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The conversation between painting and photography in the 21st century: An analysis of selected paintings by Peter Doig (1959-) and Luc Tuymans (1958-)

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2013-08-28
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The Conversation Between Painting and Photography in the 21st Century: An analysis of selected paintings by Peter Doig (1959-) and Luc Tuymans (1958-)

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A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Arts in Fine Art by Dissertation.

Johannesburg, 2013

Declaration:

I, Kate Yvonne Margot Lewis, declare that this dissertation is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Master of Arts in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination in any other university.

_____ Kate Lewis

_____ day of _____, 2013

Abstract

In this research I explore the relationship between painting and photography, focusing on the natures of both mediums and how they are questioned when creating a painting from a photographic source. I have selected works by contemporary painters Peter Doig and Luc Tuymans for analysis, examining the ways in which their images force us to question the assumed 'truth value' attached to photographic images. I also explore the potential for both painting and photography as mediums to portray the internal or the imagined, as well as painting's link to the concepts of artifice and construction throughout history, especially when compared to photography.

In this research I examine the early development of photography, as well as the development of 'photographic' or perspectival language in painting, both separate from and in relation to advancements in photographic technologies in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. I then look at 20th Century painters and photographers and their engagement with and criticism of photography through their work, while examining the continuing debate around the associations linked with both mediums. This leads into the examination of selected works by Peter Doig and Luc Tuymans, exploring how their use of a photographic source to create their images raises questions of representation and if these representations can be classified as truthful or imagined, transparency or construction, human or mechanical. Finally in the discussion of my own work I deal with painting's link to the internal or imagined, photography's indexical link to reality, and how through the combination of these mediums these links are challenged. This research also looks at the nature of my subject matter; the city of Johannesburg, as a site of contradiction, existing in a space that is at once real and somehow otherworldly or imagined.

Acknowledgements:

My sincerest thanks go to my supervisor Jeremy Wafer for all his assistance, patience and advice, and to the University of Witwatersrand for their financial help in the form of a bursary. Thanks to my parents Gavin and Colleen for all their support and for encouraging me in the pursuit of this degree and to Ryan for his constant emotional and financial help throughout every stage of my studies.

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Introduction

> A tomason is a thing that has become detached from its original purpose. Sometimes this detachment is so complete that the object is turned into an enigmatic puzzle; alternatively, the original purpose of the object may be quite apparent and its current uselessness touching or amusing….Tomasons thrive in the man-made world, in spaces that are constantly being remade and redesigned for other purposes, where the function of a thing that was useful and necessary may be swept away in a tide of change or washed off like a label.
>
> (Vladislavić, Ivan: Portrait with Keys – Joburg and what what, 2006, 175-176)

> Forms which are created by combining two mediums may not only question those mediums but create an entirely new narrative. “Such forms lead to media invention in relation to their history
>
> (Van Gelder, Hilde & Westgeest, Helen. Photography Theory in Historical Perspective. 2011, 3)

This dissertation, along with the practical component attached to it, deals with two aspects: first the process of creating paintings using a photographic source and the questioning of those mediums that ultimately arises when the two are combined; and second, the nature of Johannesburg as a site of contradiction, one which is echoed in the conflicting understandings of both painting and photography.

Both photography and painting have undergone similar and varying criticisms. Photography has been said to have inspired painting, been separate from it, been the truest form of representation and been labelled as pure construction. In turn it has been argued that painting is both imaginative and referential, flat and illusionistic, separate from and dependent upon photography.

In my research over the past two years I have explored the history of both mediums and their varying characteristics, discussing the questioning of these mediums that occurs when a painting uses a photographic source and looking at two artists who work in this way, namely Peter Doig and Luc Tuymans. I have further explored this questioning of painting

and photography through the creation of works which are representations of various urban scenes around Johannesburg.

Chapter One, The Development of 'Photographic Language' in Painting and the Invention of Photography, deals with the history and development of photography, and what effect this may or may not have had upon painting processes. Peter Galassi's Before Photography – Painting and the Invention of Photography (1982) was particularly helpful in an exploration of photography's invention, as well as providing descriptions of what was occurring in painting before and after photographic devices were developed.

Galassi explains how the development of linear perspective in the 15th Century allowed artists to create works which in their language appears photographic, long before the invention of the camera obscura in the 16th Century (1982, 16-18). A photographic view is described as one which is viewed through a rectangle, often with harshly cropped edges, extreme perspective techniques such as large objects in the foreground, smaller objects towards the background and a single vanishing point. This method of painting differed from previous methods of creating scenes which seemingly existed in three dimensions, which Galassi describes as a "synthesizing" approach (1982, 16). This synthesizing view involved multiple perspectives and the combination of many viewpoints on a canvas, whereas paintings which adhered strictly to the rules of linear perspective produced a view which Galassi describes as "analytical", one which focuses on a subject from a set point, as if looking through a window (1982, 16). It is this analytical view that we now associate with photographic images.

The *camera obscura*, developed in the 16th century, consisted of a lightproof room or box with a small hole inserted on one side. The refraction of light through this hole produced an inverted image of the subject that the hole was facing, projected onto the internal opposing wall or side. This could allow artists to trace an image which is taken 'directly from reality' but, as critic Svetlana Alpers argues, it is difficult to pinpoint which artists used the *camera obscura* and which did not. Looking at the work of 17th century Dutch painters who became obsessed with depicting nature faithfully, moving away from the imagined to the scientific, it is impossible to know whether they made use of the obscura or simply employed standards of one point perspective (Alpers: 1983, 30). It is however clear that it is impossible to say that an analytical view is solely attributed to photography, when linear perspective was being implemented long before photography's inception.

Similarly, the development of impressionism has often been linked to photography, a link which Kirk Varnedoe disputes in his text The Artifice of Candour, Impressionism and

Photography Reconsidered (1966, 99). Varnedoe's text was useful in further discussion of painting's development, as well as describing the kind of light that photographs capture; frozen, almost abstract forms, something which is echoed in my own work and is not linked to the way impressionists captured shifting, changing light. The argument that painting was "dead" as it could not represent subjects as faithfully as photographs is therefore disputed by Varnedoe, who argues that the lens provides a distorting, alien way of seeing and therefore cannot be said to be a true reflection of reality (1966, 103, 117). Varnedoe argues instead that the growing popularity of photography may have contributed to a greater acceptance of the strange, distorting views that one-point perspective sometimes creates (166, 103).

In the second chapter of this research, Between Painting and Photography, I enter into deeper conversation around the nature of both mediums, and begin to discuss the ways in which artists have engaged with photographs through painting, and the resultant questioning of both mediums that arose. Walter Benjamin's A Small History of Photography (1931), and his discussions around the nature of photography as well as his writings on the concept of 'aura' and its connection to painting are central in this chapter. Benjamin argues that photography is seen as an acceptable substitute for reality in a way that painting perhaps is not (1979 [1931], 242-243) and this argument is supported by Susan Sontag in her text On Photography (1979), who discusses our dependence on photographs to "record" our everyday lives (1979, 9). Both critics argue that our trust in photographs as an accurate depiction of 'the real' is linked to the photograph's indexical quality, as light reacts directly with photosensitive paper or photosensitive pixels. However Sontag points out that there is still a significant degree of manipulation that occurs in taking photographs, as light passes through the lens, which has been shown to be a way of seeing alien to that of the human eye, and that the photographer can manipulate focus, cropping and further manipulate the image in the developing process.

In his text The Painting of Modern Life (2007), which documents an exhibition held at the Hayward in London from 4 October until 30 December 2007 which featured painters who use photographs as source for their work, Ralph Rugoff confronts this contradiction that photographs can simultaneously be accepted as accurate depictions of reality and as purely imaginative constructions (2009, 19). It is this that many painters in this exhibition bring into question in their paintings, which force the viewer to question the truth value of photographs. Alternatively their use of photographic sources may attribute paintings with a level of truth which was previously unavailable in what is viewed as an imaginative medium, through their mimicking of photographic language. Painting's link to modernist values and a "Greenbergian model of… authenticity, originality and discipline specific purity" (Burgener,

1996, 16) means that we view painting as a subjective, individual construction, not a scientific representation of the real. But when painting from a photograph, these assumptions are brought into question as we trust photographs as objective, yet we are presented with a constructed image. We question painting's link to artifice, as well as the photograph's link to truth.

Painting has often been portrayed as a medium that can show the un-showable, and is emotive as it contains a direct reference to human activity, the "human trace" of the artist's original thoughts and mark making. Benjamin describes this as the "aura" of painting (1979 [1931], 255), something which is destroyed in reproduced photographs, which perhaps lose their feeling of originality and connection to an artist's physical trace. Artists such as Andy Warhol dealt with this in their artworks in the mid-20th century. Through his reproductions of famous figures and disaster scenes Warhol illustrated how the effect of an image can be lost through reproduction. Carolyn Christov-Barkargiev refers to this as the "removed and disembodied character of the photograph" in her text A Strange Alliance: The Painter and the Subject (2007, 14) which is contrasted with the "present-tense corporeality of the canvas" in many of the works which Rugoff discusses (2007, 14). It is this supposed estrangement of the photograph and its inability to "acknowledge or instantiate" us that artists like Warhol and Gerhard Richter, whom I also discuss, confront in their paintings.

Gerhard Richter, who uses images from newspapers, images which Christov-Barkargiev describes as "removed and disembodied" (2007, 14), may be alerting us to the removed feeling of photographs, but there are several other things occurring in his images. Perhaps he is re-instating the image with a sense of 'aura' as he has translated it into painting, or perhaps he is pointing out the remove that occurs when painting a subject, as it is distanced from 'reality' and brought into the realm of the constructed or the imagined. This double-remove is something which is present in the work of all the painters I will discuss, as well as in my own.

At the end of chapter two we are left with conflicting ideas around painting and photography as mediums of representation. Photographs are removed because the moment captured is past, however they may be the opposite as they are able to make "the past part of the living present" (Van Gelder & Westgeest: 2011, 95). Photographs could also be argued to be more closely linked to reality due to their indexical nature, yet the lens has been described as distorting, and the photographer can manipulate the image. Painting has been described as a purely imaginative medium by modernist terms, yet it constantly references things which

exist in an external reality. When painters use a photograph as a source all these elements come into question, as the image is of the past and the present, the real and the imagined.

The third chapter of this dissertation, The Question of Representation – Peter Doig's *Gasthof zur Muldentalsperre* (2000-02) and Luc Tuymans' *Cargo* (2004), engages particularly with two paintings by two contemporary artists, one by Peter Doig, the other by Luc Tuymans. Both paintings deal with ambiguities of the real; the past and the present, the real and the imagined, memory and forgetting. Rugoff argues in The Painting of Modern life (2007) that contemporary painters have found a "third way" between modernism and classical illusionism, combining both flatness and illusion in their paintings (2007, 6), and this approach is evident in Doig's painting *Gasthof zur Muldentalsperre* (2000-02). The text Peter Doig by Adrian Searle, Kitty Scott and Catherine Grenier (2007) was central in my exploration of this work and of Doig's general approach to painting.

Gasthof zur Muldentalsperre (2000-02) combines areas of modernist flatness, where the canvas beneath is visible in some areas, and assertion of the paint's materiality, with convincing illusion that draws the viewer into the painting. However, Doig combines this present-tense agency of the paint with the remove of a photograph, with one of the images he used being of a postcard of Muldentalsperre in 1910, far removed from the time Doig made the painting. This creates a spatial-temporal confusion for the viewer, who begins to question the truth of the image once they have seen the photographic source. Doig's paintings, which are often vivid and energetically rendered, contain a feeling of distance and remove (Searle: 2007, 124). This may be due to Doig's combination of Modernist and classical painting techniques, as we are drawn in by his use of illusion but pushed out again by the areas of flatness. On the other hand, this is also perhaps due to Doig's use of a photographic source. Photographs have been argued to be distant as they are images of something past, so that may linger in the painting, but this remove is perhaps doubled as Doig has translated the image into a painting, pulling it further from the original subject.

Tuymans' *Cargo* (2004) creates a similar feeling of distance and remove. His works have been described as "disturbingly detached" (Bell Behnke: 2006, www.saatchi-gallery.co.uk), and contain less of the human trace which is present in Doig's expressive paintings. In her text Notes on a Carnal Medium (2005), Penny Siopis argues that paint has the ability to find "provisional form for difficult to visualise and fugitive forces such as energy, excitement, terror and fear" (2005, 29). It is this ability to depict the internal that arguably separates painting from photography, yet in Tuymans' works he depicts one of these 'difficult to visualise and fugitive forces" – memory – while painting in a way that resembles his source

photograph very closely. This forces us to question photography's link to scientific accuracy, as it is able to present something as abstract as memory. Tuymans also forces us to question the truth value of images, as once we view the source photograph we see that the painting has led us to believe that we are looking at something entirely different.

Like Doig and Tuymans, my own work also creates a feeling of distance and of something withheld. In the final chapter of this research, Contradictions and Convergences, I discuss my painting process, which involves working from snapshot images I have taken myself on a digital camera of urban areas around Johannesburg. These images are of buildings and spaces which have been temporarily or completely abandoned, have fallen into disuse or have been misused. These "tomasons" as Vladislavić describes in the opening quote of this text – objects which have become unused or are misused – are particular representations of the strangeness and sometimes eeriness of the city landscape of Johannesburg. None of the paintings contain figures, but they do contain the trace of human activity; for example lights, cars or buildings intended for habitation. I often mimic photographic characteristics such as areas of frozen light or strange perspective, mimicking the "optical unconscious" which the photograph exposes that we would not normally see when looking at a subject (Benjamin: 1979 [1931], 255). This use of photographs as source also lends the painting a sense of nostalgia, as photographs are implicitly associated with a moment from the past. The subjects themselves also carry this nostalgia, as they appear from a long time ago or even from somewhere completely different, never quite belonging to the contemporary city that surrounds them.

This final chapter of this dissertation explores the possibility that photographs may lend painting a closer connection to 'reality', due to the photograph's indexical quality. But again I also explore the possibility that this double-translation in fact distances the image from the real world, becoming something completely new or alien. Critic Fred Ritchin argues that this is why we take photographs, not to record our lives but to transcend them, creating "an unreality in which we hope to find a transcendent immortality, a higher, less finite reality" (Ritchin:2009, 31). My works often create this feeling of "unreality", of post-apocalyptic or futuristic images in various stages of neglect. My use of obscured views through washes of paint and physical barriers such as trees increases this feeling of distance, making these familiar Johannesburg scenes feel unknown to us as viewers. However the use of photographic language dismantles this, as we trust that because it came from a photographic source the image must exist in an external reality.

This continual questioning of the nature of photography and of painting is the central concern of my research, which looks at the ways in which both mediums are being redefined, as painters who use photographic sources expose these contradictions in understanding and defining painting and photography. Both mediums are scrutinised according to their history, and perhaps reject their history in favour of new understandings and new "media invention" (Van Gelder & Westgeest: 2011, 3).

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Chapter One

The Development of 'Photographic Language' in Painting and the invention of Photography

It has often been argued that photographic language is separate from the language of painting, and that the presence of certain photographic characteristics in painting can therefore be attributed to the painter using a photograph as source material. While it can be argued that the use of a photograph as a source for painting has had an influence on the visual language of painting, as I will discuss later when looking at contemporary work and the use of digital photographs, it is difficult to claim that the presence of photographic characteristics in painting (for example cropping, unusual perspective or blurred movement) can be solely attributed to the photograph's influence on our way of seeing. In fact these characteristics seem to have been present in painting long before the invention of the camera.

In his text Before Photography – Painting and the Invention of Photography (1982), Peter Galassi discusses how the invention of linear perspective in painting around the 15th century began to influence how artists constructed their artworks, which is completely different from the way in which we actually view the world. Galassi explains how any perspectival image is the result of three decisions: the moment at which we look at a subject, the point from which we view the subject, and the parameters or "edges of the picture" (1982, 16). Already we can see how this is not the way we usually view the world, as we do not see things in isolation, through a rectangular frame, or with only one point of perspective (unless looking through a window).

