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Sfumato and conjunction

Scott Joseph Dohring

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MASTER OF FINE ARTS

SFUMATO AND CONJUNCTION

by

SCOTT JOSEPH DOHRING

5/25/94
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   The plight of the Rear Guard
For the studio section of my MFA in painting thesis, I have produced a series of paintings on canvas concerned with non-objective impasto/textured color fields, some include representation in line, abstract overlays/underlays, while some involve division of the canvas into abutting characteristic approaches.

The mediums used include water based & oil based paints, textural compounds (gel medium, joint compound, mastic, talc), pencil, and occasionally found objects.

In this paper, I shall analyze and discuss impressions, concepts, and meditations relevant to my thesis work in particular and to the issue of reconciliation between formalist and post-modern approaches to theory/criticism in general as I relate it to the defense of my approach to artistic expression. In addition, I will survey my work in other media to find relationships supporting the concepts of my thesis paintings.

I would like to thank and acknowledge my wife Catherine for her support and encouragement, and Dr. Robert C. Morgan, under whom I served as graduate assistant, and video maker Peer Bode for their help in elucidating key concepts.
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PAINTINGS IN THE THESIS SHOW:

Germic Abutment
Idiom Abutment
Loner Topology
Catatonia
Aiei-on

TWO PAINTINGS NOT IN THE THESIS SHOW:
Chol
New Catatonian

1. **Germic Abutment**, 1993, Oil, Acrylic, Latex, Mastic on Vinyl Coated Canvas, 3' x 4'.

Vertically split by 1/3 dark on the left, 2/3 light on the right, the right hand side is rendered from a microscopic photo of a human cellular structure with causeways for fluids, a network in motion. The background is light yellow, the vein/cell lines are pink, red & purple. Due to variations in the tones of the line work, there is a small amount of play, or movement in and out of the surface, though never into or behind the yellow of the background.

The entire surface is heavily built up with a semi-rough texture, as there are other (attempted) paintings beneath this painting and a layer of mastic was applied during the second attempt.
The left hand third sharply contrasts the right, with a black background and a dark brown foreground of character like marks and circles aligned in the horizontal way writing is read, though the actual marks are more reminiscent of African or Oceanic ornamental design.

Straddling the two zones are a thin wide circle in red and a thin green line placed horizontally above. These are intended to anchor the two ideo-compartments, one being the body and it's issues of health and biological determinacy, the other, less obvious, but alluding to the development of language and primal modes of expression related to decorative patterning and the permutations that occur from line to line. A relationship between the left and right planes occurs when considering evolutionary conditions (moving from an macro-animist/tribal narrative to a micro-scientific/complex narrative).

2. Idiom Abutment, 1994, Acrylic, Oil, Steel Disks on Canvas, 6' x 4'.

This Canvas began during the stretching phase. There was a natural division (ready made...) where two pieces of canvas were sewn together at the factory, which I positioned as a vertical separation again at 1/3 in from the left (the Pythagorean line of demarcation for harmonic sequences).

With the blank, stretched and primed canvas on the floor, I put down some yellow and red acrylic washes on it. Once that was dry, I splattered a blue wash, lifted one side of the canvas and let the fluid run down in lines to one direction, then lifted from the other side letting it run again, continuing this practice until the liquid spread out in four directions. This formed a grid like patterning, which looks something like the cracks that appear in asphalt or sun baked desert mud.
I simply enjoyed the way the lines connected and passed through each other. This worked for me as a new signature in my repertoire of methods. Amazingly, I haven't seen it done before (whether it has or not).

In experimenting with such a worked and reworked medium such as painting it's a surprise when one has experimentated and actually done something new (or new to oneself). One of the problems with modernism, I reflected, has been who got there first. It's as though one takes a out a patent because artists get known for style modes. However, fragmentation in methodology has become accepted, style is transformed or transferred to the concerns of a topical approach.

Upon the left third of the canvas is oil paint in all the colors I had, piled on expressionistically, quickly, forming an array of marks and gestures. I wonder if it is one of those practices that is more enjoyable to do than to see.

A grid of steel disks was then applied with nautical epoxy in a square area covering the central half of the piece bridging the two existent stylistic approaches, with about 6 inches of space between each disk. Over that was applied a large red hollow circle about two inches thick at the perimeter and 2 1/2 feet in diameter bridging (laid over) the three approaches.

My interest in this piece was brought on by the suggestion that different systems could be applied on or against each other, and that their proximity could affect the reading of the whole piece. Graphically, Germic and Idiom are the easiest pieces to read, offering a more conventional solution to the concerns of my thesis.

For these first two pieces, the idea of the divisions within a canvas is lifted directly from David Salle. I don't know if he came up with it himself, but I've also

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1 But, for instance, I'll be thinking, and have some great revelation, and find out later that David Hume already wrote about it two hundred years ago, etc.
seen something like it in the work of Sigmar Polke and in Medieval 2-D art. What I was also after, the co-existence of unlike methods of painting, was influenced in part by my discussions on structuralism with video maker Peer Bode, it is the idea that varying procedural codes combine to serve as the concept for a piece and that these approaches together could work as an esthetic model.

In the abutment works, I'm very conscious of color theory and composition in order to get the piece to 'sit still' without too many mental associations that would make me want to do something else to it. If it sits still, it has enough order to be finished. The circle acts as the psychic equivalent of a sphere of unity covering/touching part of each system or layer.

3. **Loner Topology,** 1994, Oil, Enamel, Acrylic, Latex, Gel Medium, Joint Compound, Carpenters Glue on Canvas, 4' x 4'.

I began this piece again with the lifting of one side of the canvas at a time while it sits on the floor, this time using carpenters glue to raise the surface. Upon this, I built up washes of tertiary color, aluminum and gray, and worked toward a Turneresque atmospheric ground. The large yellow-orange half moon or angled sunset was spray painted on. The grid lines from the glue function more toward architecture than as an organic structure. Because there is no perspectival rendering it becomes schematic geometry. The biomorphic coil and three striations were then applied in black, acting as a glyph-like reference and counterpoint to the ground/field. Finally, the illustration of an old camper pick up truck was applied. It gives a narrative that appoints the rest of the painting a
Loner Topology. 1994. Oil, Enamel, Acrylic, Latex, Gel Medium, Joint Compound, Carpenters Glue on Canvas, 4' x 4'.
further intimation: The old guy who lives in his truck on the edge of some industrial wasteland, past town, who is invariant even under certain transformations. Not unlike a conservative with nothing to lose.

4. Catatonia, 1993, Oil, Enamel, Varnish, Acrylic, Latex, Sand, Joint Compound, Wood, Gel Medium on Canvas, 8' x 4'.

This piece served as a watershed, in terms of the alchemy of methods and materials. During this time I was looking at Kiefer and Polke. Kiefer's landscapes, expressive power, materiality, and Polke's use of mediated imagery, pop-ism, and later, the simplicity of material aggregates -- alchemical combinations to forge something beyond its palpable resonance -- have impressive results.

