of unbroken brick centered along the bottom edge.
Also along this boundary, just below it, there is a consistent, meandering stripe of color interrupting the brick's orange. The stripe changes from light to dark grey and these are intertwined with sections of reddish purple.

The brick itself is dark reddish orange, broken up with flecks of light and dark greys, as well as shadows that indicate a rough, uneven surface. In a very small number of places, there are one or two blue, greyish green and black spots within the orange. The orange is also stained grey in a variety of places near the paint chip edges, especially in the right and bottom left sides. In many gaps, there does not seem to be a uniform arrangement of grey and orange, but the grey in many places hugs the interior edge of the gaps.

The gaps in the paint are not uniform in size, shape or orientation, though many of the edges are curved lines, with the troughs of the curves facing into the gaps. The gaps occur more on the right of the brick, and generally their arrangement progresses up and to the right.

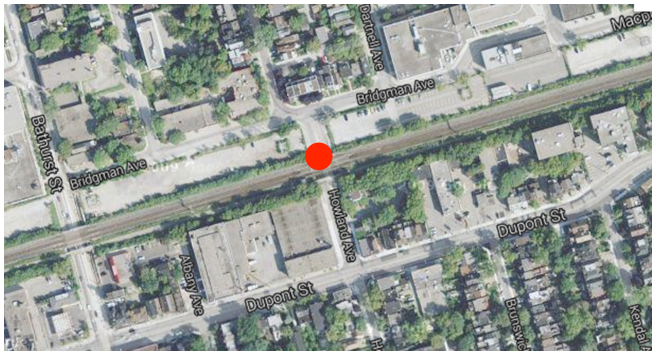
The cracks often emanate in groups of three from a single point forming three roughly equal angles. Some of these formations have a triangular hole where the cracks meet, but many do not. The cracks range in severity from barely visible, subtle, narrow, shallow, and short cracks to deeper, wider, longer, and more obvious cracks that see the edges of the paint curve upwards away from the brick on either side. The cracks occur all over the entire surface, but are more concentrated on the right side of the image, where a cloud of grey splotches (organic shapes, soft edges, opaque) dots the sky blue paint in a vertical cluster. Grey splotches occur as well in a discontinuous line of small, thin marks that travels between the bottom left corner of the brick and the center of the grey band on the right.

The blue seems to be smudged with a slightly darker grey in some places in the bottom left quadrant of the brick. It is also interrupted in a few tiny spots by marks that share the orange color of the brick. Some are tiny specks, one is a lumpy organic shape while another is an extremely narrow, discontinuous streak, oriented diagonally. The blue is also dotted with tiny black spatters. The spatters are all essentially round, are mostly very tiny, and have no apparent order in their size or spacing. There appear to be higher concentrations of larger dots in the upper left quadrant of the brick than any other.



HMB4

NOV 11/2012
3:40 PM



Discovery Notes:
Conditions overcast; no precipitation. Ground moist, but protected by bridge.
As I moved North under the bridge, towards Bridgman, I passed by HMB4 also sitting on a concrete block at ankle level on my right side. I noticed the surface facing me right away, as it was covered in bright yellow speckles, transitioning into a cloud of sandy brown, punctuated by a small cloud of yellow in one corner. The opposite corner bore a dark grey mark.
Upon further inspection, I observed that every facet had a very different appearance, each bearing a totally unique pattern of rust creeping across dull slate-blue metal. The rust ranged in color from pale golden yellow, through orange and ochre, to reddish brown and burnt umber.



Object Notes:
HMB4 is a long, thick rectangular slab of metal that has been shaped into a sharp 90 degree angle lengthwise. Its edges are still clearly defined straight lines, including the two large holes punched through one half of one face. Within these holes, the edge of the metal is a lustrous silver.
Each of the four rectangular faces of the object have totally unique, vibrant yellow and gold formations spreading across the dark bluish grey metal.
One face on the inside of the corner is almost completely covered in yallow, gold and brown rust stains. Its faces a surface with more of the grey background visible and tan, reddish brown and yellow flecks scattered across.
The outer faces have fewer yellow and gold markings, one having almost none and one being bisected on a slight angle by a crisp gold line. On one side of this line the surface is dotted with gold and brown specks.

L 35cm **W** 12cm **H** 12cm
Handling notes: Sharp corners; Rust can be smudged or scratched off with too much friction and abrasion.



