After Icebergs: Allegories of Painting, Landscape and Digital Networks

by

David Frederic Clarkson

A thesis exhibition presented to OCAD University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

MASTER OF FINE ART

in

Interdisciplinary Master's in Art, Media and Design

Toronto, Ontario, Canada, April 2012

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Abstract

My thesis examines the practical and theoretical implication of the Internet for contemporary landscape painting practice. Through a method of painting as research and self-reflexive critique, this study considers a digital painting practice that is linked to online databases by the mediation of landscape photographs and QR codes. The writing critically narrates the interdisciplinary remixing of hybrid positions that the connection of painted, natural and digital space entails. The actor-network-theory of social scientist Bruno Latour is used to support the analysis. Critical insight is developed using statements by modernist art critic Clement Greenberg, Internet pioneer Paul Baran, artists such as Gerhard Richter and Robert Smithson, in addition to key postmodernist texts by cultural theorists Walter Benjamin, Roland Barthes, Rosalind Krauss, Craig Owens and Paul Virilio, and interdisciplinary feminist theorist Karen Barad. The search for icebergs is a recurrent allegorical cipher in the thesis text and artwork.

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DEDICATION

To Joyce and Vernon Clarkson, my first teachers

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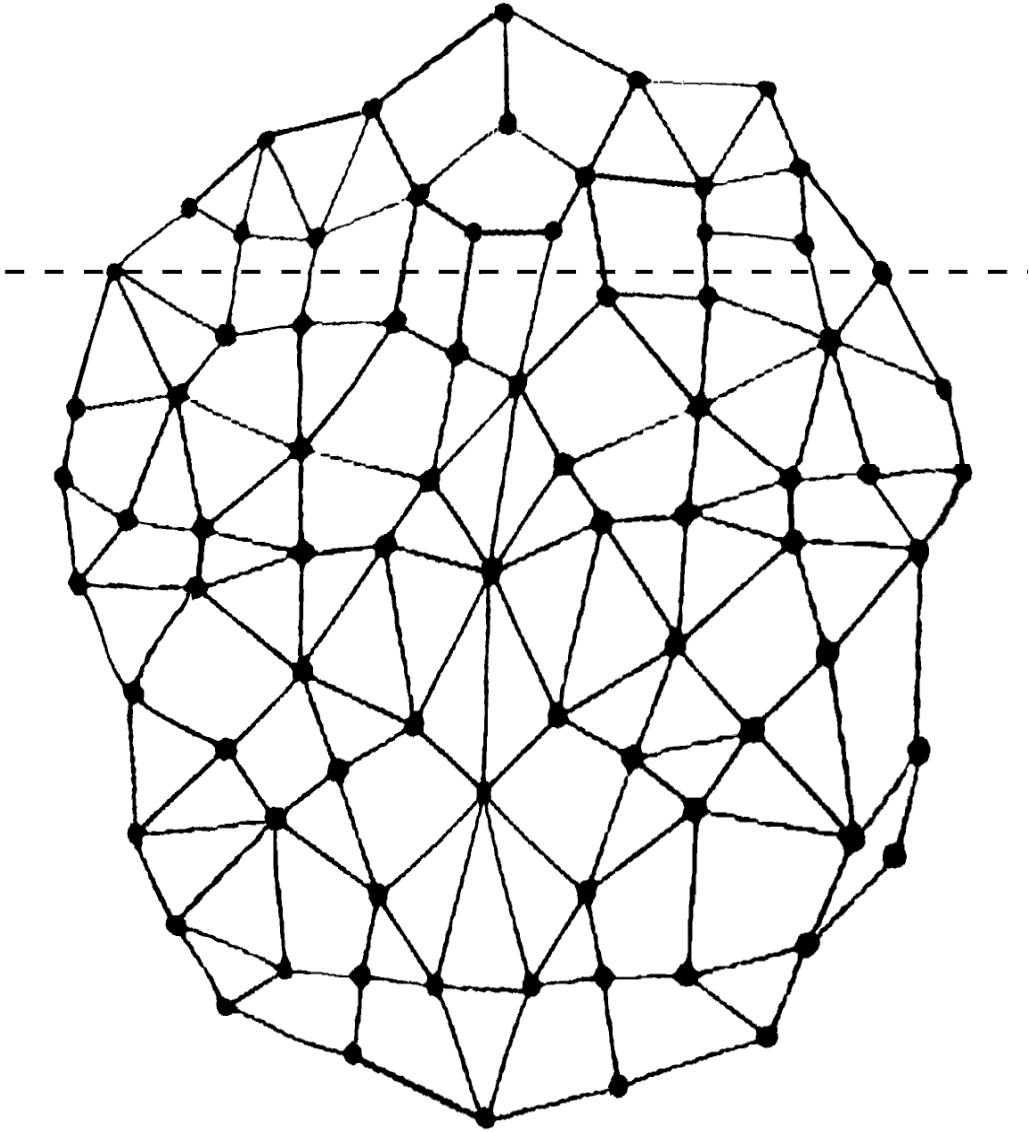
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ILLUSTRATION

David Clarkson
Image of an Iceberg as a Network and a Network as an Iceberg
(2012)

1.0   INTRODUCTION   On The Impurity of My Investigation

A book I read last year suggested the title of my thesis. But what I read was not really a book *per se*. It was an online digital scan of a microfilmed copy of a book, archived on a website linked to a National Library of Canada database. And while the book, published in 1861, was long out of print and materially unavailable, the digital image of the text I read still related an unusual travelogue. Titled "After Icebergs With A Painter: A Summer Voyage To Labrador And Around Newfoundland," it described an artist's field research expedition, a 19th century voyage to the edge of the Arctic in search of icebergs. Other icebergs will reappear later in this writing, but first I will briefly discuss the basic terms of my study, painting and digital networks, and examine why I have taken an interest in their combination.

For some, the interdisciplinary translation of digital painting that I narrate in this thesis, a story that links the virtual network space of new digital technology with the static material spatiality of a painting, may seem an awkward attempt to overcome a fundamental incompatibility. For such people, the aesthetic criterion of "medium specificity" that we inherit from 20th century Modernism is still perhaps a valid paradigm for evaluating art. For them, painting is a specialized discourse and should rightfully express only the essential qualities and characteristic methods of the medium.

As Clement Greenberg theorized it in 1960:

> Each art had to determine, through its own operations and works, the effects exclusive to itself. [It] emerged that the unique and proper area of competence of each art coincided with all that was unique in the nature of

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its medium. The task of self-criticism became to eliminate from the specific effects of each art any and every effect that might conceivably be borrowed from or by the medium of any other art. Thus would each art be rendered "pure," and in its "purity" find the guarantee of its standards of quality [.] (Greenberg 1960)[1]

From such a purified perspective, there can be no hybrid digital painting, as a digital medium would properly require expression in an inherent and essential digital language to be considered artistically valid. From this Modernist perspective, the rightful aim of painting is the elimination of every effect that might be borrowed from digital media, or that digital media might borrow from it. According to this prescription of disciplinary purity and specialized discourse, it would be necessary to artistically express the new qualities of digital technology in a more purely technological manner, as net art or an iPhone app for instance.

This is not the attitude that I take in my thesis investigation. My thesis is purposely an impure interdisciplinary one that develops new hybrid forms of digital and painterly practice in order to examine them. Rather than recycling the limitations of an art medium in a circle of self-affirming quality as Greenberg described, I intentionally employ the art of painting as an interstitial space to create a problematic hybridized boundary object. From a purified Modern perspective, such hybrid paintings might be seen as monstrous or as kitsch, but in the view that I take, such hybrid monsters are seen as a method, and as a new

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[1] Greenberg, Clement. (1960) "Modernist Painting." He continues: "The essence of Modernism lies…in the use of characteristic methods of a discipline to criticize the discipline itself, not in order to subvert it, but in order to entrench it more firmly in its area of competence." Painting's distinctive limitations are described as "the flat surface, the shape of the support, [and] the properties of the pigment."

way of thinking. Neither purely digital nor pure painting, I position digital painting as a theoretical model by which to create a critical rendering of digital networks, and as my means of visualization and cognition. I argue that fresh critical insights ensue exactly from the awkwardness of the intersection, the bad fit and interference, of the two representational regimes when they are allowed to connect.

In later sections I distinguish the two terms of "network" and "painting" more precisely, but to do so I first must add a third term to this binary. This third term enables a perspective that discourages both monologue and reflective debate. Its addition follows a digital logic as I will later show, and has Duchampian logic as well. Marcel Duchamp explains it in relation to his work 3 Standard Stoppages (1913-14): "For me the number three is important: one is unity, two is double, duality, and three is the rest" (Naumann 1996: 30). For my thesis, the third term is "nature."

Historically, painting has been a primary way of picturing human existence, and particular to landscape painting, of picturing our relations to the natural world. But our new environment is a digital as well as natural one, and can be said to be a connected nature-culture environment. So at this moment, when human sensorial abilities are being augmented to unprecedented degrees by new digital networks, and glaciers around the world are retreating as human technological advances, I argue that an examination of the ways in which painting may picture these new networks or the emphatic translations and reformations of human experience they represent, should be considered highly

relevant. In the following section, I begin to argue the merits and relevance of an impure, hybrid digital painting practice in that regard and to tell a story about searches and journeys across different landscapes, some geologically archaic and physically tangible, others less so.