I laid the painting down and threw everything in the studio on it, working as much as I could to draw on subconscious, intuitive powers. At the same time I was refusing the effects of image automatism, if something appeared, I would negate it by reworking it. As a result a rich surface was built up. By then I didn't know what to do with it. It sat for a few months as a compositional mess.

Eventually, I added the tan/off-white, covering most of the piece and it sat again for nearly six months. The whole piece now appeared as a landscape so I turned it upside down, and about a week later I painted the couch from my studio on to it. The idea was to play with narrative elements over the surface of all this textural activity. The couch as passive receptor, the TV is off, the book is open but face down on the floor.

With the representational imagery, the interest was to use a color near to the ground color, and to paint using only contours so the ground would be visible through the figure/object. In this way the couch could imbed itself retinally but
Catatonia. 1993, Oil, Enamel, Varnish, Acrylic, Latex, Sand, Joint Compound, Wood, Gel Medium on Canvas, 8' x 4'. [Top ↑]
Catatonia, (Detail), 1993, Oil, Enamel, Varnish, Acrylic, Latex, Sand, Joint Compound, Wood, Gel Medium on Canvas, 8' x 4'. [Top ↑]
psychologically as well, not even being visible from enough distance. This should give a feel of tentativeness, of a disappearing or of being 'about to be lost' to the background type of effect, like an apparition.

5. Aiei-on, 1994, Oil, Talcum Powder with Linseed Oil on Canvas, 6' x 4'.

I am hovering, over the truth, as I see it. Bestilled, a certain distance over that reality, but knowing it to be a concocted one. It is a question of plausibility, as to an agreement of it's mimesis, or truth concocted, Plato's cave parable, which needs attention before moving on again. The painting is about a stasis, the moment of transition from sensation to recognition, the final instant of discernment before decision, captured in time before motion can begin to continue. That is what I am after in rendering a piece like Aiei - On.

I got the title from the Greek for 'presence' as derived from Derrida's The Truth in Painting. I was lost trying to read this book with any serious understanding. I don't have the foundation for it, or didn't have time to really read and re-read to try to get it.

I wanted to do this as my final thesis statement piece, a flagship of sorts, for where my work could be headed. In order to give it more 'credibility' and archival standing, I worked totally in oils. With this piece I attempted to use the combinatory methods of stylistic expression which were working in Catatonia, but used more washes to allow previous stages of development to remain visible rather than covering areas opaquely and leaving others alone. Figure and ground distinctions are blurred even further than in Catatonia. The dry brush technique I had used in Catatonia wouldn't work because you need a raised surface (texture) to leave the depressed areas unpainted, this painting didn't involve much heavy
texture except from some of the previous paintings underneath. Later I mixed baby powder (talc) with linseed oil to raise the surface in some areas. The main combinations are between flat planes of translucent washes, splashes, and streaks, and the use of line for representation, abstraction, and non-objective gesture strokes. On the top most layer, I used a rolled up rag to press on some light gray coils of paint in a couple of areas, as a bunch-of-grape-like groupings.

There is a large rabbit, an infant and a fire extinguisher painted in, then covered almost completely. I wasn't trying to make a "can you find the picture" hidden image game, but it was getting perilously close to that. The idea here, is of not having a clear reading (sfumato), in order to imply the 'doubt' of the thesis.

However, to produce an authentic doubt on a non-objective canvas plane is rather a subjective problem, as is its agreement with the beholder.

What I was after was the compression of image, and non-image on a single plane. A static play on time, not in the animated sense, but in regard to a multi-event, simultaneous reading that would give equal reference (conjunction) to its varying components, without allowing the piece to become one continuous tone (hinting, however, toward non-differentiation).

I realize now that because it was thesis time, I was putting too much pressure on the one piece for its own good. In trying to break the spell of my expectations, I performed some disingenuous moves (strokes), I tried to see it in terms of a pathetic and ugly art, keeping the palette in mostly tertiary blends.

At the point of losing all control over the compositional tone, I added the rectangles to give it some structure, and finally centered a small white dot, to give a place to rest the eye on. The addition of the talc in blue-green-gray swatches was also an attempt to cause blockages or rests, as passage disembarkments without covering over too much of the previous layer.
Something in the effect of the previous three paintings *Loner, Catatonia* and *Aie - On*, work to enact an archaeological discernment among components, so that not only does the mind seek the relationships of simultaneous differences, but in the sense that there are simple (simply) temporal event-activities among and atop one another.

**TWO PAINTINGS NOT IN THE THESIS SHOW:**

1. **Chol** 1993, Oil, Wood, on Canvas, 6' x 4'.

   This piece involved my first time dividing the canvas. Again I was interested in the simultaneous reading of elements or comparisons of the portions of each. Again, the division has an antecedent in the medieval Christian paintings and frescos such as those dividing the phases of Christ's life story but in more recent art history I've seen this composition done by David Salle (about 15 years ago).

   The three representational sources are: on the right; a microscopic photo of cell structure, appropriated from Strong Hospital (a friend was working at a quick-photo shop and I asked him to pull any interesting proofs for me), an arm holding the last bite of a cheese burger – from a photo (same source) of a guy in a lodge at a park, a picnic of some kind. On the left, the dark side of the painting, is a rib cage from *Grey's Anatomy*. Previously, the whole canvas was dark, and the small figure falling in the void there beneath the rib cage was from that
previous painting.²

The narrative in this painting is related by the title, Chol-(esterol). Unlike Salle's disjunction -- which is more like the ambivalence and disparity of surrealism, the objects in Chol are clearly related to one another. See also in Catatonia, how the representational images are narrative. It is understood that I can make some narrative statement, not just an ironic distancing from the representational elements of the work, while also playing with the abstract and non-objective matter when the idea comes to me.

The block of wood with a painted border and vertical gray line, in the central upper area of the cell structure in Chol, however, is to remind me of the 'I don't know what I'm doing' aspect of painting which is so enjoyable for me, because -- I don't know exactly why I put it there. It acts as a detractor, or blockage, or compositional pause, but most importantly to register uncertainty as a crucial determinant in separating art from disciplines based on uncovering factual data.

2. New Catatonian 1994, Oil, Latex, Joint Compound, on Canvas on Plywood. 4' x 6'.

Titles aren't always that important to the work but offer to reflect the frame of mind during which the piece was executed. In this title there is the word play with Catalan, Spain, the district where I believe Tapies' sandy paintings come from, and the play between the present schizoid inactivity of the slacker

²Many of the paintings I've done are on top of earlier finished (or nearly done) paintings that I deemed failures, this does add to the textural quality though, some pieces have five or more paintings underneath, like Germic abutment for instance. After Chol, it wasn't until Catatonia and Aiei - On that I began to try to keep incorporating previous works into the visible finished product.
generation which, If you divide them into Atari wave and Nintendo wave (in growing up with video games), I would be an Atari waver.