Sample 1

Notes:
This sample, the first of two taken from HMB4, is a mottled field of dark blue, grey, and green bisected on a slight angle by a crisp, straight line of bright yellow-orange that is slightly thicker in the center of the image than at either side. It is

broken on the far right by a grey spot, above which there is a yellow archway connecting the two segments of ‘horizon.’
Above this line, the field darkens in the top left corner, becoming more grey-green in the middle before transitioning back to blue on the far right. Throughout this expanse there are small flecks of lavender, and two larger lavender marks hover just above the centre of the middle line.
An intertwining column of very fine, but very distinct, yellow ochre and orange trails rises from the ‘horizon’ to the upper right corner of the image. Near where these trails meet the top right corner, there is a short, but thicker orange mark lying on a slight incline. A few of these tiny orange trails also snake up and left from the left side.
Below the horizon line, there is a relatively even distribution of brown, ochre, and orange spots clustering faint and dark on the sides, breaking apart and dissolving into the blue field, but remaining bright and distinct in the middle.



Sample 3

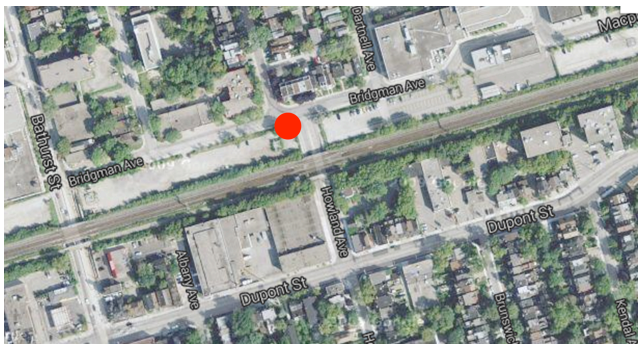
Notes:
This image makes me think of a dramatic sunset, an explosion or a campfire — in other words, something where a dark space is illuminated by a fiery light source. It calls to mind images of the sun's surface, where tendrils of hot gas are reaching out into the darkness and dissolving into molten spray. The stark contrast between the dark mound at the bottom left and the yellow cloud above it makes me think of a hill or other land formation in the foreground, backlit by an enormous burst of light. The thin trails curling along the top of the image, the particulate fragments of yellow and brown that vary in size and shape, clustering and dissipating unevenly, and the diagonal lines that mark color transitions throughout the sample, give me the impression of movement and energy.
The bottom left corner of the image is a dull, cool grey, with cornflower blue and dull reddish brown speckles. Almost immediately, as the eye moves up and to the right, this dark patch transitions through tan and ochre into a pale yellow, creating a strong complimentary contrast. Golden yellow dominates the rest of the left half of the image, spilling partially into the right half as well. This yellow is brightest along the bottom left boundary, closest to the dark patch in the bottom left corner. Elsewhere it is more golden, approaching ochre as it progresses up and to the right, where it is increasingly spotted with very small dots of burnt sienna and raw umber, and even tinier dots of raw sienna and tan. The yellow appears amorphous in shape and hazy in some places, but forms defined organic shapes in others (such as the trails that curve all together along the top). Where the yellow is clearly defined it is offset by what appears to be a greyish-blue 'background' that shows through here and there throughout the sample, concentrated close to the top in the middle, as well as in the rightmost quadrant, where it forms faint horizontal bands (one of which extends faint and broken across the sample near the bottom and is especially pronounced near the bottom right corner).
Pale olive green, light grey, ochre and sky blue appear in small spots throughout the yellow cloud, especially near the middle of the sample. In the right half of the image, the darker brown speckles that dot the yellow cloud along the top replace the yellow spots as the dominant color/formation. They are, like the yellow on the left side, offset by a background of ochre, pale olive green, and a dull sky blue, but in the far right third of the sample, equidistant from the top and bottom, these colors are joined by a thin cloud of tiny, bright lavender speckles.
Above this region, occupying most of the top half of the sample's rightmost quarter, there are two clouds of dull yellow spots. Small spots of this dull yellow appear throughout the brown speckled expanse between the large yellow cloud that dominates the sample's left half and this small cloud on the right. These small spots are organic in shape, and a few of them (dispersed near the top and bottom, to the right of the sample's center) are particularly rounded, with yellow forming a ring around a brown center.
The base of the cloud, primarily its left side, is dotted with several dark brown speckles, some of which appear to form lines with dots spaced at regular intervals, both horizontally and vertically. This kind of organization, imperfect but noticeable, is not seen anywhere else in the sample.