1.1   OBJECTIVES   Creating a Crisis for Landscape Painting

What does it mean to make landscape paintings in the 21st century? It takes only the brief consideration of a few examples of current landscape painting to detect a crisis of purpose or meaning, and the evidence of a struggle with the history and traditional procedures of the genre. For currently, landscape painting can still evoke 19th century methodology and images of *en plein air* painters, as witnessed by a recent documentary film in which David Hockney labors to paint a series of literally overblown canvases in the windy drizzle of the Yorkshire countryside.[2] Other contemporary landscape painters appear satisfied to ironically update historical images, as Kim Dorland or Douglas Coupland do in their arch versions of Group of Seven Canadiana. And arguably too, a pervasive atmosphere of generalized nostalgia is evident in the elegant expressionism of Peter Doig, perhaps the genre's most internationally identifiable current practitioner, whose landscape pictures seem to evoke a wistful remembrance of early Modernism, or perhaps of nature itself.

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[2] "David Hockney: A Bigger Picture" (2009), directed by Bruno Wollheim. Coluga Pictures.

Of course, these few examples provide insufficient evidence from which to generalize a crisis of purpose in landscape painting, and it is outside the scope of my interests to prove that such a critical problem exists in fact. But as an investigational premise for the purpose of my analysis, I will assume that there is such a problem, and furthermore, that contemporary technology is somehow implicated. No harm is done to the subject of study if there is actually no existent crisis, but the premise that a crisis does exist provides the opportunity to develop new scholarly insights into contemporary painting practice. So, if painters are struggling to represent a new contemporary landscape that can no longer be represented by recourse to traditional methods or historical models, why should it matter? After all, other art media can be used to picture landscape, if painting cannot.

If people want landscape images and painters can no longer provide them, why not just let landscape images appear elsewhere, in other new media forms that more easily embody the technological underpinning of contemporary life? Let struggling discourses simply disappear and melt into air if they are obsolete.

The rehabilitation of outmoded practices of landscape painting is not what I investigate in my thesis, but rather, through the instigation of a hypothetical premise of crisis in the genre, it is my intent to contribute to the contemporary discourse of landscape practice. I argue that unique theoretical insights into the translations of digital networks, as newly instantiated on a pre-digital practice, can be developed through careful appraisal of the significant

critical cracks and provisionally bridged fissures that currently stress the landscape genre.

However, to do this successfully as an artist, landscape painting must not be left as it has been received. If my thesis objective is to grasp the critical implication of digital networks for contemporary landscape painting practice, it seems productive to disturb artistic clichés about landscape representation. These received aspects include an overtly suppliant relation to art history whether nostalgic or ironic in effect, an assumed necessity for *in situ* research methods or indexical relation to the landscape, and lastly the desire for the bounded presentation of a non-human "other" that is definitively divided from human affairs and technological realities.

The disturbance of received beliefs and traditional habits is a distinctive attribute of contemporary art and life and is especially evident in those human endeavors into which digital technology or the Internet have been introduced. But this process of disturbance and change is nothing new. On all levels, from individual to collective, the conventions of human behavior and social organization have continuously entailed some degree of adaptive response to disturbances created by both technology and nature. Such reformations and adaptations are often apparent in the artworks, or other defining cultural elements, of a given era. In fact, this evidence of technological adaption is how certain historical eras are identified, how the Bronze Age is distinguished from the Neolithic for example.

The stakes of these reformations and translations are high. They represent redistributions of desire that change human relations with technological and natural forces, and so become the reason why wars are fought over oil fields or mineral deposits. It is why the whole world suffered an economically and environmentally debilitating Cold War throughout much of the 20th century instead of a more direct, but also more devastating, nuclear conflict. A new technological relationship to the smallest natural unit of reality, the atom, had repercussions that translated through a network of effects into a fundamental reformation of global politics and daily life. I discuss the importance of networks in reference to the work of actor-network theorist Bruno Latour in section 1.3.

But to return to the objectives of my research: as I have indicated, a primary goal of my thesis project is to manifest and examine aspects of a contemporary process of technological translation. I do this by looking at the relation of digital network technology to the landscape as it is seen in painting. To achieve this viewpoint I first ask: how can a landscape painting practice translate the dynamic networks of digital communication that define this era?

An answer to what it means to make landscape paintings that are relevant to 21st century will, at least partially, involve an analytic study of the Internet, and a willingness to consider an adaptive reformation of the landscape painting genre. To align the production and content of my artwork with this network, I first create a foundational linkage between them simply by searching online, instead of only *in situ* for natural landscapes to be translated by painting. This first step leads to another question: how can the database and search engines of

the Internet transform the imagery or production of my landscape painting? And this question suggests a corollary question: how is the Internet transformed by my painting research, since the digital search engine is reconfigured by every new search?

The use of Internet imagery in painting is certainly not an innovation in itself of course, and is easily explicated as an extension of the so-called appropriation strategy of the 1980s Picture artists, such as Sherri Levine, Richard Prince, or Jack Goldstein.[3] I build on the tactic of image re-contextualization and accumulation however, by foregrounding the idea of the search itself rather than simply the image it obtains. I position painting as research, as a method to develop personally innovative visual manifestations of digital connectivity. I do this in order to create an opportunity to theorize the digital subject that appears and so transform it from the position of my new understanding. The strategy of painting as research is an idea proposed by Graeme Sullivan that I examine in section 3.1.

With this thesis, I set out to see what creative effects will arise from a partnership of human and non-human technological and natural agents. My objective is to study this partnership through the language, practice and objects of art. My investigation is framed by a particular discourse of painting in which the digital network and the landscape are brought together and read allegorically as an image of nature-culture. Reflecting my commitment to art as research, and

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[3] Innumerable painters use the Internet to locate source images, but fewer make it a defining issue of their practice. Several interesting ones who do are: Dan Hays (England), Joy Garnett (USA) and Steven Shearer (Canada). A further analysis of their work lies outside the scope of this thesis essay however.

painting as a critical method, I also seek to determine if and how allegory might be used as a research position in section 2.1.

1.2 RATIONALE **11,400,000 Icebergs in 0.16 Seconds**

Roland Barthes conceived of a linguistically bounded ontological condition, a world written through and through by signs, all "endlessly deferring their foundations, transforming signifieds into new signifiers, infinitely citing one another" (Barthes 1977: 167-168). As an artist, I intuitively conceive of this semiotic concept through a visual metaphor, as a liquidity where words or images flow from one to another like water, sometimes freezing for a time before melting into some new configuration and occasionally evaporating before our eyes, only to condense into another term. Or I can imagine this same complexity of sign and citation in technological form, as the serial links and hyperlinks that form the interconnected network of the World Wide Web, and allow its ceaseless remixing, reflection and reformation of infinite data. Or I can see Barthes' endlessly transforming signifieds in the palimpsest of additions and erasures that constitute the basic process of painting, and the unpredictable morphologies of image that occur continuously on the surface of a painting.

The interdisciplinary nature of this MFA thesis offers the opportunity, or perhaps the challenge, to put all these concepts into play and connect them. So my thesis project correlates and problematizes an interdisciplinary triad of subjects, painting, digital technology and the natural landscape of the ocean, a

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triumvirate that may be linked to semiotics by the allowance of allegorical reading. As an artist researcher, my thesis intention is not to make up-to-date and therefore digital paintings, but rather to examine the critical implications and unpredictable translations of the triadic network I have created using the tools and procedures of art. This thesis connects my previous interest in this same triad of art, digital technology and nature in an innovative way, as I will now briefly relate.

While attending the Ontario College of Art in the late 1970s, I studied McLuhanistic ideas about technology that substantially influenced my subsequent art practice. For instance between 2001 and 2010, I made paintings exclusively based on technologically mediated landscape images that were taken by remote-control cameras or NASA Mars robots. I used these images as a method to extend my vision to the distant landscapes they conveyed. The physically inaccessible Martian landscape particularly intrigued me since it can be perceived only *via* technological mediation. This example caused me to wonder how similar methods of technological observation might be translated to field research in art practice. My thesis paintings demonstrate how the Internet can augment the observation of more terrestrial landscapes.

In an early thesis research paper about field observation methodology and art based research, I analyzed a 19th century field research expedition undertaken by Frederic Edwin Church, the famous American Hudson River School painter, in preparation for his historic polar marine landscape painting, The Icebergs (1861). In the summer of 1859, Church sailed from New York to Newfoundland

on a search after icebergs. He sought to study and sketch them empirically, as was necessary in an era before social media sites or webcams. His friend, the Reverend Louis Noble, sailed with him and chronicled their travels in the book, "After Icebergs With A Painter" (1861). Noble's book poetically describes the daily activities of the sea journey like a Victorian blog of their adventures near the Arctic.[4]

Last summer, I travelled to Fogo Island, Newfoundland on an expedition after "After Icebergs." I wanted insight into how 19th century field study techniques might contest the technologically mediated methods I had employed for my Mars paintings. I sought traces of Church's historical research experience as well as icebergs, but while searching for both along the coastal cliffs of Fogo Island, I noticed that I was often more inclined to record my objects of study with a digital camera than with a sketchbook. As I considered this, I began to see both photography and drawing as simply two modes of representation separated only by the degree of my embodied handiwork. This insight gave my thesis a direction. If I would ultimately rely on technologically derived research that was mediated by either camera or pencil, was field research even necessary?