The invention of linear perspective during the Italian Renaissance [figure 1], where all lines were directed to a vanishing point, was a movement away from old ways of painting, where artists often made use of multiple vanishing points. Galassi described these two ways of seeing as "synthesizing" and "analytical" views of perspective (1982, 16). A "synthesizing" view, as Galassi describes it, is one which combines multiple views in the composition of a painting. A synthesizing view therefore could be argued to be closer to the way in which we see, as it combines multiple perspectives at once. However this way of painting can't really be argued to be the same as an actual visual experience, as it is still flat and still confined to a rectangular frame. However an "analytical" view is even more alien to the way in which we

see, as it focuses on one view, one perspective, at one time, and adheres to linear perspective more strictly (1982,16).

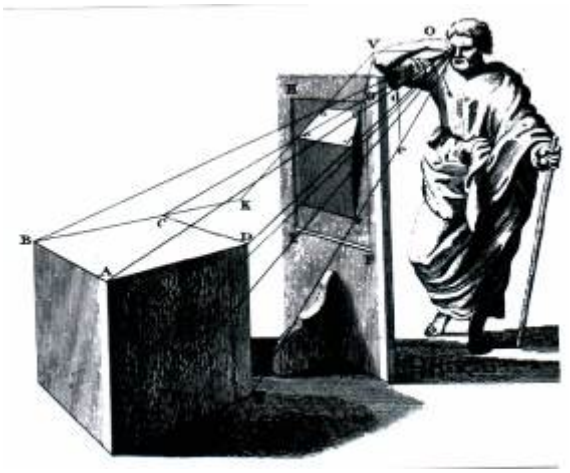


Figure 1: *The Principle of Linear Perspective*, engraving, 10x8.75 in. (1811)

These differences in looking can be seen by comparing Paolo Uccello's A Hunt (c. 1460) [Figure 2] to Edgar Degas' The Racing Field (1877-80) [Figure 3]. As Galassi argues, these two paintings make use of two different ways of looking, Uccello adapting a synthesizing view, Degas an analytical one. While Uccello's painting seems more "comprehensive" (Galassi: 1982,17), made up of multiple viewpoints and no obstructions and with no single vanishing point, Degas' painting is cropped, allowing for multiple obstructions, as if the frame of the painting is the rectangular shape through which Degas observed the scene. In Degas' image everything disappears at a single vanishing point, adhering to the standards of linear single point perspective. While Uccello's work contains multiple "synthesized" views, Degas' painting contains a single, "analytical" view (1982, 17).



Figure 2: Paolo Uccello, *A Hunt,* oil on canvas, c.1460



Figure 3: Edgar Degas, *A Racing Field,* oil on canvas, 1877-1880

With the invention of the *camera obscura* [figures 4 and 5] in the 16th century (1982, 11), it became possible for artists to compose images that perfectly contained this analytical view. The camera obscura consisted of a dark, completely light-proof room, where one wall had a small hole in it. The refraction of light through this hole allowed an image of whatever the hole was facing to be projected, inverted, on the opposite wall. The artist could then trace this image creating the 'perfect' perspectival image. The obscura could not however create a synthesized view such as in Uccello's work and it could not compose a picture in the same way. While being a "tool of perfect perspective" (1982, 17) the painter using an obscura, as Galassi argues, could not compose his picture to the same degree as the un-aided painter.

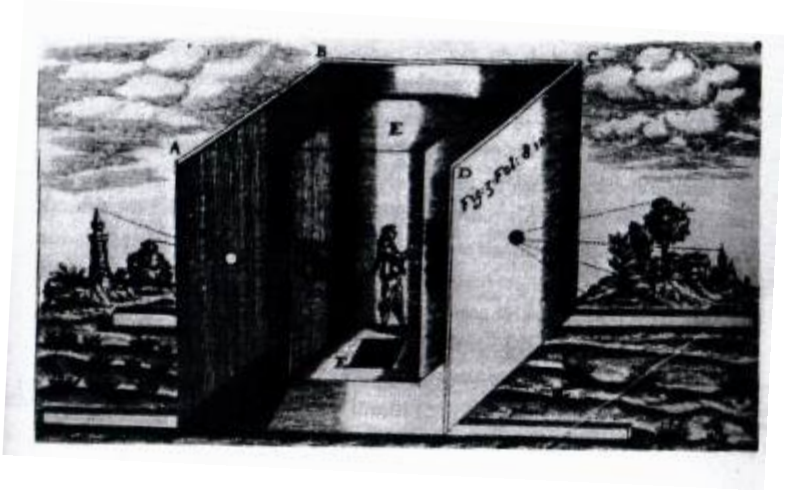


Figure 4: *Camera Obscura*, 1646

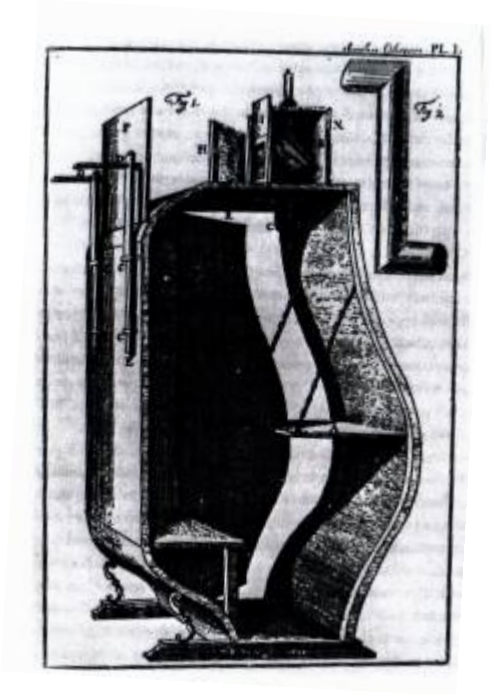


Figure 5: *Portable camera obscura*, Mid-eighteenth Century

However, there is no proof that Degas used an obscura in the creation of this painting, and as Galassi argues, the invention of photography seems rather to "coincide with or succeed the accumulation of pictorial experiment that marks the critical period of transformation from the normative procedure of Uccello's era to that of Degas" than to have caused this shift in viewing (1982, 18). It could therefore be argued that analytical paintings such as Degas' were rather a product of a desire for greater perspectival accuracy that painters were experimenting with, rigidly conforming to rules of linear perspective, than a result of being 'shown' this way of seeing with the use of an obscura. Galassi argues that to attribute the increased use of perspectival techniques in painting to the invention of the obscura is to ignore the "long tradition from which this artistic procedure is derived," (1982, 17) and that the development of techniques such as extreme cropping, placing large objects in the front of the picture with those in the background depicted as much smaller and having a single vanishing point, are all resultant of experiments with linear perspective techniques rather than a reflection of the *camera obscura's* influence. Therefore, it could be argued that what we would now understand as 'photographic language' existed in painting long before the invention of photographic techniques.

The development of this "analytical" way of viewing the world, related to close observation of nature through a limited, exclusive rectangle, seems to be linked to social changes rather than to developments in camera technologies (1982, 20). The fascination with the recording

of nature, most prominently seen in the work of 17th Century Dutch painters, showed a movement away from idealisation towards accuracy, focusing in on and analysing one specific aspect or view as if the subject was viewed from one fixed point, through a rectangle. This rise in a focus on the 'real' is linked to the movement away from neoclassical[1], humanistic art to a focus on nature (1982, 21). Galassi argues that landscape sketching was the perfect platform for artists to experiment with realism, as it was considered more of a "craft" (1982, 21) as it was the study from which the idealised painting was made, allowing for a "formidable shift in artistic values to develop" (1982, 21). These landscape sketches focused on a single aspect, rather than many aspects as had been the case with neoclassical painting. These sketches were focused on a single moment, one subject (no matter how humble or mundane) and, as Galassi states, "this is also the syntax of photography" (1982, 25). Looking at the landscape art of Claude Lorrain and the studies he used to complete his work, this shift is evident. His sketches [Figure 6] are "astonishingly informal and immediate" (1982, 21) compared to the grand, synthesized and idealised nature of his completed paintings [Figure 7].



Figure 6: Left: Claude Lorrain, *Wooded View,* c.1640. brown wash on paper.
Figure 7: Right: Claude Lorrain: *Landscape with the marriage of Isaac and Rebekah,* 1648, oil on canvas.

According to Galassi, landscape painting began to blossom in the 1780s and there was a "virtual explosion" of it in the early 19th century (1982, 27). However this is not to say that this was the first time that artists had painted in this focused way – looking at Albrecht Dürer's close, meticulously observed watercolour sketches [see figure 8], this focused and close

[1] Neoclassicism was a term first used in the 16th century that focused on the beauty of the ideal human form, focusing on a study of Greek classical forms and ideas. It stemmed from an "urge to poeticize and sublimate the world and find heroic formulations for experience and history", yet is simultaneously associated with "discipline" and "simplicity" in the rendering of the human form, in opposition to the "suave appeals" of the Baroque and Rococo movements of the 18th century (Langmuir & Lynton: 2000, 492-493).

observation of a subject in isolation was happening long before the 19th Century – but this approach was only becoming widespread around this time.



Figure 8: Albrecht Dürer, *Great Piece of Turf*, 1503, Watercolour, pen and ink on paper

From these focused images it is evident that close observation became most important to these 17th Century Dutch artists, and it became popular to use magnifying glasses in order to perfectly capture their subject (1982, 27). These works were focused on nature and the real, and seemed to be "formed by the eye instead of the mind" (1982, 27). This approach was criticized at the time by writers such as Charles Baudelaire, who believed that art was about imagination more than observation, and that a picture should be "composed" rather than captured (1992 [1895], 194-95). It was the same criticism that photography faced, as it could, according to Baudelaire, never be an art (1992 [1895], 194). Nevertheless, it was an approach to painting and an attitude to observation that was going on, according to Galassi, "long before photography was invented" (1982, 28). Galassi does not deny that photography influenced the way in which artists painted, but he argues that the shift towards a so-called 'photographic' approach occurred before photography:

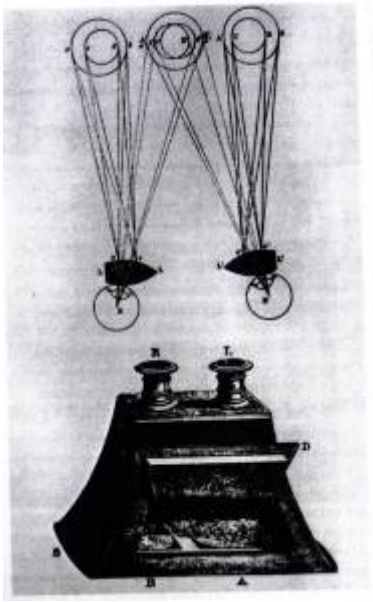
> If photography had an impact on painting (and it certainly did), it is because the new medium was born to an artistic environment that increasingly valued the mundane, the fragmentary, the seemingly uncomposed – that found in the contingent qualities of perception a standard of artistic, and moral, authenticity (1982:28).

Just as painters were adopting painting methods that focused in on a subject, depicting their subject in frozen, meticulous detail, so began the development of a technology that could do the same. Neither medium could however 'capture reality' but instead they recorded the

"visible aspect" of a certain subject, at a certain time, in a specific light, with specific parameters (1982:29).

In his text Techniques of the Observer – On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century (1990) Jonathan Crary argues that neither realist painting nor photography could be said to "capture reality", and were in fact part of a "radical abstraction and reconstruction of optical experience" (Crary: 1990, 9). He argued that artists were using a visual system which is completely alien to the way in which we actually view our surroundings and that the term 'Realism' for a painting of the early 19th Century was therefore problematic. He details several devices which were used at this time, most importantly the stereoscope and the *camera obscura*, which he argues were resultant of a shift in ways of seeing that had been occurring in painting already and that "modernist painting in the 1870s and 1880s and the development of photography after 1839 can be seen as later systems or consequences of this crucial systemic shift, which was well under way by 1820" (1990, 5). Crary argues that realism and the development of several photographic devices took us even further from the way in which we actually view the world (1990, 14).

The *camera obscura*, as I described earlier, consisted of a lightproof space with a small hole which allowed for the refraction of light onto the opposite surface which the artist could trace. There were two forms of this device; an immobile and mobile version [see figures 4 and 5], and the development of a mobile version meant that artists could use it more frequently and easily in the construction of their paintings. Crary explains that while this phenomenon of light passing through a small hole and reflecting an inverted image on the opposing surface had been known for some time, the invention of the camera obscura allowed artists to use this technique in the creation of their artworks. However, while the *camera obscura* had become, according to Crary, a dominant device in creating 'realistic' images, it was not exclusive (1990, 27). The obscura may have been able to create an image which was taken 'directly from life', but it could not reproduce our visual experience in that it could not make a three dimensional image. The Stereoscope, invented in the 19th Century, was supposed to have overcome this flaw [see figures 9 and 10].





Left - Figure 9: David Brewster's lenticular stereoscope, 1849.
Right - Figure 10: Holmes stereoscope, 1870s.

A stereoscope consisted of two images taken from slightly different perspectives, mimicking the way human eyes see two slightly different views. These images were placed adjacent to each other and viewed through a binocular-like contraption, which created a single image when viewed that seemed almost three dimensional. This contraption worked on the understanding that the two images that our eyes see are actually perceived as one coherent image (1990, 117-119). However the claim that this created a visual experience identical to life (and that there was therefore no more need to create images through painting) was flawed, as the depth it created was not lifelike, with images seeming to exist on different planes rather that in one three-dimensional space (1990, 125). Crary explains how this device allowed the user of a stereoscope to “perceive individual elements as flat, cut-out forms arrayed either nearer or further from us” (1990, 125). He also argues that while the stereoscope was seen as a revolutionary “equivalent for natural vision” it did not create a visual experience equal to a real one. This stereoscopic way of seeing had already been developed in the language of painting, and can be seen in works such as Manet’s The Execution of Emperor Maximillian in Mexico (1867) [figure 11] and Courbet’s Young Ladies of the Village (1851) [figure 12] as the figures seem to exist on receding, flat planes (1990, 125).



Figure 11: Edouard Manet, *The execution of Emperor Maximillian in Mexico,* 1867, oil on canvas



Figure 12: Gustaf Courbet, *Young Ladies of the Village*, 1852, oil on canvas

Due to the appearance of these devices around the same time that similar modes of vision were appearing in painting, some critics have argued that these devices were responsible for this change, and that even the most prolific painters made use of such devices in the construction of these works. For example it has been suggested that Jan Vermeer's Soldier and Laughing Girl (c.1858) [figure 13] was constructed with the aid of a *camera obscura*, due to the scale of the figures, with the figure in the foreground appearing very large in comparison to the figure in the background.



Figure 13: Jan Vermeer, *Soldier and Laughing Girl*, c1858, oil on canvas

The strange sizes of these figures were considered to be of "photographic scale" (Alpers: 1983, 30) by one critic in 1891, suggesting that Vermeer used an "optical device" (Alpers: 1983, 30). However, as Svetlana Alpers points out in her text The Art of Describing – Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century (1983), there is no evidence that artists such as Vermeer traced their images, and argues that there must be "specific phenomena present in paintings that are not seen by unaided vision" in order to prove that an optical device such as a camera obscura was used (1983, 30). The presence of cropping, one point perspective and window-like focus, as we have already seen, cannot be solely attributed to photography and these techniques were being employed before the invention of the *camera obscura*. One effect that the camera could have had on painting, Alpers argues, is the presence of diffused circles of light or "globules of paint" which represent the same effects seen in photographs, balls of light "that form around unfocused specular highlights" (1983, 32). Yet aside from this anomaly it is difficult to pinpoint which artists used the obscura and which did not.

Alpers also argues that the shift from 'imagined' idealised paintings towards close observation and cropping was the result of social changes rather than being related to the development of technical means for capturing an image such as the *camera obscura*. Alpers explains that in the 17th Century there was an "obsession with the crafting of nature" and a "turn from the misleading world of Brain and Fancy to the concrete world of things" (1983, 72-73). For this reason, many painters of this time embraced the use of the microscope in the pursuit of describing their subject perfectly in their paintings, and to use the camera obscura as it became more readily available (1983, 73). There was a rejection of high art, or art that introduced meaning beyond pure description, and a focus on the knowledge of nature (1983, 77-79). Nowhere was this approach more embraced than among 17th Century Dutch painters. It was argued that Dutch painters of this time, such as Jan Vermeer, combined perspective techniques of the Italian renaissance with the "actual viewing experience", creating an image that we would now label as photographic (1983, 27).