Occupying the top half of the sample, just to the right of the sample's center, there is a distinct semicircular smudge of pale grey over all of the colors. Within this smudge, the colors become hazy, though dull yellow and brown spots can be made out as can the blue-grey 'background.' The haze is especially strong along the edge of the semicircle. At the bottom edge of the semicircle, just to the right of its center, there is a tiny white spatter dripping downwards.



HMP2

NOV 11/2012
3:13 PM



Discovery Notes:
Conditions overcast; no precipitation. Ground dry.
As I was walking along Bridgman, I noticed a construction site that occupied both South corners of the Bridgman and Howland intersection, where the bridge over Howland was being repaired.
On the Southwest corner, there was a brick wall that was short enough to allow me to see a huge pile of twisted, rusty metal pieces. I took pictures from outside the site, then made my way up to the train tracks to gain entry into the site.
When I approached the pile again I began dragging several of the objects I had spotted from the other side of the fence out of the pile to be examined and evaluated for collection. One of these objects was HMP2, which I noticed and selected for the variety of colours that covered its surface, from pale blue and black to bright red and orange. I was particularly drawn to one side where the aging red paint was dented with thirteen identical round marks that had grown orange with rust.



Object Notes:
HMP2 is a very large section of metal that looks as though it was blow-torched off of a larger structure, judging from the consistent line that severs the two long plates (bent 90 degrees lengthwise) and the thinner flat diagonal piece attached to one side of the object. These three parts are all joined to a fourth piece that is much broader than all the others, but which is not as long as the two bent pieces that run along both its long edges. The long bent pieces are attached to the broad flat rectangle so that the three of them form a narrow, square letter 'C'. Several 3 cm round bolts line the interior and exterior of the angled pieces, and four 2 cm circular holes can be seen on one side.
In the interior of the 'C,' the entire object appears to have many layers of paint. The earliest visible color is a kind of yellowy beige, with red on top of that and a cool grey seemingly the most recent coating. The surface of all three pieces are severely corroded, especially the broad flat rectangle which has many pits and holes. Along all of the torched edges, the grey fades to red, which blackens upon approaching the very edge where the raw metal shines cold silver in round folds. These red and black areas are also pitted with tiny flecks of orange.
On the 'C's exterior, the rippling, pitted surface of the broad rectangle is a pale yellow, beige and grey with dark brown stains in large organic shapes. The narrow diagonal piece affixed at an angle, jutting out from one side, is speckled and mottled in browns and greys, but smooth, whereas the longer pieces are rough, especially where the paint has worn off.
On the side exterior face of the long piece without the holes, vibrant drips and trails of yellow, ochre, and orange rust are offset by the dull, cold gray metal on one half, while the other half is pale red.

L 95cm
W 22cm
H 50cm
Handling notes: Extremely heavy; Very sharp edges and corners; exterior surface has begun to crack off and can be easily scratched or marked.