I began to investigate this question after returning to Toronto. I first logged and reviewed the images I had produced on my research expedition to

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[4] Noble on the color of an iceberg's shadow: "And, after all, what is it? It is simply shadow. Is that all? That is all: only shadow. All the grand façade is one shadow. With a rim of splendor like liquid gold leaf or yellow flame, but in those depressions in a *deeper* shadow. Shadow under shadow, dove-colored and blue. Thus there seems to be drifting about, in the hollow lurking-places of the dead white, a colored atmosphere, the warmth, softness, and delicate beauty of which no mind can think of words to express… You would remember nothing more beautiful" (Noble 1861: 172). Original italics.

Newfoundland. Then to investigate the practice of landscape painting as it might appear if undertaken in partnership with a contemporary digital network, I decided to supplement my personal research database with an assemblage of images available online.

So I initiated a Google Search for "iceberg" and found "about 11,400,000 results [in] 0.16 seconds."[5] By a certain logic, my search was a great success: I had indeed found many, many more icebergs than I had discovered on Fogo Island. In practice, however, I still remained uncertain about which one of the 11,400,000 or so icebergs was most useful to my thesis research. It was a contemporary dilemma in which apparently unlimited choice still somehow results in unfulfilled desire.

I began to realize that results like this are a typical experience on the Internet, since instant access to comprehensive data sets is arguably the World Wide Web's fundamental purpose. But the very immediacy and quantity of its connections make the experience of the Internet fragmentary, arbitrary or contingent, as the quantities of information that are exchanged in this network continually surpass our capacity for evaluation. I began to see the impossibility of ever achieving a macrocosmic view of this vast virtual ocean of digital imagery. So I determined I would proceed from the micro instead, "to "stick to the visible and the graspable" (Latour 2005: 179), and to only consider the global macro-view if my trail took me there. But to begin, I would focus my attention on the common Google Image Search.

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[5] Google Image search, July 2011. On April 3, 2012, a similar Google Image search for keyword "icebergs" obtained, "About 74,600,000 results [in] 0.26 seconds."

1.3   CONCEPTS   **A Network of Networks, An Imbroglio**

The whole network is important! Even spaghettini […] when you say art, then everything possible belongs to it. In a gallery that is also the floor, the architecture, the color of the walls. (Martin Kippenberger)[6]

Having discussed my thesis objectives and rationale, I will now provide a critical context for my research into painting and digital networks, beginning with a quote from the artist Martin Kippenberger in an essay by David Joselit in 2009.

I agree with Kippenberger that the network is important to a painting and should be taken into critical account, and I argue that for every painting there are multiple networks at play, a network of networks. For instance, in addition to the closely related networks of distribution and exhibition that Joselit primarily essays, there are other discursive networks of history, education, and practice that condition a painting before its entry into the economy. And there are technical networks, newly connected digital pathways with the potential to shape artistic methodology, which are central to this thesis study.

To Kippenberger's claim that for a painting "the whole network is important," Joselit asks: "How does painting belong to a network?" (Joselit 2009: 125) I too find this a valuable question to ponder, but think the passive relation to a network it implies is problematic, and this has given my thesis direction. The question contains the implication that a painting may simply belong to a network, as if mere membership was of most importance. This passive characterization of

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[6] Martin Kippenberger quoted in Joselit, David. 2009. "Painting Beside Itself." October 130: 125-134.

network relations is challenged by this assertion by Bruno Latour: "being connected, being interconnected […] is not enough. It all depends on the sort of action that is flowing from one to the other [in the network.] The movement, the flow, and the changes… should be stressed" (Latour 2005: 143).

Latour's concept of the network, which emphasizes the importance of transformative movement between linked areas, is crucial to the definition of network as I employ it in my thesis. According to this concept, the meaning and discursive import of contemporary phenomena lies in the fact that these phenomena are interwoven and also interacting. For Latour, the most imperative aspects of the world are increasingly "hybrid […] imbroglios of science, politics, economy, law, religion, technology [and] fiction" (Latour 1993: 2). The transformation that results from such an interconnection is its true import, but this is disguised if these imbroglios are considered as discreet disciplines "like Economy, Politics, Science, Books, [or] Religion […] as if nothing odd were going on" (Latour 1993: 2).

"Our intellectual life is out of kilter," Latour argues, "Epistemology, the social sciences, the science of texts – all have their privileged vantage point, provided that they remain separate. If the [hybrid] creatures we are pursuing cross all three spaces, we are no longer understood" (Latour 1993: 5). Accordingly, observance of the segmenting disciplinary boundaries that produce specialist discourse is unproductive as this segmentation obscures the true relation between the "knowledge of things [and] power and human politics" (Latour 1993: 3). If they are to be understood, these things must first be seen

correctly, that is, as intractably linked and interacting together in a network.

Rather than let conventional disciplinary boundaries define epistemology and reality, Latour argues "we [can] retie the Gordian knot by crisscrossing, as often as we have to, the divide that separates exact knowledge and the exercise of power – let us say nature and culture" (Latour 1993: 3). Human lives exist in relation to culture as well as in relation to nature he says, and to understand this imbroglio of nature-culture we must see it in its true form, undistorted by disciplinary segmentation. To achieve this proper unification, we should "follow the imbroglios wherever they take us," and Latour continues, saying:

> To shuttle back and forth, we rely on the notion of translation, or network. More supple than the notion of system, more historical than the notion of structure, more empirical than the notion of complexity, the idea of network is the Ariadne's thread of these interwoven stories. (Latour 1993: 3)

The stories that I am weaving in my thesis are of two types. The written text tells a narrative using scholarly citation and logical critical argument. The stories interwoven in my painting on the other hand, are allegorical and visual ones that allow more open-ended interpretation. Occasionally the two types of narration imbricate as the stories of my thesis connect. These imbrications can be seen as points of translation, as mixing sites with strong innovative potential.

In the critique of modernism Latour provides, the practice of translation performs a pivotal critical role in contradistinction to the practices it challenges, namely, those ideological practices of purification and the specialization of discourse. As Latour explains:

The word 'modern' designates two sets of entirely different practices which must remain distinct if they are to remain effective, but have recently begun to be confused. The first set of practices, by 'translation', creates mixtures between entirely new types of beings, hybrids of nature and culture. The second, by 'purification', creates two entirely distinct ontological zones: that of human beings on the one hand; that of non-humans on the other. (Latour 1993: 11)

As I argued in section 1.0, the notion of medium specificity is an example of purification, a fundamental modernist legacy. Not only is this ideology used to keep art mediums separate in the name of aesthetic quality as per Greenberg, but in the preceding statement, Latour also sees this same ideological practice of purification as constructing human ontology so that both technology and nature are excluded from it. Both are made "non-human," separated from human reality.

I also argue that this modernist purified human ontology is mistaken, and that is why nature and technology figure strongly in my thesis. Modernism cleaves a Great Divide between the human and non-human elements of nature and technology in human life, a divide that Latour bridges with a hyphen that renders them "a seamless fabric of […] nature-culture" (Latour 1993: 7).[7] He casts them as a continuous network, saying translation "corresponds to what I have called networks; [purification corresponds] to what I shall call the modern critical stance" (Latour 1993: 11).

It is apparent that the network of power and epistemology that Latour describes by actor-network theory is not the digital network of the Internet. He says, "Networks are simultaneously real, like nature, narrated, like discourse, and collective, like society" (Latour 1993: 6). For Kippenberger, the network of

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[7] "since it is a bit more and a bit less than culture," he explains. (Latour 1993: 7)

painting is connected to everything. Though similarly vast, the Internet is a more tangible technical network. I submit however that both of these hyper-extensive networks are as "real, social and narrated" (Latour 1993: 7) as the actor-network concepts Latour explicates and can be apprehended through a similar critical approach.

1.4   ORGANIZATION   From Network to Text

A certain non-technical, non-material quality of the Internet, and perhaps of painting too, is illuminated by Roland Barthes' idea of the Text. Barthes writes that the Text is "not an object that can be computed [nor] a fragment of substance, occupying […] the space of books […] the Text is a methodological field" (Barthes 1971: 2) and he concludes, "the metaphor of the Text is that of the network" (Barthes 1971: 5). I begin this section on the organization of my written thesis with this quotation because I have inferred the topology of my commentary from it. I have organized my writing as a network of ideas, or perhaps organized my ideas as a network of writing.

Network topology is a description of interconnectedness, and can be seen in two ways, according to physical arrangement of nodes, or according to the movement and translation of data amongst nodes. For instance, a network of computers can be neatly arranged in a linear row of physically adjacent terminals, much like this document with section following section. But the computers can also be interconnected in a way that supersedes the physical

linearity of the rows; data can flow in nonlinear ways and appear on nonadjacent terminals. I have attempted to interconnect the ideas of my text in that way, too.