However this argument is challenged by critics such as Crary, who argues that these cropped, perspectival images are completely alien to the way in which we actually view the world (1992 [1990], 9). The human eye sees things in almost 180 degrees, in an oval-like image with multiple perspectives and vanishing points simultaneously and not like Dutch realist paintings which focus on a subject, at one moment, cropped, sometimes harshly, by a rectangular frame. Alpers agrees that the painters of this time were simply employing an "optical" approach rather than a "perspectival one" (1983, 32), and that this approach was a

distortion of how we actually see reality, as was the camera obscura or any technical device used to 'capture reality':

> Historians of science tell us that though the lens was long known, it had been considered distorting and deceptive. It was not until the seventeenth century that it was trusted (Alpers: 1983, 33)

However despite the fact that there is no way to prove which Dutch painters made use of the obscura in the creation of their paintings, and that there are many examples of artists using this new way of seeing which was more analytical and focused, the invention of the camera is often pinpointed as the sole reason for this shift in painting traditions. In his essay The Artifice of Candour: Impressionism and Photography Reconsidered (1966), Kirk Varnedoe explains how this same mistake was being made by critics of impressionism, as it had become "commonplace to say…that the painter's pictorial innovations owe substantially to the impact of the photographs they saw" and that this belief was "inaccurate and misleading" (1966, 99). Just as Alpers argued, Varnedoe explains that in order to claim that a photograph influenced a painting, there should be undeniable evidence of this in the paintings themselves (1966, 100). He explains that it was often stated that photographs introduced a new language of cropping, odd angles, deep perspective and focus on the smallest or previously ignored subject but, as we have seen, "this premise does not bear up under close historical examination" (1966, 100). The argument was that photographs showed us a flat perspectival world of images that could not be seen in real life experience; however this was what many paintings had done before. Varnedoe, like Alpers, struggles to find any visual characteristics in these paintings which could be solely attributed to photography's influence, except for some minor light effects such as solarisation (1966, 100).

It seems then that again photography's influence is minimal, and the type of images it produced merely coincided with the shifts that were taking place in painting at the time[2].However Varnedoe does say that unlike in painting, where the painter could "temper the awkwardness" of their paintings when the "perspective scheme (was) too rigorously followed", creating an image that seemed more acceptable (1966, 103), photography could not do this and perhaps as a result viewers gradually became more used to these highly perspectival images which would have first seemed too unusual despite being "demonstrably accurate in mathematical terms" (1966, 103). While painters were the first to experiment with

[2] Varnedoe suggests that Japanese prints may have had an influence on the way painters were working at the time, as they focused in on a subject, depicting it in minute detail, often with strangely cropped edges (Varnedoe: 1966, 117).

this ‘photographic’ way of looking at their subject, the invention of photography may have enabled a greater acceptance of these kinds of images as being an accurate description of our visual reality.

As Varnedoe states:

> From the very beginnings of the systematic use of perspective, a dissenting lineage developed that rejected “normal” conventions of special representation in favour of the peculiar, expressive effects of unusual (e.g. wide-angle, anamorphic or foreshortened) spacial structures (1966,103).

The arrival of the *camera lucida* in the early 19th Century, where for the first time these images could be recorded on light-sensitive paper, may not have been responsible for these “peculiar expressive effects” becoming popular in painting, but it may have been responsible for the increased acceptance of them. While the Dutch painters of the 17th Century had experimented with this new way of seeing, it was “regenerated in force” by painters in the 19th Century (1966, 103).

Those using the *camera lucida* for the first time, according to Varnedoe, were frustrated by this new form of capturing images as it could not conform to the old traditions of art, as the lens could only produce an “optical” image as opposed to a perspectival one (1986:103). Early cameras could not produce perfect clarity, and images often contained unintended “foreshortenings and obfuscations” (1966, 104). At the time when painters were embracing the one-point perspective system more than ever before, and the strange perspectives that came with it, early photographers were fighting in frustration against these inevitable characteristics that came from viewing the world through a lens. However as the camera became more readily available, and more people were exposed to the kinds of image it produced, so these highly perspectival images became more acceptable. According to Varnedoe, “gradually the unclear, the partial, the confused, and the less informative aspects of things could be accepted as true, and finally, as natural” (1966, 104).

Today we automatically associate cropping and strange perspective with photography, however the photographic way of viewing seems to have stemmed from a painting tradition, while photography may have merely played a role in encouraging an acceptance of this new way of seeing. Varnedoe argues that it is important to remember that “there is a difference between the history of photography and the larger history of the ways of representation we often think of as ‘photographic vision’”, as I have demonstrated so far (1966, 104).

Varnedoe argues that works such as Claude Monet's Boulevard des Capucines (1873-74) [figure 14] would have seemed too controversial or unusual to the "convention-bound" photographers of the same time, and that the same "eccentricities" or unusual use of perspective present in the work of impressionist works like this one did not occur in photography until the middle of the 1880s (1966, 106).



Figure 14: Claude Monet, *Boulevard des Capucines*, 1873-74, oil on canvas

Some might argue that the blurring in Monet's work is evidence of the use of a slow-exposure photograph as source, however with a more careful examination of this work, comparing it to a slow exposure image, we can see that in this kind of photography static objects are rendered "icily clear" (1966, 106) where only the moving people appear blurred [see figure 15]. Monet carries this blurring across his entire work, and is seems to be an indication of his painting process rather than a reference to a photographic image (1966, 106-107). To say that photography was therefore responsible for the realist movement is, as Varnedoe puts it, the same as stating that "perspective produced the Renaissance" (1966, 11) when in fact both perspective in the Renaissance and photography during the realist movement[3] were tools developed in the pursuit or articulation of a specific social aesthetic already appearing in painting.

[3] The realist movement focused on "the world of normal experience", and is attributed to the late 19th century where it was most prominent amongst German painters of this time. The 'realists' focused on depicting subjects that were realistic in the sense that they resemble the appearance of that subject viewed from a specific point under specific light conditions, but more importantly that they depicted everyday societal norms (Langmuir & Lynton: 2000, 580-581).



Figure 15: Adolphe Braun, *The Pont des Arts (*detail of *View of Paris),* 1868, panoramic photograph

As photography became more accessible, particularly with Kodak emerging in 1888, which allowed for mass access to photography, so there seemed to be a shift from realism to the abstract as "painting aggressively swung away from realist concerns to anti-naturalism" (1966, 117) as there was now a technical way to 'represent reality'. After the art of chemically fixing an image to paper was enabled with the invention of the *camera lucida*, many claimed that the reason for painting had disappeared, and this gave momentum to the abstract movement. The history painter, Paul Delaroche, reportedly stated after the stereoscope was introduced; "from this day on, painting is dead" (1966, 117) and Edgar Allen Poe, writing on the same device in 1840, stated that the images produced were "those of truth itself in the supreme-ness of its perfection" (1966, 117). These statements show us that there was a belief that not only could we never recreate a "perfect" image like the ones produced by these technical devices, but that these devices were the ultimate reflection of reality.

However this idea is highly problematic for many reasons. As we have seen, the camera (or any mechanical device) provides us with an optical view, one which has been argued to be completely alien to the way in which we see the world. And secondly, this belief implies that these devices somehow 'capture' reality, when in fact they are reflecting how the light fell when reflected off a subject, for one moment that does not exist anymore, and that has been distorted by its transmission through a lens. Despite this, the first half of the 20th Century seems to have been dominated by the belief that only photographs could capture 'reality' and that the only solution for painters was to paint the abstract or imagined. As Fred Ritchin stated in his 2009 text After Photography; "painting was posited to have preceded, inspired, and then been threatened by photography" (2009, 19).

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Chapter Two

Between Painting and Photography

The discussion around the relevance of painting when a mechanical means to 'capture reality' is available has been on-going since the inception of photography. It painting was "declared dead" (Brevart: 2002, 5), and was "posited to have preceded, inspired and then been threatened by photography in the early nineteenth century" (Ritchin: 2009, 19). Many have argued that a photograph could do what a painting never could – depict reality not as an "interpretation" of it, but a "transparency" (Sontag: 1979, 6). As this attitude has now changed, painters today are dealing with the complex relationship between the two mediums, exploring the limits and benefits of photography through their work, while also exploring the possibilities, and shortcomings, embedded in paint as a medium. In this chapter I will discuss the complex nature of photography and our relationship to it, as well as its centrality in the concerns of many contemporary painters.

Photographic images dominate our contemporary life. With internet, television, social networking sites, advertising, pocket-sized digital cameras, and cameras on our cell-phones, photographic images seem to have become an acceptable substitute for lived experiences. When we see a photograph of a deceased relative, we don't say "this is an image of Grandma taken with an analogue camera", but rather "this is Grandma". However if we were to see a painting of that relative, I would suggest that we would not say that "this is Grandma", but rather "this is an oil painting of Grandma. Doesn't it look a lot like her?" In his text A Small History of Photography (1931) Walter Benjamin speaks about this phenomenon, describing the way painted portraits begin to symbolise a painter's skill rather than the individual depicted as time passes, yet photographs retain the sense that the person captured is a person, an individual;

> Where the painting remained in the possession of a particular family, now and then someone would ask after the originals (the person in the painting). But after two or three generations this interest fades; the pictures, if they last, do so only as testimony to the art of the painter. With Photography, however, we encounter something new and strange: in (David Octavius) Hill's Newhaven Fishwife [see figure 1], her eyes cast down in such indolent, seductive modesty, there remains something that goes beyond the testimony to the photographer's art, something that cannot be silenced, that fills you with an unruly desire to know what her name was, the woman who was

alive there, who even now is still real and will never consent to be wholly absorbed in *art* (1979 [1931]: 242-243).



Figure 1: Robert Adamson, David Octavius Hill, *Mrs Elizabeth (Johnstone) Hall, Newhaven Fishwife*, 1843, calotype print, 19.40 x 14.80cm.

So why do we perceive photographs as substitutes for reality, and paintings as an interpretation of reality, or perhaps even something completely separate from reality? As was shown in the previous chapter, a photographic view is in reality completely alien to the way in which we see, and is based on a "radical abstraction and reconstruction of optical experience" (Crary: 1992 [1990], 14). We do not view the world from a single perspective, with cropped edges and through a lens, but in almost 180 degrees, with each eye perceiving a slightly different, oval-shaped image that combine to form a single, three-dimensional image. And yet, as Susan Sontag argues in her text On Photography (1979), people depend more and more on photographic images to 'record' their life, thereby proving that they exist and that the moment occurred. Sontag states that there is an increasing "dependence on the camera, as the device that makes real what one is experiencing" (1979, 9) and that the need to "have reality confirmed and experience enhanced by photographs is an aesthetic consumerism to which everyone is addicted" (1979, 9).

Although photographs have an indexical relationship to their subject, as light passes through the lens on to photosensitive paper (or more commonly now photosensitive pixels in digital cameras) to create the image, there is still a large degree of interpretation and manipulation

involved in creating a photograph. As Sontag argues, the photographer is “still haunted by tacit imperatives of taste and conscience” (1979, 6) when creating a photograph. In analogue photography, the photographer can change the amount of light that enters the lens, change the cropping of the subject, as well as zoom in on a chosen subject and adjust focus when taking the image, and adapt the image further in the developing process. This allows for an “insidious distortion of our vision of (the real)” as Fred Ritchin argues in After Photography (2009,11) as the viewer is presented with an image that we trust wholeheartedly as being real, because of photography’s indexical nature, when it is in actuality a construction. Digital photographs can be even more easily manipulated, and allow for “nearly effortless malleability” (1979, 19). The image can be seamlessly adjusted in any way imaginable, from changing the colour of an image to inserting other images. Yet still, although we are less trustful of images, there is the underlying sense that photographs, though constructed, are linked in some way to reality. Ritchin argues that photographs now seem to be equally accepted as both invention and reflection;

> Photography has achieved the paradoxical credibility of a subjective interpretive medium that has simultaneously been deemed reliable and ultimately useful as a societal and personal arbiter (2009, 19).

It is this contradiction that the painters, whom I will later discuss, engage with in their work today.

Another reason for the current trend in using photographs as source for painting could simply be that photographs are everywhere, and painters are merely dealing with the nature of our contemporary society. Although painters have been using photographs as reference for their work since photography’s inception, and before photography painters may have employed a camera obscura in the construction of their paintings (Benjamin: 1979 [1931], 242), the photograph was never the central concern of these painters, but rather the image it contained. While the subject matter of the photographic source is of course an important consideration for contemporary painters, the nature of the photograph as a physical object and of photography as a whole is being questioned. This may be because our everyday lives are dominated by photographs from media, and even our personal photographs are becoming public, as we place images of ourselves on social networking sites (Rose: 2010, 75). As we become increasingly surrounded and “saturated in almost dimensionless media images” (Siopis: 2005, 36), so they begin to hold our attention less and less, losing their effect on us. Sontag gives the example of how we have become desensitized to images of graphic violence in news media, as we are rarely affected unless it is something we can

relate to, stating that “a photograph - that brings news of some unsuspected zone of misery cannot make a dent in public opinion unless there is an appropriate context of feeling and attitude” (1979, 17).[4]

Writing on an exhibition titled The Painting of Modern Life held at the Hayward in London from 4 October until 30 December 2007 which featured painters who use photographs as source for their work, Ralph Rugoff argues that by painting images from photographic sources these painters are engaging directly with our contemporary life, depicting “the social landscape of the times by translating, and in a sense re-inventing, photographic imagery” (2007, 6). While each painter may be dealing with his or her own personal subject, the nature of photographs seems to be a central concern for all the artists in this exhibition (2007, 10). The works featured deal with a range of photographic sources, from media images, to film stills and family photographs, translating photographic characteristics into their paintings (2007,6). While all the paintings featured reference photographic language to varying degrees, forming an “integral part of the painter’s subject” (2007, 10), I would like to argue that contemporary painters who use photographs as source for their paintings are creating images which are a combination of a social commentary on our contemporary relationship to photographs, but also explorations of each artist’s agenda and personal concerns. Although Rugoff states that the exhibition “eschews an emphasis on the subjectivity of the artist and instead stresses our activity of reading images” (2007, 6), I would argue that while these painters are concerned with the way in which we read images, there is a movement towards the re-instatement of the personal and internal concerns of the artists themselves.

It is impossible to engage with contemporary painting without addressing its modernist history. While painters have moved away from a “Greenbergian model of… authenticity, originality and discipline specific purity” (Burgener: 1996, 16), there is still an association in contemporary painting with a belief in the emotive quality of paint, and its ability to embody something that comes internally from the artist, rather than simply from the external referent. As Alistair Hicks argues in his text The School of London – the resurgence of contemporary painting (1989), there seems to be a “belief that it is still possible to concentrate human emotion on a canvas through the act of painting” among contemporary artists (1989, 12). While the subject matter engaged with by the artists I will later discuss is integral to the often global messages of their works, there is also something intensely personal in the application

[4] It is no longer enough to photograph an image and expect others to view it with any empathy or emotion, that aura seems to be missing from photographs. Later I will discuss how painters have confronted this in their work, and how this is a central theme in my own paintings.

of paint, and the work becomes just as much about the artist's internal subjectivity as its widely recognisable subject matter (the photograph). This focus on the internal subjectivity of the artist can perhaps be interpreted as a comment on the remove and distance created in photographs[5], and by painting from the photograph this remove is atoned for.