The scene on the canvas is of a bed. The perspective is of one standing by the base board, looking toward the pillow and head board. There is a fair amount of impasto texturing applied over the whole piece using joint compound with very little pigment mixed in here and there to the compound's gray-sand earth tone. With the same pressure as the lines used to draw the bed, several dandified gestural marks are placed arbitrarily, in line, engraved into the wet joint compound. The title NEW CATATONIAN is scratched in too, below the bed at about the bottom third of the painting.

The bed though, is empty. It's occupant, who via the title should be frozen with apprehension has defied the title's description except that the term "new" might imply that even with activity the results are as though the bed might as well have its occupant there. Most slackers are intelligent enough that we might see their sluggishness as the result of their education, rather than an apathy of pure ignorance.

In practical terms the piece is a simple drawing/texture exercise and was stopped long before the issue if it being really worked came up. However, it relates to Catatonia and Aiei - On by way of using line over field, by it's attendance to surface texture, by using different schemes at one time without one really having to support the other. If each method (scribble, rendering, texture and tone change) works to its own rhythm and is well placed, the combination can function well on a unified scale of reading.

This presumes that the faculties for composition are 'on', that the positioning of the elements is served by some golden touch or command of knowledge bringing me the adjustments needed to make the piece work.
Problematically, in this kind of combination (while adjustments to a rendering can improve the quality), adjustments to those spastic scraffito markings detract from the freshness. The more it is worked the more it loses its vitality, it's 'gestural' element. Placement begins blindly, intuitively, and is then registered as right enough or smoothed out with a palette knife, ready for another try.
IMPRESSIONS, MEDITATIONS, RATIONALE

While the activity of painting is not highly theoretical for me (and often it is more intuitive), I might in retrospect be able to open up some planes of thought in critique which do offer theoretical underpinnings. In this section, I shall attempt to the best of my knowledge, to explicate just what in terms of technical manipulation can also be laden with psycho-social comprehension.

While criticism and theory may not be my forte. I can talk about general influences on my work. Historical antecedents, philosophical underpinnings (with great trepidation as to the accuracy of not only my understanding, but whether I can elucidate in writing), what the pictures do for me -- what I read from them -- what’s going through my mind, why I paint to articulate a conscious or subconscious state of mind with sight or sound rather than something more agreeable to language and text.

Approaches: Layering Concepts and the Concepts of Layering:

Here I've been painting visual languages in various forms of collision. At first and always, the interest was simply to tie in various concerns on a single canvas. The Sfumato -- a covering over in order to reveal (L. Sfumare - smoke) and the conjunction or intersection (of image or idiom; either as an abutment or a layering, sometimes transparent, sometimes less so.
I've pushed for a metaphor of *germic* consistency, rather than superficial composition -- of the substance of which the surface consists, as opposed to or aposed to the metaphysical presentation, by the comparison or laying on of different systems, practices, methods, 'bags of tricks'.

Some of these include, textured surfaces, graffito effect or mark making with an attendant light-dark-light-dark patterning (a subjective activity imbedded as mute inscription and retinal cryptology), seeking via primary colors their comparisons in tertiaries, color vibration or hum, also, line art representations lifted from advertising or dictionaries, line quality versus field quality, occasionally, a blurred distinction in the figure/ground relationship, symmetrical compositional strategies, assemblage or collage of found materials, Xeroxed distortion and pictorial photo-collaged sources, art historical gesturing and allusion to an ontological pre-existent.

**Abutment**: the division of the canvas plane into distinct characteristic approaches, each with a resolved internal order, then laid against/next to another distinct approach with a differing order, thereby altering the reading of each. Systems can be read in a new light when appearing against other systems, coexistence and tension become apparent issues which produce metaphors for external situations.

By correlating aspects pure to painting as a group of components, I have attempted to investigate their permutations through a simplified physical framework, opening avenues of visual and temporal literacy. This is a subjective practice aware of, but outside of the arena of the industrial and economic heritage of electronic and reproducible art. Art of this type then is freer to be more involved with the tradition of personal image making rather than the theatrical and literary conventions of mass media, and is less concerned with developing an alternative cultural milieu or alternative to TV,
as info/culture system, etc., than more extroverted art forms. It would seem worthwhile to practice a line of intellectual visual expression that attempts to broaden the ways in which questions of content can be referred to.

The field for cross-referencing which developed into one aspect of the post modernism of the eighties has been of interest for my work's development (again, by looking at anything as a system, one can look at a system in relation to other systems). There is a long tradition in the fine arts of borrowing ideas and methods being advanced by the sciences and humanities. We can relate for example the way 20th century physics sees the world, as complex energy events (rather than "solid" phenomena) which are permeable to influence by neighboring events, structures.

**Antecedents:**

Essentially, from what other art works I've seen, it appears that I show a likeness or affinity for, and am attempting to fuse the concerns of the likes of Salle & Adamski with Tapies and Twombly. Hopefully, similarities will end as I gain a foothold and my own content will be based on the psychological parameters of and tentativeness in objectification; including the issues of imbeddedness, emergence and disappearance with juxtapositions.

Though I started painting in the eighties, I wonder whether my work is to move further from painters of the eighties, neo expressionists who seemed to rise so quickly and are today somewhat discredited. But of German artists, Kiefer mostly (not so much for representational subject matter but surface texture and application) and Polke, in the inclusion of images with fields and division of the canvas plane, I understand. That both were students of Bueys (the most important thing I get from Bueys is his ability to fuse the social with the aesthetic) is also significant for me.
In deciding that I like and can work in the tradition of Polke, Kiefer, Tapies, Twombly and Salle, aspects of my work will look deduced, but it is also a search for my own niche of understanding. I find the mistakes, misinterpretations or unconscious events lead me to it more than influences. Its OK, I might learn something, besides, I haven't started a career in this, I'm no megalomaniac, how will I ever get known, or aren't I just doing this for my-self-for-the-world?

One day, I'm handing change to the palm reader from the new age bookstore at the diner where I work and he grabs my hand and shows his apprentice, "See?," he says, "You have the mark of fame and fortune. But you'll never use it." ("CATATONIA!", I think to myself.) "Take care of that stomach", he says... (??).

**Psychological Interpretation and Impetus:**

Catatonia was my first reaction/impression from reading Albert Camus' paper on *The Myth of Sisyphus*, not 'surrender' but 'go blank'. I see it in the slakerdom of kids around me, some my own age, the new lost generation -- 'without the poetics of loss,' as someone said. Some of my associates suffer from this, It's like, pathetic if you try, and you're a loser if you don't try, those are the choices. There is very little room for winners, and it is as much luck as a superabundance of productive energy and shmoozer skills. But this kind of cynicism isn't what I'm after or about. It is something that I have to wade through and look beyond in order to continue my work.

This isn't about wimpy disenchantment with information overload, this is about getting past the exasperation of feeling like you are in the wrong place and the wrong time. About having the wrong keys for a door you never
really wanted to enter. Or is it that adolescent thing about not wanting to grow
up and deal with it 'cause it seems to suck even when you do win (well, they
say my generation is a bunch of whiners). At this point I recall an Einstein
quote which goes something like - "A problem can't be solved at the same
level of thinking at which the problem was formed".