In 1964, "Internet Pioneer" Paul Baran explained interconnectivity in terms of network redundancy and, as he did, laid out the future topology of what has become digital daily life.[8] He described several network topologies and concluded that while "one can draw a wide variety of networks, they all factor into two components: centralized (or star) and distributed (or grid or mesh)" (Baran 1964: 1). Baran explained that the redundant surplus of non-dedicated data routes in a distributed network allows data to travel along a variety of optional paths, and the "history of […] network traffic is used to modify path selection" (Baran 1964: v).

I consider my text to be what is now known as a distributed all connected mesh network, in which all elements of the network are accessible to the others, and meaning is interdependent, deictic and contingently delivered. In his Foreword to the 1964 Rand report, which was the blueprint for the Internet, Baran notes something similar; admitting that while originally planned as eleven stand-alone volumes "somewhere downstream it became clear that this goal could not be fully met, as each part hinged upon others" (Baran 1964: vii). Baran also notes the importance of the network triad, observing that in order to achieve a basic level of redundancy, "a minimum span network, one formed with the smallest number of links possible" (Baran 1964: 3) must connect at least three nodes. A triad of nodes is needed to basically establish the nonlinear pathways of

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[8] Hafner, Katie. "Paul Baran, Internet Pioneer, Dies at 84. New York Times. March 27, 2011.

a distributed network topology. One node is unity, but no movement, two nodes is duality, but binary stasis, and three nodes is the rest, the fluid exchange of the network.

2.0   THEORY   Intentions of the Indexical Image

There is something abominable about cameras [...] (Robert Smithson)[9]

I have previously identified the triad of painting, nature and the Internet as underpinning my thesis. Baran has explained that such a triad of nodal subjects can form the basis of a distributed network. My reading of Latour has suggested that I consider my triadic thesis subjects as a network, one that is real, like nature, narrated, like discourse, and collective, like society. In this section I examine several theories of the image that help illuminate these connections further in relation to my thesis painting practice.

At the outset of my argument, I mentioned that an operational premise of my thesis, the perspective from which I investigate what it means to make a contemporary landscape painting, was the hypothesis of a current crisis of meaning and method in landscape painting. In reference to David Hockney, I argued that landscape painting struggled with received ideas about the necessity for *in situ* research methods. Desire for an indexical relation to the landscape subject, and also a tension between material presence and virtual representation in painting, are the subject of this section.

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[9] "because they possess the power to invent many worlds" (Smithson 1996: 371). In "Art Through the Camera's Eye" (circa 1971).

When Church voyaged to Newfoundland to study icebergs, or Tom Thompson traveled to Algonquin Park, these artists were acting a bit like the hyphen of Latour's nature-culture. These journeys linked the natural landscape with the social collectives of New York or Toronto. I argue that it is useful to examine the aura of indexical authenticity that images obtained on such expeditions emanate.

Through the medium of a landscape painting, the painter translates impressions that emerge from the immediate interface with the natural site, and the painted representation subsequently transmits this encoded experiential data is transmitted through the form of the painting to an absent viewer. This distant viewer translates the painted data once again, as a communication of the painter's original landscape experience. The study, sketch or *en plein air* painting that enables this conventional communication across time and space is mobile and through its physical presence links all the spaces and moments of the communication. If seen as an instantiation of immediate experience and a representational form that pivots on the authenticity of its physical origin in a natural setting, the landscape image created *in situ* has critical properties that relate to the class of signs called the index, and by extension to the photograph.

As Rosalind Krauss notes, "indexes establish their meaning along the axis of a physical relationship to their referents. They are the marks or traces of a particular cause, and that cause is the thing to which they refer, the object they signify" (Krauss 1977: 70). Krauss understands the photograph to be inherently indexical, as she indicates: "Every photograph is the result of a physical imprint

transferred by light reflections onto a sensitive surface. The photograph is thus a type of […] visual likeness, which bears an indexical relationship to its object" (Krauss 1977: 75). Since the intention of either the handcrafted or photographic *en plein air* landscape image is to convey some indexical relation to its landscape subject, the landscape painter is placed in competition with the camera's indexical translations of the landscape. But the unequal dynamic of this contest creates a crisis for the painter, since the indexical attribute of photography is inherently more complete. As Gerhard Richter explains, "Photography altered ways of seeing and thinking. Photographs were regarded as true, paintings as artificial. The painted picture was no longer credible […] because it was not authentic but invented" (Richter 1995: 31).

The camera's indexical recording is apparently so complete and provides such an absence of translation that its representational model makes the painted image look no longer credible. As Richter puts it, "Photographs are almost Nature" (Richter 1995: 187). Something in the way the camera invents the world is inherently more automatic and autonomous than a painter can achieve. Barthes notes:

> The photograph is never experienced as an illusion; it is nothing but a presence (one must continually keep in mind the magical character of the photographic image). Its reality is that of a having-been-there, because in all photographs there is the constantly amazing evidence: this took place in this way. (Barthes quoted in Krauss 1977: 75)

The photograph is seen as magically real, as having-been-there. The predicament of the landscape painter stems from photography's "absoluteness of

physical genesis [which] seems to short-circuit or disallow those processes of […] symbolic intervention that operate within the graphic representations of most paintings" (Krauss 1977: 75). Given this observation by Krauss, and the dilemma that contemporary digital mass-photography poses for the practice of landscape painting: why toil in the field at all? Why insist on an *in situ* indexical origin for the painted landscape subject when any claim to indexical causation that the painting will make will be "short-circuited or disallowed" *a priori* by the "amazing evidence" and technological absoluteness of the camera?

I do not argue that certain subjects are forbidden to certain mediums, or that every medium must only admit its essential qualities, only that media have different technological and representational capabilities. A painting may be used as an ironing board for instance, but the rationality of its specific technological design makes an ironing board superior for that function. Likewise, a camera is designed to indexically represent objects in a material setting and does so more accurately than any painter, so initially it appears that the indexical challenge photography poses for the landscape painter has no easy answer. However, a synthetic medium unspecific pathway exists around this dilemma, a path that retains an aspect of the indexical relation to the pictured landscape that conventional practice demonstrates, while also allowing for a new technological connection to the site as well, as my thesis demonstrates.

The landscape painter need not choose between brush and camera, except to decide when to use them. Just as telephones are now hybrid objects we use to talk, tell the time or record video, painting may also be constituted as a hybrid

object. Landscape painters may appropriate the indexical power of the camera, if they choose to incorporate digital indices of the landscape on the painting surface. While the strength of photography's claim to indexical veracity has been eroded by the now ubiquitous availability of digital image manipulation, the photograph still retains some narrative link to the real. Painting from life or *en plein air*, photographs or collage, remix or quotation already constitutes a continuum of indexical forms. This broadened idea of the indexical allows the mixed use of digital printing techniques and hand-painting that are evident in my thesis artworks. Landscape images exist in the physical world and online, so I search both for the subject of my paintings.

I contend that these two realms I have just mentioned are not as distinctly divided as they once were thought to be. Knowledge and action are now developed from two sometimes conflicting but interdependent nodes of experience and perception, sometimes described as virtual or actual experiences. We reference Google for what we have forgotten and then act on that information. Telephones extend our voice and hearing beyond their natural reach. Computer simulations train pilots who fly us places. Software models our clothes and buildings. Virtual space overlaps and intersects with actual space, and this two-fold, recombinant, hybridized space is just where we live now. A crisis of relevance and purpose would surely ensue if contemporary painting practice refused to engage the very aspects of the contemporary world that make the world contemporary.

2.1   ALLEGORY   The Wreck of Former Boundaries

> And of all these things the Albino whale was the symbol. Wonder ye then at the fiery hunt? (Herman Melville)[10]

Herman Melville's Albino whale meant many, many things. An entire chapter of Moby Dick is devoted to listing associations the whale evokes and is too extensive to describe here. I believe it sufficient to say the whale was a whale of a whale; a big white mammal certainly, but also a magnetic nexus of intense symbolic reference, and the activating node in a network of reference that connects many disciplines and cultures. Moby Dick is perhaps an imbroglio of the sort that Latour wrote about in which "all of culture and all of nature get churned up" (Latour 1993: 2). In the open meshwork of cultural, scientific, economic and psychological signification that Melville casts, the whale emerges as an allegorical figure.

Melville presents the whale as a hybrid monstrosity of shifting signs, now part this, and now part that. It seems precisely the type of creature that Latour recommends should be followed as it cuts across the boundary spaces of discourse and I cite the whale while keeping in mind Latour's injunction that, "If the creatures we are pursuing cross [too many] spaces, we are no longer understood" (Latour 1993: 5).