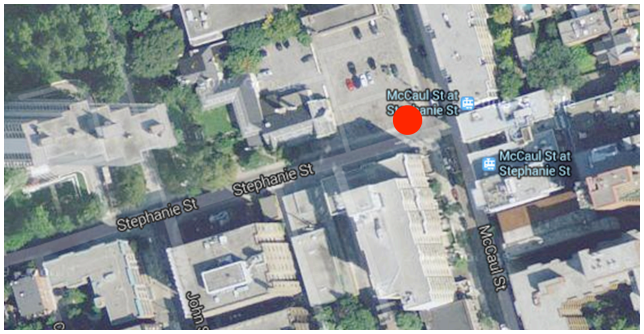
Sample 7

Notes:
This sample reminds me of molten lava travelling across a landscape or bursting upward into the air. The thick, meandering trails of bright orange, yellow, and reddish brown, offset by the dark greyish blue, give the impression of liquid in motion, particularly in their upper reaches where the colors form an aqueous-looking blend that glows against background (a mix of cold blue, primarily toward the bottom left, and warmer purples and browns, blending up and to the right). The background is mottled and contains many variations of greyish purple, sienna, umber, green, blue, and ochre. The contrast between vibrant oranges and yellows and the cool dark blues of the background seems strongest in spots scattered around the center of the image, as well as the trail that runs from the sample's center up and to the right. Within these patches of cool dark blues and greys, there are flecks of lavender, especially noticeable along the left edge of the image above the rust. In contrast, the opposite edge is tinged yellow.
The texture of the dark 'field' against which the trails stand out resembles the rough speckling of granite or tree bark. Below the trails, the rust takes on a pebbly texture and seems to acquire a lustrous quality. The bright golden oranges are not as concentrated but they fade in and out in a fine spray near the bottom left and middle right, interrupting the dark sienna, chocolate brown and ochre speckles. These speckles are extremely fine like television noise, showing a slight gradation from dark to light moving left to right, where the dark reddish browns become more yellow.



MCC3

NOV 09/2012
2:13 PM



Discovery Notes:
Conditions overcast; no precipitation. Ground dry.
I encountered this object near campus, on Stephanie Street just off McCaul, lying with some other construction rubble adjacent to the sidewalk. I spotted the rusted, calcified tip of its pole and was instantly reminded of a rocky landscape.
My attention was subsequently drawn to the high contrast white and blue of the battered sticker still clinging to the middle of the pole.



Object Notes:
MCC3 is a City of Toronto bicycle pole that presumably stood with its bottom sixth or so embedded in the pavement for enough time to accumulate a variety of textures and colors of matter. The central pole and the mounted circle are silver and bear many scratches and marks of abrasion. There is a pale grey accumulation on both sides of the circle.
At the top of the pole there is a white piece of paper wrapped around the pole, partially peeling on one side. Further down, within the circle, a long blue sticker with a faded cycling graphic still holds fast to the pole. It is also scratched all over with thin white scratches going in every direction.
The base of the pole shows a clear line, presumably where the pole met the pavement. This line deviates from the gray of the pole with diffuse bands of reddish brown and yellow stains. There is a thin ring of grey pole again and then the smooth grey becomes rough browns, from deep burnt umber and sienna to light orange, tan, and ochre, with just a hint of forest green here and there. This gradually transitions into a chalky, abraded bluish grey area that appears rough, but not as rough as the brown area.

L 130cm **W** 60cm **H** 10cm
Handling notes: Heavy; Exterior surface has begun to crack off and is extremely fragile at the rusted end.



Sample 2

Notes:
When oriented vertically, this tall, narrow sample reads as a landscape due to an emphatic horizontal band across one end of the image. At the other end, the scraped, tinny blue quarter of pole, gradually fading to splotches of pale grey and earth tones, darkening on the way down and ending in a murky grey horizontal field, reminds me of the landscapes I had seen in Southern Thailand where monumental limestone formations have led to large tidal caves.
At the bottom the band is a medium grey with flecks of black and lighter greys. On the left and right sides are some small dark grey scratch marks and on the left near the top of the band are

some light grey blobs surrounded by dark grey speckles. Level with these blobs, the grey background suddenly transitions to reddish brown, fading as it moves upward into a pale greyish pink that is dotted with light grey speckles. The upper edge of the band fades into a very light grey and is a mostly flat line. Above this, the sample becomes dark brown with flecks of grey, dark blue, and maroon, getting lighter and more colorful (adding tiny flecks of orange and ochre and large areas of burnt sienna) as it moves upward. In the center of this region is an island shaped like an upside down L or the continent of Africa. This island is spotted with lighter colours like yellow-orange, beige, forest green, light grey, and magenta.

The dark region meets a lighter region about midway up the sample. This region shares the island's lighter coloration and pebbly texture. There is no clear background color with white, forest green, various light and dark greys, browns, burnt sienna and yellow orange making a complex mottled expanse of tiny speckles. This fades to light grey and browns about two thirds up the sample, with the left side covered in dark brown spots that look like holes against the light grey and reddish brown expanse. On the right side of this upper third of the sample, the texture becomes hazy and almost completely dominated by light grey. The greys and browns fade moving up to the top of the sample where the coloration becomes greyish blue with light grey splotches of all sizes and shapes.



Appendix C: Exhibition Documentation

The following are images that document my MFA thesis exhibition *Digital Adaptations*, staged in the OCAD University Graduate Gallery at 205 Richmond St. West from January 10th – 19th, 2014.