A psychoanalytic description might include this element of anxiety:
"where there is no clear object to point to the source of disturbance"¹, and is
founded partially in the fabrication of an outer circumference of inarticulate
or super natural (hallucinogenic, even) intimation around a sphere of
vexation and consternation by natural causes. Serious concentration on the
absolute qualities of the object of dissension is closed off by being drawn
towards its platonic "original", an element of assessment that cannot be freely
assumed because of its faulted perception of universal significance and being.

Saying something is like something else can be shown,² but the
imaginary construct has served its point in less time then to actually 'do' the
image. The compensatory theory of art (Lévi Strauss) has art serve to present
imaginary solutions to real life problems. This is an untenable position for the
work of this thesis. It presumes the work goes farther than it does, in offering
a solution, which it doesn't. It acts more to spread out the material significance
rather than to close in on and resolve an issue.

If one takes the spaces between meaning to uncover what relationships
are cloaked, (literally, to read between the lines), I would use this reference to

¹ J. W. Kling, Ph.D., Psychology Pocket Crammer, (New York: Ken Publishing Co.,
1963.), p. 128.

² And is of use, but the illustration is implicit in the further purpose of the
language (it is more than the comparison itself that is of importance) and therefor of less
use in the image.
see what lies with the cloaking or sfumato relationships between simultaneous genre presentments, referring to the 'also/and' rather than the 'either/or'.

Genuine indecision, the enigmatic embrace of contradiction, a Kierkegaardian doubt, un-compensatory imaginaries, won't abide in the discordant chaos of presence by a superficial resolution. The work is left hanging in catatonia, a frozen schizoid presentation, to deny the un-presentable a negative impact while sedating it's call for decision (or differentiation?). Neither denial nor embrace can fully account, cynical and utopian inflection are too hyperbolic.

Relativism would be disdained in a binary evaluation, differentiation is necessary to produce not only value, but communication at all. The defense of dualism is of the need for contrasts to allow for definition. Beyond this is an aesthetic, a meta-aesthetic reception. There is a critical analysis but it is un-judgmental or absolving -- liberating.

So are farts O.K.? Or Murder? It's happening. Justifications are being created. Most of us would say there are things we all like and don't like. But a moral relativity would have anything approach justification on some terms. Is catatonia a fair response to this? Of course, not clinically speaking, but we understand this reaction, as a kind of fence sitting. Unless we are personally faced with an actual situation, all the other aspects apart from us, the craziness of the world float by and are beyond us.

Rendering stasis, in the passive-receptor-near-catatonic-mode, a super-awareness, and Buddha like stillness beyond the binary cognition; hope and pessimism are enmeshed, passion and apathy given over to the volumes of thought, of brain work, canceling one another out, as an entombment or surrender. Not with a blank alpha wave, but a dreamscaped theta wave on the encephalographic brain wave chart. Like the passing imagery for the shaman
to follow while in entrainment, in the trance of a vision quest. This presupposes that the traveler has the power to identify, de-code and use this information passage to the completion of some end.

I find uses of pop psyche references to schizophrenia useful in terms of the descriptive rather than diagnostic impression of my works. Fredric Jameson's articulate reference to the subject has paralleled this line of thinking to some degree. As he relates Lacan, we are in "the position of grasping schizophrenia as the breakdown of the relationship between signifiers".³

The temporal quality of these paintings especially in layering, i.e. Aiel-on and Catatonia, at once express the schizophrenic logic of current cultural systems. TV for instance, applies what Neil Postman refers to as an "and then" rather than a "because" sensibility. Segments are lined up one after another with no apparent relationship, no deeper explication or dissemination. The news, for instance, scene by scene, the "and then" occurs.

Ambivalence & anxiety act as methods of restraint, a distance created not so much from fear as from disillusionsment, not so much from utter revulsion as resistance, in the feeling that there must be a better way, to live and to express, again there is a 'hovering over'. The scan, the process of a search for plausibility.

I came home one day to see the dog on the front porch. With a light whimper and tapping paws, he pleadingly looked to me to release him from his chain. The chain was attached to his collar but not attached to anything at the other end. In fact he was free to roam all along had he tested it. His conformity to what usually is his tether kept him there. I bring in this metaphor because I

see how difficult it is to test one's boundaries. Many people don't trust the freedom of knowing themselves over the workaday situations that bring them security. It takes much effort either way. Maybe too much freedom can alienate one who doesn't have the presence of mind to know what to do with it.

Modality, Confinement and Liberation:

"What was objected to as experimental in the formative phase...was essentially its criticism of this discrepancy: particularly of the way in which idiom had degenerated into a sort of padding between material and composition."

T.W. Adorno from Vers une Musique Informelle

In general every art movement has contained its significance (manifest) and set up for failure. The modal quality is to say, "That's not it, that's not it, that's not it.....", after every turn. Each time a coinage is produced, it's value, once determined becomes... useless. A new mint gets set up in an infinite series. The mode becomes over determined and loses its vitality, like a cliché. In an effort to contain entropy or find a stabilizing conclusion even with an awareness that this is only temporary, the struggle lies in differentiating between what is just information and what can hold as solid knowledge or wizdom.

Could it just be boredom and what Niel Postman might call a ceaseless need to be entertained? Ancient Egypt (the very germ of western civilization) produced a culture that changed so little, comparatively, for so long. We are far, far from that kind of stability, that cyclical knowledge became un-moored and spiral like, not to return to zero. No recurrent flood washes the arts to its foundation. It has been de-established, and any connotation of roots is another creation, an imaginary. In fact, it is the trivialization of our substantive cultural, narrative symbols which act as a parenthesis for this age. The
reorganization of them and integration of new symbols serve as the birthing pains of a future epistemology.

The thing that interests me in a positive light, is the kind of alchemy taking place between the various graphic elements of a given painting in my repertoire. An interest in what is existent in life that is not factually or scientifically grounded. The ineffable, as they used to call it, which in some ways may have been forsaken precisely because it cannot be quantified or applied in concrete terms. I think there's enough of this around that can somehow be included in our artistic relationship with the world. Irony and absurdity are certainly close relatives of this genre.

With the notion of its universality denied, the art cannot be read from the view of high transcendence. I am thinking of the idea discussed by Foucault of the self as not coming from a pure essence (to be 'discovered'), but as a construction, with a membrane or horizon between the inside and outside or self and not self.

RIT's Professor Suits, in the course Philosophy of Mind, put forth a similar theory in which the interaction of a suitably complex environment with a suitably complex organism is what produces 'mind'. If one were to be without the other, it would work to produce the other, as we are products of evolution -- from the environment. Likewise, if we are sensorially deprived, we hallucinate, we create a mental environment, to dream.