When looking at artworks which were created from photographic sources towards the end of the 20th Century compared to the works being created more recently, the shift from a focus on the way in which we view photographs, towards more personal and subjective subject matter combining with this concern with the nature of photographs can be seen. Artists such as American pop artist Andy Warhol often created works which directly referenced the "mechanical reproductions on which they were based" (2001, 10), thereby commenting on the mediated nature of society at the time. Warhol's *Marilyn Diptych* [see figure 2] consisted of silkscreen prints of the famous American actress Marilyn Monroe, repeated over and over in a simplified, tri-colour style. These works commented on our obsession with celebrity, as these images are repeated so often that they begin to become less and less representative of something human but are a symbol of a marketable commodity. Benjamin refers to this as a loss of "aura", the undefinable feeling of looking at someone from the past, and atmospheric human trace, which is lost in the repetition of images (1979 [1931], 250). With each repetition, the image of Marilyn becomes more and more mask-like and less human, commenting on how photographic media sell an image drained of any human or personal connection to reality. The Marilyn images on the right of the work are printed in black and white and begin to smudge and fade, as they would if the printer were running out of ink.

This work not only references the way media photographs are continuously reproduced, but is also a visual representation of the impermanence of celebrity and of images, which fade into obscurity and become completely separated from the representation of an actual person, but instead represent an icon. The images are completely impersonal and reference the disposable, highlighting the way in which media images create a feeling of remove and distance, rather than providing a way for the viewer to better understand or know the subject. This work is as much concerned with the nature of photography as it is with its subject[6] (Marilyn Monroe).

[5] However there is the possibility that painting from a photograph creates a "scene twice-removed" (Bell Behnke: 2006, www.saatchi-gallery.co.uk), enhancing the images distance from the viewer and creating a lack of internal emotion.

[6] This view is of course debateable, as a subjectively painted image of Monroe may be similarly distanced from the actress as an individual, as it would be more a representation of the artist's skill and personal agenda than of her 'essence'.



Figure 2: Andy Warhol, *Marilyn Diptych* (1962), acrylic and Silkscreen on canvas, 205.44cm x 289.56cm, Tate Modern

Warhol's *Saturday Disaster 1964* (1968) [see figure 3] formed part of his *Disaster Series*, depicting different images of car and aeroplane accidents. *Saturday Disaster 1964* shows a newspaper-like image of a car accident, repeated over and over in silkscreen tri-colour. This image not only directly references it's photographic source, as images produced in newspapers were often printed using only three colours (red, blue and green) to create a range of colours, but also comments on how the reproduction of violent images in media has led to our becoming desensitized and numb to the horror these images depict. The central concern of these works is not personal, but rather a social comment on the nature of photography and media.



Figure 3: Andy Warhol, *Saturday Disaster 1964,* 1968, acrylic and silkscreen on canvas, 8 1/4" x 11 1/4", Provenance: Private Collection, New Jersey

Gerhard Richter's work which also deals directly with the nature of photographic images, does not simply reproduce or mimic the nature of his photographic source material, but begins to engage with the nature of painting. His works seem to mix the "present-tense corporeality of the canvas with the removed and disembodied character of the photograph" (2007, 14). His painting *Frau mit Schirm* ('Woman with Umbrella') (1964) [see figure 4] is an example of a work which deals simultaneously with the nature of photography, media and the nature of painting, in a way that feels more intimate and subjective. In his text Gerhard Richter Portraits (2009) published to accompany the exhibition *Gerhard Richter Portraits: Painting Appearances* held at the National Portrait Gallery in London from 26 February to 31 May in 2009, Paul Moorhouse writes that despite Richter's often using public or political images as source, he does not strive to create objective images; "Rather than seeking to banish personal involvement, his œuvre may be seen, instead, as proceeding in the way of deeply rooted enquiry, underpinned by profound questions about the nature of the world and the way it is represented" (2009, 15).



Figure 4: Gerhard Richter, *Woman with Umbrella,* 1964, oil on canvas, 160 x 95 cm, Daros Collection, Switzerland

When looking at Woman with an Umbrella (1964) it appears to simply be an image of an anonymous woman, her hand clasped over her mouth in grief or shock. However this painting is in fact a copy of a photograph of Jackie Kennedy, taken of her at the funeral

procession of John F. Kennedy. While the image looks anonymous, there is no doubt that this is an image of a real person, as its photographic characteristics are evident. There is a dark shadow behind the woman's legs, indicating the harsh flash of a camera. The blurring of the image references a snapshot photograph, blurring as the photographer moved the camera. There are also clues that this image is a public one, as it references images printed in newspapers. The column of blank space on the left of the painting mimics newspaper columns where the news article would appear, and the muted colours also indicate a newspaper source. Despite these references to media photography, there is a painterly quality to the image. The smudgy application of paint draws attention to the materiality of the medium, suggesting something altogether more subjective and hinting at the human-involvement in the creation of this work, as opposed to the more mechanical nature of photography.

When looking at a painting one is not only considering the painting itself but also the history of painting as a medium. It is almost impossible to look at a painting without the implicit knowledge of what has come before it. While contemporary painters may not adhere to Modernist values, these values are embedded in the painting's surface. As Karin Preller explains in her MA dissertation Critical possibilities for the encoding of labour in photography-based painting (2001) a Modernist approach is "indexical only of the painter's hand, through the brush mark – it indexes an individual and internalised vision and not the object depicted" (2001, 47). Following this argument that any trace of the artist's hand in painting is a direct reference to that artist's internal self, paintings which use photographs as source engage simultaneously with the removed referential aspect of photographs as well as the subjective and personal perspective of the artist. This argument for the originality and personal subjectivity of the artist somehow being embodied in paint has been disputed, as no image can ever be completely non-referential. However contemporary painters who use photographs as source seem to be both dismantling and upholding this modernist view, creating images with an overt external reference (the photograph) that is nevertheless intensely personal, in that they contain the 'trace of the artist's hand', the 'aura' of originality.

The act of capturing a photograph has often been described as a violent one, and an element of this seems to linger in the photographs themselves, particularly those which capture private moments without the subject's consent, or which record another human's suffering. In her text A Strange Alliance: The Painter and the Subject (2007), Carolyn Christov-Barkargiev argues that there is an "aggression and violence implicit in the mechanical camera gaze" (2007, 34) as the camera unfeelingly reveals its entire subject without compassion or sensitivity. She argues that this leads to the subject of a photograph

remaining permanently out of reach, as the camera can never "acknowledge or instantiate" its subject (2007, 35). Even though a photograph may have an indexical relationship to reality, as we know that whatever was captured by the camera must have existed at some point, personal photographs, though somehow "familiar" will always remain "estranged" from us to a certain degree as we cannot identify with this violent removal that occurs in the taking of a photograph (2007, 35). Sontag also acknowledges this aggressive tendency in photography, stating that it "turns people into objects that can be symbolically possessed" (1979, 14). This need to 'possess' our experiences and loved ones by taking photographs has come to dominate contemporary society, as no holiday or valuable experience would be complete without the taking of photographs. It is almost as if in order for something to be real, we must prove its existence with a photograph (1979, 9). The combination of this need to prove our existence with photographs with the photographs' violent and somewhat distanced nature, may be the reason why photographs are increasingly losing their effect on us, as they limit our lives "into an image, a souvenir" (1979, 9). The term "snapshot" itself is a hunting term[7] (2011, 75) and as Crary argued in his text Techniques of the Observer (1990), photography has not provided the ultimate means to record our reality, but rather seems to "annihilate the real world" with its alien and aggressive nature (1990, 14). It is perhaps for these reasons, as South African Artist Penny Siopis argues, that contemporary painters are painting from photographs, as it is an attempt by these artists to remove some of the aggression embedded in the photographs, while satisfying the craving for a "human trace" in images (Siopis: 2005, 36). However it could be argued that painting has nothing to do with "the real world" either, as it is impossible to 'capture a subject' in painting, and what is produced may be pure construction (Crary: 1990, 14).

Portrait painters have often spoken of the inability of painters to capture their subject, arguing that what is created in the process is something entirely new, which is more about the artist than the subject. Looking at the work of portrait painter Lucien Freud, it could be argued that his works are indexical more of the artist's hand than of a visual reality. In her text 'The Figure Unravelled' in Painting People – figure painting today (2006), Charlotte Mullins discusses Freud's painting process. She explains that the artist always works from life, and that the resultant paintings are a result of a "distillation of his observations from sometimes hundreds of sittings" (2006, 19). This means that the portraits Freud creates are not of a subject from one perspective in one moment, as is the assumption when looking at a static image, but are a combination of multiple moments and repeated observations. There is also a relationship that is created between the painter and his subject, and the artist's own

[7] A "snapshot" in hunting is a shot that is taken hastily, without careful aim (2011, 75).

subjectivity must inevitably become embedded in the painting. Freud creates images which are “subjectively composed, with more attention paid to things that interest him” (2006, 19). The image becomes indicative of time, as layers of paint and different perspectives created over multiple sittings come together one a single, static surface (2006, 20). This kind of painting is therefore about everything that photographs are not; the subjectivity of the artist, the trace of his hand, and the recoding of multiple viewings of a subject taken over a period of time.

What then happens when a painter uses a photograph as his/her subject? The viewpoint is already determined and cannot be shifted; only a moment is visible, and the image is not a condensation of time but a fleeting moment. The trace of the artist is invisible (though perhaps still exists as the photographer can still manipulate the resulting image), and the image has not been created through extended and careful looking, particularly in the case of a snapshot, but from looking at the subject for the briefest of moments. In the painting process however the artist still studies the image over time, but what the artist is now studying is not the subject of the photograph but the photograph itself. The resultant painting will not be of the subject captured by the photographer but of the continued looking and relooking at the photograph by the painter. A strange co-existence of the single perspective of the photograph combined with the labour-intensive process of painting is created. These images are therefore about the external world of the photographed subject, as well as the internal subjectivity of the artist. They are about a fleeting moment that has passed, and the agency of action and time embedded in the paint itself. These paintings could therefore be argued to sit between the internal and external, the past and the present, the embodied and the removed.

Although photographs bear an indexical relationship to reality, in that light acts directly on the photosensitive paper or pixels to create an image (Schwabsky, 2005, 2), snapshots, throw-away photographs that we encounter in our everyday lives seem to have an increasingly anonymous, almost generic quality. This is of course not true of all photographs, particularly not those which are presented as ‘art’, but it is increasingly argued that the snapshot images which fill newspapers or social networking sites have lost their emotive effect through continuous repetition. Rugoff argues that the kind of photographs contemporary painters are engaging with are these snapshot images, “whose effect has been drained through repetition” (2007, 6). Rugoff lists “snapshots, news images, family portraits and archival photographs” (2007, 6), as the images these painters deal with, and I would like to argue that this is not only because these images dominate our contemporary lives, but also that they lack an essential emotive quality which painters may be highlighting

or trying to re-instate. Sontag explains that although it was believed that photographs were somehow “miniatures of reality” (1979, 4), photographs seem rather to be distanced from reality, lacking its essential emotive aura. It is perhaps for this reason that we are so desensitized by disturbing photographs, and can look at a graphic image of human violence without it having any effect on us.

However, while it can be argued that paintings that use photographs as reference somehow re-instate a feeling of embodiment, the opposite could actually be occurring, as there is a double remove in the capturing of the photograph and then in the painting of that image. Although I have argued that the process of painting is indicative of the personal and emotive, painting from a photograph may be presenting an image that has been taken even further away from what we would see as ‘reality’. The two painters I will discuss in the next chapter exemplify both sides of this argument, as Peter Doig paints in a way which highlights the trace of the artist and his personal subjectivity while Luc Tuymans presents a “scene twice-removed” (Bell Behnke: 2006, www.saatchi-gallery.co.uk), one which highlights the distance that has been created between the image and the original subject through the photograph and subsequently through the painting created from that photograph. Tuymans does however provide an image that could be closer to ‘lived experience’ in that he has perhaps created a visual language for something implicit but not visually articulated in photographs, namely memory.

A slogan for Kodak in the 1990s, “let the memories begin” is the perfect illustration of how we now associate recording memory and lived experiences with taking photographs (Ritchin, 2009, 23). However as Alison M. Gingeras points out in her text The Mnemonic Function of the Painted Image (2005) memory itself is too imprecise to be faithfully and truthfully captured in a photograph, “it is nebulous, malleable and ever-changing” (2005) rather than fixed as a photograph portrays it. Like Gingeras, Preller also argues in her MA Fine art dissertation Critical Possibilities for the Encoding of Labour in Photography-based Painting (2001) that photographs don’t connect with the “haziness of our memory, its vagueness” (2001, 50), denying memory’s essential nature. This seems to be leading to a feeling of distance from private photographs, which is becoming ever more apparent as social networking sites have dominated our lives, and we see our same images (the graduation, the wedding, the new baby) repeated over and over again.

Another reason why so many contemporary painters are reworking photographs in their paintings may be to reinstate a feeling of life or gain some agency over images. Photographs seem to be signifiers of our mortality, testifying to absence rather than presence, as the

moment captured by the camera will never exist again. As Roland Barthes argued in Camera Lucida (1980), a photograph only makes the viewers more aware that they are looking at the past, something which no longer exists (Van Gelder & Westgeest: 2011, 95), thereby achieving the opposite of what photography intended to do, which is preserve our reality. However, one could argue that photographs do preserve reality in a small way as "the past (is made part) of the living present", thereby restoring what is absent to us (Van Gelder & Westgeest: 2011, 95).

When photography was first invented it took a long exposure time to capture an image, and the subject would have to remain still for a long time in front of the camera lens. This relates to the way in which paintings are made, as the painter studies his or her subject for a long time when creating an image. The first fixed photographic image, considered to be a heliograph taken by Joseph Nicéphore Niépce in 1826, took almost eight hours of exposure time to capture. The invention of the daguerreotype in the 1830s allowed photographers to reduce this time, but only to about half an hour (2011, 74). In Benjamin's A Small History of Photography (1931) he argues that this process forced the subject to focus on his life and on the moment more than ever before (1979 [1931], 245).This process reflects what happens in painting, as suddenly the subject becomes aware that they are being captured, aware that their life and existence are being documented in a way the encourages intense exploration of oneself in that moment. Although countless portrait painters have stated that it is impossible to capture someone's essence in a painting, this extended process of looking and painting seems to document a relationship between painter and subject, just as this extended exposure time may have captured the subject relating with a photographer for an extended period. However as this exposure time is now reduced, to the point today where the lens is usually only open for a fraction of a second (particularly in the kind of snapshot, throw-away image that painters are working with today), I would argue that this essential contemplation is lost, and all that is captured is a mere glimpse of a subject.

Despite all these factors – the violence of a photograph, its quickness, its association with absence rather than presence – there seems to be a lingering trust of photographs as 'real' which we can't escape. The work of artist Hiroshi Sugimoto highlights this trust and reveals its artifice in his photographs of dioramas and wax sculptures. These black and white photographs are immediately accepted by the viewer as real due to the fact that they are photographs, and because they play into the documentary status of black and white imagery, so we almost instinctively trust them as photographs of a real person or animal. However when one actually considers the subject, one soon realises that the subject could never have been photographed. For example; Sugimoto's *Portrait of Henry VIII* (1999) [see

figure 5], convinces the viewer that this is a photograph of the Tudor King Henry VIII, when in fact it is a photograph of a wax sculpture of the monarch, which was modelled on Hans Holbein the Younger's portrait of Henry VIII painted circa 1540 [see figure 6]. We know that this couldn't possibly be a photograph of Henry VIII himself as photography hadn't yet been invented. Sugimoto directly confronts our trust of photographs, showing how this trust is irrational. He not only questions this trust, but also exposes our desire to record our visual surroundings, to document "the appearance of the world objectively and truthfully" (Brougher & Elliott: 2006, www.hirshhorn.si.edu/bio/in-depth-hiroshi-sugimoto). It becomes clear in these images that this is difficult, if not impossible to achieve. The camera distorts and obscures, providing us not with an objective representation as some have argued, but with an entirely subjective interpretation.



Figure 5: Hiroshi Sugimoto, *Henry VIII* from "Portraits", 1999, commissioned work for the Deutsche Guggenheim



Figure 6: Hans Holbein the Younger, *Portrait of Henry VIII (1491-1547),* 1540, oil on Panel, 88.5x74.5cm, Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Antica

Contemporary painters who use photographs as source such as Gerard Richter, Marlene Dumas, Peter Doig, Cecily Jones or Luc Tuymans to name a few, all confront this paradox, that photographs are entirely subjective and yet they are perceived as objective. Some of these painters exploit this, using the photograph's implicit "real-ness" to add greater connection and trust of that connection to reality. Others expose it, highlighting the subjectivity of both mediums, and indeed of any form of representation. In the next chapter I will look at specific works by Peter Doig and Luc Tuymans which engage with all these questions that circulate around both painting and photography as means of representation.

