

A greyscale print of a yawning dawggy – all floppy ears and snarling teeth is actually on closer inspection a horned gargoyle. The beast, and I think it is right to call the creature in question by such a name, is looking at itself. It appears symmetrical, a reflection, two lolloping tongues touching at the tip. Whilst the gaping mouth surely makes a sound, something demonic, deep, the hound raises an ear to its twin ear and listens, as though to a whisper. You would think that the animal might be salivating - and a dripping jaw is a living jaw - but this one is bone dry. Actually, I don't mind the teeth, but the horns really bother me. Surrounding the dog are bloody fingerprints - placed in dainty clusters like so many deadly garlands. I grew up with this image multiplied countless times on wallpaper, and would look at it helplessly, the only witness to those moments of anger and anguish which peppered my childhood.

Luckily, the walls in my home were papered over with something less satanic and more seventies. Not so for the imaginary inhabitant in the art-domestic settings Jennie Temple has made for her exhibition *Ruin*. Here we have a backdrop where repetition is both the harbinger and agent in something sinisterly elegant. We learn that the artist collects the fingerprints from early and pre-renaissance depictions of violence. The violence is subtracted from its context, rendered monotonous and chic. The technique of montage is used by Temple in the print which is installed on top of the wallpaper, part of the *I Want What you Want Don't Want Want* series where the dichotomy between the material world and the spiritual planes are spliced.

My proposed Mphil/PhD thesis is an exploration into the syncretism of flatness and lived experience in contemporary art. I hope to create a body of curatorial and written work that explores the prevalence of flat interfaces such as painting, screen spaces, digital screen technologies, virtual realities, and photography, as a locus of understanding. I will be looking at what this propensity, and the tension between distanced and embodied experiences. In order to do identify fully understand what is at stake this I will also examine the preoccupation with rendering things flat since Upper Palaeolithic paintings filled the crevices and plateaus of caves that will challenge the notion of a primitive mentality and offer fresh insights into the effects of artworks on cognition.

My particular interest is in the affects of flat interfaces seen in the midst of immersive installations that disrupt the Cartesian separation of body and mind by layering screen images, objects, and sound. Framing my thoughts is the writing of Giambattista Vico who stated the obvious when he mused that the human mind gives shape to the material world but proposed imaginatively, that the world takes the shape of the human mind. Perhaps this unwitting urge to project outward the inner workings of the mind can be traced and a human propensity demonstrated.

My case studies will be artworks and exhibitions, such as the *International Exhibition of Surrealism*, 1938, and Ola Pherson's *Hunt for the Una Bomber*, 2005, which employ layered planes and interfaces¹. The importance of the artworks in this thesis for me is in compelling the viewer into both immersive embodied attention and the distanced traditions of aesthetic contemplation. The ways in which these notions are complicated by artworks such as the recent installation of Gregor Schneider, *Kinderzimmer* at the Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester also demonstrates the power of juxtaposing the immersive and the plane. With this particular example a direct analogy to the experience of paintings in caves will be hard to avoid.

My approach to curating is driven by my urge to extrapolate or reconcile my experience inside and outside the gallery, this is mirrored by the object of this thesis, the syncretism of flatness and lived experience in contemporary art. All experience is fundamentally limited and flawed, by this I mean that as experience is subjective and subject to bodily senses it follows (and neuroscience demonstrates) that it is impossible to fully absorb and synchronise the pictures, sounds, smells and touch in the flesh of the world. I hypothesize that art and particular gallery environments highlight this lack or loss, but of course in a fascinating way, or I would just become forlorn. And stop. I instead intend to embrace the futility of an all encompassing experience in the best way I know how – curating and writing. My studies will be equal parts curating and writing, mixing together occasionally like oil and water.

¹ In fact the exhibition on the opening night with Duchamp's coal bags suspended from the ceiling and Man Ray's 'plan B' lighting of the exhibition by torchlight somewhat resembles the sensorious experience at the crux of my thinking and will be a useful case study for this thesis.

I will argue that the disjuncture of real embodied experience and flat interfaces often results in a melancholic affect. For the purpose of this study melancholia can be understood as the thoughtful or gentle sadness associated with the feeling of a loss – in this case the loss of an object in space or the loss of oneself through absorption in space. It is in the tension between the disinterested approach to viewing art, and the heavily theorized embodied experience in which the melancholic affect is found, a melancholy, which I argue translates into my lived experience within the world. The melancholic tendency is the underlying emotion of this study, and my practice. The situations of daily life and the push me pull you of experience between total sensorium-haptic of the exterior world and the striated requirements of long distance viewing in the cinema, or close range interfaces of google maps and computer screens respectively merge and dislocate.