This interface model of the self or mind offers some closure to help examine the questions of where to place the self in a social or cultural context. It also affects how we position ourselves when we identify the 'not selves' around us (many aspects of my work are completely self reflexive as a result, looking inside, looking outside). While truth then may be considered from the view of a construct, art's usual aim regarding truth simply seeks out
plausibility as an aim. Works can be based on realities, as situations without having to pose a universal truth. If they might be regarded as plausible, it is to the situation of which the work is a treatment.

Post structuralism is grounded in the idea that the "individual subjective experience is mediated by the social and cultural schema imbedded on us (or into which the self is an enfolding) and which is beyond our individual control." 4 Where much art of divergent topical interests is involved (whether as a private therapy or public commentary), a first step must acknowledge such a mediation to challenge the determinations, by reflection, of the social discourse. Because of the stifling nature of society; the impositions and contradictions against our beliefs in liberty (agency) as revealed in post structural theory, this acknowledgment is a positive step. The question is not so much of reclamation as it is one of, "what are we to do now?"

So, strategically, as for the conventional access and presentation of information vs. my interest in withholding and hovering, I have kept in mind an aspect of information theory, which states that, "If a situation is highly organized so that the possible consequents have a high degree of probability, then if the probable occurs, the information communicated by the message is minimal. If, on the other hand, the situation is less predictable so that the antecedent-consequent relationship does not have a high degree of probability, then the information contained will be high." 5

In dealing with the crisis' in representation that I have discussed up to now, confidence in improvisatory activity, and utilizing intuition as much as


possible in making art work, have so far cured me of any inability's to actually get some painting done, at the same time also often relieving me of the ordered or predictable resolution. Compare *Idiom Abutment* with *Aiei - On*, we can see that the conventionality of *Idiom*’s appearance seems more refined, plausible, but acts to cut off a deep resonance which *Aiei* offers in the voice of the work, given time.

However, to recoup the work from pure improvisatory speculation, which may hinder any further reading of the piece, I have tried to keep in mind Kant's idea on the balance of concept and intuition. In holding such a balance between structure and chaos, the relationship between the constant and its permutation is legible beyond its own inscriptive activity.
INTERMEDIA RELATIONSHIPS: TOWARD THE COMPREHENSION OF MY ARTISTIC OEUVRE

At this point I shall identify and to some extent analyze the various artistic idioms I have been involved with. Although using a particular approach in a series, a conceptual similarity in the resulting group doesn't necessarily form a signature style. As I will relate in the following paragraphs there are many approaches to particular subject matter which produce divergent presences and 'takes' on that topic matter.

From the perspective of 'intermedia' (Fluxus artist Dick Higgins' term for crossing mediums while focusing on the same topic matter), I would like to introduce my work with painting in relation to my work with other mediums to anchor it among the simile of artistic interests.

For about a decade now, in addition to painting, I have been working with music/soundart, video, assemblage sculpture, photocopy and networking arts. The main recurrent themes in all of my work deal (physically) with texture, overlay/underlay, episodic sequencing and questions of border/boundary cognition, hybridization and recombinant (or recyclation) structuring. The work has been done at intervals, more or less intensely with one or another medium and sometimes as a collaborative effort with a partner, small group and in the case of mail art - a community of like minded others.
I am a founding member of the experimental music ensemble Lumber (1989 - present) and the alternative rock group Deerpark (1987 - present). My solo project, d’Zoid, since 1985 has involved electronic soundart & media manipulation.

In 1984 I created a xerox magazine with a friend, John Wischmann. He came to me with a two page local poetry flier, we called it Forced Poetry. He transferred out of RIT later in the year and I changed the magazine to include xerography, got involved - slowly at first - with the international mailart scene, postal networking, called it Foist Magazine and expanded the format to include all kinds of work until it was running 60 to 80 pages in length. By ’86 I started doing cassette compilations of experimental, alternative music, noise and soundart. In ’89 I applied for and received a $3,000 LIFT grant through Arts for Greater Rochester to do an LP record. As editor and producer of Foist Magazine, I released 7 issues of the international survey of experimental printed media. Surveying xerography, collage, performance documents, poetry, and mail art. Via Foist and my alter tag d’Zoid, I contacted, corresponded and traded work with artists, writers, musicians, freaks and ‘cultural workers’ from North and South America, Eastern and Western Europe, Japan and Australia. Hybridization and cross-pollination in the exchange of ideas form the impetus for producing Foist.

My work with xerography has been traded internationally through the alternative ‘zine and mailart network and exhibited in Maine, London, Portugal, Japan, Brazil and Norway as well as the Cell gallery and Pyramid Arts Center locally. The work is of two strains; one involves recycylation of images on top of each other in a montage style which can then be reduced or enlarged.
and re-Xeroxed to produce 'third' imagery, conceptually derived from the literary "third mind" projects of William S. Burroughs and Brian Gyson. The other approach uses portrait photo proofs from local studios. The faces are collaged together to form new composite identities. These fractured portraits are then photocopied, some with text cut from found sources -- sometimes political sometimes silly -- but usually of a descriptive or taxonomic order. These were then enlarged and used as sources for painting in my final project for my BFA and for the first half of my time studying for a Masters degree.

Musically I have collaborated with others and worked on a solo project (d'Zoid) which again involves texture and layering. Some of the work acknowledges the structural nature of the working materials. After some time I became aware that I was also fashioning my work approach in a manner consistent with what modernist composer John Cage had referred to as "determinate" and "indeterminate" systems. Electronic recording equipment (for video as well as music) in its physical structure has allowed for artists to engage in pursuing the metaphysical aspects of how a system shapes our perception and vise versa. Some of the precedents had been set for this kind of technical manipulation by the tangible progression which had been happening via the avant garde practitioners in electronic music, and with musique concrète (the composing of new music and sound art with isolated properties of audio tape).

The subjectivity of perception has been an underlying theme of my work to date, a theme which ties into the ongoing question of how it shall be cast outward, to the world, visually and aurally. By exploring what the tools of sound making and recording do, and for that matter what tools are available in painting in terms of procedural methodology, I've been working to discover a
palette for personal art making that, while it already has a tradition, is somehow distilled by individual experience (in effect again relating to the stasis by giving a yes/no answer to the statement, "If you've seen one snow flake, you've seen them all."

In addition, rhythm & texture became a focal point for the audio work. I sometimes think of a Brian Eno quote to the effect that melody in our western scale has been through so many permutations by the 16th century that the further use in this century is about its mediation via textural applications. With a growing awareness of sound quality over tonal arrangement, the attendant textural quality is applied in the 1989 cassette release from d'Zoid, entitled Swirl. A review from Ear Magazine (NYC, 10/89) had this to say:

Armed with only tragically outdated electronics and low-budget instruments, d'Zoid (Scott Dohring) still manages to form audio collages rich and complex enough to be hung in the Met. Swirl, a virtual quantum leap from his earlier work, is his best so far, possessed of a striking originality in its approach to sonic construction. Dohring derives inspiration from his background in visual arts, giving rise to new esthetic strategies, ranging from episodic sound transfiguration to contrasted layering of textures, never giving in to gratuitous repetition. Expect a touch of techno shamanism.