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Chapter Three

The Question of Representation – Peter Doig's *Gasthof zur Muldentalsperre* (2000-02) and Luc Tuymans' *Cargo* (2004)

> The image is both real and imaginary, descriptive and symbolic, a manifestation of both memory and forgetting. In relation to representation, the paint thus takes up the position of the Other, that indefinable element which questions and at the same time presents its own enigma.
>
> Catherine Grenier, *Reconquering the World: 100 Years Ago*, 2007, 110

Painters who work from photographs seem to engage with a range of ambiguities implicit in both painting and photography. Questions that emerge when looking at any photographic or painted image are: is this from the past or is it of the present? Is this a memory and if so how is something as intangible as memory preserved in a physical form? Am I immersed in this image or am I distanced from it? And most importantly, as both mediums deal with representation, is this real or imagined?

Thus far I have discussed the possibility that using photographs as source in painting can both bring us closer and distance us from reality or lived experience, and that neither medium can be declared as a transparent depiction of reality, nor can they be labelled as pure constructions. In this chapter I will discuss how contemporary painters Peter Doig and Luc Tuymans confront these questions in their work, and raise some questions about the definability of both painting and photography.

Writing on the exhibition The Painting of Modern Life which was held at the Hayward Gallery in London from 4 October 2007 to 30 December 2007, Ralph Rugoff argues that painters who use photographs as reference, and for whom photographs form an "integral part" of their subject, seem to have found a "third-way" of painting which sits between Modernist ideals of originality, flatness and truth to medium, and more traditional forms of painting (2007, 6-10). However, painters today seem to be painting in a way that combines several approaches, be it modernist, expressionist, surrealist, realist, all which seem to sit on the canvas in harmony. In his introduction in the text Vitamin P – New Perspectives in Painting

(2002), Barry Schwabsky discusses the possibility that contemporary painters might not simply be setting themselves up in opposition to painting traditions, but perhaps seeing themselves as cut off from that tradition entirely, creating works which cannot be so easily defined as belonging to, or rebelling against, any specific approach (2002, 8).

Looking at the works of Peter Doig and Luc Tuymans, it seems that there is a need for an all-encompassing approach when criticising the methods and medium of these artists, as their work seem to hold only a tenuous grasp on any one style or definition. In the case of Doig's work, there are moments of modernist flatness in his paintings but the most overwhelming modernist trait is his exposure of the materiality of the medium. Doig's paintings are however also linked to academic painting's obsession with illusion, creating a "view into some imaginary distance", and a world that seems to continue beyond the edges of the painting (2007, 26). Simultaneously operating within these binaries is the photographic source, which destabilises the "present-tense corporeality" of the painting (2007, 14). In photograph-based paintings the feeling that you as the viewer are in this moment, in the space of the picture, is combined with the remove of the photograph, which is very much about a moment that has passed (2007, 14). It is this confusion in the spatial-temporal aspect of the image, as well as the multitude of painterly approaches he employs, that makes Doig's work so difficult to classify.

In his text Survey – A Kind of Blankness (2007), Adrian Searle discusses the kind of paintings Peter Doig produces. Although the subject matter is incredibly wide and varied, from skiers on Canadian peaks to basketball courts to buildings to canoes floating in lonely landscapes, all Doig's work seems to exist in the realm of the imaginary. His images are always saturated in colour, and the way he uses paint is intensely expressive and embodied. These tactile, embodied, emotionally charged and vibrant images confront the viewer with a sense of the emotive, the sense that a story is being told. However, when commenting on his own works, Doig's statements seem completely disharmonious with this perception. He states that his paintings are "totally non-linguistic" and that he's "often trying to create numbness" (2007, 124). The question arises then; how could Doig's works possess this 'Kind of Blankness' when the surfaces are so charged with action and emotive use of colour? This is the line that Doig's work traverses, as it is at once embodied and absent, past and present, real and imagined, flat and illusionistic. While Doig blurs these boundaries in his choice of subject matter and in the way he uses paint, our assumptions around what photographs can and cannot do, and ultimately what painting can or cannot do, are dismantled.

Looking at Doig's paintings for the first time, it is difficult to think of them as removed or 'numb'. He employs bold use of colour; washes of paint sit in juxtaposition with emotive impasto marks which often suggest glowing globules of light or violent snowstorms; paint that suggests action and hints at a painter who is truly embedded in the creation of this work. However, there is an overriding sense of estrangement, a "hollow unease" which is at odds with his painting style (Searle: 2007, 55). Searle provides an explanation for this feeling of remove:

> There is none of that formal or aesthetic chill or blankness with which one is so often confronted elsewhere in contemporary painting. What there is instead is a pervasive sense of something withheld, a narrative stalled or kept in abeyance, a world suspended and waiting to happen. This is the painting's invitation, and where its blankness lies (2007, 103).

So how is this feeling of distance created? Sometimes it is in the way Doig paints, as he often makes use of effects which cover the surface of the canvas, literally blocking your view of what occurs beyond. However this is not always the case, as we will see when I discuss one of his paintings later on, and yet this distance is maintained in his work. The answer lies in his source material; the photograph. Photographs have always been associated with absence, distance and remove. As Roland Barthes argues in his seminal text Camera Lucida (1980), the moment that was captured in a photograph can never exist again, and it is therefore a marker of time passing, of absence, of our mortality (Van Gelder & Westgeest: 2011, 95). The distance we feel is one of time, as not only are we unable to access the world of the painting we are viewing, but the subject seems to come from an entirely different time, as if "the distance between us and them is measurable not in yards or miles but in years" (2007, 55). The painting's effect of the viewer being in that moment, the feeling of being confronted in the present, is conflated with the feeling of being shown an image that was seen by someone else in the past.

Peter Doig's work *Gasthof zur Muldentalsperre* (2000-02) [see figure 1] confronts both the nature of painting as a medium, but also the nature of the photographic sources he used. The painting consists of two men, standing in front of a bridge under a night sky. The men look out of the painting, confronting the viewer, and the assumption is that these men have passed along this bridge before stopping at this point to confront you. The men are dressed in a way that indicates that they are from a long time ago, and the bridge is painted in a brilliant array of rainbow colours, under a fantastically blue and twinkling night sky, indicating a magical and therefore imagined space. The title of the work suggests that these figures

have come to welcome you as a guest, as '*Gasthof*' means 'guest house' in German. You are being welcomed at the gate or 'barrier' to the guest house at Muldental in Germany and you will now follow these figures across the bridge to this guest house which is beyond the frame of the image. There is a slippage that happens here between what is real and what is not. We can see that this is an imaginary scene, that the colours could not exist in this world and that these figures are not from this time, yet we can imagine ourselves walking that bridge, following the figures to a place beyond the painting. The surface is completely permeable, as Doig invites the viewer in to this alternate realty. The lines between what is possible and what is not become blurred.



Figure 1: Peter Doig, *Gasthof zur Muldentalsperre*, 2000-02, oil on canvas, 196x 296cm, Collection; The Art Institute of Chicago

However it could also be argued that the exact opposite is happening, that Doig shuts us out as viewers, both in his imagery and in the way the paint sits on the canvas. Although Doig adheres to academic painting rules of depth and perspective, there are moments where the paint slips from illusionism into expressive abstraction. The trees in the front left and right of the image are only washes, and the raw canvas becomes visible underneath the thin paint. Splashes of white paint are flecked across the surface, sometimes resembling stars and other times asserting what they are; paint on the surface of the canvas. In the sky the materiality of the wet paint is asserted, as it drips and blends like a moving body of liquid. It is in these moments that the eye is forced back out of the image, illusion is interrupted and we become aware again of modernist surface and flatness. The surface is impenetrable,

“Doig puts us in our place, draws us in and holds us at bay” (Searle: 2007, 55). The figures in the image are blocking the entrance to the bridge, perhaps they are not welcoming us at all but shutting us out, and Doig has denied us a view of the guest house, we cannot get to the end of the bridge to see it. This is the perfect example of the ambiguity of Doig’s work, the images can be at once inviting and distancing, drawing us in or pushing us back, perspectival and flat, both emotionally charged and emotionally cold, or as Doig would phrase it; ‘numb’.

The image was constructed using two different photographic sources, one a postcard picture taken of Muldentensperre in Germany in 1910 [see figure 2], and the other of Doig and a friend in costume from a time when he worked at an Opera theatre where Igor Stravinsky’s ballet *Petrouchka* was performed (2007, 86). The play was based on the original 1911 Ballet Russes ballet, in which Rudolf Nureyev played the role of Petrouchka. Although Doig was working as a set painter, he was given a small role in the production and this photograph was taken [see figure 3][8]. Knowing the reference for the creation of this painting, we now question its link to reality yet at the same time we are surprised by its closeness to reality. The image is a construction, those are not figures from the early 20th century, but are merely dressed as if they are. They are not performing the play at its first showing in 1911, they are performing it much later, yet they have been placed in an early 20th Century scene. But perhaps these are the original performers; perhaps they should be in this scene? Perhaps what Doig has done is not create a false image but a new, alternate reality, one in which the figures could possibly have stood in this spot in Muldental in 1910. Due to our association of photographs with truth because of their indexical nature, however false this attribution might be, we gain a greater trust of this image as real once we are aware of its photographic source. However we simultaneously question the photograph, as it becomes clear how easily we can be manipulated in believing that what we are looking at is real, when photographs can be so simply manipulated (in this case the figures simply wear costume and we are convinced that they are from another time). The truth value of photographs is at once asserted and dismantled.

[8] Peter Doig painted over the original photograph.



Figure 2: Postcard of Muldentensperre, Germany, c.1910, from the artist's archives



Figure 3: Peter Doig, *Untitled*, 2002, oil on cut photograph, 65x50cm

When asked why he uses photographs as a reference for his paintings, Doig stated that photographs helped to preserve the memory of the moment, "as if the taking of the photograph allowed the memory to stay inside his camera" (Searle: 2007, 101). The connection between the photograph and memory has been much discussed, but what happens to this memory when it is re-interpreted in a painting? Perhaps the memory is strengthened, as Doig is able to re-insert some of the emotive quality of the memory through paint that was lost in the capturing of the photograph, or perhaps it is distanced even further as it is subjected to a double-remove? Searle describes Doig's use of photographs in the creation of his paintings as an "act of retrieval, the refinding of a memory, a discovery and reminiscence" (2007, 101). This is in line with the argument that paint is able to imbue an image with the kind of emotional capacity that a photograph never could, that painting can

"find provisional form for difficult to visualise and fugitive forces such as energy, excitement, terror and fear" (Siopis: 2005, 29). A painting's connection to aura lends it the ability to depict the un-showable, bringing the image closer to the viewer and reinstating the memory's emotional gravitas which was absent from the photograph. Beatrix Ruff agrees with this view in her text Peter Doig (2005) written for the Saatchi Gallery website after he showed work there in the group show The Triumph of Painting – Part One in 2005:

> Doig plugs into a nostalgia that photography can never capture: the physicality of his paintings makes these generic memories more vivid and desirable than the viewer's own (Ruff: 2005, 8).

Doig's paintings could therefore be seen as a way to get closer to the memory, closer to the lived experience as the photographic image provides an indexical source from which the painting can reference the abstract subjectivity which is missing from the photographic image. We are therefore brought closer to the image, and the painting can, as Siopis argues in her text Notes on a Carnal Medium (2005) "shape, suggest and materialise the inner world" (2005, 29).

However, Doig's use of photographs as source could have the opposite effect entirely. Doig may be creating distanced images which we as viewers cannot access, as there is a remove in the sense that we cannot enter the world of the image, and cannot see what is beyond the edges of the frame. But there is also a double remove that happens when painting from a photograph, as the actual event or memory is distanced in the taking of that photograph and then again in the painting of that photographic image. Perhaps this is an intentional comment by the artist on the nature of photography – that it is too removed and that the painting can reinstate lost aura. Alternatively Doig is saying that painting is as much removed as a photograph, and that painting is always a construction, never a representation. *Gasthof zur Muldentalsperre* (2000-02) is in its subject matter about the untrustworthy nature of images, their slipperiness and in-definability and, as Searle argues, "is, most of all, a painting about artifice, a reconstruction of a false landscape, a fake night, a painted landscape. It is a kind of double bluff, a play on painting's ambiguity and fiction" (2007, 86). Just as Doig's painting technique is complex and does not fit any one definition, so is the relationship between the photographic source and painting, as it blurs past and present, closeness and remove, truth and fiction, the imagined and the real.

When looking at the work of Luc Tuymans, the issue of whether these images are removed or not does not come into question, and as critic Stephanie Bell Behnke states; "if media images inadequately depict the horrors of reality, then Luc Tuymans' paintings are even

more disturbingly detached" (2006, www.saatchi-gallery.co.uk). Tuymans' works seem to enhance the feeling that the images that surround us in our everyday lives are too removed, too closed off for us to identify with, and this is brought to our attention in the way Tuymans paints the images. His paintings appear as if sitting behind a mist, as if there is a physical barrier between the viewer and the subject. The viewer is made to feel completely cut off from the subject, and as Bell Behnke describes, his work appears as "vaporised remnants" (Bell Behnke: 2006, www.saatchi-gallery.co.uk) of the original subject. While this mistiness is an intentional, painterly technique that Tuymans employs, it is also reminiscent of snapshot, overexposed amateur photographs. Despite this association with amateur photography, Tuymans often paints iconic media images, ones which would have been unlikely to be overexposed in their original form. This approach which Tuymans applies to all his subjects, iconic or ordinary, places everything on the same level of importance, or un-importance, and on the same level of remove.

One interpretation of this way of painting is that Tuymans wants to create works which "consciously fall desperately short of the iconic" (2006, www.saatchi-gallery.co.uk) thereby exposing the insufficiency of photographs to represent reality. Tuymans' paintings leave the viewer feeling completely numb, totally distanced, as these lifeless images produce a resounding feeling of silence and cool remove. This feeling is the same when looking at paintings created from charged news media or a mundane still life. The photograph is too removed, the painting even more so. Tuymans questions the ability of photographs to depict human emotion and the ability of paint to do the same. In Tuymans' work all representation becomes a further degree of separation from life. As Helen Molesworth describes in her text Luc Tuymans: Painting the Banality of Evil (2009), his works are about this feeling of remove, and the "seemingly bottomless amounts of distance that Tuymans is able to place between the viewer and the painting, the painting and its referent, the fragment and its relation to the whole" (Molesworth: 2009, 27). Political horrors become mundane, and Tuymans as painter is completely removed from the subject in the process of painting (Vermeiren: 2009, 15).

This distancing is created by Tuymans in the way that he paints, as the images are hazy, sapped of colour or painterly action. Unlike with Doig's work, the paint does not lend the viewer the same feeling of looking at a picture which exists in the present. His technique works against the "spatial logistics" of painting (Molesworth: 2009, 21), reminding the viewer that while painting creates the feeling that it is 'of the moment' it is not, it is merely a record of activity that has already happened. This dismantles the idea that only photographs are about absence, and that neither medium can ever stand in for lived experience.

This feeling of distance that Tuymans creates in his paintings reinforces the idea that true representation is impossible, and supports the artist's idea that "representation can only be partial and subjective" (Harris: 2009, www.theartnewspaper.com). In Tuymans' work *Cargo* (2004) [figure 4], this view is supported in his painting technique as well as in his subject matter and reference. The work shows a cargo ship floating in a bluish space, with a strong light shining down on the ship from above. The painting is painted in typical Tuymans style with the ship realistically and perfectly rendered, while the image is hazy and very light as if the painting had faded over many years. This fading links to associations of memory and nostalgia, as if this image came from a very long time ago. This is in contrast to Doig's images in which the embodied-ness of the paint creates the feeling of looking at something that is 'happening', whereas Tuymans' images create the feeling of something that has 'happened'. Tuymans' works have always been associated with the "aesthetics of memory" (Vermeiren: 2009, 19) as the mistiness of his images could be argued to embody the haziness of memory.