The case studies of artworks elucidate how we experience and make sense of multi-layered existence. They also highlight similar examples occurring at completely different points in time. My reliance on feeling and cognition in my approach to artworks is heightened as I dwell on the nuances of a particular experience of art. In order to write about these experiences I return through the images of my thoughts rather than immediately cogitating, digesting and regurgitating the artworks. It is at this point before writing that experience becomes flattened for me, caught in the mind's eye, before pitching a tent in the imagination of the other. What this exploration of dimensions can do for our understanding of art and the nature of contemporary technological experiences will only be as useful as my descriptions and curatorial dalliances allow.

Rather than postulate different modes of spectatorship and interfacing as a dichotomy, my thesis and the artworks in this study, make like contemporary experience, intertwining and sustaining modes of experience, a syncretism of flatness and lived experience in contemporary art. The online Lets Paint TV allows the viewer to navigate the trauma of creative practice by skyping real time philosophical questions at the shamanistically suited figure of artist John Kilduff through a Russian doll play of painting as performance, amplified to number eleven with lets paint whilst, blending, basting a chicken and exercising. The acrobatic ways in which the notions of the flatness of perception and dimensional theories have informed modern and contemporary art production here seem paramount in my investigation. As I am operating in a plugged in,

globalised and historically flattened world, my case studies reflect this, it is my bringing them all together temporarily through this writing and exhibition which here constitutes my local.²

One of the interesting things for me about art is that, albeit periodically, since the Upper Paleolithic Niaux painted caves, there has been something of a preoccupation with flatness. Technologies come, technologies go, but what remains is flatness both in contemporary art and in more everyday experiences. Unflinching in the face of quantum mechanics, psychoanalysis, wind turbines and war, flatness prevails as the human beings modus operandi. Paintings, microfilm, photography, film, television, computer screens, all share a certain quality so obvious it hardly worth mentioning. We explore things under and over the three dimensions we are prone to. Using any sense we have access to, a navigation in the world occurs which does not, on the interface of it, have much relation to two dimensions. New technologies of flatness have been seen to mirror the working of the mind and images of thought, flat but, like the internet, with limitless depth of field and content. Recent writers such as Stephen Crocker and Robert Witkin, Caroline Jones and Ken Hillis have explored the chiasma of the sensorium, flatness and depth of thought, and I intend to explore this through my studies. I want to employ various approaches to synthesise the plethora of archaeological data documenting our ancestors artistic (or other) environs with certain examples of contemporary art.

I envisage this post graduate study as an opportunity to specialize in research and writing in order to further my knowledge and the knowledge of others. The integration of studio-based practice with theoretical work is an essential component of my teaching philosophy, as is a transdisciplinary approach, sharing methodologies where appropriate with cognitive science, sociology, phenomenology and quantum science. I would be a committed student teacher, and intend to forge a rigorous level of cultural theorist expertise through postgraduate study, combined with furthering my level of engagement with undergraduate students. I see my interest in transdisciplinary approaches to thinking about modern and contemporary art as key in developing my social vision of art, a reciprocal relationship of knowledge bringing forth action, and action bringing forth knowledge.

² However paradoxically wherever possible without the use of irresponsible flights of fancy

My research will take my audiences and me on a dimensional journey from big Brane to little brain with art as the conductor (brine). The artists which I will be looking to for answers will be amongst others John Kilduff - Lets Paint TV, Ola Pherson, Janet Cardiff and George Burres Miller Gregor Schneider, Marcel Duchamp. A scientific extrapolation of the substance of the universe and the cogs of the mind will mingle with a particular sociology of art and experience. The spectre of the esoteric will be neatly avoided by the close analysis of artworks, exhibitions and real time case studies which will throw into sharp relief the object of research – namely the syncretism of flatness and lived experience, the nature of this experience and the impact of scientific discovery and technologies in contemporary art. If indeed we do, as Vico argues, create the world in the shape of the human mind, perhaps the distilled experiences presented through art and examined in this study, suspend us in the tension between a bodily and perspectival experience and in doing so mirror the human condition.

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