Pieces from Swirl were included in the 1990 compilation Porkopolis and received airplay through a series set up by the Visual Studies Workshop called "Maybe But Not Necessarily Music".
Deerpark began in 1987 as a collaboration with Jon Hull as a soundart/noise project, although I had worked with Jon for two years previously on isolated performances. We collected sounds from machines and vents and used them as backing tapes with guitars, digital drums and an old mono phonic Korg synthesizer. We called it 'lounge industrial' because it was quieter, more introspective and cerebral than a lot of the screaming sin and skin influences like Fetus, Einsturzende Nuebauten, and Psychic TV happening at the time.

By 1990, Deerpark was evolving into a regular alternative rock band. As we added a drummer and guitarist (I played bass, Jon guitar), we found we could get more shows. I concentrated my efforts toward the band and it became more music like.

Eventually we formed an offshoot group to retain some of the efforts of the earlier experimental incarnation of Deerpark and called it Lumber. Lumber is an improvisational ensemble, formed in 1990, which explores rhythm and texture through a mix of primal drumming, meditative soundscapes, 'tiny music' and 'urban' noise, using a variety of found, homemade and traditional instrumentation. The group has collaborated with audio-visual artists, performance artists, poets and dancers, as well as performing on its own. Lumber received the 1991 Rochester Artists award for performing arts from the Pyramid Arts Center.

Deerpark also utilize audio-visuals & dancers on occasion. We completed a 12 song recording session at Wharton Tiers' Fun City Studios in NYC in May of '91. In September of '93, the band completed a 6 song session at Godiva Studios in Rochester. We are included in the compilations A Joyful noise: Dissident Music from Europe, America and Japan, Produced by Sterile Records in London (1990), The Foist compilation (1989), and the 1992 The Bug Jar CD Compilation.
Both Lumber and Deerpark have the same core members and have accomplished numerous performances at local venues and on the radio as well as in Buffalo & Ithaca, NY and at Goddard College in Vermont. The groups have opened for national and internationally touring acts; Kingmissle, The Haters, Chicken Scratch, Insane Jane, Bongwater & Phantom Tollbooth.

Aspiring to carry non-documentary and non-narrative video beyond the seduction of an artistically exhausted and isolated "retinal" or special effects use of the late 60's (which eventually veered toward commercial significance for the TV industry), I am questioning how the components of video can still be worked toward a reflexive, metaphysical stature. In identifying the physical processes of video, beyond feedback, I've been using 'rescan' (videotaping off the picture tube) of both literal images and imagery discovered from stills of video glitches to develop a vocabulary for what writer John Hanhardt described in the 1987 Whitney Biennial catalogue, as "working toward a new visual language." Using a friends desktop production tool called the Video Toaster, I've been able to distort, layer and re-color the videos as well. The video work also figures well with my audio experiments and with lumber.

My use of assemblage has been primarily concerned with outdoor sites, utilizing industrial and domestic scrap as well as wood and stone to create totemic structures; they look as sites where the pseudo-religious have or could carry out pseudo-rituals. But for me the exercises at these sites are methods of recycling wasted objects, exhausted of their intended use, into carriers of new meaning, above the resultant sculpture grottoes that one may happen across in the outdoors, as double simulacra, one for the meaning the objects once
stood for and then as some icon which the viewer can immediately sense in relation to an animism, as an opening to the other world, lost but to the deep cerebral genetic shaman memory ghost. Something of this effect has been prevalent in all my various endeavors but as a matter of concentration, it hasn't always come forward as the dominant aspect.
RELINQUISH OR RECONCILE:
THE PLIGHT OF THE REARGUARD.

Key issues in the epistemological shift we are experiencing today relate to conventionalism in value perception and the ebbing of free agency, metaphysics, the value of the subconscious and spirituality. I would like to discuss why I continue to practice studio painting. Why and what it means to me to paint in a manner somehow remote from, or in the face of technologically based, activist, and language based art, which today holds sway as the progressing art forms. How can formalist art converse with new ideas about art?

I certainly don't intend to suggest big answers, but I hope to use this opportunity to sort and air out some of my impressions on the matter. In this way the masters program obviously serves as not only an accomplishment in itself but a place to embark from. The challenge shall be to continue to study and practice without the anchor of the academic institution, my personal world is full of the usual constraints on the ability to continue to make art with devotion. Please be prepared to go along with my muddled thinking in this foray, and see it as part of the process. Besides, these are muddled and confounding matters, even for articulate and competent writers.
Painting in the contemporary scene is in a problematic situation. Since the late sixties it has been more reactionary than radical, and in a culture where artistic advancement is based on radical gestures, painting is simply becoming less effective. In this discussion, I am not referring to art market indicators, for painting still holds a strong position there. But painting, especially non-objective painting, has been said to be irresponsible to its culture, as it is a solitary, introspective art form. Nevertheless it is in this way that the desire to comment on the human condition (or enigma) can be carried out, with the personal vehicle of painting, to opt out of a competition for advancing what in the end may be a pretentious and flawed enterprise.

As various fields of advanced thinking are more and more tied to technology for providing physical evidence of their endeavors, painting occurs as low tech and uncritical, especially when eschewing its mimetic heritage. But a progress most certainly erodes as well as imbues. The recent "national school" in post-formal, post-structural thinking might redress the painters exile in light of the new sedimentations following the latest phase(fad) of speculations and demarcation on the present episteme shift -- whether or not its seen as ruptural or fluid.

For painting, at work since, say, Lascaux, a visual and non-functional aspect (the esthetic) in its permutations of social and nature cognition, mutely bypasses questions of motivational purposefulness. When the power supply cuts out (gets cut off?), the hand still speaks to the eye as long as there is light -- this is low tech but should not be confused with nostalgia. It is actually highly political in a grass roots way, because it doesn't require the cash for technological tools.
We have here the mammals (nurturing) heart but predators eye,¹ and in the perceptual sense, a visual acquisition is the opening for a metaphor of reckoning that has an *interstasis*, paralleling the literary, and the aural. Today the individual gains are met with a historical amnesia. Multiple linguistics or means, are used for a reference to humanities knowledge, which it consumes, to energize its self-understanding and placement, to understand while eventually only repeatedly supplanting the ontological conception of that material figurative.

The futility of that game and the century long disengagement from 'aesthetics' has led us to the theme of a non utopian social justice in the lifeworld, apparently without spiritual or metaphysical aide. A sad effect of modernism is its insistence that innovation requires a cognition of technical and objective order rather than its exercise as a subjective residual. The progression moves logically to a resolution; Ad Rienhardt does a black canvas, it speaks as much to the condition of art than the condition of humanity (which has somewhat become articulate only from a personal perspective). Joe Smith does a black canvas a year later and it has no value. This absurd condition of the modality of art has in no way been redressed by postmodernism. A modal message gets over used, loses its value, causing the need for a new mode.