However we have also seen that there is something incredibly removed and impersonal about Tuymans' works, which contrasts with the idea of a sentimental memory. Instead Tuymans seems to be conveying an idea of memory in general, rather than to personal memory. As Tuymans himself explains; "there is an idea of memory that is neither personal nor collective; it's just a picture of memory, a non-picture" (2003 [1996], 112). This statement is interesting in that it links to issues with personal photographs and their connection to memory. As discussed in the previous chapter, personal photographs have become increasingly less significant as they are more easily produced and therefore less treasured, and as they enter the public domain via social networking sites and become available for widespread scrutiny. Personal photographs have become mundane, throw-away objects and perhaps do not hold the same emotional weight as they once did. Memory could be argued to have become an aesthetic, faded old photographs perhaps have joined mainstream media images in their lack of personal connection to us. Unlike Doig who may arguably be trying to reinstate this importance or 'touch of the personal' in his painting from photographs, Tuymans is simply pointing it out, exposing the emptiness of meaning in photographic images.



Figure 4: Luc Tuymans, *Cargo*, 2004, oil on canvas, 150x 196.5cm

Tuymans' statement may not only be about the nature of photography, as is evident is his painting style. The painting is illusionistic in the sense that it is proportionally correct and makes use of basic illusion techniques such as shadow to suggest three-dimensionality. However his painting is still incredibly flat. The paint is evenly applied all over the canvas, with no particular area receiving more emphasis or attention. This flatness references modernist ideals, in which a "decentralised" approach was valued, as there was no particular point of referential focus, with an "'all-over' surface" application of paint (Schwabsky: 2007, 26). These modernist ideals exist in this work simultaneously with its highly referential, photographic nature. In this way the viewer is both kept at bay by an awareness of the surface's flatness, yet drawn in by the subject that is recognisable in as something that existed in reality and was captured by the photograph. This tension forces the viewer to consider their lack of connection to images in general, as increasingly images have become drained of meaning through repetition. Tuymans is "'making visible' the artifice inherent in both types of images", the painted and photographic (Preller: 2001, 52).

The title of Tuymans' work could be interpreted in various ways. On the most basic level, it is a cargo ship which appears to be stranded in ice. The image itself speaks of distance, a ship forgotten and left to decay in this expanse of ice, photographed at night from above with a searchlight[9]. However the word 'cargo' could refer to memory, as it has associations of 'carrying', perhaps in this case the ship is a representation of memory as something we carry with us, something which has begun to fade over time and become less and less clear in our minds. The painting questions what the photograph is able to carry from the actual experience it attempts to capture, and whether it can truly stand as a substitute for that reality. It also questions painting's supposed ability to represent abstract feelings of emotion

[9] What this image is actually depicting will be discussed later.

as Siopis argues in Notes on a Carnal Medium (2005, 28), as Tuymans is painting in a way which seems to do the opposite, pulling the image even further away from that reality.

When looking at the source from which Tuymans made this painting [see figure 5], any remaining trust we have as viewers of photographs as real is dismantled, and our realisation of painting's ability to mislead us is solidified.



Figure 5: Photograph from artist's archives

The only hint Tuymans places in the painting which suggests the ship's true location is a faint line stemming from the left hand side of the ship. The muted ice blue suggests that this ship is sitting in ice, however the faint line, at first barely noticeable, suggests an entirely different location. The photographic source shows us that this is in fact a toy ship, sitting on a tablecloth. Tuymans has copied the image extremely closely, making only minor changes to the contrast of the image, but it is this small change which leads the viewer to see something that is untrue. The title now suggests to us that this is 'cargo' from childhood, an emotionally charged object from childhood has been diluted to this banal, detached painting. Tuymans is showing us that photographs can trick you, and paintings even more so. Neither medium, according to Tuymans, can be argued to be a true representation of reality. While some may argue that using photographs as reference for painting helped restore painting's lack of indexical quality, which combined with painting's ability to depict the internal created the perfect representational image[10], Tuymans' work suggests that all representation is a construction, portraying a world of images which have become drained of any emotion, as society has become "saturated" in representations which are too distant from reality (Siopis: 2005, 28).

[10] As Gerhard Richter stated when asked why he used photographs as source for his paintings; "I did not take it (a photograph) as a substitute for reality but as a crutch to help me get to reality" (Richter, Gerhard in Rugoff, Ralph, The Painting of Modern Life – 1960s to Now, The Hayward, London, 2007, p10.

In her text The Mnemonic Function of the Painted Image (2005), an article contributed to the publication which accompanied the exhibition The Triumph of Painting at the Saatchi Gallery in 2005, Alison Gingeras states that "certain contemporary painters have long understood the mnemonic insufficiency of the photograph and have capitalized on their medium's own strength in this domain" (2005, 8) however when looking closely at the work of painters such as Doig and Tuymans the argument for painting as a medium which can 'improve on' or make up for the shortcomings of photography as a medium which can accurately reference reality and memory is complex. Tuymans' works seem to dispute this, enhancing paintings' separation from lived experience rather than trying to close this gap, creating a "scene twice-removed" (Bell Behnke: 2006, www.saatchi-gallery.co.uk).

Tuymans is therefore highlighting the inability of either painting or photography to create a translation of reality. Alternatively it could be argued that Tuymans provides an extremely accurate representation of memory, one which emphasises its imprecise nature. Gingeras argues that this is only possible in paint, as its "material sensuality, tactility and atmospheric possibilities, corresponds more closely to the imprecision of the human brain's mnemonic functions" (2005, 9). This view is problematic though, as photographs can often contain atmospheric qualities which very closely resemble the 'aesthetics of memory' – this is apparent in the washed out look of the photograph Tuymans used as source for *Cargo* (2004) [see figure 5]. However, there is still an implicit association with painting as constructed, more so than with photographs, which allows the viewer to more readily accept it as a representation of the internal, abstract and changeable nature of memory. Tuymans' painting exposes the photograph as capable of the same capacity to depict the undefinable.

Doig's work also exposes the artifice of painting as a medium that references reality, even an internal or emotional reality, and his use of fantastic, imagined landscapes may hint at this artifice. But this artificial nature of his work may perhaps be an attempt to reference the internal, the emotional and therefore the un-representable. When seeing the photographic sources that Doig used to create the image, one is surprised by the painting's link to reality, as it seems a complete fabrication and construction. This shows us however that neither the painting nor the photograph is a transparency to reality, and the combination of the two may not amend the shortcomings of either painting or photography as a purely representational medium, but may in fact be highlighting the constructed nature of both mediums. The combination of painting and photograph forces the viewer to acknowledge images as of the past, even though painting may portray a feeling of agency and being in the present. Doig's blurring of painting styles also confuses the eye as it shifts between representational and abstract, three-dimensional and flat, as he "explores the possibilities and limits of several

ways of constructing an image – and paintings" (Searle: 2007, 103). Unlike Tuymans' paintings which are undoubtedly of the past, and create an undeniable feeling of distance, Doig's work plays with these boundaries, forcing the viewer to question what they know about photographs, what they know about painting, and what they are looking at.

In an interview with Gareth Harris, Tuymans explains that the central concern of his work is dealing with the untrustworthy nature of images, as "a lot of the imagery is not lived through but just seen" (2009, www.theartnewspaper.com). Despite this, there is still a dependence on images as a true representation of what we see and what we experience. As Sontag argues in On Photography (1979): "Photography implies that we know about the world if we accept it as the camera records it. But this is the opposite of understanding, which starts from not accepting the world as it looks" (1979, 23). It is this questioning that both Tuymans and Doig encourage through their paintings, and their works are as much about the nature of their photographic references, as they are about the nature of painting itself, and the possibilities it carries for representation. Both artists force us to question whether there can ever be true representation of abstract thoughts memories, and feelings, and if so, how this could be aesthetically represented in a painting or a photograph in this "age of the image" (Schwabsky: 2005, 3).

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Chapter Four

Contradictions and Convergences

In my own practice over the past two years I have worked from photographs I took on a simple point-and-shoot digital camera around the city of Johannesburg. The images are always of spaces which have been emptied of human activity, neglected, abandoned, or temporarily left during the night hours. However, all the images, despite the absence of physical human activity, contain traces of human occupation. This chapter will explore how these images speak about the past, absence, nostalgia and memory, all of which are embodied in the subject matter but also perhaps in the fact that I mimic the language of my photographic source in the paintings, a medium which critic Roland Barthes argued to be inextricably linked with these characteristics of something past (1980). In this chapter I will reflect on the importance of the photograph as source for my paintings, the process of painting itself, the influence of other artists on my work and the feeling that the combination of these factors evokes in relation to my subject matter, the city of Johannesburg, itself an area of contradictions and convergences.

The practice of creating paintings using a photographic source is not a new one, and has been occurring for decades. In his text A Small History of Photography (1979 [1931]) Walter Benjamin describes how the painter Utrillo was painting Paris landscapes from postcards in the early twentieth century (1979 [1931], 242), and the English portrait painter David Ocatvius Hill based a fresco of the first general synod of the Church of Scotland in 1843 on several portrait photographs [see figures 1A and 1B]. Throughout the long history of photography and painting, the practice of combining the two has led to continuing scrutiny and evaluation. What is the effect of this process? What does it say about both mediums? And how does it support or hinder the subject or meaning or emotive effect of the painting? As we have seen over the previous chapters there seems to be no one answer, as the process of painting from photographs creates varied and complex effects, commenting on the triumphs and shortfalls of both mediums.



Figure 1A: David Octavius Hill, *Disruption of 1843 which formed the Free Church of Scotland*, circa 1850, fresco on plaster



Figure 1B: One of a series of photographs taken by David Octavius Hill and Robert Adamson as preparatory work for a painting by David Octavius Hill for *Disruption of 1843 which formed the Free Church of Scotland*, circa 1843, George Eastman House

In my own work, the use of photographs seems to have imbued the paintings with all the qualities and contradictions I have thus far discussed; from the distance and feeling of remove which is seen in Luc Tuymans' work, to the embodied agency which is sometimes present in Peter Doig's. The works at once invite you in and keep you at bay. This is a contradiction which is associated with the nature of painting with its illusionist capabilities and modernist associations; with photographs which are at once an indexical reference to

the ‘real’ and yet are associated with absence and death; and with my subject matter, Johannesburg, a chaotic and vibrant city which is full of agency and life, but at the same time can feel strangely abandoned with areas of neglect and emptiness.

While my paintings are about all these things – photographs, paint and its materiality, and the empty, abandoned spaces of Johannesburg – they are primarily about light, and giving shape to this intangible form. Taking photographs is a way to achieve this by capturing “transposed and – perhaps just for that reason – almost abstract form” (Van Gelder & Westgeest: 2011, 192). My paintings take advantage of this photographic characteristic, capturing light not as it shifts and changes the way that, for example, Claude Monet did in his multiple paintings of the Rouen Cathedral in various lights [see figures 2A and 2B], but of how light appeared in a split second, captured in a frozen moment as the camera hurries past – the way in which we usually see the city, not in walking it but in driving past it. This is something uniquely characteristic of photography. As Benjamin explains, it allows us to see the previously unseen, freezing a moment and allowing us to scrutinize it; “Photography, with its devices of slow motion and enlargement, reveals the secret. It is through photography that we first discover the existence of this optical unconscious” (1979 [1931], 243). In this sense using a photograph as a source turns the painter into a scientist, scrutinising and revealing aspects of a subject not visible, that which we are not at first conscious of, when painting from the subject directly.

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Figure 2A: Claude Monet, *Rouen Cathedral, the West Portal and Saint-Romain Tower, Full Sunlight, Harmony in Blue and Gold*, 1894, oil on canvas, 107 x 73 cm, Musee d'Orsay, Paris

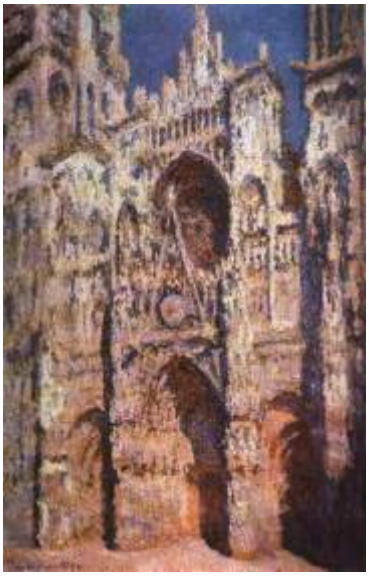


Figure 2B: Claude Monet, *Rouen Cathedral: Full Sunlight,* 1894, oil on canvas, Louvre, Paris

However this is also one of the drawbacks of photographs – that they expose the subject mechanically and therefore arguably with disregard for the nature of the subject in actual lived experience. Benjamin refers to this as the "destruction of the aura", or the removal of the emotive sense of the trace of human intervention, which is further destroyed by the photograph's ability to be continuously reproduced (1979 [1931], 255). This feeling of 'aura' is associated with modernist values in painting, as a painting is intensely personal and, according to a modernist approach, always a unique production.

However there is also the post-modernist argument that all paintings take inspiration from an external referent, and there is no such thing as an 'original'. In his text Potential Images: Ambiguity and Indeterminacy in Modern Art (2002), Dario Gamboni acknowledges this contradiction: 'If postmodern painting has 'let the world in again' as Gamboni states, it is to the extent that tensions between certain 'worlds' are recognised, allowing for the inhabitation of the 'potential'" (Van Gelder & Westgeest: 2011, 15). This tension between the loss of originality or aura through reproduction and mimesis and the implicit association of the presence of aura in painting due to its connection to modernist ideals of "avant-gardism" and originality (Rugoff: 2007, 6) is an example of how painting from photographs challenges our views on originality and aura, both asserting and dismantling it simultaneously. Paintings which mimic photographic language straddle this border between abstraction and illusion, reality and imagination, the original and the reproduced. This, as Gamboni argues, allows for an ambiguity which opens up the image to new potential of understanding in reaction to and perhaps even separate from the history associated with both painting and photography (2011, 15).

We can see therefore that when painting from a photograph our assumptions around both mediums are dismantled. The photograph is no longer a symbol of something gone or 'dead' as it has been brought into the immediate medium of painting and yet the painting is not entirely 'of the present', as it references several processes of translation through which the original subject has passed. In On Photography (1979) Sontag argued that taking photographs somehow diluted experience, "limiting experience to an image, a souvenir" (1979, 9). But perhaps what is happening is that we are creating a new experience, one that only references that 'original' experience in the creation of something new, imagined and imbued with its own sense of aura. This certainly seems to be the feeling created in my own works; that what is being presented isn't a real place but an imaginary one, one which reminds us of our own experiences of Johannesburg but is somehow amplified.

Fred Ritchin argues in After Photography (2009) that this is precisely why we take photographs and why we value them perhaps even more than the actual experience; "It is not because it makes it more immediately 'real' that we prefer the image, but because it makes it more unreal, an unreality in which we hope to find a transcendent immortality, a higher, less finite realty" (2009, 21). Perhaps reality is too limiting, and taking photographs allows us to transcend the moment into something higher, which is only magnified when the photograph is translated into the implicitly more 'imaginative'[11] medium of paint.

Ultimately while the photograph is important, and its trace remains in the painted work; it is merely the initial research for something new. My works are also about surface, how the paint sits on the canvas, keeping the viewer at bay, and how that surface occasionally opens up into illusion, drawing the viewer in. The surface and subject matter become equally important; the paintings are depictions of areas and buildings around Johannesburg but are also of the abstract form of light. This effect creates a feeling of uncertainty, a feeling of getting to know the subject at times and at other times being presented with a strange, unknowable subject. This is a quality of both Peter Doig's and Luc Tuymans' paintings, which have had a visible influence on my own painting style. In the previous chapter I discussed Doig's *Gasthof zur Muldentalsperre* (2000-02) [see figure 9] which speaks to "a kind of blankness" (Searle: 2007, 55), a feeling of distance and remove. The figures block one's entrance to the bridge and the viewer can never see what is around the corner. Yet at the same time Doig uses illusion which draws the eye in, but in places what is supposed to be stars in the sky or a tree in the foreground slip into abstract washes and drips if paint, asserting the flatness of the canvas and the fact that we are looking at paint and not through a window at a three-dimensional scene.