Walter Benjamin was interested in allegory's innate violation of spaces and borders, noting, "allegory is said always to reveal a crossing of the borders of a different mode" (Benjamin 1977: 177). It represents an incursion by visual art

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[10] Melville, Herman. "The Whiteness of the Whale, Chapter xlii," in Moby Dick 1851: 194.
[cited February 2012]. Available from www.princeton.edu/~batke/moby/

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forms, he says, into the foreign territory of the rhetorical arts of writing and poetry. He quotes Carl Horst to the effect that allegory's "violation of frontiers [are such that] its intrusion could therefore be described as a harsh disturbance of the peace and a disruption of law and order in the arts" (Benjamin 1977: 177).

Craig Owens also remarks on allegory's disregard for visual and verbal distinctions created between the mediums of painting, writing or poetry, saying:

> Confusion of the verbal and the visual is however but one aspect of allegory's hopeless confusion of all aesthetic mediums and stylistic categories (hopeless, that is, according to any partitioning of the aesthetic field on essentialist grounds). Allegorical work is synthetic; it crosses aesthetic boundaries. (Owens 1980: 75)

It is allegory's impurity and confusion of genre that Owens claims "reappears today in hybridization, in eclectic work which ostentatiously combine previously distinct art mediums […] and distinguish it from its modernist predecessors." (Owens 1980: 75). Besides hybridization, he cites appropriation and the accumulation of images as some key distinguishing strategies of the early postmodernist allegorical art of 1980. I will briefly discuss these latter two before returning to allegory's "wreck of former boundaries" (Smithson 1996: 110).[11]

In the previous section, I discussed my hybridized approach to digital painting in terms of the index. This same hybrid strategy is reinforced by the present examination of allegory, as are the tactics of appropriation and image accumulation that also figure prominently in my thesis paintings. As Owens indicates, while appropriation and accumulation can be related to allegory, their

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[11] Smithson, Robert. "A Sedimentation of the Mind" (1968).

appearance in my paintings is also easily explained in different terms: as relating to the cut-and-paste aesthetic of digital technology or a response to the Internet's many image databases, for instance.

A double explanation is appropriate in this section on allegory, for as Owens observes, "allegory is conceived as a supplement, an expression […] added to another expression" (Owens 1980: 83). Allegory is elusive and fluid by nature. "The basic characteristic of allegory […] is ambiguity, multiplicity of meaning" (Benjamin 1977: 177). This is perhaps not surprising since allegory is derived from the Greek word for "speaking otherwise." An allegory has a literal exterior reading, and also those interior ones that emerge for every interpreter. Allegory allows a layering of significations to coexist in a single image so that two complimentary or contradictory readings may reside there superimposed.

I submit it is this ability to contain multiple meanings in a single image that makes allegory so troublesome to the peace, law and order of the arts. At a fundamental level, it refuses to cohere to a single discursive system; it undermines the disciplinary authority of specialized discourse and escapes the bounds of rational discourse. As Owens concludes, "Allegory is extravagant, an expenditure of surplus value; it is always in excess. [It is] 'monstrous' precisely because it encodes two contents within one form" (Owens 1980: 84).

Allegory is interpretation, a translation, and its outcome is as unpredictable as any creative act. In my research role as artist-allegorist, I began to intuit invisible connections between allegory and the Internet, to see mutual resemblance in their additive method of signification and perpetually morphing

images. In allegory, as online, all data is potentially significant, but obscured by seemingly surplus information. Metonymy multiplies as details and distinctions become lost in a blizzard of similitude. Benjamin warned of the expanding non-specificity of allegorical signification: "Any person, any object, any relationship can mean absolutely anything else" (Benjamin 1977: 175). Melville also hinted at this limitless condition, noting a certain mute "blankness, full of meaning" (Moby Dick 1851: 193).

"Yet," as definitions crumble in a wreck of their former boundaries, Smithson says, "if art is art it must have limits. How can one contain this oceanic site?" (Smithson 1996: 111).[12]

3.0   METHODOLOGY   Artist as Agent, Practice as Research

> There is no form […] without meaning, quality and feeling. It is also impossible to express a feeling without a form. Embodiment is the central effort in art [.] (Donald Judd)[13]

I am an artist and have developed a research methodology from the position of my experience and expertise. My thesis paintings are my primary research discovery, and equally importantly, my primary investigative method. I employ a self-reflexive, art-based qualitative research strategy using conventional painting materials in connection with the Internet. My goal is to develop landscape paintings in a technological matrix, artworks that can then be used as the evidential basis for my critical theorization of digital painting

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[12] Smithson, Robert. (1968) "A Sedimentation of the Mind."
[13] In *Donald Judd, Complete Writings: 1975-1986*. Eindhoven: van Abbemuseum: 31.

practice. In simpler terms, I pursue painting as research about painting by painting.

The looping process of self-discovery, of learning from what we make as we make it, is a familiar one to artists and is fundamental to the practice of art, as I understand it. Paintings are stories that painters tell themselves, but while every picture tells one, sometimes these stories are not the ones we had expected to tell. This is why it is important to contemplate and critique the paintings that result. Art practice, when performed in the context of a MFA thesis is a consciously directed process, informed by and proceeding in tandem with, theory and research.

I have approached this matrix of material, practice and theory from a critical perspective similar to one that Karen Barad describes when she writes, "Theories are not sets of free-floating ideas but rather specific material practices in the ongoing intra-active engagement of the world with itself, and as such they are empirically open and responsive. That is, they are always already part of what the world does in its ongoing openness and responsiveness to itself" (Barad 2011: 4-5). Theory, then, is a contingent set of ideas suggested by our experience of the world, which are measured for relevance and usefulness against our continued experience.

My thesis investigation did not set out to analyze a predetermined theory regarding technology and landscape painting. Instead I resolved to observe what occurred as I connected the two, and to critically consider the result. This resulting idea would suggest further possibilities of action and investigation. I

submit this process is an example of what Barad has called "material-conceptual practices," of which she says:

> Material-conceptual practices are simultaneously conditions of possibility and performative actions that produce phenomena inseparable from the apparatuses of production […] subjects and objects do not preexist but rather emerge from their intra-action. (Barad 2011: 2)

Barad expresses the subject and object of art-based research as a continuum that stresses the indivisible mutual construction of painting as both object and representation. She emphasizes that meaning emerges from "intra-action," or performative movements within a network of material and conceptual relations, not only from iconography in isolation. Image and form are inherent in the condition of the other; both condition meaning.

Image, form or meanings however, do not emerge in a painting except with the agency of an artist who is attentive to those things. The artist does not impose meaning so much as negotiate it through a type of collaboration, by responding to or organizing material form in various ways to produce a desired and meaningful effect. Latour describes this activity as a collaboration of human and non-human actors, and as he explains, "to use the word 'actor' means that it's never clear who or what is acting when we act since an actor […] is never alone in acting" (Latour 2005: 46).

In this process the paintings direct me even as I direct them. The paintings lead me to seek certain theorists to help illuminate them, and not others. I notice the paintings require research about network theory for example, or about allegory, so I look into that and not other subjects. As Barad said, these

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theories have material-conceptual consequence. After conducting research reading in light of what they require, I might realign my studio processes by employing new tools. These new tools and processes in turn may suggest that I innovate new techniques with which to make the paintings. As I do, the story that the paintings narrate is changed, and further research is required.

This methodology has also required the investigation of many other things besides theory. It has suggested I conduct discussions with other artist practitioners, or attend specific exhibitions and conferences. My painting methodology spurred the narrative pretext of a genre in crisis to help explain it, and the story I am writing here. This methodology also suggested experimenting with new digital printing techniques and painting supports, researching and developing QR code bars, learning Final Cut Pro and Cinema 4D software programs, exploring vast numbers of images on the Internet for hours at a time, and so on. As well, I conducted archival research in libraries that blended with my online research data, and experimented with social media sites as resources for research and production. I developed new knowledge about all these things because they are useful to the paintings I am making and to help translate the story of the paintings more clearly.

My approach to methodology was suggested in part by Graeme Sullivan, who has written about painting as research. Sullivan describes painting as simultaneously "theory, form, idea, and action" (Sullivan 2008: 241), a description in line with Barad's continuum of material-conceptual activity. The "three elements [that] characterize painting as a cultural practice [are] structure,

agency and action," he writes (Sullivan 2008: 240) and it is the relationship of these elements that position painting as "both a noun and a verb" (Sullivan 2008: 241).

Sullivan observes, "artists think in a medium" (Sullivan 2008: 240). To an artist, the ability to think in a medium suggests a research approach. "As a research methodology, art practice is premised on the need to 'create and critique'," Sullivan explains (Sullivan 2008: 242). This strategic idea, to "create and critique," is a key aspect of my thesis program. Sullivan describes the creative continuity this strategy affords:

> Conceiving painting as theory within a framework of inquiry sets in place the prospect of doing research *in* painting. When used as a site for research, painting brings into play the seamless relationship between the 'researcher' (painter) and the 'researched' (painting practice), and this builds on arguments that disrupt untenable dichotomies such as the fictive subject-objective divide, or presumptions that form and content can somehow be separated. (Sullivan 2008: 242. Italics in original.)