There are less constants as a result, in our society. Art, science, etc., are focused on the surface orientations of change. Egyptian art, while a great constant for thousands of years, but also offered only to 'serve the few', has no real transference in our understanding.

¹ If one sees our bodies as unchanged since being evolutionarily organized for hunting and gathering, all the ergonomics we do are still based on that original survival principle — acquisition.
Liberating effects are found for us in the exercise of innovation but it is known that it is not to be considered final. The surrender to the act of chasing the rainbow serves, like Sisyphus' rolling the stone, as the liberating force. Like a hunger, this liberating effect is heralded on consumption, denied on digestion, and finally eviscerated with contempt simply for its exhaustion. So, like a pendulum, the dissent from such a surrender then liberates. The effect is a result of our logocentrism, the Zen description of trying to scratch ones foot with the shoe still on. Because our search for understanding may not be one which can ultimately be expressed in words, a picture can pose as being more 'trustworthy.' Yet it's interpretation, again, due to the paradoxes of language and interpretation itself, cannot be fully corroborated.

We are at a time when our influences are focused more on culture than nature. Much of today's art seems severed from original impelling forces, be they spiritual, mythological or occult, because of those foundations, still lingering, being understood via the observation of nature. The impulse of art then, in shifting focus from nature to culture, is informed differently but still has this hunger. For it was on the presumption of leisure (Velbin), afforded by the acquisition, the manipulation of anything external to us, from individual to group to nation, from the survival to the subsistence to the domination, that took us away from mythos and toward logos, psychologically and technologically, but in its visual ideogrammatic formulations as well.

It seems that our efforts are continually to debunk the mysteries with quantitative evidence, while the "ghost in the machine" lurks in any new construction... absurdity will remain with us no matter how microscopic our ability to define and even if temporarily, to 'put to rest' a given conflict or enigma.
And then, being physically and psychically supportive of, but inarticulately visually expressive of this, a new look at subjectivity recommended itself to me even though the consensus of radical thought, as I understand it, finds it unfriutworthy. Metaphysics and aesthetics have become implausible now, so it somehow seems useless and therapeutic to attempt to go on in this direction.

But an impasse may deteriorate while we look away, directing our attention at other things. Precisely, in relation to another discernment. The term 'neo' may be suspect, but a certain direction should not be condemned because an earlier effort was discredited, exhausted, reviled.

As a painter in the Nineties, I am interested in how (or whether) a reconciliation between expressive quality and social criticism might be played out in art. How can a work display the progression to balance between this motivational schism, its continuing shift as a model of self absorbed surface arrangement to the hybridization of tools and approaches? What teleological strategies are available to maintain significance and attentiveness over resistance to rhetoric? It is a question of entertainment vs serious discovery (while each has a value and place for good), of building a ground on which good work can be shared without a souring didacticism being employed.

The relinquishment of formal concerns for instrumentalist concerns in artistic critique has deprived and relieved many motivations for art making to those who seek a reading from the play of signs that is not simply a group of handed down values, nor swallowed up by the media (culture vultures?) to be diluted of its value. This presentation hopes to offer postmodern painting in terms of art that does not advertantly admit complacency to esthetic postures,

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but also work in which the representation of ideological concerns needn't usurp formal quality.

At the same time there is the danger of a kind of fence sitting, or rather a vacillation between an all encompassing agreement, and the picking and choosing which begins as a result of being well informed and ends up simply as a matter of taste. Many times I find myself identifying with the Taoist like position, "crouch low as the arrows fly." In all honesty, it should be the way one finds oneself in their art. Not as a total disregard, but this may be a good route to relieve the nagging suspicion that western thinking will never advance itself enough to cure our bewilderment at the world.

Comparing the conceptual lineage and strategy as painting and photography interact; early in the century the photograph frees painting from realist constraints to enter its expressionist and then formalist phases. In the last two decades, as a result of photographic onslaught in mass media, the approaches in post modernism again frees painting, this time from its contentual constraints in "Greenbergian" formalism.

Yet due to the malleability of the medium (paintings 'hand-oriented' properties), the retention of an "inner directed" effort is inherited from formalism in these paintings, surfacing as the maintenance of esthetic pleasure, while being recontextualized in the form of a hybridized or 'cutty-pastey' approach. This could be viewed as a capacity for painting to 'keep up' with the national discourse or as a last clutch at validity for an art form already in exile, except as a symbolic commodity of late capitalism.

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The eighties critique of mass culture then brought us into the nineties with a new way of dealing with subjectivism, as a detournment. The issue of manifold approaches was brought on in part by artists working in totally cultural concerns and often involved diaretical work such as personal biographies or localized projects, both serving to acknowledge non-universalism. In this pluralization of methods of making art, truths must be regarded as specific to each situation. No longer is there a hegemonic colonizer seen as the bearer of universals.

Determinism, relativity, and subatomic theory have all contributed to a wavering of totalizing "truth" principles in human behavior. Until recently "man" has been the sole object of knowledge, but as Michel Foucault suggests, "this figure is the product of a particular configuration of knowledge and will disappear as that configuration changes, i.e. molecular biology, and biochemistry look at processes and elements not particular to our species". This belies the judgment that our thoughts are normative with other times, cultures, etc.

Although these themes become clearer when a body of works from various approaches are seen, we might look at them as putting out ideas as questioning language without being didactic. The effect of not accepting any one approach, of parallel vs. equal experience, and the dynamic convergence of simultaneous lines of thought give legitimacy to exploring the configuration a multi-system culture.

While the idea of sub-cultures and hierarchies have been studied through the social democratic lens since the post W.W.2 era; economic class strata, feminism, race, sexual preference, age, and regional and ethnic

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4 A small advance built on previous knowledge rather then a revolutionary maneuver.

groupings have all become cultural lenses through which to present and receive information. While this has afforded a certain attempt at 'leveling', ideally to bring a Jeffersonian democracy to bear to deal with such difference, these politics reveal that commercial culture has tried to presuppose a merging cultural homogeneity which did not come through. The culture as a uni-expressive element presents the fiction of transmutability.

As the current battles of culture are taking place in relation to multiculturalism, the humanist principles founded in Rome act as a mask for the dominant paradigm, accepting and again co-opting. The inclusion of "the other" is reflected in our second amendment to the constitution. But the origins and purpose of humanitas were as opposed to barbarians. Heidegger's interpretation -- Hintergehen -- or deceptive circumvention, was a colonization by means of taking in the other, an ideological outflanking. Thus in appearance overcoming binary 'us and them' logic by "encouraging otherness in the name of disinterestedness, free inquiry, individualism, and pluralism, but only to incorporate and accommodate this difference to the ontologically prior identical whole: to assign this 'other' its 'proper' place within its normalizing and pacifying circle. Which is to say, to colonize it".6

The changes in our arts reflect the necessity to overcome injustices by utilizing a multicultural representation, and would have us move towards a closer connection with the society itself, so that following the 'balkanization' would be the reinvention of larger, unifying narratives.