Johannesburg is a city of similar contradictions of belonging and being kept at bay. Suburbs and city centre sit in close relation to each other, large areas of the city centre sit abandoned, the buildings starting to decay through years of disuse, and yet adjacent office blocks are filled with activity. At night the streets empty almost entirely, and this heavily populated city becomes eerily devoid of activity.

In his Masters Dissertation in Fine Art for the University of the Witwatersrand; Johannesburg as Place in Selected Films by William Kentridge (2006), Cobi Labuschagne describes

[11] I am not suggesting that photographs do not have the capacity to create new, imagined images, but its indexical link to reality is arguably a limiting factor in this sense. Viewing painting from a Modernist sense implies that painting is completely non referential, and only indexical of the 'imagined'. However this view becomes problematic when painting from a reference such as a photograph, as the imagined and indexical co-exist in the resulting image.

Johannesburg as a site of “convergence” (2006, 94) where there are all sorts of unlikely contradictions in its layout and the way it is inhabited. Rich and poor live adjacent to one another; the squatter camps of Alexandra neighbour the highly affluent suburb of Sandton, and the quiet family streets of Parktown flank the decaying Johannesburg city centre. Johannesburg is a strange city of contradictions and convergences, belonging almost to a dream world. As described in Kinshasa: Tales of an Invisible City, “places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it might be possible to indicate their location in reality” (de Boek & Plissart: 2006, 254). In her Masters Dissertation for the University of the Witwatersrand Invisible Johannesburg Seen and Unseen: An exploration of the imaged/imagined city (2009)**,** Mary Wafer describes how the city is “envisioned and experienced differently by every person in it, and so the whole seems to exist almost entirely in the imaginations of its inhabitants” (2009, 10). It is this imagined place that I depict in my paintings, which through their photographic reference, remind the viewer that this dream world is real.

My work *Come In* (2004) [see figure 3A] is based on a photograph I took of a block of apartments in Braamfontein, near Johannesburg’s city centre. The photograph is unremarkable, simply a photograph of a building slightly obscured by trees, but in the painting I have exaggerated this, almost completely obscuring the building beyond. The trees themselves are painted with large expressive brushstrokes which are in contrast to the more controlled, illusionistic painting behind. There are no human figures, and both photograph and painting are uncomfortably empty. This mimics the feeling of being blocked out, kept at bay both in the subject matter and in the way it is painted. Influenced by Doig’s *Concrete Cabin II* (1992) [see figure 4], the abstract trees in the foreground create the feeling that something is hidden from the viewer, that they cannot penetrate or access the building beyond. Johannesburg seems to create this feeling, as its strangeness and alien-ness exclude one from fully belonging to it. The photographic reference further adds to this feeling of distance, as the translation through a lens and then through paint perhaps enhances a feeling of distance and exclusion. The photograph is a relic, evidence of something from the past and this painting is a way to engage with the present feeling embodied yet not visible in the old photograph, as if since then the building has become overgrown with trees over years of neglect. This feeling of remove is similar to that created in Doig’s works, which possess a “kind of blankness” (Searle: 2007, 55) despite the energetic, embodied application of paint. The title of this work suggests this contradiction; although this is a residential building and we should feel welcomed, we are kept at bay.



Figure 3: Kate Lewis, *Come In*, 2012, oil on paper, 192.5 x 121.5cm



Figure 3B: Kate Lewis, Photograph of an apartment block in Braamfontein: Johannesburg for *'Come In'*, 2012



Figure 4: Peter Doig, *Concrete Cabin II*, 1992, oil on canvas, 200x275cm

The feeling that we are looking at something from the past is a recurring theme in my work, something which is also present in Luc Tuymans' paintings. His use of muted colours mimic the washed out, bleached quality of old photographs which carry associations of nostalgia and memory. His works particularly influenced me in *Mirage* (2011) [see figure 5], a painting of a building in Johannesburg's Central Business District on Commissioner street, known for its colonial buildings, themselves relics of the past.



Figure 5: Kate Lewis, *Mirage,* 2011-12, oil on canvas, 130 x 250cm

Despite this building being on one of the busiest streets in Johannesburg's city centre, again the image is empty of figures. There are a few vehicles, but the glazed windows seem to be empty of people. The windows in my work are often rendered in this opaque manner in the daytime scenes, as if there is nothing to view beyond, or perhaps there is a presence hidden

from us. This seems to create an ominous feeling of ghostly human presence and absence. A similar feeling is present in my depictions of windows at night, as the light harshly blocks out the building's interior, which I shall show later.

The work *Mirage* (2011-12) is rendered in muted pink tones, suggesting something dreamlike and otherworldly – this does not seem to be an image of a bustling, dirty, polluted city centre, but a rose-coloured pink heaven. The title suggests this, that what we are seeing perhaps exists only in our imaginations, a utopia of the past in amongst the city decay. I have mimicked Luc Tuymans' signature muted painting style [see example figure 6], as a film of white paint covers the scene beyond. This enhances the feeling that this is an image from long ago; as this muted colouring mimics old faded photographs, playing into ideas of nostalgia and loss. The viewer is forced out of the painting abruptly by some hastily rendered dark columns which are in contrast to the more muted tones and meticulous painting beneath. The use of an aesthetic which we associate with overexposed or faded old photographs in this work brings up undeniable associations of nostalgia and memory; this is confirmed in the colonial style of the buildings. But the photograph I used as a source for this image was captured recently. What is missing from the photograph is expressed in the painting; that this is a building from the past, from an idealised time of wealth, but which is now being overgrown and consumed by the modern city surrounding it. The viewer is kept out of the image, and can only peer at the building through layers of paint which conceal it.

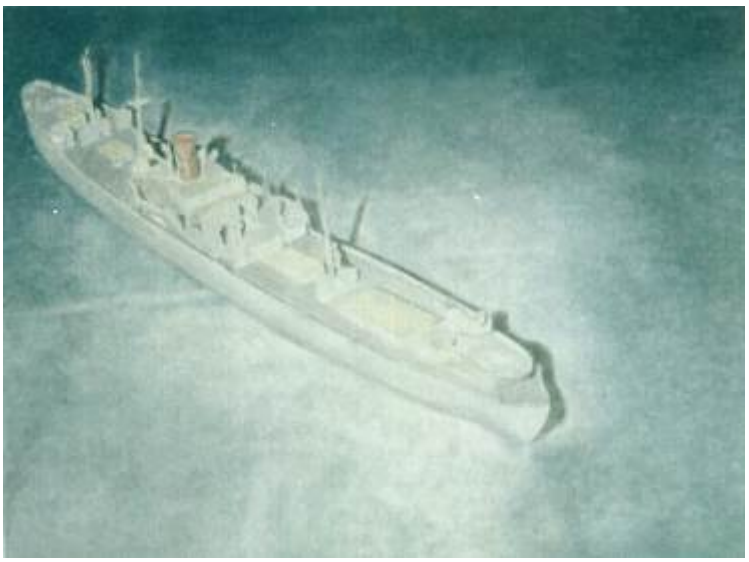


Figure 6: Luc Tuymans, *Cargo*, 2004, oil on canvas, 150x 196.5cm

This feeling of remove is present in all my works which obscure the viewer by use of washes and painted lines which partly cover the more meticulous illusion rendered beneath. They employ modernist values of abstraction and flatness along with traditional illusionism,

simultaneously asserting the materiality of paint with the all-over flatness which is present in over-exposed digital photographs.

In *Gateway* (2012) [see figure 7A], based on a photograph I took when walking over Nelson Mandela Bridge in Braamfontein [see figure 7B] I used a paint roller to create vertical bands which obscure the image below. In some areas the image below is almost completely obscured, whilst in others the thinner paint allows the viewer to see what is beneath. Aside from my omission of the figure in the bottom right hand corner of the photograph I have copied the dimensions of the photograph quite faithfully, and when looking at the photograph in conjunction with the painting, it seems as if the trace of that figure still exists, as if he was in the image but has now moved away. This feeling that a space was previously inhabited is present in a lot of my works, although they are absent of figures there is the uneasy feeling that someone was there; which is felt in the depiction of cars moving by or lights left on in buildings. This is how Johannesburg can feel at night, abandoned but not empty, emoting associations of nostalgia, ghost-like presence and death. These feelings are similar to those evoked by photography, as we are looking at the trace of an action, one which no longer exists but existed at some point. This distancing is created with my use of marks and washes which obscure the image in some cases and in others by my mimicking frozen light which is present in night time photographs, which themselves carry associations of an invisible human presence.



Figure 7A: Kate Lewis, *Gateway*, 2011-12, oil on canvas, 250 x 160cm



Figure 7B: Kate Lewis, Photograph of Nelson Mandela Bridge for *'Gateway'*, 2011

Nelson Mandela bridge is the perfect example of an area which exists “outside of all places” (de Boek & Plissart: 2006, 254), as it straddles the border between the city centre and more affluent residential areas, belonging to both places and to neither. This ‘gateway’ to the city is in some ways a dividing barrier, and I have attempted to capture this feeling of being blocked or separated from what lies beyond in the painting in the physical barrier of Payne’s grey paint which has been rolled over the surface.

The title of my work *Rushing In* (2011-12) [figure 8] again links to ideas of access and the denial of access. The painting is based on a photograph of the railways which run beneath Nelson Mandela Bridge. However these trains are stationary, having fallen into disuse like so many features of Johannesburg’s city centre. The single point perspective of this image creates the feeling of being drawn in, as if the trains are moving forward into the city beyond. As in Doig’s *Gasthof zur Muldentalsperre* (2000-02) [figure 9], there is a sense of wanting to follow the path that the trains are on (and in the case of Doig’s work to follow the bridge) to an imagined place beyond, which despite its not being visible is present in our minds. This can create the feeling that we are penetrating the image, as if looking through a window, yet we are also held at a distance, as we can never see what lies beyond. Doig’s use of flattened, almost abstract areas of paint asserts this feeling of distance, forcing the eye out again, and the figures which stand at the path’s entrance do not invite us in but block the way. This is mirrored in *Rushing In* (2011-12) through my use of washes of paint, which partly obscure the scene beyond. Illusion sits in conjunction with flatness, as the pale wash on the lower half of the painting and the darker wash on the top half creates the sense of viewing multiple planes at once, which sit on the surface of the canvas or even appear to hover above the image beyond. This washed out quality is characteristic of snapshot photographs and reproduced images, as this painting was in fact based on an image from a newspaper. The painting mimics the flatness and as Benjamin would call the “destruction of the aura” (1979 [1931], 250) that occurs in reproduced images where the image is “divested of its uniqueness – by means of its reproduction” (1979 [1931], 250).



Figure 8: Kate Lewis, *Rushing In*, 2011-12, oil on canvas, 130 x 250cm



Figure 9: Peter Doig, *Gasthof zur Muldentalsperre*, 2000-02, oil on canvas, 196x 296cm, Collection: The Art Institute of Chicago

This work confronts the contradictory nature of both painting and photography, as the photograph tells us that this is a real scene, yet it has perhaps been stripped of its aura and been rendered “dead” (Barthes: 1980) as it is an image of the past. However the photograph’s translation through paint may further increase this feeling of distance from the real, yet at the same time presents us with the supposed ‘aura’ which may have been re-instated in the process of creating an original, embodied image which is indexical of the painter’s hand. However this image cannot be truly ‘original’ in a modernist sense as it is referential, yet at the same time it is a new construction, despite the influence of the

photographic source. This shows us how when painting from photographs we are forced to question the nature of both mediums, and this may "draw our attention to the characteristics of the various media involved… and often such forms lead to media invention in relation to their history" (Van Gelder & Westgeest: 2011, 3). Both mediums are questioned, allowing for new interpretations of painting and photography, and this leads to re-looking at established ideas around both mediums and the construction of new attitudes towards them.

The idea of creating an image which stems from the artist's internal self is a modernist one, based on critic Clement Greenberg's argument that painting should come directly from the mind of the painter rather than from an external referent (Harris: 2005, www.theartnewspaper.com/articles), however my paintings depict a world that exists "entirely in the imaginations of its inhabitants" (Wafer: 2009, 10) while using a photographic source. Sontag argued that photographs have actually distanced us from their referent, "reality" (1979, 9) and Ritchin stated that this is why we take photographs, as they provide us with an image that transcends reality (2009, 21). These ideas around painting's autonomy and photography's direct indexical link to the real are dismantled when painting from a photograph, presenting us with an image that is simultaneously real and imagined, referential and abstract. All my paintings provide the viewer with this contradiction, allowing them at times to access the image and recognise it as something familiar, and at other times be denied this access, as if viewing a scene not of this world.

In my work *The Year 3000* (2012) [see figure 10A] I have depicted a scene that looks otherworldly yet is strongly recognisable as a feature of Johannesburg's highways. Based on an image I took of an e-toll structure [figure 10B], the painting closely mimics the photograph's language, and the way in which light has been captured, as is characteristic of a snapshot digital image. However my depiction is considerably more muted than the photograph, as I covered the image with washes of dark paint. This creates as sense of dilution, as if the image has been washed out. This mimics the feeling of remove that is felt in Tuymans' images, which speaks to the double remove that occurs in capturing a subject through the photographic lens, and then translating that subject into a painting, and can also be argued to be a comment on the distancing effect of the photograph, as it is an image of a fleeting moment which has now passed. Again as in *Rushing In* (2011-12), this image creates a sense that we are being drawn to a vanishing point, and if we were to follow the road we would see something beyond it. Yet, as in Doig's *Gasthof zur Muldentalsperre* (2000-02) we are denied this access, and while feeling drawn in we are somehow blocked out of the image at the same time, as we cannot see what lies beyond the vanishing point. This image, although containing two vehicles, feels eerily absent of human presence. Only

the traces of human activity remain, and the fact that the vehicles are moving away from us intensifies this feeling of a post-apocalyptic world, which is being emptied of human presence. This painting is a depiction of Johannesburg's contradiction; that it is a growing, densely populated city, yet it can feeling strangely empty and abandoned, particularly at night when it is often unsafe to be walking the streets.



Figure 10A: Kate Lewis, *The Year 3000*, 2012, Oil on Canvas, 140 x 185cm



Figure10B: Kate Lewis, Photograph of E-toll for *'The Year 3000'*, 2012

This feeling of absence is also reflected in the subject matter of the painting, the e-toll structure. This is the ultimate symbol of poor city planning and of structures sitting unused, something which is characteristic of many urban areas in Johannesburg. The e-toll

structures have yet to be implemented, and they are associated with waste and unnecessary government spending. Johannesburg has many structures and buildings like the e-tolls, which sit abandoned of human activity.

The washes of paint which I have used to obscure the image beneath again allow the viewer only partial access to the subject. While drawn in by the use of perspectival painting, the flatness of the washes also asserts the canvas surface, and in areas where the paint has dripped or where lights appear more as globules of paint, this illusion is dismantled giving way to abstraction. The title of this work asserts the otherworldly, inaccessible feeling created in my paintings. While the subject is intensely familiar, the areas of abstraction and washes which obscure the image lend a feeling of distance and inaccessibility, and of looking at something imagined or from an alien place and time. By using a photograph as a reference for this painting the implicit associations which form part of the history of both mediums – painting's supposed ability to depict the imagined, the "most direct expression" (Kuspit: 2002, 2) of the internal and photography's supposed link to the real through its indexical relationship to light – provide the viewer with conflicting ideas, supporting and contradicting the established notions we have about both mediums.

One of the works which seems to most successfully capture this feeling of access and restriction, the familiar and the strange, is a painting I did of a large, empty petrol station at night titled *A Nice Place to Visit* (2011-12) [see figure 11]. The work depicts several rows of petrol filling pumps, yet is completely devoid of people or vehicles. The station itself is brightly illuminated, however everything behind is in total darkness. This enhances the feeling of isolation and loneliness created by the absence of human activity, as the petrol station seems to float in a void of nothingness, totally cut off from everything around it. In this work I have mimicked the streaking that occurs when the camera moves during the capturing of the shot. This creates a sense of something fleeting or remembered, as if it is somehow fading away. This reference to a characteristic of photographs, along with the photograph-like rendering of the frozen, abstract forms of light, links this painting to associations with photography without the viewer necessarily knowing that it was created using a photographic source. The association of photographs with something that no longer exists and with the past and memory lends this painting a sense of loss and emptiness.