Objects, along with didactic panels featuring the corresponding catalogue entries, were presented on plinths across from the artwork developed out of photographs taken from their surfaces.

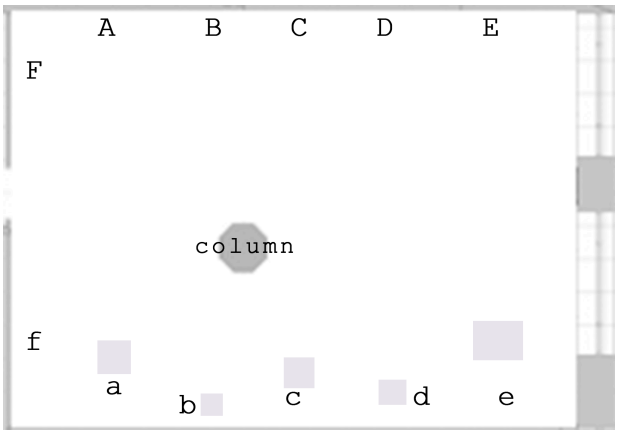
digital adaptations

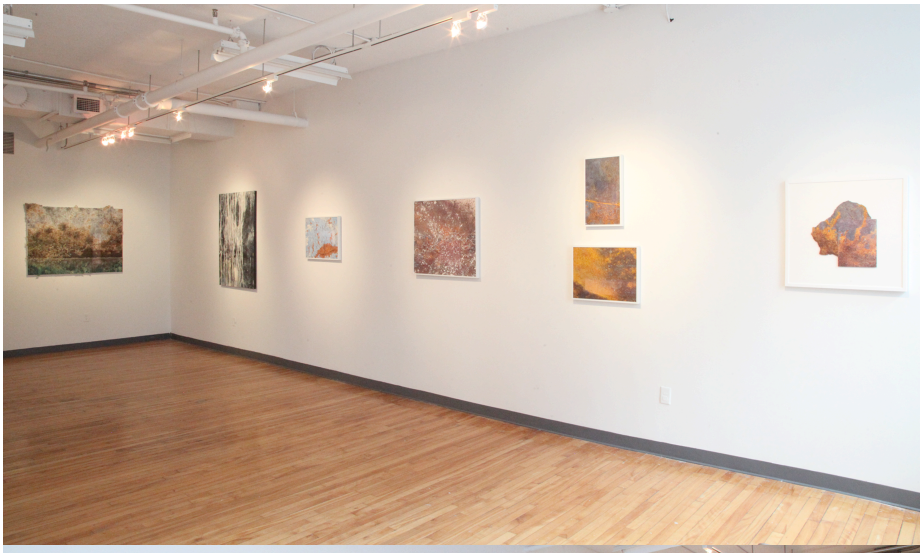


Nick Sweetman
MFA Thesis Exhibition

OCAD U Graduate Gallery
205 Richmond St. W, Level G
JAN 10 - 17, 12-6pm
Opening Party: JAN 10, 7-11pm
Thesis Defence: JAN 17, 1-4pm

Promotional poster







OCAD University Graduate Gallery

A
Untitled I
Acrylic on wood panel; inkjet print
36 x 48″

a
POP1 (found bucket)

B
Untitled III
Acrylic, toilet paper, Bristol board, found poster, and powdered sugar on cork board; inkjet print; aluminum frame
18 x 24″

b
RIC4 (found brick piece)

C
Untitled II
Acrylic, crayon, and toilet paper on Masonite; inkjet print; aluminum frame
27 x 30″

c
HMB1 (found metal object)

D
Untitled IV
Crayon on wood panel; inkjet print; aluminum frame
12 x 20″

Untitled V
Crayon and beeswax on MDF panel; inkjet print; aluminum frame
16 x 21″

d
HMB4 (found metal object)

E
Untitled VI
Crayon, beeswax, and vermiculite on Masonite; inkjet print; wood frame
24 x 24″

e
HMP2 (found metal object)

F
Untitled VII
Acrylic, coffee grounds, crayon, Styrofoam, lint, road mulch, furnace filter, beeswax, felt, gesso, and Masonite on wood panel; inkjet print
35 1/2 x 48″

f
MCC3 (found bike pole)



A



a



a A B



B



b





C



c





D



d



E



e





F



f F



f