Puritanical as it may sound, for myself, I don't consider the idea that I personally (as a heterosexual white middle-class male) have some amassed power base that I could relinquish even though I may be perceived or treated in some way relative to such a theme culturally.

6 Ibid. p17.
While discrimination is necessary to isolate a concept in order to better understand its contribution, this doesn't need to be a value judgment per se. If I listen to rock more than jazz it doesn't mean it's any better. Taste and value are two entirely different orders of cognition.

In addition, thinking about audience as part of the process of the artwork (how the audience 'performs' the reading via different levels of visual and critical literacy), and that the audience comes from no single unified reference point is part of a set of ideas implied in what video maker Peer Bode terms "post media". Post Media for Bode has to do with "reclaim(ing) information, knowledge, sensory experience, as elements of imagination and subjectiveness, human use, the performance of reception". It acknowledges the increasing accessibility for personal electronic media practice and speculates on the possibilities for electronic democracy with the wiring together of TV, telephone and computer.

The territories of future art will be mapped out within the media/computer revolution. While subjectivism and multiculturalism get sorted out and fed back into the cultural system; as video artist Tony Conrad has noted, issues such as networking art, education and industry will be pivotal to the 90's. We are at the stage where artists are, as Bode notes "repopulating in the technoworld" and in the new "community(,) is a place of interactions and discussions".

For painting, these residues have been equivalent yet solitary. The question of accessibility to working tools & materials, while also a financial one, is one more easily overcome as a low tech means to production. The difference is the question of accessibility to reproduction, via criticism, and the gallery system. Static work can be presented on a picture tube (given the

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This and the following quotes from Bode are from an unpublished interview I conducted in February, 1994. Peer Bode, is an Associate Professor of Video Arts at the School of Art and Design, Alfred State University.
electronic alteration and degradation) while the opposite occurs in relation to bringing back the aura of the singular or unique artwork.

Beyond the concerns of technology, there remains the issue of utilizing art for an activist/social critique purpose. While I certainly agree and support its use even when it amounts to mere sloganeering and 'preaching to converts' within the artworld, or when as it is actually effective in terms of 'cultural work'\(^8\) outside the art world, the best I can do is be aware of this type of approach. I think it's wrong to feel that any other kind of work is useless. In my view the new work is a continuation of modernism in a radical form rather than an abrogation of it. Being after modernism in the term post-modern works the way post-impressionism was after impressionism. It added to its tradition even if there were breaks in the continuum.

I prefer to see activism in terms of its political activity first and foremost. Therefore, I would rather attend a rally or work on educating, or revealing a power issue without having it cloaked as an artistic activity. Let it be what it is — political. However, art is available to any means of elucidating an issue, political or otherwise.\(^9\) Docu-art, activist and socially critical art can successfully work as a tag-along before, after, along side or hopeful for legislative changes. I don't question whether political art is art. Art can be everywhere (so is god), and has no hold on any one front of knowledge-seeking or question-raising, but that becomes a side issue to what is specific to the content of a project. In effect, as a sociological issue is raised as a project, if a grant were applied for under the rubric of sociology rather than art, might it stand to get more funding anyway?

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8 Usually most effective as a concrete localized project, or conceptually in terms of the resolution of a problem of specific social design/recognition rather than an ethereal or esthetic exercise.

9 Whatever pressures the NEA may feel, art throughout history has been available as a political tool, whether to raise consciousness or to lower it.
It seems that the new art -- at whatever historical stage in modernism, has to kill it's father, to wipe the game board of its pieces, to ditch the previous configuration in order to be, in order to get a hearing, to set up a foundation for its own institutionalization (usually within the same generation) and then co-option and inactivity or eventual ineffectiveness beyond its initial advance.

Then the phase of re-examination of the previous comes, as I believe has begun. And the voice that wins out, rather than a backlash, is the reconciliation, the synthesis. In this case the transgressive\textsuperscript{10} quality of formalism is to be recuperated, while the limitations of its purism and elitism are let to fade away, before the new radical gesture is articulated and again swallowed up and so forth.

In the semiology of language bound works, I also find a vacuum when it comes to my attempts produce such work. I have used text in xerography and video, and it has been very common in painting and photography in much work of the last quarter century. Yet the thing I am interested in is what a visual image can offer besides being literally illustrative (a narrative representation) or requiring a statement alongside it to enable the transmission of an idea.

There is the sphere of the visual that on some portion, even peripherally, is not able to be fully elucidated via text. This is not simply to say that painting in this matter attempts to derive its value from concerns with the ineffable. It is more a parallel of sight with poetic economy than descriptive portrayal. Sensory experience is a function 'privatized'\textsuperscript{11} by the

\textsuperscript{10} Morgan, ibid. See "Formalism as a Transgressive Device," p54.
brain with its own sort of subjective present in time, and some would go as far as saying it has no objective reality whatsoever.

Being that the visual is already a vestige tied to language, as culture is tied to language, as language pervades even our dreams as we sleep, I understand the course of a visual event as scanned and transferred to its language referents following and in accord with perception. I simply have more confidence as an image maker with sight and sound than with words.

I am obviously very concerned over how my work can fit in and be of some contribution to the energy of the day. I sometimes wistfully desire a 'cause' to make my art respond to. But I also think of what a jurist for the Shoestring Gallery's recent Woman's Work show said, "I'd rather see a good watercolor than a badly done work that's au courant."

I realize how different my work is from much of what is considered advanced at this time, because it acts as a respite to, rather demonstration of, the dominant ideologies. I don't question the fact that art can be oppositional to and supported by bourgeois culture (that has been a given since WWI era modernism and has never really spoken to the disenfranchised even when that is its primary subject matter).

I am hoping the kind of work I am interested is offering an alternative rather than apology, backlash, or simple throwback. Rather than producing work that is simply "declarative... (which) can do little to stimulate the growth of a really troubling doubt", the last phase of my thesis work has been a germination away from a strategy of easy recognizance, that in the end won't

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just shrug at the miasma of corporate victoriousness and advert/info inundation even if it were to end up on it's walls.

I see changes, even when radical and abrupt, from a macro-view. Change is always tied to the ideas and structures that occur before it. In this sense humanity may look at this century from the future and see our current ruptures as rather fluid.

Lastly, I would like to close with this statement from Joeseph Nechvatal, which I have found useful in addressing the matter of painting in relation to post studio practices:

"The outgrowth of painting as an institution, from representation to abstraction, allows us to trace painting's dissolution into handicraft and its regeneration as idea: painting as critical theory, as meta-idea, as sign vehicle, as representation of representations, as ideas about the discourse of painting, as source of archeological information about itself. This reconstruction of painting is a renewal brought about through a reproduction of its own terms, but from outside the discourse of painting as a handicraft. It is thus a painting less devout and more promiscuous, which criticizes the discourse of traditional painting, for such painting still functions as the standard, measuring the distance (difference) to which new art goes, and indicating whence it has come. Let us see an end to the endless declarations of << the end of painting >>, which now so routinely hold conservative painting in a state of cynical being." 13

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