Despite the fact that petrol stations are an intensely familiar and mundane feature of the city, this painting depicts this space as something haunting and unfamiliar, linking into the overall feeling created in my exhibition; of Johannesburg as a site of uneasiness and unfamiliarity. The bands of thin paint which cover the surface of the work create the feeling of being

blocked out from this scene, as if looking through a veil at a ghost-like world beyond. This feeling is in direct conflict with the way in which the eye is drawn in by the perspective of the painting and comforted by the familiarity of a petrol station. Again this feeling of push and pull exists in the work, which is echoed in the process of making a painting from a photographic source. The expressive mark making seen in the smudging of the paint creates a feeling of agency, of being 'of this moment', and yet the references to photographic language allude to that which has passed, a moment that no longer exists. Furthermore what we are viewing is a scene that has undergone a double removal, both in the capturing of the photograph and then in painting it. This process lends itself to depictions of Johannesburg, a site which can seem so alien and unknown.



Figure 11: Kate Lewis, A Nice Palce to Visit, 2011-12, Oil on canvas, 250 x 160cm

My exhibition, Painting Johannesburg, which was held at the University of the Witwatersrand in the Wits School of Art Substation, and ran from 18 to 23 February 2013, exhibited ten works depicting Johannesburg scenes on canvas and paper in oils. While the subjects ranged from the apartment blocks to street scenes to well-known landmarks, depicted both during the day and at night, they all formed part of an exploration of the nature of painting, the nature of photographs, and the feelings of distance, remove, memory, nostalgia, the familiar and alien in the City of Johannesburg. These themes of emptiness, the trace of human activity and the depiction of something passed or imagined are not only themes relating to Johannesburg, but also to the nature of photography and painting. The works

which reference photographs in their language (although there were no actual photographs on display at the exhibition) and reference modernist flatness in painting along with traditional illusionism, set up many contradictions around the understanding of both mediums – the attempt to understand the contradictory nature of Johannesburg as a city, while continuously questioning what it is to attempt to depict a subject.

My works therefore seem to be holding a number of contradictions in tension: they create a certain “silence” as is present in the works of Luc Tuymans (Tuymans: 2009, 21) but simultaneously contain an embodied “human trace” (Siopis: 2005, 36) as is sometimes present in the more expressive mark making in Peter Doig’s paintings; yet they purposely distance us from the subject with harsh abstract marks which block us from the painting. Photographs are also contradictory in this sense. They have a direct, referential relationship to the subject as light passes through the lens and reacts directly with the photosensitive pixels of a digital camera, and can prove that the moment captured really existed. Yet they also present us with an entirely alien way of seeing, as well as depicting something which is dead, disembodied and does not exist anymore. Painting shares similar contradictions; it is sometimes argued to be a “direct expression” of the internal self (Kuspit: 2000, 2), having an indexical relationship to the painter’s hand, and yet can also be argued to be inevitably influenced by external references, and will never be purely autonomous. Painting could be purely imaginative, stemming from the artist alone, or perhaps it is a more reliable depiction of reality that a photograph, as it depicts the relationship between painter and subject rather than coldly depicting a subject in removed isolation. When combining the two mediums all these contradictions and convergences are brought to the foreground, as they sometimes support or sometimes dismantle our assumptions around both mediums.

Johannesburg, a city which often has a conflicting and strange character, could arguably not be truly depicted either in a photograph which may be too distant or removed, or in a painting which may be too separate from actual experience. But through a combination of the two mediums we may get closer to capturing Johannesburg’s contradictory nature.

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Conclusion

This research set out to examine the development of photography and painting and how our understanding of these mediums has continually shifted over time. I discussed how artists have confronted the nature of photography through painting, and how they have also questioned painting itself during this process. After examining selected works by painters Peter Doig and Luc Tuymans, who use photographs as source for their paintings, I have argued that it is difficult to define painting as pure construction, and photography as transparency. In my own work I have explored photographic language through the medium of paint, asserting the photographic source as well as the materiality of paint in my works, which has led to the combination of conflicting feelings of access and restriction, knowing and unknowing in my work. This feeling of contradiction created by the combinations of both photographic language and painterly language in my work has supported the nature of my subject matter; the city of Johannesburg, which can seem both familiar and strange or alien.

In the first section of this research, The Development of 'Photographic Language' in Painting and the Invention of Photography, I looked the invention of the *camera obscura* in the 16th century, from which photography was born (Galassi: 1982, 11). In my exploration of the beginnings of photography I looked at Peter Galassi's text Before Photography: Painting and the Invention of Photography (1982), which also describes the developments occurring in painting during the invention and growth of photographic methods. Galassi argues that what we would term as 'photographic language'; one point perspective, cropping, and objects in the foreground appearing larger than those in the background; was appearing in painting before the obscura's invention in the 16th century. The appearance of this new form of seeing is linked by Galassi to the development of "linear perspective" in the 15th century (1982, 2). Galassi explains that this led to a shift in the way artists were composing their paintings, from a "synthesizing" view, which depicted multiple perspectives at once, to an "analytical" view which depicted one "particular point of view" from a fixed moment (1982, 12-13). He therefore argued that while the *camera obscura* could perhaps be termed a tool of "perfect perspective", it could not compose a synthesized image in the way that painting could (1982, 17).

As Galassi shows, it was often argued that the presence of an analytical view in painting was a direct result of the influence of photography, but this "ignores the long tradition" from which painting was derived (1982, 17). He states that photography seems to have arrived at a time

when there was an “accumulation of pictorial experiment” in modes of representation, and photography was developed in conjunction with painting rather than in opposition to it (1982, 18). However Galassi does state that the development of photography did have an influence on painting in that it allowed for greater acceptance of highly perspectival images, as perspectival techniques such as the “prominent foregrounds” employed by 17th century Dutch painters would have arguably been seen as too unusual, had there not been exposure to these modes of vision in photographs (1982, 19).

With a shift away from neoclassical ideals of “human art” to a focus on nature in the 1800s, those preparatory sketches which artists employed to create grand, synthesized works gained importance in a way they hadn’t before (1982, 20). This allowed for a “formidable shift in artistic values”, as the idealised and composed was rejected for the mundane and focused (1982, 21). These paintings of one aspect of a subject, viewed from one point at a specific time, had its echoes in photography, as this is the “syntax of photography” (1982, 22). This supports Galassi’s view that painting and photography were developing in conjunction with a widespread social shift in values, and did not develop in reaction to one another (17, 1982).

In her text The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century (1983), Svetlana Alpers supports Galassi’s argument that the presence of linear perspective in painting was not due to the influence of photography, arguing that it is impossible to know if artists used the camera obscura in the construction of their paintings, however “images made by the *camera obscura* and the photograph have frequently been invoked as analogue to this direct, natural vision” (1983, 27). However Alpers argues that there is no evidence suggesting that these artists made use of an obscura, and that there would have to be “specific phenomena present in paintings that are not seen by unaided vision” in order to prove a connection to this device (1983, 30). In Kirk Varnedoe’s The Artifice of Candour – Impressionism and Photography Reconsidered (1966) he confronts the argument that the impressionist movement was influenced by developments in photography (1966, 99). Although the impressionists were concerned with the capturing of light, their approach was entirely different from a photographic one. Photographs capture light in a frozen, almost abstract from, where the impressionists attempted to capture the way light shifted over time. This links to Galassi’s statement that a photograph could never capture a “synthesized view”, which is made up of a combination of moments, in the way that painting can (1982, 12-13).

The second chapter of my research; Between Painting and Photography, dealt with the nature of photography in the 20th century, and the enduring belief that photographs could depict reality in a way that paintings never could. However as Jonathan Crary argues in Techniques of the Observer – On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century (1992 [1990]), photographs produce a view that is completely alien to the way in which we actually see the world, and is based on a "radical abstraction and reconstruction of optical experience" (1992 [1990], 9). The connection of photography with 'reality' is therefore problematic, as is the argument that analytical perspective in painting is directly linked to photography's influence. It is this misconception that many artists in the twentieth century confronted. In his text After Photography (2009) Fred Ritchin explains how photography has achieved the "paradoxical credibility of a subjective, interpretive medium that has simultaneously been deemed reliable and ultimately useful as a societal and personal arbiter" (2009, 19). My discussion around Hiroshi Sugimoto's photographic work is the perfect example of the trust we place in photographs as being 'real' due to their indexical relationship to their subject. Sugimoto's photograph of Tudor King Henry VIII couldn't possibly be a photograph of the real person, as photography was invented long after his death. The photograph is in fact of a wax sculpture of the King, however due to this being a photographic image and through Sugimoto's use of black and white photography - which we connect to documentary photographs - our first response is that this is an image of a real person. This shows the degree to which photographs can be manipulated, deceiving the viewer that they are "transparencies" of reality (Sontag: 1979, 9).

In his text A Little History of Photography (1979 [1931]), Walter Benjamin argues that we are more likely to trust a photograph as 'real' and view a painting as construction or imagination (1979 [1931], 242-243). Both Peter Doig and Luc Tuymans confront this in their paintings, which deal with the artifice inherent in both photography and painting. For these painters the photograph does not simply serve as a reference for accurate depiction, but is an "integral part of the painter's subject" (Rugoff: 2007, 10). As photographs have come to dominate our contemporary lives, many painters confront this, depicting the "social landscape of the times by translating and in a sense re-inventing, photographic imagery" (Rugoff: 2007, 6). In my discussion of Gerhard Richter's *Woman with Umbrella (*1964), which depicts a woman with her hand clasped over her mouth, and is in fact a copy of a newspaper image of Jackie Kennedy at her husband's funeral, I illustrated how Richter confronted the way that photographs may have lost their emotive effect on us through repetition. This is an image of a highly intimate and moving moment, one which is stripped of its affect and become mundane through repetition in media images. Perhaps Richter has re-instated some of the

“aura of originality” which is inherent in painting, as Benjamin describes (1979 [1931], 255), as the agency and “human trace” (Siopis: 2005, 29) of the artist is inserted into this reproduced image. However, I also discussed the possibility that this double translation through photograph and then paint may increase the feeling of distance between subject and resulting image, asserting the fact that both mediums are constructions and interpretations.

Due to its connection to a modernist history of originality and truth to medium (Burgener: 1996, 16), painting is has often been argued to be a purely constructed form. However when painting from a photograph these assumptions are brought into question, as we implicitly associate the photograph as having an indexical connection to the outside world or the ‘real’. In a painting that uses a photographic source, photographs can be read as constructed and painting as having an indexical link to the external.

In chapter three; The Question of Representation – Peter Doig’s *Gasthof zur Muldentalsperre* (2000-02) and Luc Tuymans’ *Cargo* (2004) I discussed these contradictions in our understandings of painting and photography in relation to two artworks which raise these questions of the definition of these mediums. Peter Doig’s *Gasthof zur Muldentalsperre* (2000-02) which depicts to figures standing at the entrance to a bridge, which leads off to the right of the image, raises questions about the truth value attributed to photographs, painting’s connection to artifice, and the spatial-temporal confusion that occurs when painting from photographs. The image is based on two images, one from a postcard of a German town Muldentensperre in 1910, the other of Doig and a friend in costume for a performance of the ballet *Petrouchka*, which was based on the original 1911 Ballet Russes ballet, in which Rudolf Nureyev played the role of Petrouchka. These images are not from the same time, but by dressing as the characters from this 1911 ballet Doig has already altered the truth of this image, leading us to believe that these figures could have stood on this spot in the early 1900s. The painting’s link to these photographic sources lends it an indexical connection to ‘the real’ yet this painting has been created using two different images from different times, and one of the images has been constructed to look as if it was photographed much earlier. Doig’s painting style is also embodied and expressive, lending it a feeling of being of the present, adding to the confusion of “first and second hand-experience engendered in a media saturated culture” (Rugoff: 2007, 14). As photographs capture a moment that has past, this conflicts with the painting’s link the ‘embodied’ or ‘present’.

Doig's combination of an expressive painting style with the illusionist capacity of the photograph creates an uneasy feeling of access and restriction, as we are both drawn into the painting and kept out of it. This may be a comment on the photograph's distance from reality, and that while we are lead to believe that we are looking at a permeable transparency we are left feeling distanced from the subject matter. Through my analysis of Luc Tuymans' *Cargo* (2004), I further exemplified how this process of translating a photograph into a painting may increase the feeling of remove we have when looking at a reproduced image. Tuymans' work depicts a cargo ship seemingly stranded in ice, however when we view the source photograph we realise that this is a toy ship. This indicates the way in which images deceive us, similar to the way Sugimoto's photograph did, as we trust the photograph as real despite its constructed nature. Tuymans' paintings feel incredibly distant and "numb", containing "seemingly bottomless amounts of distance between the subject and the painting (Molesworth: 2009, 27). This distance is felt in Tuymans' painting style, which appears washed out and devoid of the trace of the artist's hand, but also in the double translation of photograph and painting, pulling us further away from an intimate experience of the subject.

Contradictions and Convergences, the final chapter of this research, dealt with an exploration of my own work which was exhibited at the University of the Witwatersrand, in the Wits School of Art Substation, from 18 February 2013 to 23 February 2013. The exhibition titled Painting Johannesburg exhibited ten works that I had completed over my two years of study at Wits University. The works depicted urban scenes from around Johannesburg, which had been temporarily emptied of human activity or abandoned. This is in contrast with the heavily populated city Johannesburg is known to be. Despite this, there are many areas of Johannesburg that have become unused and even begun to decay, and this emptiness is particularly evident at night, which the majority of the work depicts. The works were based on photographs I took on a digital camera, and the trace of this photographic language remains in the works. The photographs present the viewer with unusual cropping and distortion, as well as with light that has been frozen in time, resulting in abstract forms. Despite the influence of photographs on these works they are still painterly, containing areas of flatness in conjunction with more heavily worked areas. All the paintings contain some sort of barrier, as they are covered in washes or the image is obscured by opaque lines or abstracted trees.

The combination of illusion and these barriers which assert themselves on the canvas' surface leads to a sense of being both drawn into the work and being denied access, which is echoed in painting's historic link to modernist flatness and photography's association

(however false) with transparency. Our assumptions around both mediums are dismantled in these works, as we recognise these spaces as 'real' and photographic, yet in these paintings they appear strange and other-worldly. This links to the nature of Johannesburg itself, which is a space that is full of contradictions such as wealth and poverty, action and quietness, growth and decay. In his text Portrait with Keys – Joburg and what what (2006), Ivan Vladislavić describes the nature of Johannesburg:

> In Johannesburg, the Venice of the South, the backdrop is always a man-made one. We have planted a forest the birds endorse. For Hills, we have mine dumps covered with grass. We do not wait for time and the elements to weather us, we change the scenery ourselves, to suit our moods. Nature is for other people, in other places.
>
> - Ivan Vladislavić, *Portrait with Keys – Joburg and what what,* 'Abstract', 2006.

This man made "forest", as Vladislavić describes it, is constantly growing and decaying in unusual and unpredictable ways, as new buildings go up and attract people to them, so surrounding areas become poverty stricken and unused. This contradictory nature of Johannesburg is echoed in my translation of photographs into paintings, as we feel that we know these spaces due to their indexical link to 'reality', yet they seem so unfamiliar and eerily deserted in the paintings.

As we live in the "age of the image" (Schwabsky: 2005, 3) photographs dominate our contemporary live. We are only too aware of their constructed nature yet there is still an implicit trust of them as 'real', as we use them to "record" and document our everyday lives (Sontag: 1979, 9). It has also been argued that painting's development was linked to photography, and that painting could never capture reality in the way that a photograph does. However, through careful analysis of both mediums and through engaging with photography in painting, our assumptions around painting's link to artifice and photography's link to 'the real' are being dismantled. Painting from photographs has allowed us to reinvest "feeling into images whose affect has been drained through repetition" (Rugoff: 2007, 6) and at the same time has intensified this repetition, presenting us with images that are distanced even further from the 'real', asserting the idea that perhaps all images are construction.

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