I argue as Sullivan does, that when using painting as research "the artwork becomes the primary site of knowledge and painting becomes the source of questions, problems and insights, which emerge as part of the practice" (Sullivan 2008: 244). How these insights emerge and against what criteria value is to be measured are relevant questions, though questions that may be posed of qualitative research methods in general. Sullivan points out however that: "The tasks of a rigorous inquiry [are] not only to produce new insight, but also to realize how this can transform our knowledge of things that we assume we already know" (Sullivan 2008: 248). In other words, the value of emergent

insights can be measured by the convincing nature of the narrative they allow to be told about the other knowledge they eventually connect with. More precisely, this value arises from the ways in which these new insights translate preexisting knowledge thereby changing our evaluation about what we think we already know.

3.1   RESULTS   An Assemblage of Meaning

> Simply put the question posed was: if we know what these images are, if we in fact recognize them, do we then know what they mean? (Thomas Lawson) [14]

In this section, I describe my thesis artwork, the catalyst and product of my research, to provide insight into the criteria that directed my decisions. My narration of these works seeks to translate my research findings about networks through interconnected material-conceptual descriptions of the paintings, rather than an analysis of isolated iconography. But the meaning of my thesis paintings only proceeds from the visible. In a larger and invisible way, not unlike the submerged portion of an iceberg, meaning may continue to emerge from the as-yet-unseen connections that others may make. My narration means to encourage interpretive participation and collective engagement with the stories the paintings tell. An assemblage of meaning results from the speculations of contributing observers, reader/authors and allegorists, all searchers after the very meanings they themselves may supply in the search. I will demonstrate how such an

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[14] Lawson, Thomas. (1990) "Going Public". In Lawson 2004: 227.

assemblage of meaning can begin by examining the first key work of my thesis project, a painting that represents the image of a multifaceted iceberg.[15]

3.2   PAINTING 1   Painting After Icebergs

Painting After Icebergs (2012) displays an image of an iceberg bisected by the waterline. It is a large painting about 2 meters high by 1.5 meters wide, and is composed of six panels, each predominantly colored blue and white. The iceberg image is a remix of images from online, archival and handcrafted sources. I have emphasized the geometry of the berg. It is depicted as a series of interconnected jagged shapes, faceted like a diamond or a kaleidoscope, and arranged as a visually disorienting network of reflected image fragments. The painting assembles an inventory of divisions and divided parts that I will briefly catalog.

The drifting iceberg is depicted as divided by a waterline into submerged and unsubmerged portions. The totality of the image is divided and displayed across half a dozen separate panels of the painting. The space between the panels creates a network of channels crisscrossing the iceberg image like fault lines or internal borders.

As well, these panels incorporate three representational techniques: photography, hand-painting, and photographic enlargements of mass-reproduced, but originally hand rendered, drawings from old comic books. Each of these

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[15] For purpose of brevity, I will discuss only two of the artworks that will be displayed in my thesis exhibition, After Icebergs, April 2012.

three techniques displays traces of further divisions. For example, the photographs that show the iceberg above the waterline are digital composites of several iceberg photos. The enlarged comic book drawings that depict the submerged part of the iceberg are clearly another form of collage, cut and pasted together from many fragments of printed matter. Further still, it is apparent that these physical collages have also been digitally altered into new kaleidoscopic configurations that divide them internally as well. The hand-painted elements that mark the composition are crisply colored and produced by a hard-edged technique to emphasize the distinct boundary of each color.

At different levels, the painting is presented as an assembly of divided parts. These parts are connected through the physical presence and visual-mental activity of a viewer, in what I argue is a process of allegorical interpretation or translation. It is a process that is not entirely random or open-ended, as it depends on the empirical evidence that the painting supplies, as well as the visual acuity of the individual viewer. Not unlike Barthes notion of the Text, the viewer assembles the disparate parts of the painting into a meaningful whole. As Barthes says, "The reader is the space on which all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost; […] that *someone* who holds together in a single field all the traces by which the […] text is constituted" (Barthes 1977: 148. Italics in original). But the unity that is achieved by the reading is incomplete and temporary, as in the end the painting remains a collection of divided physical panels. However, the divided nature of the painting allows the viewer to enact the sort of linkage and crisscrossing of divisions that

Latour has explained are significant actions of the network.

Seen in this way, Painting After Icebergs presents an apparently vast synthetic landscape that can be seen as constituting an experience of conceptual participation similar to an Internet search, where one website is linked to another in endless referral and the viewer must provide the sense of meaningful relation. I argue that the open grid structure I have used in my painting can be thought of as a visualization of a network and the discursive experience it provides. Both the painting and the network provide an experience that is simultaneously irrationally and rationally ordered. Both are a collection of connectable fragments whose holistic integration always remains contingent on the viewer.

For instance, the painting presents a conjunction of abstraction and naturalistic realism to the viewer. Both visual orders are assembled in the painting and, as I have said, their equivalent presentation requires an active inclusive reading to shuttle between them. The painting's refusal to privilege one order over the other creates a tension of aesthetic coherence, but does so in order that this expectation may be critiqued. The stratagem of simultaneous continuity and division, of disassembly and reassembly used in the painting, manifests a distinctive procedural method of the Internet, which continually divides texts, images and sounds into data, only to then remix and multiply them across connected network sites. Such actions present models of innovative assemblage, reordering and reevaluation that challenge received order, and also arguably suggest why a collage-like approach to contemporary representation is pertinent.

Like an example of the material-conceptual practice Barad describes, the

painting creates a condition of conceptual possibility that is particularly receptive to metaphoric meanings that "do not preexist but rather emerge from the […] intra-action" of the viewers and the material form the painting provides as an "apparatus of production" (Barad 2011: 2). By following a course of production that intersects with real social forms like the Internet, photography and digital printing, Painting After Icebergs avoids the crisis of practice I have hypothesized in contemporary landscape painting. The painting manifests this productive intersection by picturing nature-culture as a continuum that is linked by specific technological activity, and not as an eternally divided, and transcendent binary opposition. What emerges in the interplay of viewer, artist and the painting is an allegorical idea of an iceberg as a network, and a network as an iceberg.

3.3   PAINTING 2   After Icebergs, A Hollow Earth

Many of the attributes of the painting that I have described in the previous section also apply to the work under discussion here, particularly the size and multi-panel format, and non-hierarchical mixture of digital and hand-painted imagery. I will not repeat their description, but rather focus on a significant way this painting differs from the Painting After Icebergs. The difference I describe involves the use, and the reading, of negative space.

After Icebergs (2012) is organized around a quasi-vacancy, an empty square area occupying the centre of the painting. Like Painting After Icebergs, this painting measures about 2 meters by 2 meters and is constructed from

multiple panels, but the arrangement of the panels differs in a basic way. Unlike Painting After Icebergs, which is arranged with a network of vacant space between all the panels, some of the panels of After Icebergs physically abut and vertical seams appear where the canvases are joined together. The imagery of the painting flows across these joints. The painting mixes photographic images of sky and sea with painted panels that replicate the color and representational content of the digital images.

After Icebergs is composed like a cartouche, a form of visual organization often associated with Baroque illustration or antique maps, in which a central scene is depicted as enframed by a border of supplemental allegorical images. In my painting, this formal convention is inverted as the subsidiary border is presented alone, apparently framing a square empty space. The painting then becomes a frame for the whiteness of the wall that is seen through it. The periphery of the painting has moved to its center, or more accurately exists both outside the painting as well as inside it.[16]

I have previously referred to the center of the painting as quasi-vacant since the fact of its vacancy is disturbed. Though the square central space is materially unoccupied, if the surrounding landscape image panels are taken into account, this same space can be read as an image of an iceberg or the space of an absent one. I submit as well that the square white surface of the wall can be read

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[16] Robert Smithson often used the cartouche format, from his early drawings to his Non-Site containers. The cartouche can also be seen in relation to Jacques Derrida's ideas of the parergon as "neither work nor outside the work, neither inside or outside, neither above or below." See Derrida, J. (1987) *The Truth in Painting*, trans. by G. Bennington and I. McLeod, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press.) And also in relation to Clement Greenberg: "inside and outside are interwoven. The artist no longer seals his figure or construction off from the rest of space… but instead permits space to enter into its core and the core to reach out into and organize the ambiance." See "Our Period Style," *Parisian Review* 16, no. 11 (November 1949): p.136.

as an enlarged single pixel to signify an iceberg.

The space is not empty but rather an empty sign, and as theorized by Paul Virilio, it is also a screen. Virilio has written of *l'horizon au carré,* a term that can mean both "on the screen and 'squared', that is, a kind of doubling" (Virilio 2001: 87-88). He explains the conception of the squared screen in relation to the landscape and horizon:

> There is one horizon that is the direct horizon: a line. It is the horizon […] when one looks out across the sea. It is the horizon of real space. And there is a horizon of real time which means that there are also two perspectives: on the one hand, one perspective of real space with a horizon line and a vanishing point, and on the other hand the perspective of real time, in which the horizon is no longer a line but a screen. (Virilio 2001: 100)

Virilio points out that the use of the computer screen has doubled our relation to the horizon by providing a technological alternative to our previously unmediated experience. According to Virilio, telecommunication translates the landscape of the ocean horizon in a way that necessitates a new cultural adaptation: a seeing double that juggles two perspectives, one naturally embodied and the other technologically represented.

I have characterized the blank center of After Icebergs (2012) as an empty sign as well as a screen. Krauss discusses the concept of the empty sign in relation to a category of signs called "shifters," small words like "this" and "I" whose referents "keep changing places across the space of our conversation" (Krauss 1977: 69). I have discussed the space at the center of my painting in changing ways, as quasi-empty, an image of an iceberg, the space of an absent

one, a pixel, a screen and an empty sign, however, there is still another way to consider this hollowness at the center of the landscape. This hollow space also brings to mind "The Greatest Geographical Discovery in History," a certain late 19th century theory "that the Earth is hollow […] and that its hollow interior communicates with the surface by two polar openings" (Bernard 2009: 21).

Whether sited at the core of the world or a painting, such hollowness requires a consideration of its potential. What is our relation to this blank area of the map? Will we go there and do things or will we not? What meanings or monsters reside there? The empty spaces of the network, the unnoticed places of the open mesh that the links do not yet reach, tell of many such bypassed territories that remain unexplored, uncharted and unknown. After Icebergs demonstrates the value of examining the mute blankness of such overlooked zones, which as Melville noted, may prove to be full of meaning.

4.0   SUMMATION   This Doubled Space

At the outset of this paper I posed a few questions that were discussed in the course of my argument and that I will briefly review in conclusion.

I first asked a general question about what it means to make landscape paintings in the 21st century. [17] Drawing on the Social Science theory of Latour, I argued that answers were to be found by examining an "imbroglio" of nature, art

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[17] A century in which the number of Internet users has grown "from 250 million to 2 billion" since the turn of the millennium, according to the latest United Nations International Telecommunications Union report (2011). [cited February 2012]. Available from http://www.physorg.com/news/2011-01-internet-users-worldwide-billion.html

and technology, a triad of subjects that are bound by a network of relations "simultaneously real, like nature, narrated, like discourse, and collective, like society" (Latour 1993: 6). I asserted that if landscape painting found the means to address this triad in "real, social and narrated" ways (Latour 1993: 7), this artistic genre could achieve relevant contemporary meanings and avoid crisis.

I established through the production of artwork and written argument, that one way for landscape practice to achieve such a real, social and narrative grounding was to pursue the notion of hybrid art forms that engage with technology like the Internet and to manifest a nature-culture world view. In this way, the natural landscape is seen as the basis of human activity, not merely as a "standing reserve" whose value lies only in material exploitation.[18] I stressed that the hybrid approach to landscape painting practice requires a consideration of new technology and innovative interdisciplinary translations that eschew modernist expectations of medium specificity and purification.

I asked in this regard: how can a landscape painting practice translate the networks of digital communication that define this era? I offered a way to do this using Graeme Sullivan's "create to critique" methodology idea of painting as research, to position my practice as a means of research. I located support for this approach in the idea of material-conceptual practice suggested by Karen Barad. This encouraged me to pursue various paintings in which images and meanings emerged from research activity with the material apparatus of the Internet. My painting became a node in a technical network, as capable of translating

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[18] This well-known phrase is from Martin Heidegger's "The Question Concerning Technology." Available from http://www.scribd.com/doc/30112927/Martin-Heidegger-The-Question-Concerning-Technology

information and transmitting data as any other digital node. A painting considered in such a way is a linkage mediating virtual and actual space, partaking of both spaces and shuttling over the boundary of the screen.

This doubled space was examined in relation to the "speaking otherwise" of allegory with its employment of double readings, translations and contingent interpretations provided by active viewer/authors. I also related allegory to a capability that a network enables to wreck boundaries and so transcend the imposed limitations of disciplinary specialization.

Finally, there was my initial question, how might the Internet transform the imagery or production of my landscape painting? I have shown quite clearly that it has marked it tremendously. My paintings feature numerous images that were located using Internet search engines and online databases. My studio laptop computer is in continual use as I search, test and modify the images I find. But while innovations in my practice, these things are also translations of certain previous studio practices. I have included found images in my work before, for instance, though simply hand-traced and not digitally printed.

The answer to the research question I initially posed is: the Internet translated my painting practice significantly, but did not reconstruct it absolutely, that is, as an unrecognizable new activity. For me, digital painting is still painting. However, I submit that the new hybrid painting object that results from combining digital technology and landscape painting, requires the development of its own unique set of new critical theories, methodologies and aesthetics.

4.1   CONCLUSIONS   My Monstrous Results

> I'm not scientific. No 'ends', no 'goals'. One thing leads to another. I do not have a system. I am a system. There won't be any summing up. Perhaps there will. (Michael Snow)[19]

While the Internet did not reconstruct my paintings in absolute terms, the transformation of practice that did occur was profound. The digital network intensifies the studio process, making certain previous methods inadequate and facilitating others. The net effect of its translation and added intensity is a hybrid digital painting object. This intensification, resulting from an amplified speed and increased data exchange, can come at the cost of distraction and loss of specificity however. For example, while in less than a second, there are millions of Internet icebergs to choose from on the Internet, those that appear are untethered visual fragments adrift and arbitrarily ordered on the screen. The story of how or why each came into view remains unknown and subject to speculation. As Benjamin said in regard to allegory, the "profane" world "is characterized as a world in which the detail is of no great importance" (Benjamin 1977: 175).

Though the various individual Internet icebergs possess a specific history and material existence elsewhere, they also have digital existence. This doubled location, like allegory and its "speaking otherwise," necessitates a consideration of these two positions. Allegory's ability to suspend the tension of doubled meaning by simply allowing these meanings to coexist, helped me conceive of, and to accept, the collaged hybrid paintings that emerged in my thesis. My

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[19] Snow, Michael. (1971) "Passage." *Artforum* 10 (1) p. 64.

paintings demonstrate how allegory does not seek to resolve or purify the narrative contradictions of multiple meanings. The work I have made uses the tension of contradiction as bait to engage participant viewers in an exploration or search that produces unstable allegories without finite conclusion.[20] The painting's forms are as open-ended as their meanings.

The non-hierarchical, hybrid forms my artworks present, create an opportunity to examine the criteria underlying the contemporary evaluation of a painting, particularly in relation to a desire for medium specificity. Must a painting be only painted? Must its subject be limited by an innate materiality? How fundamental to a painting is embodied skill and traditional handicraft? My paintings provoke these questions and provide the occasion to consider what it means to make a landscape painting today.

I have made paintings of landscapes that are as much printed as painted, landscape paintings that use Internet photographs to depict synthetic locations. I have presented nature as a transmitted image-of-nature, as a scene that has been digitally abstracted from an originating location, to emphasize a contemporary interconnection of the natural environment and the technological environment of the network. For many people, nature and technology exist distinctly separated, as realms of the organic and the machinic. However, I conclude that while nature and technology are non-human, both are fundamental to what it is to be human. It is impossible to conceive of existence in the absence of either.

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[20] Thanks to my colleague, Andy Patton for his idea that "we think as bait," as well as for helping refine my research regarding allegory in contemporary painting.

There is nothing utopian about this conclusion. Though eternally implicated in human affairs, nature and technology are dangerous and untrustworthy human allies. Constant vigilance and struggle is required to offset their unpredictable movements. "Photographs are almost Nature," said Richter (Richter 1995: 187), "nature […] in all its forms is against us, because it knows no meaning, no pity, no sympathy, because it knows nothing and is […] absolutely inhuman. Every beauty we see in the landscape […] is our projection" (Richter 1995: 124). I submit that the remorseless qualities that Richter ascribes to nature can just as easily be ascribed to technology. But no matter how pitilessly or beautifully they do it, nature and technologies fundamentally condition human existence.

At this time, nature and technology have entered an unstable new relation. Glaciers are disappearing all over the world in unprecedented fashion. Ice sheets are sheering off in larger and larger magnitudes in both Greenland and Antarctica. It is quite possible the benefit that we derive from our relation with technology has created an imbalance in our relation to nature, causing us to ignore an ultimate dependence on natural stability. This unsustainable new relation will require attention and many adaptations for the foreseeable future.

As always, the unavoidable necessity of nature and technology to human life requires constant adjustment to the shifting challenge they continually supply. It is a contradictory situation in which what is necessary for human life, nature and technology, also constantly trouble it. I submit that allegories of landscape, painting and digital networks can help navigate this contradiction. Art,

myth and allegory are important apparatuses of human adaptation. They provide the means for exploration after the new understandings that will be used to cope with the shifting relationships of nature-culture. I conclude that given the interdisciplinary and multivalent nature of the contemporary world, the interdisciplinary and multivalent nature of allegory presents a viable option for the discovery of such new understandings in contemporary art.

Finally, what about icebergs? Why search after them? What do they mean? It would be easy to hide behind the ambiguity of allegory, and say icebergs are everything and nothing, but I will not argue that. They are all that, and they are not. It is true that icebergs are a solidified liquid, a bit like the paint of a painting perhaps, but they are also rare tangible aspects of a global flux that exceeds individual human duration, as I will briefly describe.

Water vapor condenses and some falls as snow. This snow occasionally falls in a location where over ten thousand winters, it is compacted by subsequent snows into a great mass of ice. The immense weight of this ice causes it to flow downhill as a glacier, where it may eventually cross from land into the sea. If it does, the ice cracks, sheers off and floats away on the ocean current, breaking into smaller and smaller fragments as it drifts. No matter how grand in size, each of these tumbling splinters erodes and changes shape as it sails according to the action of wind, waves and sun, before eventually vanishing by melting into the sea. But that is not the end of it. The ocean waters flow and ebb for eons and in time, evaporate. The water vapor condenses, becomes a cloud and some falls as snow.

It is a reality, an empirical law, that water cannot be fractured permanently. It may only be diverted for a time until it finds its course again, or its natural level. Modern science can split water; fracture it into two constituent atomic elements of hydrogen and oxygen, but only temporarily. These two particular elements have a universal affinity for each other as a result of how they are shaped, and bond together whenever or wherever it is possible to connect. They always come together in a triad, a molecule that links two H's and an O. This is why water and ice exist everywhere.

To human perception, this moist movement is interminable and invisible, too vast or atomic to observe and so it eludes our embodied perception. Water's continuity and wholeness is mythic and almost unimaginable, perhaps truly unpresentable in an empirical way. It is not surprising that the sea and its constant motion figures so prominently in dreams. The sea presents a paradox: its state of constant mutability appears unchanging and timeless to human eyes. Icebergs are briefly frozen fragments of this eternal flux.

But physical icebergs are only the tip of the iceberg. Allegorically, icebergs represent something else; those things that remain vast and unknown, beyond comprehension. In the one-tenth that is visible, we catch only a glimpse and elusive intimation of the other nine-tenths, and from the part, we imagine the whole. In icebergs, we find a transitory image that implies more than it reveals, and can intuit the sense and boundless union of all things, extant but unseen beneath of surface of our senses. Of all these things the iceberg was the symbol.

For my thesis, I searched after icebergs online from my studio, as well as on an expedition to Newfoundland. In this essay I explored and examined the meanings the icy hunt revealed. In French, *essayer* refers to trying, experiment and attempts: all aspects of "the search," as well as of research. I crafted my essay and artwork to enact a sense of the similarity and difference between these terms, and between expedition and exploration, as well. An expedition is the time it takes to go somewhere to look for something. An exploration is the time it takes to go somewhere and look at where you are.

The search for the pure water of the crystalline iceberg was the expedition that the exploration of the impure paintings required. Each landscape present in the paintings also connects to an absent natural location and to other virtual spaces that also lie elsewhere. Ron Geyshick, Ojibwa guide, author and medicine man has said, "You can get anywhere in the world from just a drop of water, because every drop of water connects to all the lakes and oceans in the earth" (Geyshick Doyle 1989: 116). Any climatologist, oceanographer, hydrologist or interplanetary biologist will agree: if you follow the water long enough, it will eventually lead you everywhere.[21]

I have followed the water in its icy form through a variety of landscapes, wherever it has led me. I did this in part, by employing Barthes' concept that "the Text is a methodological field," and "the metaphor of the Text is [...] the network." (Barthes 1971) In regard to both, Latour has said the network that

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[21] Even to interstellar space: comets are entirely composed of "normal" ice, cosmic icebergs. Water, water everywhere, even on Mars where NASA too "follows the water" as a strategy to explore the planet for traces of extra-terrestrial life.

emerges from a text is "the indicator of the quality of a text [.] A good text elicits networks of actors when it allows the writer to trace a set of relations defined as so many translations" (Latour 2005: 129). I have attempted to do exactly this with my thesis, and submit that my arguments have discursive and practical implications for the discourse of contemporary painting.

In my introduction I said that the rehabilitation of outmoded practices and methods of landscape painting is not what I proposed to accomplish in this thesis. My intent, through the premise of a proposed crisis of the genre, is to contribute to the discourse of contemporary landscape practice, and I submit that this goal is achieved with my written argument. In particular, I extended Latour's general critique of modernist purification in a way that challenges a legacy of medium specificity in contemporary art. I countered this aesthetic paradigm by stressing the value of hybridity, and suggesting ways that digital technology or online resources may be used to facilitate allegorical artistic hybrids. My digital paintings address with the world with such stories, since allegory is as fundamentally impure, hybrid, monstrous, and amodern as the way we are now.

But Smithson's question lingers. If everything can mean anything in allegory, it can just as easily mean nothing. If art is art, it must have limits. Icebergs of information appear drifting on seas of endless data, only to melt into air or a fog of possible import. We sink or swim or surf among waves of limitless option, pulled by the strong currents of a fluid network toward some eternally deferred horizon. How can one contain this oceanic site?

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6.0 APPENDIX

OCEAN-CHART.
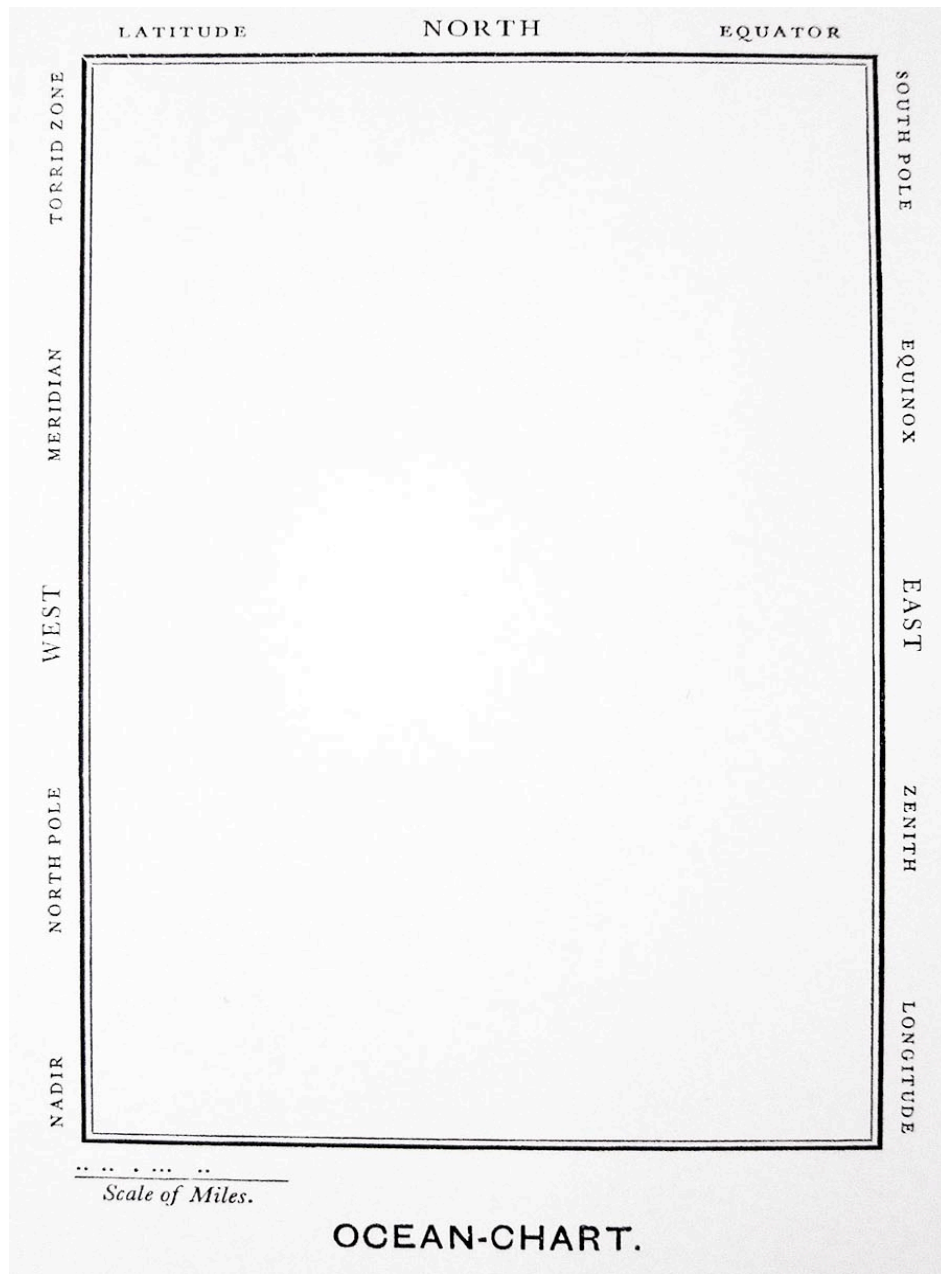
APPENDIX A:

Henry Holiday
Illustration: Map of an Oceanic Site
(1874)

APPENDIX B:

David Clarkson
After Icebergs – Landscape Painting Study
(2012)

APPENDIX C:

What a pleasure it must be when the right word is forthcoming at the right place, or when without trouble argument succeeds argument […] I write of the future; of the hopes of being more worthy – but will I ever be [?] No one will ever see these words, therefore I may write freely – what does it all mean?

(Captain Robert Falcon Scott, c. 1910) [22]

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[22] Huxley, Elspeth. 1977. *Scott of the Antarctic*, London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson.